

Reflections on the Presence of Sign Language Interpreters in the First School Years / Reflexões acerca da presença de intérpretes de língua de sinais nos anos iniciais de escolarização

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to question the practice of sign language - oral language interpreters in the first school years and to discuss the implications of the presence of this professional in the process of sign language assimilation by deaf students and their learning process. We conclude that, through these professionals, besides the maintenance of the ideological reproduction that privileges groups of economic, political, linguistic, social, and cultural power, a new power relation is established within the school, contributing to the exclusion of deaf people from education. It is mandatory that we re-signify the concept of inclusion, distancing it from that which is restricted to school spaces in order to assign it an extensive meaning that ensures the social, cultural and linguistic recognition of deaf people in all social spheres.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education; Deaf Students; Sign Language Interpreters

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo problematizar a prática dos intérpretes de língua de sinais - línguas orais nos anos iniciais de escolarização e discutir as implicações da presença deste profissional para os processos de assimilação da língua de sinais pelos alunos surdos e para seus processos de aprendizagem escolar. Conclui-se que, por meio destes profissionais, além de ser mantida a reprodução ideológica que privilegia grupos de poder político, linguístico, social e cultural, uma nova relação de poder tem sido estabelecida no interior da escola, contribuindo para a exclusão educacional dos surdos. Torna-se assim premente uma ressignificação do conceito de inclusão, distanciando-se daquele que o reduz aos espaços escolares, para um sentido mais amplo, que assegure o reconhecimento social, cultural e linguístico das pessoas surdas em todas as esferas sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação inclusiva; Alunos surdos; Intérpretes de língua de sinais

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Introduction

In Uruguay and Brazil deaf people education is conceived of from dissimilar perspectives. In Uruguay, since 1987, bilingual education has privileged the first years of education, a period in which schools and classes for deaf people began migrating from an oralist paradigm to a bilingual one. However, the former is still maintained, even today, under the perspective of special education. One understands deaf people bilingual education as that in which students go to schools and/or classes where educational activities are developed in Uruguayan Sign Language (USL). Bilingual education recognizes the right of students to learn in the language by which they are constituted and is, thus, the language responsible for their linguistic, cognitive and educational development.

In this context, schools that offer the first years of schooling and children's education assume the responsibility of hearing USL-speaking teachers and deaf instructors who accompany them; only in Montevideo are some classes under the responsibility of only deaf teachers (PELUSO; VALLARINO, 2015; PELUSO; LARRINAGA; LODI, 2016). This way, these places do not have sign language - oral language interpreters (SLIs). These professionals are only integrated to deaf people education in secondary education (final years of basic schooling in Brazil), in classes only for deaf people. In these classes, teachers do not have knowledge of USL so they can teach in this language. Interpreters are also present in cities where, in this education level, there are no classes for deaf people. This reality changes in the whole country in the period when students move to secondary education (as it is called in Brazil), because all educational processes take place in classes in which deaf and hearing students share the same space.

This school organization developed in Uruguay, according to Federal Act No. 5.625/05, was to be introduced in Brazil. However, the *National Policy for Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education*, issued in 2008, attributed a new meaning to the concept of bilingual education (discussed by Lodi, 2013), but it nonetheless established that deaf students are enrolled and remain, throughout basic education, in classes organized and intended for hearing students, with the presence of

Brazilian Sign Language – Portuguese translators and interpreters. This has been the main model adopted in Brazil ever since.¹

Contradicting bilingual education assumptions, in inclusive education, as it is called, in addition to showing little attention regarding subjectivity-construction processes, and linguistic, cognitive and educational development of deaf students, sign language is understood as an instrument to convey teaching contents and to teach the written modality of Portuguese, the language spoken by the majority of the students. Due to this, the professional practice of Sign language–Portuguese translators and interpreters (SLTIs)² is the object of transformation (LODI, 2013).

This article aims at debating SLI/SLTI practice in the first school years and to discuss the implications of the presence of this professional in sign language assimilation processes of deaf students and their learning processes. To do so, this article is divided into three sections: in the first one, there is a brief history of sign language - oral language interpreters and the main concepts that support their training in Uruguay and Brazil, aiming to show what makes them different: the interpreting practice as a verbal interaction process which places in dialogue the interlocutors' histories. It seemed relevant to us to compare the organization of deaf people education and professional SLI/SLTI training processes in the two countries by considering that these countries, although using similar practices in the course of the history of deaf people education, followed different paths in terms of legal aspects and linguistic and educational policies for deaf people. In this sense, this comparison allows us to approach the subject from two distinct perspectives.

In the second section, we discuss why SLI/SLTI presence in the first school years is not viable and the ways their practice is altered when one considers the necessary assimilation of sign language by deaf students in order for their school learning to be possible. In the third, we reflect about how, through the presence of these professionals in classrooms, the historical ideological reproduction that has always favored more powerful political, linguistic, social and cultural groups has been maintained, and how their presence sets a new power relation inside schools. In the final

¹ In the State of São Paulo, this professional is called Teacher-Interlocutor. S/he works either in state or city schools.

² The difference regarding designations for this professional in Brazil and Uruguay will be discussed in the next section.

remarks, the three sections will be articulated in order to discuss how interpreting practice in the first school years has contributed to exclude deaf students from schools instead of favoring their education.

1 A Brief History of SLI/SLTI: Uruguay and Brazil

There is no register about when interpreting between oral language-sign languages began, but it is recognized that this practice has existed for many years now so that verbal interactions are guaranteed between deaf and hearing communities, since these social groups coexist on a daily basis. This conviviality, however, always took place in an asymmetrical way, because not all hearing people need to coexist with deaf people who use sign language. This is not true for the deaf, though, since they will share the same time-space with hearing people and are obligated to be in constant interlinguistic contact. This fact gives the wrong idea that deaf people are the ones who need interpreters to get in touch with hearing people and because of that there is no reciprocity in this relation; in other words, hearing people do not need interpreters to get in touch with deaf people, since they do not have much to say to them.

In this unequal relation, the practice of interpreting LIBRAS-Portuguese and USL-Spanish was carried out informally in the beginning, and there was no concern about professional training for the ones practicing it. In Uruguay it is recognized that interpreters were initially hearing children of deaf parents (Children of Deaf Adults - Codas), who took the role of “helping” their parents in their daily relations in different spheres of activity (FAMULARO, 2011). In Brazil, this reality was not very different: besides the Codas, there were hearing people with deaf children and others who worked in schools for deaf people. The systematization of this practice took place in the 1980s, mainly in religious places (ROSA, 2005; ALMEIDA, 2010).

Notwithstanding who was carrying out this practice, the knowledge of sign language was built in interaction between hearing and deaf communities, which began to help them also in how they could carry out interpreting (ALMEIDA, 2010). This process gave birth to a false idea according to which to act as LIBRAS/USL interpreter required only knowledge of a sign language, even if this knowledge was limited to daily contacts with deaf people, a fact that delayed the recognition of the necessary training of

these professionals. Due to this misconception, the practice of interpreting was, for a long time, vulgarized and understood as a mechanical activity: interpreters should choose the structures they judged adequate in order to guarantee their proximity with those of the language in which utterances were produced (LODI, 2007).

Interpreting training began to receive attention in the 2000s, due to the new linguistic policies that began to recognize the right of deaf people to use sign language in any and all social spaces. In Uruguay this training started by helping deaf people in a private institution before this period, based on the same assumptions previously described; it was only in 2009 that *Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad de la República* established the university training in Uruguayan Sign Language *Interpreting [Tecnatura Universitaria en Interpretación en Lengua de Señas Uruguaya (TUILSU)]*, offered now in three cities of the country.

In Brazil, although the training of these professionals was recognized in 2000, only in 2005, due to Federal Decree No. 5.626, would there be guidelines about how it should be carried out: through translation and interpreting undergraduate courses with majors in LIBRAS-Portuguese interpreting (BRAZIL, 2005, Article 17) and/or in high school, professional training, university extension or continued training courses, provided they were offered by university institutions accredited by bureaus of education (BRAZIL, 2005, Article 18, Subsection I, II and III).

However, university training was vetoed by Act No. 12.319/10, which rules the profession, because of the understanding that it violated Article 5, XIII of the Federal Constitution, according to which “the exercise of any work, trade or profession is free as long as the professional qualifications established by law are provided.”³ Nevertheless, from January 2020 on, according to the Brazilian Inclusion Act, university training will be demanded for interpreting undergraduate and graduate programs, recognizing high school training only for interpreting practice in basic education (BRAZIL, 2015, Article 28, § 2).

We should point out that, in Brazilian legislation, training demanded for the professional, both in high school and college, must include practices of interpreting and translation, although technical literature recognizes that they are different

³ In original: “é livre o exercício de qualquer trabalho, ofício ou profissão, atendidas as qualificações profissionais que a lei estabelecer.”

practices/trainings. Thus, in Brazil hearing people are privileged in these courses, which do not question deaf people's presence during sign language-written language translation and vice-versa and/or interpreting of sign languages from other countries.

In Uruguay, from the beginning of the 2010s there was the understanding that translation might also be from LSU-written Spanish-LSU, due to the use of video-recordings, that is, texts uttered in sign language, which led them to offer this kind of training also to deaf people (PELUSO, 2015). Thus, training offered currently by TUILSU emphasizes translation rather than interpreting practices, since in Uruguayan school system organization, text production using USL has been increasingly necessary in school spheres. These practices are considered vital for the consolidation of a true bilingual intercultural education so that students may have access to different texts uttered in their language, whether they are produced originally in USL or those that require translation from Spanish to USL or from USL to Spanish. In addition, compared to Brazil, there is a low demand for interpreters to assist students in classrooms. In contrast to this, in Brazil the focus in SLTI training processes is on Portuguese-LIBRAS-Portuguese interpreting because of the strong influence of education policies in development in the country and the increasing participation of deaf people in social spaces of political and cultural nature, a fact that demands professionals to interpret them.

Thus, considering this paper's aims and taking into account that text production in USL and text translation from and to LSU are recent practices in Uruguay and are little discussed and explored in Brazil, the focus of debates is always on interpreting (and not translation processes). This is the reason why from now on professionals will be called Sign Language Interpreters (SLIs), the way they are called in Uruguay.

Still thinking about training processes, we also see the presence, in training courses, of distinct concepts of language and of how professional practices are to be constituted, both in university and high school courses (in the case of Brazil) and the fact that the concept which formed the basis of non-professional interpreting practice is still privileged nowadays. This has determined the primacy of grammatical-linguistic knowledge of sign language because it is considered to be enough for a good interpreting practice.

Disagreeing with this understanding, in this text a distinct concept will be adopted: we see interpreters as professionals who act in the frontier of senses between sign languages and oral languages. Due to this, they develop a language of work and work with language, and for that reason their knowledge must transcend that of grammar; they must know how these languages function, their distinct uses according to the spheres of human activity in which utterances are produced. We argue that, if language materializes in enunciation, we must accept that the focus of this practice turns to concrete utterances, to senses present therein, in their intrinsic relation with the continuous chain of verbal communication. It is thus a practice that leads professionals to produce senses in the discourse to be interpreted in order to make possible the construction of a new utterance that guarantees the completeness of that which is being interpreted (LODI, 2007; FAMULARO, 2011; ALMEIDA, LODI, 2014). This way, this practice depends, fundamentally, on being among interlocutors who master the languages involved, since the act of interpreting cannot be considered a lonely act. It has the form of a dialogue, of verbal interaction and so “utterer/interpreter/interlocutor actively take part, because, as senses are potentially infinite, they can only be produced and actualized when there is contact with other senses” (LODI, 2007, s./p).⁴

Having these tenets as the basis of our research, we seek to problematize Libras/USL interpreter training and, thus, the impracticality of their presence in the first school years, since most deaf students still have not assimilated sign language as their first language.

2 Sign Language Assimilation by the Students and the SLI: Tenets

In accordance with Bakhtin’s thought (1990),⁵ we are born by means of verbal interactions in a world that exists previously to our existence. We occupy, physically, in the concrete world, a unique place in life, but our body, at that moment, is restricted to the inner body: organic sensations, needs, etc. Our exterior body is still the body of

⁴ In original: “locutor/intérprete/interlocutor participam ativamente, na medida em que, por serem potencialmente infinitos, os sentidos só podem ser construídos e atualizados se em contato com outros sentidos”

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. Art and Answerability. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.1-3.

another, whose register can only happen fragmentarily. We do not manage to autonomously resist it. We receive, still in a scattered way, all the acts that are directed to us (acts of love, attention, care), modulated by a language loaded by tones of value attributed to us: we receive a name, become involved in senses about ourselves, our body, our sensations; we receive a language that connects us, as a response, to our exterior body. This other that looks at us and that is responsible for our first glance at ourselves, introduces us to the first words, those which subsequently will also be spoken by us.

In this essentially dialectic and dialogic relation in which we change all the time, we also change others, moving them from their position by each act toward them: crying, smiling, the satisfaction of our needs, the first words we utter (which were uttered before we existed). We respond to the project of future belonging to those who have lived their existence before ours, to something yet-to-be accomplished, as discussed by Geraldi (2013), something which gives us sense and direction (never straight or linear); a project only possible due to the excess of seeing that others have regarding us, for, in life, the author continues, “it is necessary to project a future so we can extract from it the criteria to select what is past, which can work as a lever for the construction of this very future” (p.19).⁶ Thus, we live our life, our history, our present, in a dialog with the past and with what is still to be.

However, this process differs when we think about the birth of a deaf baby in a hearing family. From the mother and relatives, s/he will receive affection, smiles and expressions; s/he will see the lips of the mother moving, addressing her/him. The baby will not be able to hear the words that, little by little, are giving sense to her/his existence; words that s/he would later utter. Oral language can be perceived only in the fragmentary way - by the constitutive extraverbal aspects of discourse or by means of loose words coming from a greater context related to life. From the mother, the baby will receive a name, but s/he will learn about it only latter; her/his birth will not be narrated to her/him. This way, the baby will distance herself/himself from the family’s constitutive histories, histories that would dialogue with her/his own, as they are shared in the course of their existence only by language.

⁶ In original: “é preciso projetar um futuro para dele extrair os critérios de seleção do que é passado que possa funcionar como alavanca de construção desse futuro.”

Countless attempts to change reality are done by the family, especially according to instructions given by health professionals, who will try, at all costs, to treat this child by using uncontextualized speech teaching practices as well as restoring their hearing capacity using hearing-aid devices and/or invasive procedures, as is the case of surgeries for cochlear implants. In these cases, this child is denied interactions using sign language, relations with adult deaf people and between peers using this language. As a consequence, the child's subjectivity(ies) is(are) built from the hearing model s/he should assimilate. Throughout her/his history and in this process in which s/he lacks words to be able to signify the world, the other and herself/himself, deaf people grow according to the place attributed to them by the many people with whom they live: people with special needs (related to speech and audition), different (in the negative sense of the term) persons, those who cannot participate in and from the countless verbal interactions full of sense and (why not?) knowledge.

This hegemonic discourse which is part of the great time of the history of deaf people brings with it the marks of a past of isolation, difficulties, silencing. But it also brings, as a counterpoint, a past of struggles for being social-culturally recognized as deaf people, as persons who express themselves in a language different from that of the hearing majority: sign language (LANE, 1988; MOURA, 2000). However, this past, in dialogue with the present, aims at a transformation of the future that is still far from being reached, at least in terms of education.

The discourse of the inclusive education policy, as it is adopted in Brazil today, is an example of something not to be achieved, since deaf students are denied the right of learning sign language, because at the moment they enter school and, subsequently, that environment, they do not have opportunities for verbal interactions with other deaf people using sign Language, a reality that is concealed by the presence of SLI. The idea that there is no education without language, without verbal interaction, that “there is no education outside the relation between the self and the other” (GERALDI, 2013, p.15),⁷ in our case teacher-student and students-students, is ignored in school contexts where deaf and hearing students are in the same classroom. The construction of interactions in sign language is reduced to the relations between deaf students and interpreters, who are

⁷ In original: “não há educação fora da relação entre o eu e o outro.”

held responsible and take responsibility for this reality, both for mediating school learning processes and teaching this language to students.

In this context, SLI have only one choice: to teach sign language to students, addressing a specific context - school contents –, in an indifferent and isolated way. Removed from history and the social horizon in which it is uttered, this way of approaching language allows only knowing how language's constitutive elements are organized, most times using oral language as a basis, since it is the language used in the classroom and the school. This language concept determines, consequently, a relation in which apprentices must passively accept the information they are given.

The teaching of a mother or native language and/or foreign languages through the opposition between approaching words as “signals” or “signs” is discussed by Vološinov (1973).⁸ For him, the word as “signal” is an instrument used to designate objects, being thus understood as an entity that has an identic-to-itself inalterable content – a dictionary word – and does not pertain to the field of ideology. The word as a sign, by its turn, is inside the ideological sphere, situated among socially organized individuals. It materializes by being uttered in a given social-historic and cultural context; it is always addressed to someone, appropriated by different accentuations that give life to it. To this word, we must invariably respond. Thanks to its social ubiquity, we can understand all evolutionary processes that occur in distinct social spheres; thus, the history of those who live it materializes in it.

However, when we consider that the relation deaf people establish with sign language in school spaces takes place through interlocutors who do not live it and are not constituted by it, we see once again students who live this reality deprived from the history of the language and the culture that it determines and is determined by it. In addition to it, the word, or more exactly its product, enunciation, responsible for verbal interaction processes, is addressed according to interlocutors and thus to community. Therefore, if the group to whom deaf people utterances will be addressed is constituted by hearing people, we subject deaf people to the community that uses Portuguese.

In this sense, depending on the training offered to professional SLIs, whether the primacy of grammar or linguistic forms are approached as signals to the detriment of senses in social circulation, their work will presuppose language as having transparency

⁸ VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejk and I. R-Titunik. New York; London: Seminar Press, 1973.

and fixity. Consequently, students “learn” signals (both in the Bakhtinian sense and in the sense of “words” in sign language).⁹ They may learn school contents, because it is believed that what is important in interpreting is the equivalence of form rather than the meanings of what is being uttered. Due to this, education and life are significantly deepened, as is in most school spaces, in deaf people’s education, making it impossible for a process to favor the transformation of all school agents.

3 Education and Life: The Word of Others in the Learning Process

The objectified language teaching process and the exclusion of language from reality, from lived life, reminds us what Bakhtin (1990,¹⁰ 1993)¹¹ discussed in his first works: the impossibility of separating culture from life. For the author, the theoretical world, the world of knowledge, of specific disciplines, which comes to existence thanks to an abstraction, is similar and closed in itself. To it we cannot add anything, in so far as it is severed from life and is unable to offer praxis and act to life. For Bakhtin (1993),¹² the world must be given from the unique and singular place in which each one is, so that it may be lived in a real and responsible way. That implies the recognition of each human being’s singular difference. Bakhtin (1993)¹³ disagrees with the idea of a universal, general, repeatable and constant truth (истина - *Istina*) which has nothing to say to the truth of lived life, with the intonation of the act (правда - *Pravda*). This scission can still be recognized in current school practices that separate knowledge from life, instead of making efforts to establish a dialectical relation between them.

While discussing the architectonics that composes world and life events, Bakhtin (1990)¹⁴ exemplifies this question this way: geography, by itself, does not know what is nearby or distant, here and there, the same way history does not know what is past, present and future. To make sense (although relatively), these concepts must come from an absolute axiological center - humans in their specific time and space. Infinite time-

⁹ TN: The authors are making a play with words. In Portuguese, both “sign” in sign language and “signal” are translated as “sinal.”

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 5.

¹¹ BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1993.

¹² For reference, see footnote 11.

¹³ For reference, see footnote 11.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 5.

space – the only sense which guarantees a theoretical determination – is realized in only a way outside human life, since time and space are lived differently by each one of us. Event-intrinsic time would thus have sense when related to time extrinsic to the event actualization, according to the singular volitive tones in the unity of each subject. A past in relation with the present projects itself to a distinct future, making a path in which we are and produce at the same time.

This way, one understands that knowledge and language objectification, and thus their severing from life, eventually determines asymmetrical relations inside schools, teacher-students' verbal interactions which affect the way knowledge is conveyed. This asymmetry significantly intensifies when we consider the presence of deaf people in hearing classrooms, places in which all knowledge is approached from social-cultural and linguistic contexts of the majority (hearing students); they are then offered interpreting of the contents/concepts into LIBRAS, having a direct relation with the context in which utterances are produced by teachers to hearing students. Thus, as the dialog between knowledge/culture and life is not a fact inside schools (and exceptions are rare), their distance from deaf people's social-cultural and linguistic contexts increases considerably.

In addition, according to Bakhtin (1981,¹⁵ 1990),¹⁶ the relation between our existence and the words of others should be taken into consideration. Bakhtin recognizes what we live surrounded by words of others and that we react to them in the course of our existence. It is through these words that we assimilate the wealth of human culture. Their presence in human life makes necessary the task of responding to them and understanding them (understanding and responding merge in a reciprocally conditioned dialectical relation, and one of them cannot exist without the other). In this process, the word of the other, by being assimilated by me, becomes alien-my words and, in the dialogue with other alien words, becomes my-words, after engaging in a difficult ideological battle.

According to Bakhtin (1981),¹⁷ the words of the other, responsible for the process of ideological constitution of individual consciousness (due to their

¹⁵ BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. BAKHTIN. Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 5.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 15.

intervention, our ideological attitudes regarding others and the world may be (re)defined) are affected by different processes of production and transmission, determined by the contextual framing to which they are subjected. However, independently of the way the discourse of the other is (re)elaborated by the discourse of the speaking person, the dialogic relation established between them will transform the words of the other according to senses and social-ideological accentuations on the basis of the discursive project of those who say something. These words/discourses may take two forms: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse.

The authoritative discourse demands of us recognition and assimilation and because of this, it is much more difficult for us to modify their senses and accentuations when it is integrated to the discourse of those who speak. The author adds that their existence is inseparable from what “authority” for a given group represents, whether it is political, institutional, or personal. Contrary to this, the internally persuasive discourse intertwines with our own words, becoming half ours, half somebody else’s, and is able to organize, from the inside, our own words. Their development in individual consciousness is constant, adapting to new contexts and situations and, for that reason, it may interrelate in a tense and conflictual process with other internally persuasive words. Because it is and remains open to new senses, it reveals them in each new dialogized context, making it impossible to know everything about it and about what it can still say to us.

We then understand that while working with objectified contents that do not favor the aesthetic finishing of knowledge, the relation that students establish with these contents cannot be other than one of authoritative assimilation, as truth [ИСТИНА - *Istina*]. This fact will have even more serious implications in the students’ constitution of their individual consciences when we take into account that, according to Freire (2014), the school, through their work with language, has been historically reproducing the ideology of the dominant class.

Thus, when we reflect on classrooms in which there are two languages to which students relate socially in quite an asymmetrical way, we see that the authority of teachers’ word replicates in the interpreters’ words. Interpreters, when interpreting the discourse of those who have institutional power, do it from the logic of the Portuguese language. This process, which results in reproducing the dominant ideology, also

establishes a new relation of power inside the school: the SLI is the person who has knowledge of what teachers say and the way they do, but also of the sign language, a fact that places SLI in the center of all deaf people interactions. This way, it is not possible to establish a dialogue between the histories of deaf students and those who utter in Portuguese/Spanish without SLI mediation, and this restriction does not allow the words of the others (the teachers', the hearing students'), as they are uttered, to become internally persuasive words for deaf people. They are not intertwined with deaf people's words and are thus unable to organize, from the inside, deaf people's own words.

Therefore, it is possible to say that teaching practices are distant from the concrete cultural and historical world of deaf people, excluding them from the possibility of individual transformation, from learning. This way, we realize that the past, which did not allow an equitable education between deaf and hearing people, is reproduced in the present (although in another discourse), projecting again a future of exclusion, non-learning, ignorance of mankind history and culture - deaf people's and also hearing people's. SLI is thus assigned a distinct role in the replication of this reality, still contributing to the maintenance of power relations between languages and social groups.

Final Considerations

In this text, we sought to discuss the implications of SLI training and practice in the first school years, the underlying presuppositions about their work in this education level, and, consequently, inclusive education - the way it is organized today in Brazil and the possibility of its being introduced in Uruguay. Although inclusive education has been the claim of some sectors that can influence the country's education policies, the current results of work in basic education and at the university (professional training that emphasizes the production and translation of texts from and to USL) point to the fact that the way that has been followed until now is the one which better respects the social-cultural and linguistic peculiarities of deaf people.

Therefore, in spite of the discourse of acceptance of diversity and the necessary transformation of school institutions to assure respect to the peculiarities of all students,

the *status quo* is maintained: a context of inequality and disrespect that historically affects deaf people's education, masked by the presence of SLIs. The latter, by their turn, because they are unable to assume the role of deaf students' interlocutors, since most deaf students have not assimilated sign language, take the responsibility of teaching this language to deaf students, and they do it based on an objectified conception of language, adequate for specific school contexts. Thus, they contribute to the false idea that the assimilation of a language is possible from the knowledge of its linguistic forms and/or of sentences completely severed from the history and the culture of that which is uttered in that language. We must consider that, with rare exceptions, SLIs also do not live the language from inside, from the culture that determines and is determined by Libras/LSU. They still collaborate to maintain the mistaken understanding that school learning is possible only by means of the linguistic knowledge made available by them to deaf students.

Thus, they corroborate, very often without questioning their role, (i) the myth of learning without language; (ii) the historical view that deaf people depend on them for living with hearing people (in a non-reciprocal relation), as if the deaf did not have anything to say and/or share in terms of experience and life to majority social groups; and (iii) the establishment of a new power relation of hearing/deaf people inside schools. In this asymmetrical relation, the words of the others – teachers, SLIs – are transmitted to deaf students in an authoritative way with no possibility for establishing a dialogue with them.

In this text, we argue that an education effectively focused on being inclusive/equitable cannot be reduced to the existence, in the school sphere, of people who speak two languages. Also, the conviviality therein cannot be treated as if it were peaceful. To live this conflict would imply the possibility of multiple discourses in circulation, the words of the others, to become, free from authoritative transmission, internally persuasive utterances, offering thus students the “mutual constitution of the mind by the world and of the world by the mind, of human beings by society and society by human beings” (SOBRAL, s/d., p.6).¹⁸ These are discourses which, instead of treating education as severed from life, aim to establish with it an intrinsic relation, so that life is lived in education and education, in life. This relation between

¹⁸ In original: “constituição mútua da mente pelo mundo e do mundo pela mente, dos seres humanos pela sociedade e da sociedade pelos seres humanos.”

languages/cultures becomes still more complex when these two languages/cultures have quite asymmetrical social values as regards prestige, as is the case of Portuguese/Spanish – Libras/USL, respectively, and between the hearing people's and deaf people's cultures.

This way, an education that intends to be inclusive should imply an intricate transformation of social relations built inside schools, mainly regarding the ethical responsibility established by teachers as they have a double exotopic position in relation to their students: by giving them completeness and making them constantly dislocate toward the (non-linear) knowledge production, which is their project as teachers.

Thus, a change of this reality would only be accomplished in Brazil by introducing bilingual education such as proposed and developed in Uruguay, which, by allowing deaf children and young people to assimilate a language through which being-as-event would be possible, the aesthetic unity of knowledge/science and life can be accomplished, through verbal interactions with deaf people and/or directly by teachers who utter in sign language. In this case, it is not a question of believing that only language change would be a determinant of this process, but that of considering the possibility that is offered when learning conditions are transformed. This way, we do not ignore countless other factors that would also be determinant for an education practice that makes this process viable: teachers and their excess of seeing in relation to students and their education project; students as teachers' excess of seeing; the questioning of school tradition that works with knowledge objectification, to mention just a few.

When we turn the learning context into a space where people utter in sign language – experienced in life and not taught to students –, other power relations are established inside schools/classes, because teachers (as most of them are hearing) are obligated to move from their “linguistic comfort zone” when they utter in a language distinct from that in which they were constituted. This is something that will potentially require a transformation of their teaching practices and the way their discourses will be produced. We say ‘potentially’ because for that to happen, there must be, on the part of teachers, an understanding of language in its discursive dimension and, consequently, of sign language as the one that allows new processes of signification of the world and social-ideological constitution of deaf people: a language that cannot be uttered only for

interactions among peers and the exchange of daily and informal experiences, but rather one which will allow the development and social construction of socially and culturally conveyed knowledges (LODI; HARRISON; CAMPOS, 2002).

It is then necessary to question the concept of inclusion as something restricted to school contexts, because its current understanding in Brazil makes these processes far from being accomplished. And school exclusion, which is a landmark in the history of deaf people's education, is perpetuated by the education practices of teachers and the relations between SLIs and deaf students. To discuss and argue for deaf people inclusion must then lead necessarily to an extension of this concept to all social spheres. This implies, as a consequence, the recognition of deaf people as part of a social, cultural and linguistic minority so that their rights and duties as citizens are guaranteed.

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