

AN ESSAY ON THE INSTITUTIONAL IMPORTANCE TO SUPPORT SIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION: THE BRAZILIAN CASE

UM ENSAIO DA IMPORTÂNCIA INSTITUCIONAL PARA SUPORTE AOS INTÉRPRETES PROFISSIONAIS DE LÍNGUA DE SINAIS EM TEMPOS DA PANDEMIA COVID-19: O CASO BRASILEIRO

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ABSTRACT

Our essay seeks to present the actual situation of health communication regarding Covid-19 in Brazil. Our main objective is to start a discussion on how public institutions guarantee access to this kind of information. By undertaking a critical analysis of the situation, this paper shows the importance of translators and interpreters when it comes to reporting on the news during a pandemic so deaf people can get information without delay. This also allows them to avoid fake news, which is crucial in all circumstances. Some considerations have been presented concerning how these institutions can finance the professionals and their legal utilization by the community in order to reinforce their rights.

Keywords: Libras, Risky Communication, Social Inclusion

RESUMO

Nosso ensaio procura apresentar a situação atual da comunicação durante a pandemia Covid-19 no Brasil. Nosso principal objetivo é iniciar uma discussão sobre como as instituições públicas garantem o acesso a esse tipo de informação. Ao fazer uma análise crítica da situação, este artigo mostra a importância de tradutores e intérpretes quando se trata de reportar notícias durante uma pandemia, para que pessoas surdas possam obter informações sem demora. Isso também permite evitar notícias falsas, cruciais em todas as circunstâncias. Algumas considerações foram apresentadas sobre como essas instituições podem financiar os profissionais, utilizando-se de meios legais pela comunidade, a fim de reforçar seus direitos.

Palavras-chave: Libras, Comunicação de Risco, Inclusão Social

INTRODUCTION

Since (and before) the early 1920s, when the Spanish flu killed approximately 50 million people around the world, the deaf community has been challenged when it comes to getting information on all kinds of health issues. In the past 100 years, some pandemic situations have occurred, with Covid-19 being the latest. Especially considering the advent of the internet and fast information, the accessibility of all communities has been improved. Considering this, many deaf signers have sign language as their first language and spoken and written Brazilian as their second (Staden, Badenhurst & Ridge, 2008).

The World Health Organization (2020) has shown that 466 million people are living with disabling hearing loss and that 1 billion youngsters aged between 12 and 35 are exposed to the risk of hearing loss because of the loud noises in their lives. Referencing this amount, 10 million deaf or hard of hearing people live in Brazil according to the

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2010 Censo-IBGE, the last census taken in Brazil. This is a signal showing that the population of the deaf community is increasing and that there is a need to defend their rights. One of which is the necessity to improve the level and quality of the education provided to translators. The other implies making the profession more attractive.

The deaf community has the right to be respected in terms of the use of their language, as much so as hearing people. The information to the latter must be preserved and respected all over the world. In the Brazilian case, we have Law 10.436 from April 24, 2002 and Law 12.319 from September 11, 2010. This guarantees the respect given to the language and it also confirms the officialization of the profession of translators. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these laws has been proven slow. Our main interest here is to demonstrate the importance of translators in live reports, especially during a pandemic, despite the presence of fake news. Napier *et al.* (2018) dwells upon the importance of technology in situations like this, which they can use to prompt increased accessibility.

Farjado, Vigo, and Salmerón (2009), in their subsection entitled "Bilingual (sign plus text) web site", defended their site by saying that accessibility can be improved by using technology. However, this method will only be valuable in comparison to text information or captured media. As far as live or urgent events are concerned, this approach does not apply to all of them. Thus, it fails to effectively inform the deaf community.

The main problem of live events, interviews, reports, and shows was analyzed and discussed by Lorentz (2020) in an interview with Gessilma Dias, which covered the specific difficulties of the interpreters in working at live music presentations. (quarantine entertainment in the Covid-19 pandemic situation). For her, it is a hard task for an interpreter to translate at the same time as the person speaking or singing without delay as pointed out by Napier (2017). Some expressions will be lost if the interpreter and speaker do not have a meeting before the interview to make sure that all metaphors and jokes are made clear. In relation to the coronavirus pandemic, Amorim *et al.* (2020) discussed the different signs used to define the pandemic and the problems involving medical technical signs. These can be different for the different regions in Brazil due to the language variance, as abstracted on and explained in the interview with Gessilma.

Another problem related to this kind of theme is financial support. Most of the interpreters working to ensure accessibility for the community are volunteers. The Facebook page *Central Libras/Coronavirus*¹ dedicates a lot of time to ensuring that quality information is provided to the deaf, including translating news, laws, decrees, and other issues related to the pandemic as part of the Brazilian online system. It is a hard task to develop this kind of work without financial support, which could be an effort undertaken by the relevant institutions.

The National Association of the Deaf (US) shows that any institution that receives support by the federal government must guarantee sign language interpreters for their deaf fellows in order to provide information on the coronavirus crisis. In the European Union and Great Britain, the Association of Action Hearing Loss shows that the government provides financial support to sign language interpreters and for other issues related to the deaf. The Prime Minister of New Zealand has invited some interpreters to engage, paying them to ensure that information is provided to all deaf citizens. However, not all countries have this kind of support. One of our aims here is to start a discussion about the creation of a public institution financed by donations and taxes that can guarantee the right to information for the deaf community.

This is especially so in the case of Brazil, which has provided some accessibility to the deaf community, supporting the information provided through social media by the volunteer interpreters. The government has recruited sign language interpreters to mediate the official information provided on Covid-19 since the creation of the program named "*Pátria Voluntária*".² However, they have refused to pay for the classes, alleging lack of revenue, despite acknowledging the necessity of them to the community. The main issue here is the importance of valuing the class, which is legally supported by the Brazilian Interpreters National Federation (Febrapils, Federação Brasileira das Associações dos Profissionais Tradutores e Intérpretes e Guia-Intérpretes de Língua de Sinais). This institution stands in the middle of a severe fight for the rights of its associated members to allow them to respond to the abuses of the Brazilian Government, as presented in the study by Febrapils (2020).

Our paper seeks to present the importance of translators when it comes to interpreting live reports during the pandemic. This is crucial in these unusual circumstances so the deaf can get information without delay. We also seek to present some of the legal support that can be used by the community to finance the interpreters. Our

1. You can find more information about the program at: <https://pt-br.facebook.com/groups/918648301921031/>

2. You can find more information about the program at: <https://patriavoluntaria.org/pt-BR>

paper is divided into four sections. The first one is the introduction with a brief explanation of the justification of its importance. The second deals with the presence of the family and translators in relation to the deaf community and the importance of the translation of live reports. We also show the negative implications of fake news. The third section presents the impact of the institutions when it comes to financing the interpreters since most workers are related to the government, to universities, or to the private sector. In the final section, we present the concluding remarks and some encouragement of new possible proposals which can be used by the system.

THE SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERPRETERS TO MEDIATE INFORMATION AND AVOID FAKE NEWS

How does the deaf community deal with television, the internet, or any social media when it is not presented using sign language? In cases like this, the family must support and guarantee accessibility for their kin. According to Yue (2010, pp. 2), 95% of deaf children are related to hearing parents. Unfortunately, they do not use the same language to interact, creating a barrier between the deaf individual and his/her family. In Brazil, the situation is severe, since the country has a poor level of education throughout all social classes. This makes it difficult to learn anything, including sign language. Bittencourt *et al.* (2011) and Kelman *et al.* (2011) explained the importance of the family and subtitles in such moments. For them, without any accessibility provided by the communication system, their family must supply the demand. On the other hand, in many cases this is not possible, considering the poor - or even absent - knowledge of sign language by their relatives.

Some parents, partners, and related members of the family prefer to communicate with their deaf kindred using lip-reading (the so-called oralized process). This issue is also discussed by Yue (2010), especially when considering the advances in medical science supporting the argument for cochlear implants. However, it is a hard task for the person with these skills when using the television, the internet, and so on. The situation creates impediments, making access to getting information difficult, thus limiting their knowledge. These barriers were presented in the report by Declercq (2020), which showed the difficulties encountered by the deaf community when it comes to keeping up with the news on Covid-19 without any accessibility.

Intending to support the deaf community with a more accessible platform during the pandemic, some apps have been developed, constructing a more open platform. One of them is LsAcademy³, a dictionary that provides the biggest glossary of the Portuguese language and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras, Língua Brasileira de Sinais), ensuring the ability to gain knowledge of the scientific terms used. Another support is presented by the National Association of the Deaf (US)⁴. It has created a huge platform to support this community in all areas and to inform them about Covid-19 updates. This approach has been extensively used by the Pennsylvania Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing⁵, especially through their social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and others. All interpreters on this kind of social network don't need any certification and they are not paid as they are all volunteers. In Brazil, the students of PUC-PR⁶ have developed a website for the same purpose (GAZETA DO POVO, 2020). This is in addition to the one made by Lab I-UFSCAR⁷ that provides information on Covid-19 prevention (FAPESP, 2020). These approaches have been welcomed by the deaf community. However, they must consider that there is a delay in the process, which does not preserve the information in real-time.

Besides the evolution needed in order to create a more accessible environment for the deaf community, other countries such as Germany have been successively charged by the population, which includes minorities and especially the deaf community, as pointed out by Hammerstein (2020). The indifference of the government to these citizens opens up the possibility of a huge health crisis, since these people are not being given access to the proper information on the pandemic situation. In this case, voluntary interpreters support this community, translating the news and publishing it on their social media. Nevertheless, this kind of approach requires dedication and a long investigation in order to check to see if the content of the news is true or false. The main difficulty encountered by these important collaborators is how to identify the fake news scattered around the world.

3. You can find more information about the program at: <https://pwa.app.vc/lacademy#/group/18024109>

4. You can find more information about the program at: <https://www.nad.org/coronavirus/>

5. You can find more information about the program at: <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/odhh/Pages/default.aspx>

6. You can find more information about the program at: <https://www.unidospelasaude.com.br/>

7. You can find more information about the program at: <http://www.labi.ufscar.br/>

The effect of the fake news is that it has been a challenge for all informative systems, both in Brazil and around the world, particularly considering that politics and health are the central themes of this report. Our country has been seriously impacted by fake news, especially in political and health communication, leading the parliament to create a Parliamentary-Inquired Commission (CPI) named "Fake News." Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, we have been exposed to lots of false information, with much of it coming from unusual or unfaithful references that have to be checked by interpreters to mediate the information provided to the deaf community. The biggest responsibility of this process is globalization. This creates a secure environment, particularly in social media, for anyone to express their own opinion without any evidence to support it. Globalization has two sides. The first one facilitates the giving of information to the whole world in real-time. However, the second promotes the proliferation of false news, which is usually propagated via social networks. These issues have been discussed by Zhang and Ghorbani (2020), and they presented the negative impact that fake news has on society, that is expanded on in online social media.

The main problem of fake news has been presented by Carlson (2020). He showed the moral panic created on behalf of fake news reports in the 2016 US election. The effect of these problems is the manipulation of information. This can be used for the selfish interests of some groups or individuals to guarantee them benefits or to develop confusion in a given group. Today, some use software-based robots online to handle information, using the majority of fake news in social media to produce false beliefs and to mislead other people. These robots have started to be used to proliferate news about vaccines or other medications that can be used to win the fight against Covid-19 in Brazil, intending to support the economic activities. To determine whether the report is fake or not, Berghel (2017) developed a fact-checking system with postulating steps. For more information, check his article. To reduce the proliferation of false news, some government agents have used live translation and hire interpreters to translate the news into sign language.

In New Zealand, the Prime Minister summons up 6 highly skilled interpreters to ensure that the information is provided to the deaf and hard of hearing community at the same time as the hearing population. In the Brazilian case, the delegation is translated into Libras. A volunteer performance is presented. On the other hand, other countries such as Germany do not deal with this theme and show a poor level of responsibility. The biggest obstacles to this issue are income restriction and low wages. In some countries, the institutions guarantee this support, making the process easy. This accessibility is also a cultural issue and it is not always present. The next section proposes analysing the foundations in some countries which prevent and support class.

THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE SUPPORT GIVEN TO THE DEAF COMMUNITY IN BRAZIL

How can the deaf community fund its accessibility without the interference of public or private institutions? The answer to this question is "They cannot", and neither can the other disabled communities. This community is a minority, distinguished by their language, even though it is recognised by Law 10.436 as mentioned before. Considering that Portuguese is characterized as an oral-auditory style, the deaf community has assumed it as a second language. The world has been challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and providing information to this community is both an economic and institutional problem. As we saw in the preceding section, a highly efficient way to inform all sections of society about a situation is through live reports or high-quality journals or newspapers. For the first approach, the best way to facilitate accessibility for the deaf is hiring sign language interpreters, considering their difficulties with Portuguese.

One example of the responsibility of society to their kin is presented by Welsh (2019). He analysed the economic impact of deafness on the 1985 US economy. He concluded that the country has a gap between the earnings of hearers and the deaf, especially considering when the latter has the same education [see the inclusion in the education system and the financial support to their language is treated in Scott (2011)]. However, they did not have the same credibility as the former and they were allocated underpaid jobs. This reality has been a challenge for the deaf community. It still fights for a space in more relevant jobs. Thus, actions of institutions to guarantee the rights of the deaf community are necessary. Their victories in Brazil have to be used as an example to the whole world, and their fight has to continue.

There have been some accomplishments earned by their fight, which is necessary to comment on here. The level of education has continued to be upgraded over the years based on their victories, hence the ordinances approved by the Brazilian National Congress. Two of these laws are Law 10.436 from April 24, 2002 and Law 12,319 from September 11, 2010, which ensure community accessibility and the officialization of their language. The latter registers the following phrase: "communicate between deaf and hearers, deaf and deaf, deaf and deaf-blind, deaf-blind and hearers, through Libras for the oral language and vice versa", referring to the profession of interpreters. This same regulation does not guarantee a minimum wage or even the remuneration of the professionals involved in this kind of event. The profession is not recognized in Brazil, as we saw in the section above. In terms of these two laws, the presence of an interpreter is not required in reports or announcements, even in cases such as Covid-19, defaulting the access to health information. This is while considering that the Constitution ensures that all citizens must be treated equally, according to Article 5, which represents the Constitutional Principle of Equality, and article 5, item III of Law 3.298 from December 20, 1999.

In terms of these principles, how can society guarantee access to information in a pandemic in relation to live reports for the deaf community, as well as ensuring that it reaches hearers too? This is the main objective of our essay, namely to consider that the only way to avoid fake news is to monitor the access to information in the form of referenced reports or live reports, as shown in the section above. The latter is usually made in the form of pronouncements by public agents or scientific researchers. Sometimes these authorities hire sign language translators to interpret the information to the community, but it is more common instead to either pay a professional or to invite them as volunteers. However, this is not considered to be a rule either way. The deaf community usually depends on the subtitles on television or written newspapers. Some of the individuals in this community do not have the necessary fluency to understand the news. As we have seen, Portuguese is an oral-auditory language, thus it is characterized as a difficult language to understand by deaf people. This justifies the need to invite voluntary interpreters to translate the information about Covid-19 as it improves the level of social inclusion by mediating the health information provided and reducing any associated risks. They must spend a lot of time verifying if the news is true or false so as not to create risky communication. They do this without a salary.

Since these workers earn their income by working on translations, both private and public institutions will have to be capable of paying them to translate the information. In order to proceed with the payment, the institutions need to earn an income to ensure these rights or they need to be supported by other establishments, the government, and other entities. Deaf people, as well as hearing people, have to pay income tax (their cost with the deafness like technology support does not reduce their taxes), as shown by Law 7.713 from 22 December 1988. This creates an aliquot between 7.5% and 27.5% depending on the income of the person in Brazil. The right to be exempt from this tax was discussed in the project of Law 6.990/2010. However, in 2015, this project was filed. The destiny of the government income is to support health, education, and social projects. The latter is included on the list but it does not deal with language and cultural spaces for the deaf community, isolating them from access to information, especially in the domain of health communications. They are even more exposed nowadays by the Covid-19 pandemic. The income earned by the government can be destined to the creation of a platform or foundation intended to support the accessibility of the deaf community. In Brazil, some foundations support a lot of social politics. For example, the Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement is a federal institution that gives financial support to students studying for PhDs or master's degrees.

The need for an interpreter as a requirement within the accessibility of the deaf community is highlighted above, especially concerning the accomplishment of the fundamental right to information. This is essential for the preservation of human dignity, as well as the principles of equality. In the next section, we will discuss and comment on one possibility concerning a financial system that can implement a foundation or possible support for our idea.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Access to knowledge is a legal right for all kinds of communities. However, in some cases, this is a hard task for the deaf community, creating a risky environment due to the barriers adopted by traditional communication. Our focus in this section is to present some of the important views about language development in the information field,

and the motivation of new future scientific research on how public institutions can finance accessibility for the deaf, ensuring that there is a proper way for them to receive information.

Much of the information in Brazil is given in Portuguese. Some textbooks have published a lexical expansion of the terms used in what can be almost considered "Brazilian English." This is because the scientific terms are derived from the English language [see Paiva and Pagano (2001)]. In this process, Libras is not left behind as the Portuguese language instigates and allows for Brazilian Sign Language to create, expand and research in order to develop itself. It is the interpreting translators who are responsible for the mediation of communication, although the latter is often not valued by institutions. This is even after considering the fact that they support a whole community with information. This community is sponsored by article 5, item III of Law 3.298 from December 20, 1999, which says the following: "Respect for people with disabilities (...) should receive equal opportunities in society by recognising the rights that are guaranteed to them, without privileges or paternalism."

Using the instruments and institutional aspects of Law 3.298, we can consider media as the "fourth branch" since we have the legislative branch, the judiciary branch and the executive branch already present as part of the institutional order in Brazil. It is not for an empty reason that there are numerous attacks on media professionals in Brazil. The media's influence has been able to promote different influences in Brazilian society in recent years. The prevalence of fake news is another issue that the media has constantly and seriously grappled with. We can verify through our analysis the points that we have reported on: the health crisis, the economic crisis, and any attempt to impose a political crisis, as presented in Section Two. Given these issues, the role of the media over the years has been noted and the information is often passed on in Portuguese. A target audience like the deaf community is expected to be stigmatised for not having access to the information in Libras. The deaf can be empowered by understanding the bilingual information with the help of Libras translators.

Considering the necessity of ensuring the continued accessibility of the aforementioned people, one of the proposals here is to encourage researchers to analyze the amount of deaf people who are taxpayers. Using this information, we can calculate a percentage of this amount to create a foundation or to designate an institution to guarantee accessibility. This is an assurance set out for all kinds of disability by article 8, item II of Law 3.298, especially in situations like the current coronavirus pandemic. Expanding on this is a subject for another paper. In reference to the composition of the establishment or institution providing financial support for the interpreters, this guarantees the execution of article 5, item XIV of the Brazilian Federative Constitution (1988), which ensures that all citizens will have "access to information [that] is guaranteed for all and [of which the] confidentiality of the source is safeguarded, when necessary for professional practice." This is the main subject discussed in this essay.

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