

## DEAF GAINS IN BRAZIL

## Linguistic Policies and Network Establishment

RONICE MÜLLER DE QUADROS, KARIN STROBEL,  
AND MARA LÚCIA MASUTTI

This chapter aims to present several effective gains that Deaf people have achieved in Brazil following the approval of Decree 5626 in December 2005, which regulates the Brazilian Sign Language Federal Law (Libras Law 10.436 of April 2002). It will also set out the experiences and challenges confronted by the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina (IFSC) regarding the support given by these legal documents. These institutions encourage Deaf empowerment and all other cultural forms of expression by the Deaf community, and promote the deconstruction of logophonocentric paradigms.<sup>1</sup> The results of these actions are the Deaf gains that show how Deaf people organize their social relations in order to develop knowledge. The main Deaf Gain discussed here is the empowerment of the network that established a Deaf organization in order to exchange experiences and knowledge through the conditions created by these institutions. There are several related Deaf gains that we will discuss as well, such as multilingual awareness throughout Brazil, the influence on translation studies, the visibility of cultural differences, linguistic and cultural negotiations among Deaf and hearing people and in Deaf-Deaf meetings in the e-learning system, Deaf access to academic knowledge, and Deaf people as enhancers of Deaf education.

## Linguistic Policies as a Deaf Gain

The Libras Federal Law 10.436 (from April 2002) was a critical milestone in Brazilian Sign Language linguistic policies. This law recognizes and affirms Libras as one of the Brazilian languages used by a specific community in Brazil. This law is a milestone because it is a concrete result of Deaf-social-movement demands that are directly connected to academic research conducted on Libras.<sup>2</sup>

National Decree 5626 (2005) establishes guidelines on the implementation of Law 10.436 (2002) relating to Brazilian Sign Language (the earlier law is referred to as the Libras Law). Some of these guidelines are (a) the obligatory offer



of Brazilian Sign Language classes in general undergraduate teaching programs; (b) the opening of regular programs for the education of Brazilian Sign Language teaching, bilingual education for nursery and elementary schools, Portuguese-as-a-second-language education, and Sign Language Interpreter training; (c) the priority of Deaf people for vacancies in Libras teacher-training programs; (d) Deaf people's access to bilingual education (Libras as an instructional language and Portuguese as a second language); and (e) Deaf people's access to public spaces through Libras.

The consequences of the implementation of this law are that Deaf as well as hearing Brazilians have started taking advantage of this visually organized language that is Libras. Sign language is becoming more and more common among Brazilians.<sup>3</sup> The main Deaf Gain here is breaking the monolingual status constructed by linguistic policies over the years. The law reviews this perspective in turn, showing that Brazilians are not monolingual but rather multilingual throughout the country. The Libras Law has empowered the discussion on bilingual education in Brazil for Deaf people as well as for other bilingual language pairs. Never before have Brazilians had a law that recognizes a language other than Brazilian Portuguese. Even the indigenous population, which has bilingual schools, does not have a law recognizing their languages. This has had a huge impact on the way the country has started to consider the languages that are signed and spoken in its territory. In this sense, the mandatory Libras classes for all courses that train teachers of every area have made students realize that Libras is a language and that there are Brazilian cultures and languages besides Portuguese in the country. Teachers thus increase their knowledge, graduate, and start their careers with these new concepts. As teachers, they are then able to disseminate their multilingual perspective and the recognition of Deaf rights.

According to Louis Jean Calvet, linguistic policies are decisions about relations between languages and society strictly connected to language planning, including the implementation and application of these decisions.<sup>4</sup> However, there is no language planning without judicial support. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that Libras, with its own law, represents an important advance in the organization of new linguistic policies involving Deaf communities. It is also important to highlight that, despite the fragile aspects presented by legal documents relating to its propositions, the Libras official settlement has a direct effect on the linguistic status of Libras and, as a consequence, on its power correlation with other languages.

Decree 5626 enshrines concrete actions to transform the social exclusion of the Brazilian Deaf community, not only in formal education but also in its relation with work. Although this decree cannot be described as a legal no-fail and no-gaps instrument, it may be considered a reference tool for the recognition of Deaf communities' needs.

A policy for the use of sign language is visible at universities, schools, and in public spaces. Despite this, it is not a stress-free construction process. Unfortu-



nately, legal comments do not guarantee that Deaf-Deaf meetings to promote effective education will happen. The perspectives of the main discourse that focus on the logophonocentrism of Portuguese as an inclusive tool are still given considerable emphasis in Brazil. The crucial question H-Dirksen Bauman raises in his article "What Frames of Reference Have We Used to See Deafness in Deaf People?" remains current, as the boundary oscillates in terms of projects for Deaf citizens.<sup>5</sup> This boundary does not always favor deaf people and sign language.

It is not possible to naively believe that progress may happen without tension from contact with frontier zones.<sup>6</sup> Still, the Libras Law has empowered the multilingual perspectives that are being brought to Brazil with globalization. This represents a true Deaf Gain for Brazilian people: to be recognized as multilingual and to improve education with this perspective.

### *Obligatory Libras in Higher Education*

What effective gains do we have given the inclusion of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) in higher education? The main gain of this law is that Libras is now being disseminated throughout the country among the Deaf as well as among hearing people. Hearing people are gaining the opportunity to discover this language. This is also a substantial gain, because there are not yet sufficient numbers of professionals who can lecture on Libras in the various university programs. Universities are obliged to resolve this situation by offering more higher-education courses in Libras because of the high demand created by the law.

Another important aspect of the law is that, with Federal Decree 5626, many Brazilian public universities have opened positions for new professors, for which Deaf people are applying and being taken on as Libras teachers. Moreover, these are full-time, tenure-track positions that guarantee time for research as well. This active presence of Deaf professionals gives new perspectives to the interactive processes between Deaf and hearing subjects and begins the process of reviewing ways of accessing knowledge. As a consequence, hearing students have contact with Deaf people, get to know Deaf ways, and have opportunities to see the world through their language.

The fact is that Deaf participation in higher education and in training future educators has stimulated understanding of the linguistic and cultural differences of Deaf communities, as well as of the development of sociovisual skills. The former "dying away" of the Deaf was caused by many factors, the greatest of which was the absence of promotion and recognition of members of this community by a considerable percentage of the country's six million Brazilians. This community was neglected for a long time by public policy in the country. However, the picture has changed radically over the last decade, because many people have started to notice the existence of the Deaf community as a consequence of the legal stipulation.

In this context, Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) has now started to figure as



a language in the academic environment, making Deaf people more visible. With this in mind, it is interesting to consider how deaf citizens' lives are affected as a result of this academic visibility. What occurs is that the linguistic policy starts to gradually create social and cultural networks. This social connection then moves on from its own static signification in relation to language conceptions. Deaf people in contact with each other throughout the country have started to question how it is possible to enable the Brazilian Sign Language-learning process; in other words, they are questioning linguistic-planning mechanisms, which will start to "give birth" to a multilingual and multimodal society.

Linguistic-planning mechanisms point out relations of power. As Michel Foucault asserts, power exists at different levels of society and delineates a social network of micropowers.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the coexistence of Libras and Portuguese in some spaces can mean that hearing people feel excluded when sign language is used instead of Portuguese, and vice versa. These contexts lead to feelings of exclusion that are related to these micropowers. Hearing people feel that Portuguese should be used, and Deaf people feel that sign language should be used. When this does not happen on either side, invisible power relations are invoked, even if only silently. Even this situation, though, can turn into a Deaf Gain when negotiation takes place. The premise that linguistic relations give rise to an invisible camp of micropowers established in systems parallel to the official system cannot be ignored.

The subject of sign language has been taken up in discussion circuits that have never existed before and creates a new correlation between linguistic, cultural, and ethical forces. This is also a Deaf Gain for the whole of society in Brazil. For example, the visibility of a lecture that is interpreted into Brazilian Sign Language is undeniable. Simultaneous interpreting is an indication that there is a Deaf "audience," that its right to the information has been given importance, and that a linguistic policy has been translated and implemented. Finally, the institutional formalization of the Brazilian Sign Language as a core discipline allows this knowledge, which for a long time was not considered, to be reconsidered.

### *Brazilian Sign Language: Establishing Priorities for Deaf Teachers*

The legislative priority given to Deaf people for teaching Brazilian Sign Language is a significant Deaf Gain, because it reflects the recognition that Deaf people have a singular linguistic and cultural potential that requires social and political investment. The importance of Deaf Brazilian Sign Language teachers is not restricted to language teaching, as they contribute Deaf norms effectively to various areas within the education process.<sup>8</sup> Adapting to the visual constitution of knowledge is important in order to change the predominant logophonocentric perspective. In short, students have the opportunity to access Libras through Deaf eyes. This is a Deaf Gain.

Moreover, interactive situations depend both on a certain level of sympathy



transference in the professor–student relation and on the pedagogical interactive processes that can be established effectively between Deaf teachers and Deaf students. This relationship can produce significant effects on manifesting student potential. Thus, the presence of Deaf teachers in Deaf-education institutions can help to disarticulate the long process that identified Deafness as a handicap. In this way, the identity perspective of a Deaf person as a social agent is established. Such kinds of representation contribute to the reeducation of society's vision of different ways of social participation. Such contexts are being observed at the UFSC and the IFSC, where there are Deaf professors.

In education, Deaf teachers develop pedagogical strategies such as performance, storytelling, and visual-arts production, which are indispensable areas of Deaf education. As Karin Strobel points out, Deaf people present cultural artifacts that reflect the singularity of their visual, linguistic, literary, sporting, political, and material experiences, as in their use of technology.<sup>9</sup> In this way, one can assert that Decree 5626 supports a valorization of the Deaf professional-training process. However, the implementation of such training does not happen without a paradigmatic tension arising from opponents of this vision who try to debunk this approach. Despite such conflicts between different concepts of inclusion, the project for Deaf education in the context of higher education has been significant in recent years, with 867 Deaf students starting degrees in Brazilian Sign Language at UFSC. In addition, 371 Deaf students graduated at the undergraduate level, 12 Deaf students graduated with a master's degree, and 4 deaf students obtained a doctorate degree.

At UFSC, six Deaf professors have regular full-time, tenured positions. Similarly, other Deaf professors have been hired by other Brazilian universities.

### *Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese Usage and Diffusion for Deaf People's Access to Education*

There is a huge Deaf Gain from the prominence given in the law to the condition of Brazilian Portuguese as the Deaf community's second language. Recognition like this makes it necessary to dig deeper into the implications for the process of implementing a linguistic policy built on sign language rather than Brazilian Portuguese. In this context, Chapters IV and VI of Decree 5626 enshrine the following:

IV—to adopt coherent evaluation mechanisms with the second language learning process, in the written exam corrections, valuing the semantic aspect and recognizing the linguistic singularity manifested on the formal aspect of the Brazilian Portuguese language.

VI—Brazilian Sign Language and Brazilian Portuguese translator and interpreter training.



Deaf relations with Brazilian Portuguese start to figure within a comparative system of a second language and are used as an evaluative parameter. This is a concrete Deaf Gain in Brazilian society for the deconstruction of the monolingual ideology.

The discussion that provoked this legal decree cannot be separated from the general debate about identity and linguistic policies. In this sense, the theoretical perspectives developed by Homi Bhabha, Walter Mignolo, and Stuart Hall contribute to the analysis of the colonial relationships between deaf and hearing people in Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

The Deaf gains of professional people in the areas of translation and interpreting are undeniable. The policy regarding Brazilian Sign Language translation and interpreting has developed little by little, not only with higher-education courses, for example, but also with bachelor's degrees in Brazilian Sign Language (called *Letras Libras*) to train Brazilian Sign Language translators and interpreters, and with the effective insertion of the Deaf into a society that will guarantee their rights. In addition, in postgraduate study, sign-language training for translators and interpreters now has its own space within the field of translation studies, with academic recognition guaranteed. UFSC has just started offering a specific research program, interpreting studies, to meet this demand.

The consolidation of a formal academic interpreter training leads to a domino effect. The prominence of this profession also entails a gain for the Deaf community that extends through the rest of society, in that it is no longer subject to constraints relating to the usage of its second language. This is especially true in the case of Brazilian Portuguese in its spoken modality, because of the presence of sign-language interpreters in a variety of formal situations.

Another Deaf Gain has been in the field of translation, occupied particularly by bilingual Deaf people. A new profession has come about through the creation of Brazilian Sign Language undergraduate courses: the Deaf translator-actor. Texts in Portuguese are translated into the Brazilian Sign Language by translators who are studying sign-language translation, the majority of whom are Deaf professionals. They have developed specific methods for performing their translations within a Deaf norm,<sup>11</sup> observing at the same time issues such as faithfulness to the source text in the source language (Portuguese, in this case). Translations such as these have been described by Rimar Ramalho Segala and Saulo Xavier Souza, for example.<sup>12</sup> The Deaf norms of the translators are related to discourse organization, for example, in the use of written words with visual hints, a kind of glossary with pictorial representations in sign-word order, as a strategy that drives discourse in the target sign language. Brazilian Sign Language translators are essential for guaranteeing that Brazilian Portuguese texts will be available in the corresponding *Libras* in educational spaces. Translation also represents a gain for the translation studies area: the research that is being developed in sign-language translation and interpretation studies has an impact on translation studies, es-



pecially in regard to intermodality, including interlinguistic and intersemiotic analyses of translation and interpretation products. To translate sign language to a spoken language or vice versa, there is a modal effect of sign language being gestural-visual. This means that when sign language is involved, there is always an interlinguistic process associated with an intersemiotic process, as sign language has signs and gestures in a single modality. Matters were more separate when two spoken languages were involved. However, the change in the paradigm brought about by sign languages can bring new approaches to translation studies.<sup>13</sup>

The presence of Deaf translators contributes to a Brazilian Sign Language course with a possible Deaf norm.<sup>14</sup> The foundation of the whole educational process is consolidated through social interactions.

The institutionalization of sign-language interpreters and sign-language translators represents Deaf Gain, because these people integrate bilingualism that starts to be established at a national level. The deconstruction of the monolingual society takes place through the presence of other languages. These professionals, together with Deaf communities nationwide, make the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) visible.

### *Deaf Rights to a Bilingual Education*

Chapter VI of Federal Decree 5626, Article 22, Paragraph 1, describes precisely the following: "[B]ilingual schools or classrooms are those in which Brazilian Sign Language and the written modality of the Portuguese Language are used for instruction throughout the entire development of the educational process." Even though doctors, audiologists, and speech therapists still question the effects of Deaf people's being exposed to sign language, this law recognizes Deaf bilingual education. The law avoids controversial perspectives about the relevance of sign language to Deaf education. This legal position is crucial for families with Deaf children, as they have the right to precise information about the importance of sign language for their children.

The deconstruction of a Brazilian monolingualism is vital to meeting the real demands of a population comprising various ethnic groups and linguistic singularities so that they are respected and answerable. In this sense, movements for sign languages and Deaf education have contributed to the opening of the general debate on difference policy.

The policy aspects of Brazilian Sign Language cited here require linguistic planning and effective actions to its implementation. In the following sections, we will approach the consequences of Federal Decree 5626 in the ambit of UFSC and IFSC.

### **Network Establishment through Deaf Education: A Strong Deaf Gain**

The UFSC offers training programs for Brazilian Sign Language researchers in two modalities: e-learning and face-to-face courses. The e-learning course is



being offered nationally in fifteen states within Brazil under the official seal of the UFSC, as well as in partnership with other local public universities. This course was arranged for the Deaf, in other words, from its inception; the method of teaching and learning was thought through with Deaf scholars to guarantee the success of the learning-teaching process.<sup>15</sup>

One of the gains is Deaf-Deaf meetings in the context of e-learning education. These were created to count on Deaf ways of arranging the learning and teaching process through a very well established network for the virtual environment of teaching and learning (VETL). Deaf understandings have changed and contributed to the understandings applied to other undergraduate courses offered in the e-learning modality. The visual arrangement of the VETL with a Deaf format, through the usage of schemata and items, has favored the teaching process. This same pattern has started to be used for other e-learning courses offered by the university. Thus, Deaf understandings have modified institutional understandings in the context of formal teaching in the e-learning modality.

As well as this course, UFSC offers an undergraduate course to train Brazilian Sign Language translators and interpreters in the two modalities of teaching. The training process of these professionals is a Deaf Gain, because access to information is given through bilingual professionals. The qualification of the sign-language translators and interpreters has become essential, because the Deaf have started to hold positions inside and outside the university that require more qualified sign-language professional translators and interpreters. The performance levels of these professionals have risen significantly. They now have access to their education following a Deaf norm.

The virtual spaces for teaching include collaborative spaces that can be restricted to a local group or opened to every student in the country. Since the beginning, Deaf students have used the collective spaces as effective learning spaces. From the e-learning education managers' perspective, these collaborative spaces have taken on a greater dimension in the Letras Libras courses. There is a culture based on the establishment of contact networks through Deaf-to-Deaf meetings. This is historical in the Deaf community, dating to even before the advent of the Internet and improvements to new technologies. Deaf people contact each other from the North to the South, the East to the West quickly and efficiently. Whereas once they passed information face-to-face,<sup>16</sup> their need for contact is now empowered by Internet technology that breaks down distances through synchronized video exchange.

Deaf Gain is characterized here by the meeting of Deaf people who deconstruct the old culture, which was based on marginalization. The deconstruction of myths about Deaf people is being replaced by visual experiences and Deaf traditions. Gladis Perlin and Karin Strobel have discussed Deaf-Deaf meeting representations and the enforcement of Deaf identities.<sup>17</sup> The network established in



the Letras Libras courses is an example of this. What the Deaf used to do without technology some years ago has now taken on a new dimension: fifteen states were connected through virtual-environmental spaces in which more than eight hundred Deaf people could communicate using Libras and written Portuguese. These spaces were used as Deaf–Deaf meeting places, not only for the purpose of knowledge sharing but also for empowering Deaf organizations in the country.

Initially, all the students in the first group (500 students, with 447 Deaf among them) had access to all the messages posted in the VETL. However, the participation was so intensive that tutors had to request group creation by each unit so that participants could better control the interactions that were under their responsibility. We provided the group creation but, to the VETL managers' surprise, there were complaints from students who considered the contact among all students throughout the country to be an essential part of the learning process. The Deaf students always interacted with their colleagues from around the whole country, which was different from the experience of students from other e-learning courses managed by UFSC. The reaction of the Deaf students provoked an interactive-space review at the VETL. As a result, common spaces were created for all students so that they could all interact with every unit in the country, as well as locally within each unit (this first group of students counted on nine units throughout nine Brazilian federal units). With the second group, which brought more than 450 Deaf students to the Sign Language Program and 450 students to the Sign Language Interpreting and Translation Program, common spaces were already established. More units were added to the first nine, totaling fifteen units around the country. Deaf people took advantage of this network for their own purposes: Deaf–Deaf meeting spaces constitute a true Deaf Gain. The virtual Cyber Café is an interaction space used by students in every course in the whole country. The students take advantage of the national dimension of the common space to debate questions related to their course and to political questions. The common space is also a leisure space. Students empowered the Cyber Café space to establish Deaf–Deaf meetings. From this network, Facebook became popular, and specific spaces for Deaf–Deaf meeting were created there. This network of Deaf students has also been empowered by other available technologies.

In May 2011, four thousand Deaf people in Brazil organized themselves in the capital of the country, Brasilia, to stand up against mainstreaming policies for Deaf education. Deaf people used their network contacts to empower the Deaf–Deaf meetings that were already part of the Deaf community, but now in another, much more powerful dimension. After the 2011 protest, Deaf people used the network to mobilize the whole country, including not only Deaf people but also all hearing people who could make the movement stronger. They organized public audiences in seventeen states in the country with the local representative justice ministers to deliver formal documents explaining why Deaf education needed to



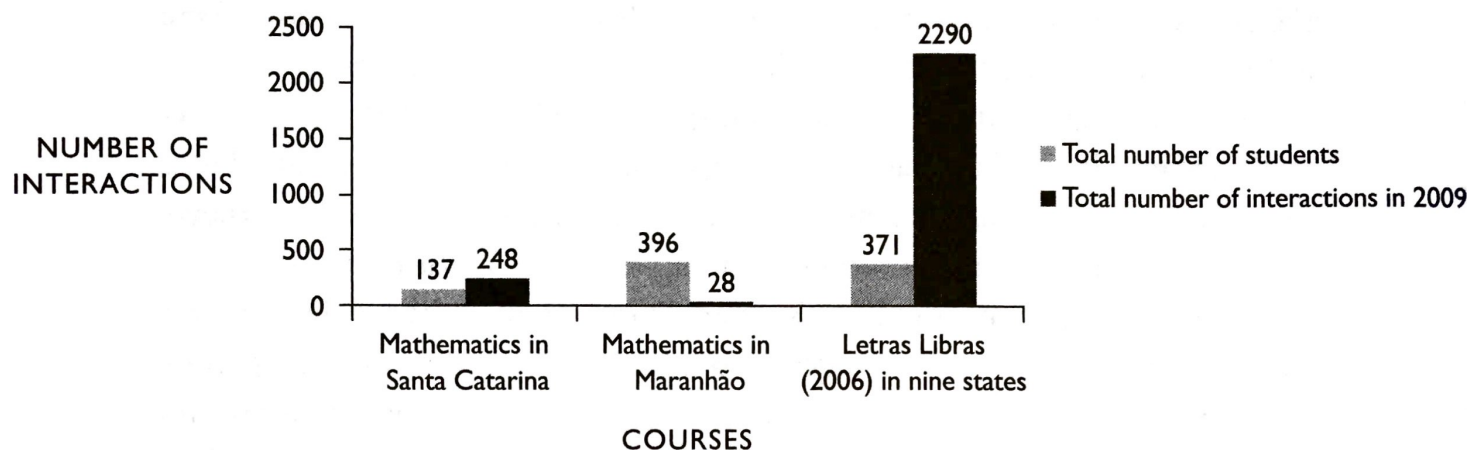


Figure 20.1. Social network in Brazil by course: average number of interactions by students in e-learning undergraduate courses during 2009.

take place in bilingual schools instead of regular schools. This organization happened through social networks available on the Internet. The huge Deaf Gain here is the empowerment of Deaf-Deaf meetings using these networks as tools.

These spaces became spaces for social interaction as well. Effectively, virtual spaces for interaction are a Deaf Gain, as they have become appropriate vehicles for the subjective expression of the Deaf. The data comparing the use of these virtual spaces as collaborative spaces by Deaf students and hearing students reveal huge differences within a single university. The number of accesses and effective interchanges during 2009 at UFSC in the Letras Libras course for Deaf students was considerably higher than other accesses by students in the two e-learning math courses for hearing students only (Figure 20.1).

The modality effects of sign language require the organization of new teaching systems with visual tools. For example, all the classes at UFSC are prepared by designers in sign language, materials are produced in sign, and evaluations are organized using sign language. The sign-language teacher, translator, and interpreter training courses present this perspective as part of their teaching and learning approaches. The Deaf students use intensively collaborative spaces to teach in sign language, as well as in written Portuguese-as-a-second-language, which is also recognized. (Libras became the instructional language, so Portuguese is no more a factor of exclusion. Deaf people started to use Portuguese without being worried that they would be evaluated in their usage. Written Portuguese-as-a-second-language circulated throughout academic activities, alternating with Libras in movies posted by the students.)

By the end of the courses, several Deaf students said that they had learned Portuguese better, even though this was not the goal of the courses. They were in a safe place to use their second language in their own ways. This made them learn more about the language and empowered their bilingual status, which is an intrinsic Deaf Gain.<sup>18</sup>



As Ana Regina e Souza Campello states, Deaf pedagogies or visual pedagogies are the best way of teaching and learning for Deaf people.<sup>19</sup> Social networks are visual tools Deaf people use to empower their learning processes, and given that this works, it may help to improve e-learning systems. This, too, is a Deaf Gain.

As Vilmar Silva argues, the social network that has been empowered by Brazilian Deaf people involves spaces in which they share their language, their culture, and their differences, as well as develop complex ways of spreading their knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Deaf people are social agents; they form these networks, making and deconstructing their own paths, making it impossible to define their strategies of organization merely as closed systems. Different groups form different networks, and Deaf people integrate them into their everyday lives and in their social movements. They make it possible to diffuse common needs and spread them quickly throughout the whole country, connecting local and broader needs. These connections through the Internet disseminate knowledge as well as strategies of articulation by Deaf people that can offer new readings of the world and can contribute to new meanings for possible social and cultural transformations. In this sense, these social networks empower spaces of negotiation, even when they are divergent or conflicting.

### Deaf Cultural Marks at UFSC and IFSC

In the Letras Libras program at UFSC and the Bilingual Unity program at IFSC, there are now spaces in virtual environments, including DVDs and videoconferences, in which Deaf actors translate academic texts from Brazilian Portuguese to Brazilian Sign Language in various disciplines. These materials have been linguistically and culturally adapted by the instructional designers with the goal of making the materials accessible to Deaf students.

Such visual materials are a Deaf Gain incorporating Deaf senses that can improve education for everybody, as is mentioned by these Deaf researchers: "Visual experience means the usage of vision (in total substitution to the hearing form), as a form of communication. From this visual experience emerges a deaf culture represented by sign language, by the different way of being, expressing, knowing the world, entering the arts, scientific and academic knowledge."<sup>21</sup> In accordance with this idea, we have come up with a cultural and pedagogical model that places emphasis on the Deaf way of teaching, which demands visual-teaching strategies, sign-language knowledge transmission, and Deaf professors' presence at schools and universities. These visual-teaching strategies start with visual contact between teachers and students. This is an interesting approach, as all the material is available through videos. When we started to produce videos for this purpose, our Deaf translator was looking at cue cards below the camera. Students complained that the Deaf translators were not looking at them. This led us to change the method of presenting the cues the Deaf translators needed for their work: we started using a teleprompter. Another situation was the presence in the videos of



hearing teachers with sign-language interpreters. Students complained about the size of the sign-language window on the screen. So, we put the hearing teacher in a small window in the corner of the screen, in contrast to the whole body of the sign-language interpreter. However, this was still visually uncomfortable, as the head of the interpreter was a kind of visual "noise."

Deaf students have made notes and filmed others in sign language with cameras, indispensable objects that have now been rapidly overtaken by mobile phones, which are continuously used to take pictures, make films, and text messages. All this technology has empowered Deaf-Deaf meetings, because they enable face-to-face contact, even if not in a shared space. Such technological tools influence proximity among Deaf people and have become a kind of cultural artifact that helps to construct social relationships, defend against threats to Deaf identities, transmit cultural values, and motivate the exchange of experiences about Deaf identity and the celebration of Deaf people.

The Deaf-Deaf meeting seeks to unify the Deaf community as a singular cultural identity in an affirmative perspective, so that it can be seen by everyone as a single group. This is very important for the organization of the Deaf community inside the hearing community. This is the way to transformation, in which the recognition of a strong organization enables negotiation with others.<sup>22</sup> According to Gladis Dalcin, the Deaf feel like strangers inside their own families.<sup>23</sup> This occurs because of the language barrier, which makes it hard for the Deaf to have the same kind of familial identification that the hearing do. Identification, for the Deaf, occurs inside the Deaf community, where they create these spaces empowered by technology.

In relation to national cultural identity, Owen Wrigley makes an interesting remark: "Deafness is a country without a proper 'place.' It is a citizenship without a geographic origin."<sup>24</sup> This may also explain why the social networks available through the Letras Libras course are a very strong means of empowering Deaf relationships. We present a story from Sueli Fernandes: "[T]he mother comes into the room and finds the curious and afflicted gaze of the Deaf daughter in front of the world map. Her gestures expressed anxiety by receiving an answer that would help her to understand what was going on: 'Mum, the Japanese live in Japan; here is Germany, the country of the German people; Italy, that is the nation of the Italians; where is the Deaf country, mum? Where is my nation?'"<sup>25</sup> Deaf subjects, as holders of a different culture, feel like foreigners in their own society. They are in the buses, malls, and universities, cheering for the same soccer teams, enjoying eating rice and beans, living in the same country, ethnically formed by the same African, Portuguese, and Amerindian ancestors and some Italian and Japanese and German ancestors in the southern part of the country. A Deaf male baby is given blue clothes and a ball, and a Deaf female baby pink clothes and a doll. As Wrigley mentions, Deaf people are a country where history has been rewrit-



ten over generations and sign-language cultures, as the social knowledge of Deaf people is made again and again by each generation.<sup>26</sup> The Deaf community itself is the Deaf country. Thus, Deaf-Deaf meetings are crucial.

How is culture created and transmitted unless by language? If Deaf and hearing people do not share the same linguistic code, how can they share a culture? It is possible to have interchanges thanks to language competence, but each group must have its own cultural space in which to identify itself. Deaf and hearing worlds construct cultural experiences of their collective identities. For example, every year, the Letras Libras students arrange the National Meeting of Letras Libras Students (ENELL) in different Brazilian regions. During the first, second, and third editions of the ENELL, the great majority of the participants were Deaf students, because for them this kind of event was essential to organizing Deaf-Deaf meetings.

In these terms, Deaf-Deaf meetings represent the possibility of sharing the meanings of identity constitution. Thus, the other is someone who uses the same language, who can construct possibilities for effective interchange, and who can share a significant political process that makes sense in Deaf terms. It was from the Deaf desire to be part of a group of Letras Libras students who shared the same way of being and communicating that we noticed that these were determinant factors in the process of raising the Deaf identity. Therefore, in the face of the "discomfort" felt by Deaf people in relation to the hearing culture and of their bewilderment in seeing others behaving differently from themselves, they built up a new approach, a new way of seeing themselves, and they sought to find their own identity in relation to their own group.

For these Deaf students, it was the academic Deaf-Hearing relationship that inspired groups to manifestly seek out the value of their own culture and the recognition of their own rights and values. This initially came about through achieving official recognition of their language from the authorities through Federal Law 10.436, which recognizes Brazilian Sign Language as the first language of Brazilian Deaf citizens. This was followed by Federal Decree 5626, which has made it possible to expand Deaf teacher training in several university environments.

### Final Remarks

The bilingual educational perspective of Deaf milestones anticipates the awareness of Deaf subjects about the significance of being Deaf, which, until just a short time ago, happened only when Deaf people became adults. Deaf ways of learning and teaching use Deaf-Deaf meetings as the basis for development. The social and educational networks of Deaf people that are used in educational centers have proved to be a Deaf Gain. The Deaf-Deaf meaning, as Wilson Miranda has pointed out, is the key to empowering the Deaf community.<sup>27</sup> It allows for the possibility of constructing Deaf identities as people and as social agents. The network



at Letras Libras has shown this potential connection as an empowering social and cultural tool. We will end with a quote by a Deaf teacher, collected by Silva in his research on Deaf milestones:

The networks of contacts among Deaf people have long existed. Deaf associations played an important role in constructing Deaf networks. The research that we conducted shows that these networks had important effects on the lives of Deaf people. Social networks are milestones of Deaf social movements. We now have strong networks through FENEIS (National Federation of the Deaf) and *Letras Libras*, which in the past were represented by Deaf Associations and informal person-person contact among Deaf people. This was the first form of social network that Deaf people used to enable contact among themselves. I think that all these social networks are focused on the celebration of sign language, which empowers Deaf people around the country.<sup>28</sup>

## Notes

We thank Joseph Murray (Gallaudet University) and H-Dirksen Bauman (Gallaudet University) for their comments on a previous draft of this chapter.

1. Jacques Derrida, *Gramatologia* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2004).
2. Ronice Müller de Quadros, "Políticas Linguísticas e Bilingüismo na Educação de Surdos Brasileiros," in *Linguística Luso-Brasileira*, ed. Ana M. Carvalho (Madrid: Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert, 2009), 215–35.
3. Noriko Lúcia Sabanai, "A Evolução da Comunicação Entre e com Surdos no Brasil," *HELB* 1, no. 1 (2007), accessed on January 25, 2011, <http://www.helb.org.br/>; Ronice Müller de Quadros et al., *Exame Prolibras* (Florianópolis, Brazil: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2009).
4. Louis Jean Calvet, *As Políticas Linguísticas*, trans. Isabel de Oliveira Duarte, Jonas Tenfen, and Marcos Bagno (São Paulo: Parábola Editorial; IPOL, 2007).
5. H-Dirksen Bauman, "What Frames of Reference Have We Used to See Deafness in Deaf People?," Canadian Hearing Society, accessed December 2011, <http://www.chs.ca/>.
6. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," in *Ways of Reading*, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's / Bedford, 1999).
7. Michel Foucault, *A Arqueologia do Saber* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes Centro do Livro Brasileiro, 1972).
8. Christopher Stone, *Toward a Deaf Translation Norm* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2009).
9. Karin Strobel, *As Imagens do Outro sobre a Cultura Surda* (Florianópolis, Brazil: Editora UFSC, 2008), 118.
10. Homi Bhabha, *O Local da Cultura*, trans. Myriam Ávila, Eliana L. L. Reis, and Gláucia R. Gonçalves (Belo Horizonte, Brazil: UFMG, 1998); Walter Dignolo, *Histórias Locais/Projetos Globais: Colonialidade, Saberes Subalternos, e Pensamento Liminal*, trans. Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira (Belo Horizonte, Brazil: UFMG, 2003); Stuart Hall, *A Identidade Cultural na Pós-modernidade*, trans. Tomaz Tadeu da Silva and Guacira Lopes Louro, 7th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2003).
11. Stone, *Toward a Deaf Translation Norm*.



12. Rimar Ramalho Segala, "Tradução Intermodal e Intersemiótica/Interlingual: Português Brasileiro Escrito para Língua Brasileira de Sinais" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 2010); Saulo Xavier Souza, "Performances de Tradução para a Língua Brasileira de Sinais Observadas no Curso de Letras-Libras" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 2010).
13. Renata Krusser, "Design de Objetos para Aprendizagem Bilíngues (Libras/Português)" (doctoral diss., Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, forthcoming).
14. Stone, *Toward a Deaf Translation Norm*.
15. Marianne Stumpf and Ronice Müller de Quadros, "First Graduation Program in Brazilian Sign Language," in *Abstracts Book of Presentations and Papers of the 15th World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf* (Madrid: World Federation of the Deaf, 2007).
16. Vilmar Silva, "A Política da Diferença: Educadores-Intelectuais Surdos" (doctoral diss., Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 2009); Wilson Miranda, "Comunidade dos Surdos: Olhares sobre os Contatos Culturais" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2001); Gladis Perlin and Karin Strobel, "Fundamentos de Educação dos Surdos" (lecture, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 2006).
17. Perlin and Strobel, "Fundamentos de Educação dos Surdos."
18. H-Dirksen Bauman and Joseph Murray, "Deaf Studies in the Twenty-First Century: 'Deaf Gain' and the Future of Human Diversity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, ed. Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2:210–25.
19. Ana Regina e Souza Campello, "Pedagogia Visual na Educação de Surdos-Mudos" (doctoral diss., Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil, 2008).
20. Silva, "A Política da Diferença."
21. Gladis Perlin and Wilson Miranda, "Surdos: O Narrar e a Política," *Ponto de Vista*, no. 5 (2003): 218.
22. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987).
23. Gladis Dalcin, "Um Estranho no Ninho: Um Estudo Psicanalítico sobre a Constituição da Subjetividade do Sujeito Surdo," in *Estudos Surdos*, ed. Ronice Quadros (Petrópolis, Brazil: Arara Azul, 2006).
24. Owen Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996), 11.
25. Sueli Fernandes, "Educação Bilíngüe para Surdos: Identidades, Diferenças, Contradições, e Mistérios" (doctoral diss., Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil, 2003).
26. Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 25.
27. Miranda, "Comunidade dos Surdos."
28. Silva, "A Política da Diferença."