

**Deafness and alterity: “the meeting between the tiling of the voices
and the waving of hands”¹**

***Surdez e alteridade: “o encontro entre o tilintar das vozes e o tremular
das mãos”²***

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Abstract:

The essayist text considers the dialogue between Deaf Studies in a post-structuralist bias and the Philosophy of Language to approaching the difference as a non-coincidence. In it, the deafness experience is treated as a single event, problematizing the deaf person’s body imprisonment to fixed representations, on behalf of a homogenizing project marked by the reproduction of the identity. Nobody affirms itself because the universalizing force of linguistic standardization is directly proportional to the invisibility of those who hear and oralize. However, affirming itself becomes evident the non-submission of the Deaf Person to the monolingual and monocultural listener project, and denounces the attempt of fixating the identity according to the normality canons. Opposition relations which mark the deaf identity and the listener normality bear the impossibility of dialogue, making the claims of hands which signal remain invisible in territories inhabited by voices that are inaccessible to the deaf people’s ears, in contrast to the alterity.

Keywords: difference, Deafness, Bilingualism, Libras

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Resumo:

De caráter ensaístico, este texto contempla o diálogo entre os estudos surdos com viés pós-estruturalista e a filosofia da linguagem para abordar a diferença como não coincidência. Nele, a experiência da surdez é tratada como um evento singular, problematizando o aprisionamento dos corpos dos surdos às representações fixas, em nome de um projeto homogeneizador marcado pela reprodução da identidade. Ninguém se afirma, pois a força universalista da padronização linguística é diretamente proporcional a invisibilidade daqueles que ouvem e oralizam. Entretanto, afirmar-se evidencia a insubmissão dos surdos ao projeto monolíngue e monocultural ouvinte e denuncia a tentativa de fixação da identidade ditada pelos cânones da normalidade. As relações opositivas que marcam a identidade surda e a normalidade ouvinte trazem consigo a impossibilidade do diálogo, mantendo invisíveis os clamores das mãos que sinalizam nos territórios habitados por vozes inacessíveis aos ouvidos dos surdos, na contramão da alteridade.

Palavras-chave: *diferença, surdez, bilinguismo, Libras*

This work is a theoretical review that establishes a dialogue of deaf studies with a post-structuralist perspective, cultural studies, and language studies in the Bakhtinian perspective to deal with crystallization problems and the fixation of social identification processes related to deaf people. Nowadays, the multiple discursive fields have been concerned with the biological variation, diagnosed in the abnormal hearing limit and cultural variation, manifested in the use of sign language to identify some members of society either as hearing impaired, or as deaf and/or Deaf, to distinguish them from the hearing majority and speakers of oral languages.

About this, Thoma (2012) explains that in a cultural analysis, which associates the production of subjects through discursive practices, *hearing impaired* are those who live the condition of deafness as a handicap and, therefore, are willing to search for a cure through medication, rehabilitation and correction practices aiming to make them speak, read lips, and even listen through the intervention of the sophisticated surgical technique of cochlear implants. In other words, these are situated as potentially hearing people, assuming a clinical-therapeutical representation of deafness, founded in the discourse of assimilation, i.e., in the project of homogenization or the attempt to make everyone the same, erasing, as much as possible, the differences.

Deaf are subjects who inscribe themselves in the socio-anthropological representation of deafness, celebrating the sensorial and linguistic difference as signs of insubmission. By affirming themselves as *Deaf*, they position themselves as member of a linguist and social minority that fights for visibility and, especially, for the recognition and prestige of sign language, investing "...in the struggle against the interpretation of deafness as a handicap, against the view of the deaf as a handicapped person, sick, a victim, and against the definition of deafness as the experience of lack" (Sá, 2006, p. 66).

The variation on the terms *deaf* and *Deaf*, adopted by sociolinguist James Woodward (1972) to establish identity positions in the deaf field studies has been adopted worldwide by Deaf associations and by researchers connected to cultural studies in the area of deaf people education. For the adopters of this difference, the word *deaf* refers to the degree of deafness from the subjects with high-level of hearing loss, which have low responses to the stimulation of hearing residues and are not successful in oral communication. While the term *Deaf* is an identity mark, the deaf difference and the adhesion to the defense of sign language as the first language of deaf people, been correlated to the cultural studies³ in the area. Aware of this difference in the designations *deaf* and *Deaf*, in this text we opted to use the term *deaf* to refer to people who cannot hear, because we do not have the pretention to situate them in fixed representations, and the designation *Deaf* has been used in literature with this objective. We also would like to clarify that both representations, clinic-therapeutical and socio-anthropological, highlight the biological/natural or historical/cultural factors, taking sensorial handicap and linguistic difference as categoric attributes to delimit the generalized 'identificability' of individuals with deafness and classify them as a whole, be as *hearing impaired* or as *Deaf*, delimitating their cultural experiences in the social space these subjects share with the hearing.

Thus, declaring a hearing handicap or assuming a deaf identity "...reflects the tendency to take what we are as the norm through which we describe or evaluate what we are not" (Silva, 2014, p. 76). About this, Santos (2008) asserts that when the endless human experience is confined in limited and known ways of being and living in the world, totalities made of

³ Deaf studies are a derivation of cultural studies that incorporate researches in the educational area, contemplating the language, the identities, the projects connected to education, art, communities, and the deaf culture. According to Skliar (1998), these studies focus on discussions about culture, about discursive practices, involving tensions and fights present in the structures of power and disputes in the field of knowledge.

homogeneous parts are created, which underestimate the limitless multiplicity of logics, cultures, and rationalities.

In this sense, Thoma (2016, p. 758) affirms that the discursive production of representations circumscribed to *bodies with deafness* tend to reproduce subjects in series through significations established by opposite terms: hearing *versus* Deafs; Deafs *versus* hearing impaired; sensorial handicap *versus* linguistic minority; oral language *versus* sign language; Portuguese *versus* Brazilian sign language (*língua brasileira de sinais* -Libras). From these processes emerge crystalized discourses which induce people with deafness to adjust themselves to certain titles.

To Ponzio (2010), in this adjustment in which difference “...normally works by binary opposition, the singular differences are canceled, what counts is the difference of genre... that is constitutively in contrast, in opposition, with another difference of genre”. Therefore, in social, cultural, recognized, official, coded, legally binding relations, it is valid to interact with the world through hearing experiences manifesting one’s culture by the official oral language. Thus, the interaction through visual experiences, manifesting the culture of sign language, starts to legitimize a delimited way of being in the world, in which individuals “...are individualized by coordinates that assume them as representatives of this or that group” (p. 18), made out of opposite and conflicting relations between identities, roles, belongings.

Under this way of understanding the world and life, “...the alterity of each one is erased, and, at best, there is a tolerance of the other, but always a tolerance of another that belongs to the genre, the other in general, whose difference is the identity in the ensemble to which s/he belongs” (p. 18).

Deaf identity: emblems of reluctance against the hearing (mono)culture

If it was possible an “...imaginary world completely homogeneous, in which everyone shared the same identity” (Silva, 2014, p. 75), to declare yourself *Deaf* would not be necessary. However, as previously claimed by Skliar (2014, p. 158), the “... world is an immense circumference permeated by exceptions” and, according Geraldi (2015, p. 105), “... even under

apparently well-behaved skins on a world of desired uniformity, from conflicts there appears to emerge unsubmitive differences.”

Nobody declares themselves *Hearing* because “...the homogenizing power of normal identity is directly proportional to its invisibility” (Silva, 2014, p. 83). But assuming yourself *Deaf* and fighting for the prestige of language little known socially, despite the acquired legal representativeness, is a way to fracture the hegemonic imposition (Martins, 2016) of what is considered acceptable, desirable, and natural, making visible the attempt to eliminate other ways of interaction besides orality and hearing.

In this sense, identities emerge from the differences oscillating between two opposite movements, on one hand, taken as marks of the individual’s inadequacy to the demands of the social spaces occupied, aiming to assimilate them through corrective techniques and stabilize a universal identity standard under the definition of what is considered acceptable, desirable, and natural; on the other, the non-assimilated individuals highlight their differences to prove the lack of social spaces generically produced and break with the socio-normative patterns, for considering them limited and indifferent to their peculiarities.

This process of identity production that gathers groups with opposite purposes is what moves the formation of classes and, consequently, the division of the social world into asymmetric and hierarchical groups, in which “...having the privilege to classify means also to have the privilege to attribute different values for the classified groups (Silva, 2014, p. 82). Therefore, we can see that:

... independently of the ensembles of meanings created by discourses, they can only be effective if they recruit us as subjects. The subjects are then subjected to the discourse and should, themselves, assume it as individuals that, thus, position themselves. (Woodward, 2014, p. 56)

According to Silva (2014), due to our tendency to consider identity and differences as given, as elements of nature, from a transcendental world, we frequently forget that, besides being interdependent they are effects of linguistic creation, and cannot be “...understood, therefore, outside the systems of signification in which they acquire meaning” (p. 78), because signals carry values and sign representations emanate as force vectors in power disputes.

In an essentialist perspective, in which differences are managed in the name of ‘sameness’, identity seems to gain existence in a crystalline ensemble, genuine of characteristics

shared by all members and that do not alter throughout time. According to Woodward (2014), there are two versions of identity essentialism, one “...grounds identity in the “truth” of a tradition in the roots of ‘history’”, while the other is “...related to a “natural” category, steady, in which “truth” is rooted in biology [emphasis in the original]” (p. 38).

Regarding deafness, the first version supports the identity position of the individual with deafness as *Deaf*, while the second version leads to the identification and self-denomination as *hearing impaired*. Anyway, both encompass a unified concept of identity, leading to the binarism Deaf *versus* Hearing, as well as Deaf *versus* hearing impaired.

In this perspective, Woodward (2014) affirms that to legitimize their own identity, an individual or a group attributes positive meanings to signals that represent them and, in a comparative relation of self-affirmation, engrave negativity to the signs that are inscribed in the representation of another identity. In this antagonistic movement, the insulted group reacts celebrating its difference also as a positive attribute.

However, it is not only about the fact that the definition of identity and difference is the object of dispute between social groups asymmetric situated in relation to power...The affirmation of identity and the enunciation of difference translate the desire of different social groups, asymmetrically situated, to guarantee a privileged access to social goods.(Silva, 2014, p. 81)

In a (mono)cultural context that overvalues oral language and the standard-working of hearing, the ‘differentialism’ related to the sensorial and linguistic ability of people with deafness would never coincide with anything and, consequently, the individuals considered *hearing impaired*, those disabled of hearing and speaking, who “...would be incapable to be made able, the incomplete to complete, the needy to be given, the savage to civilize, etc.” (Skliar, 2015, p. 32).

On the other hand, those who are self-defined as *Deaf* question “...the essentialism of identity and its rigidity as something ‘natural’, that is, as a biological category” (Woodward, 2014, p. 37), and call upon the prominence of deaf identity and culture, positioning themselves as “...members of a linguistic community, with the right to access and use sign language and an education in this language” (Thoma, 2016, p. 761). They organize social movements to fight against cultural, education, and linguistic losses caused to them because, according to Martins (2016), in the educational field “...the deaf has been narrated as a person with a handicap and counted as part of the target-audience for special education” (p. 720). For the author,

... this would not be tense if there was a dialogue among special education managers, between the knowledges that compose truths on deafness in the field of special education, and the deaf movement. However, the deaf affirm that they are not handicapped, and in the lack of hearing, they have a visual experience different from the hearing ones, and because of this lack, they have the need to establish themselves through a visual-gestural language, as is sign language.

In terms of binary opposition, the dichotomic discursive practices spread in the field of medicine, linguistic, anthropology, and human rights start to coexist in society, mainly hearing and oralized, to operate the distinction between deaf people and the others, highlighting the adaptive inefficiency of these bodies to the demands and to the physical space they occupy or, on the contrary, highlighting the deprivations and impositions that a limited space of audio-oral interaction can entail, so that the duality of these discursive practices interfere in the formulation and the ambivalence of educational discourses.

Carvalho (2015, p. 35) highlights that the diagnostic of any body as normal is natural, because "...its normalcy is an artificial production, demands all types of cultural instruments that makes it a common utility". Based on this reflection, we can affirm that the normalcy of *monolingual hearing people* is a product of the emphasis given to sound references and to the oral language that integrate our culture. Because of this, the designation *hearing impaired* used to establish deafness as a lack of something, is a strategy to diminish different biological and linguistic manifestations and keeping unshaken the functionality of dominant cultural demands, to restrict or hide the threats of social unstructuring.

Skliar (2015) explains that when the sense of difference is conditioned to the definition of someone as a different subject, this 'differentialism' attributed to the other is related to the one who sees and names it and, because of that, "...it is nothing else but finger pointing which directly accuses anyone who he believes is lacking something, or understands as insufficient, what is characterized as abnormal" (p. 32).

As the accusation is not enough to keep the order, the *hearing* invade the social spaces with their representations and establish and deliberate laws on the deaf, disregarding sign language, the visual primacy and the history of these people (Teske, 2012). To Sardagna (2013), we define this action as an ordering operation, signaling that the recruitment of *hearing impaired* assumed by schools, institutions, the medical body, and formal job market aims to homogenize these individuals and overshadow sensorial and linguistic differences.

However, the Deaf social movement insists on the discursive negotiation by the recognition of their differences, resisting the clinical-therapeutical corrections and the technologies to hear and to ‘oralize’, in the attempt to subvert the privileged biological and (mono)cultural standards in the spaces they share with the hearing. With this, they try to impact democracy that, based on qualitative isonomy, marginalized minority groups in the name of a majority power (Pagni, 2015).

Teske (2012) adverts that, in this plot

... culture is the symbolic order through which certain men express in a certain way their relations with nature, among themselves, and with power, as well as the way through which they interpret these relations, as the notion of culture itself is averse to unification. (p. 39)

According to the author, aspiring a legitimation of their culture and singular experience of deafness, the deaf community uses sign language to show a predetermined world and reproduce a mechanical relation among subjects. *Deaf* and *hearing* and *Deaf* and *deaf*, closing the possibility of a consensus (Teske, 2012), as the political character of conflict characterizes all consensus as a way of silencing and erasing difference.

Certainly, “...the ways through which culture establish frontiers and distinguishes the difference are crucial to understand identities” (Woodward, 2014, p. 42). Furthermore, the difference taken as a cultural value in itself, as a mechanical connection that stems from the subject’s belonging to a whole, to a certain content, to a certain role and function, and the loyalty to an interchangeable identity

... has a clear political consequence: the absolutization of cultural values corresponds to the concept that the people choose only once, renouncing its freedom, giving themselves to the State and transforming themselves, from that moment on, in slaves of their free decision. (Ponzio, 2010, p. 25)

Different scholars affirm that, by making sign languages absolute and classify the peers that do not appropriate it as *hearing impaired* or *deaf*, the self-called *Deaf* risk repeating the same mistakes against which they have been fighting in a historic process, because while criticizing ideas considered radical, connected to the (mono)cultural hearing universalism, they repeat the attitudes that they condemn and establish a frontier that divides *Deaf* and *non-deaf*, reproducing the colonialist practices from which they want to free themselves (Klein & Lunardi, 2006 quoted

by Bastos, 2013) and instigating the oppositional positioning explicit in the first letter of the word deaf.

In some way, deaf identity can strengthen and reaffirm the linguistic and sociocultural diversity that constitutes Brazilian society, intensifying the fights against acculturation and the “social ties that place individuals with deafness in the condition of handicaps, that are missing something, as subjects that need to be corrected, obligatorily and with great effort, through the leaning of the oral language from the hearing majority” (Thoma, 2012, p. 171). However, we cannot lose sight that “...the identity construction is *as* symbolic *as* social” (Woodward, 2014, p. 10), because, as affirmed by Anderson (1983), there is no natural community around which one can assemble all people through a feeling and/or something else in common; on the contrary, the ties that allow isolated individuals to connect themselves are created and materialized by discursive acts and systems of signification founded in ‘identificability’, depending on a collective will for an equal treatment reserved to those similar. In other words,

... identities are positions that the subject is forced to assume, despite “knowing”...always, that they are representations, that the representations are always built through a “lack”, through a division, from the place of the Other and that, therefore, they can never be adjusted – identical- to the processes of the subjects invested in them. (Hall, 2014, p. 112)

According to Wrigley (1996), deafness is a disperse event, for that reason, in the national territories mostly inhabited by hearing people, the relation of deaf children with sound and oral experiences, through an official language, make them believe that they are incomplete people, inferior, lacking. In this sense, Thoma (2012) affirms that meeting other deaf people allows them the possibility of inverting these impressions, allowing another way of seeing and being into the world, in which their interaction and constitution is done through sign language, by the visual-gestural channel.

However, this demands belonging to a community, what, to Bauman (2003), is not always easy, because admitting the protection and security of life in community implies dismissing our freedom, that is, to “...deny the principle of the right to be ourselves” (Thoma, 2012, p. 173).

Deafness and alterity: the meeting *between* the tiling of the voices and the waving of hands

Although the nations have arduously subjugated their people through narratives and narrators, many disagreeing enunciates, from deaf and hearing, have obstructed the homogenizing project forged by the imposition of a single and common national language. In the tiling of complacent voices and the waving of hands, the marginalized oral languages and sign languages in the name of a monolingual unicity continue alive and prevail as force vectors in favor of the recognition and valorization of plurilingualism⁴.

According to Santos (2010) and Skliar (2014), the broader rather than the most known experiences – heterogeneity and not homogeneity, multiplicity and not universality- make the world what it really is: an open territory to inhabit the body, the face, the voice of each one. However, the fatidic desire for reproduction led individuals to excessively measure the destiny of others. “Thus, each one cannot be anyone” (Skliar, 2014, p. 213) and, due to this arbitrary relation, today “...the territory of difference is devastated by innumerable crusades that try to end with alterity” (p. 161).

Using Bakhtinian assumptions, Ponzio (2010) observes that the strategy of repeating itself is subordinated to the principle of formal ethics, material, referring to the concept of universality of having to be, as well as to the principle of generalization and a uniform behavior, formulated to the construction of a world abstractly systematic. In the Bakhtinian conception, this is an empty formula, as it is not up to their propositions in the concrete unique place that each subject occupies.

“The reduced perspective of the deaf as a handicap, as someone that needs to be fixed is a result of our ignorance, our unfamiliarity, as hearing people, with the singularity of deaf experience” (Lima, Sampaio, & Ribeiro, 2015, p. 98). These authors affirm that not even the failure of the oralist project allowed us to see the deaf as subjects, with knowledge and culture, as, by keeping monolingualism, we continue to believe that if the communication with the deaf

⁴ Plurilingual nations are those that recognize the domain of different languages by their citizens, opening possibilities to exercise and use these languages. A plurilingual nation should guarantee the right to linguistic varieties, by the law of co-officialization and adoption of strategies to increase the role of speech communities, as well as the circulation of co-officialized languages in social spaces, aiming a “pedagogy for plurilingualism” (Altenhofen & Broch, 2011).

is not effective, the difficulty, the failure, and the problem is his/hers, who is unable to acquire oral, official, and predominantly spoken language.

Of course, the dispute arisen from the desire of repetition itself and the denial of difference provokes a nefarious and violent relation of oneself and the other

...because it reduces to the other the inability of seen “between”, because it hides in the other what one is not capable to see in yourself; because, ultimately, this stops the other to be seen as any other and, therefore, separates, abandons, puts under suspicion the idea that the other is not as human as yourself. (Skliar, 2015, p. 32)

To complete, according to Thoma (2016), despite having the expressions “respect to the differences” and “valuing singularities” in the texts of current educational policies, the pedagogy and the process of schooling are through for categories of diversity subjects, what also broadens the invisibility of how to be deaf, because there is “...a strong tendency to reduce the handicapped subjects to their handicap, forgetting that they are not, under any hypothesis, equal” (Thoma, 2004).

To talk about diversity, as many authors have pointed out..., leads to erasing differences and overshadowing social conflicts, as it understands the so-called excluded as subjects belonging to a homogeneous category, whose identity traces are summed up in their belonging to a certain group (women, black, old, homosexual, handicapped). Believing that a big step has been made in the decrease of social inequalities, diversity is understood as a characteristic of modern societies to be accepted and tolerated, while difference is a social, political, historic, and linguistic construction embedded in power relations that affect each one and all of us. (p. 45)

In other words, diversity and difference are not synonyms, “...because difference is not a subject, but a relation” (Skliar, 2014, p. 156) in which each one is absolutely an *other* and not similar to me. Even in a collective, the *we* do not become the plural of *I*, because “neither the possession, nor the unity of number, nor the unity of concept incorporate me to the *other*” (Lévinas, 2002, p. 63). As for diversity, it is effectuated in the simple descriptive exercise of exteriority, that makes the *I*, my monocultural society, monolingual, heterosexual, capitalist, etc., the reference point to see the *other* as a variation, a deviation, not considering the possibility of placing myself in his presence without been immune, without superimposing.

About this, Ponzio (2010) contests the universal proposition of the subject’s mechanical constitution through a monologic discourse, relegating to the private, to the official base, to the public, the formal, the monocultural, the monolithic identity and reinforces the idea that the

individual is constituted in a dialogical relation, giving space to “...the singularity, the unicity, the alterity of each one, with the participations and not the indifference towards the singularities of others” (p. 19). In this direction, the authors believe that we are not mechanically constituted by a given context, but by the possibility of appropriation and re-inscription – of a world translated into language – from the other’s world. Consequently, “... as there are many others in whose eyes we inhabit, giving our finishing touches, our identities are multiple, unstable instabilities” (Geraldi, 2015, p. 112) or, as affirmed by Hall (2014, p. 112), identities are “... points of temporary attachment to the positions-of-the-subject that the discursive practices build to us”.

Are we culturally locked into a dialectical predilection for rendering all social reality into mutually exclusive categories of either/or, us/them, good/bad? Is it possible for individuals, or groups, to define themselves without first creating an external Other? If human language (all language, and not only the language of the socially powerful) is inherently a process of "putting down," excluding, absenting, and dismembering the subject, is stigmatization inherent in what it means to be "human?"

Considering such ideas, we resume Solomon (1986) to question if “... we culturally locked into a dialectical predilection for rendering all social reality into mutually exclusive categories of either/or, us/them, good/bad? Is it possible for individuals, or groups, to define themselves without first creating an external Other?” (p. 73).

According to Skliar (2014, p. 162), “... there has never been a self-centered subject, omniscient, able to fill himself and become absolute”

It is in the tension of the match/mismatch of the I and the You that both are constituted. It is in this activity that language is built as a necessary signal mediation....Born in the universes of discourses that precede us, we internalize, from the discourses in which we participate, expressions/pre-constructed understandings, in a continuous process of making intraindividual what is interindividual. But with each expression/pre-constructed understanding we make match our counterwords, articulating and rearticulating dialogically what is now apprehended by the mediations themselves of what has been previously apprehended. (Geraldi, 2015, p. 108)

Faced by this series of mediations and sign internalizations, we can ask what is the best way to refer to the individuals with deafness: *hearing impaired*, *deaf-mute*, *Deaf*, or simply *deaf*? According to Thoma (2012), these questions are relevant, considering that the terms carry meanings.

In Brazil, the Decree n° 5.626/2005, created to regularize the law n° 10.436/2002, establishes that deaf is the person “...that, because of a hearing loss understands and interacts with the world through visual experiences, manifesting their culture mainly through the use of Brazilian Sign Language – Libras” (Capítulo I, artigo 2°). The same document specifies that hearing impairment occurs from “...the bilateral, partial, or total loss of forty one decibels (dB) or more, measure by an audiogram in the frequencies of 500 Hz, 1,000 Hz, 2,000 Hz and 3.000 Hz” (Capítulo I, Parágrafo único).

Regarding the definition of deaf person officialized in the Decree, we point that all formal validity interpreted and authorized by the action of a theoretical and abstract subject, indifferent to the unicity of decision-making, acquires “...a value on itself and a power and a domain on the subject’s life (Ponzio, 2010, p. 22). Thereby, taking as a reference the cultural analysis, we support that the marks of sensorial and linguistic difference present in the document are political artifacts of the visibility and the discursive practices of the *Deaf* who refuse to merge in the hearing universal norm and “... opt for their particularity, fighting for their civic rights and for a full and whole citizenship” (Wieviorka, 2002 quoted by Gomes, 2012, p. 24), “... against a teaching history that ignores, that does not listen, does not believe in visual experiences and sign language” (Lima, Sampaio, & Ribeiro, 2015, p. 105).

However, if “... the discourses that constitute each one of the identities are submitted to the view of others” (Wieviorka, 2002 quoted by Gomes, 2012, p. 24), “... we are, in fact, differently positioned by different expectations and social restrictions involved” (Woodward, 2014) in each relation, “...representing us, in front of others, differently in each context” (p. 31). Such claims indicate that not all individuals affected by deafness live in a world in which they are, regarding value, the same as deaf. In other words:

There are so many conditions of being deaf as there are existing possibilities.

Being deaf means having an identity trace that hybrids itself with others to establish a subject, a constitution that cannot be reduced to the biological condition of not hearing. Deafness is an experience established in the relation with others (deaf or hearing) and there is no way to describe all deaf people according to some types or rigid and pure categories. Being deaf is a plural condition, and deaf identities can be as many as there can be any other identity. (Thoma, 2012, p. 154)

In this direction, we can affirm that the identity conceived in terms of binary opposition is a trap, because an individual with deafness can occupy innumerable positions that escape the poles of usual classifications. To exemplify the permanent typification according to the versions and variations of subjects with deafness, we use the study of Kuchenbecker (2011), that, when analyzing the discourse of documents in different fields of knowledge (medical, social, psychological, and pedagogical), point to a discursive regularity that conceives Down deaf people as docile subjects, but also with limitations and difficulties of understanding and expressing in sign language. Another example refers to the research of Pontin (2014), which investigated the discourses on deafness, deaf people and cochlear implant, point to the constitution of new subjects that, as been nor *Deaf* nor *hearing*, are represented by the sign of *implanted*.

With this, we want to question the instance on the difference “...as a supposed opposition between the two terms, between beings, two concepts, or two things” (Skliar, 2015, p. 33), as this comparative process that confines difference to identity reduces our relation with the other, annulling the possibility of affecting us by their singular experiences.

Although we can see ourselves, following the common sense, as being “the same person” in all our different meetings and interactions, it is not difficult to perceive that we are differently positioned, in different moments and in different places, according to the different social roles we play. (Hall, 1997 quoted by Woodward, 2014, p. 31)

According to Skliar (2014, p. 156), “... supposing a difference in some but not in others results in a long exercise of violence” formalized by authorized discourses, renovated, always current, always vigilant and tense, in the service of accusing the deviation, other people(s)’ abnormality, a fact that monologizes language and, mainly, the relation, life, promoting the denial and the despise of any other faith, idea, body, or person.

Under the enunciative-discursive perspective of Bakhtin, in which language is understood in a dialogic perspective, we treat difference as non-coincidental. To do so, we considered the conviction that not even the *I* that is to come coincides with my own current state (Bakhtin, 2011), and the fact that the dialogism “...is not established from a relation between affirmatives and denials” (Amorim, 2004, p. 140). In this perspective, we understand that the experience of each one is legitimate and, therefore, their existence does not need

authorized discourses, firming in the limits of cultural, national, economic, ethnic, religious, and linguistic territories.

By specifically approaching deaf experience, we would like to emphasize that, despite the strategies of medicalization and the imposition of an oralist pedagogic philosophy, there were many dissident voices, of deaf and hearing, who prevented the formalized validation of universality. Be it by resisting hearing imposition or the failure of learning oral language and in the competent communication using speech, sign language continued and keeps been a witness and an artifact of free-will and the impossibility of uniformity (Lima, Sampaio, & Ribeiro, 2015).

According to Ponzio (2010), the identity to which we belong and in which we can all be assimilated as humans has been defined by ideas of positivist sciences with identify in a broader ensemble, in which we can place all, within the same assumption of universal genre. However, the author emphasizes that the attempt to fixate the identical escapes from what is essentially human.

According to Canguilhem (2009), the real individuals that we find deviate more or less from the idealized model of human being and it is this that makes the individuality of each one. Therefore, the establishment of a human being is not done in the recognition of *another me*, but in the encounter of *another of me* and the *other of each one*. To find them, we have to decide if the difference *between* "...us will get us together or will distinguish, categorize, and confine" (Skliar, 2015, p. 33).

Ponzio (2010) affirms that each one is unique, therefore escapes from the ties of gender, class, the ensemble, allowing the other to consider him/herself unique; but not in an ontological level, but in relation to the other "...unique in a living word, in a word that relates to another word" (p. 23). According to Hall, this open position

... accepts that identities will never be unified; that they are, in late modernity, increasingly fragmented and fractured; that they are not, ever, singular, but multiply built through discourses, practices, and positions that can intercross or be antagonistic. Identities are subjected to a radical historization, been in a constant process of change and transformation. (Hall, 2014, p. 108)

As a symbolic and social creation "...the unity, the internal homogeneity, that the term identity assumes as foundational is not a natural form, but built out of closures" (p. 110) assumed by us to attend an aesthetic need of totality, of finishing, and the endless desire for completeness. However, by subsisting only in the disturbing presence of the other, of what is

externally constitutive, “...every identity has, in its ‘margin’, an excess, something else...every identity needs something that is ‘missing’ from it” (p. 110). About this, Geraldi (2015) considers that “the finished whole of your life is not dominated by the ‘I’. Therefore, the world of life is an ethic world, even though life can be lived aesthetically” (p. 107). In other words, the totality is only given by others, that, living inaccessible experiences from I, becomes the only consolation of your incompleteness.

Despite all the efforts of the official discourse, “...we cannot think that the process of signs internalization, that establishes us as subjects, is a process of crystallization of the senses and the fixation on the identic” (Geraldi, 2015, p. 113). In the concrete level, there are many dissident voices that see in the denial of difference a solution and not a problem. About deafness, “...the deaf, as other, as a legitimate subject, does not need or has needed an authorization to be other”(Lima, Sampaio, & Ribeiro, 2015, p. 99).

The clinical-therapeutical and socio-anthropological representations “...promote distinct ways to think deafness and therefore, apparently, dialogue impossibilities” (Martins, 2016, p. 722). To attend linguistic, cultural, and educational demands of deaf people, the Decree nº 5.626/2005, as the carrier of an authorized discourse with the highest political representativeness in the deaf community in Brazil, established, among other proposals, the subject Libras as obligatory in all teacher training undergraduate majors and also the organization of schools and classes of bilingual education, open to hearing and deaf students and with bilingual teachers, in which Libras and the written Portuguese are the instruction languages used to develop the whole educational process. However, the hegemonic imperative of hearing mono-logic has hindered the materialization of changes, in the name of keeping the uniformed structure idealized by it.

As pointed by Bárcena (2015, p. 56) “... the difference hurts, then our first reaction is to deny it, trying to normalize its rarity”. In this perspective, we prefer to interpret the unknown *others*. In the limits of self-centrism, we need to understand that the difference among two, three or more is what enlarges *each one* in a movement of unfinishable finish and stop interrupting “...the aphonic sounds, the limper walk, the tired back, the curved learning, the casual memory, the inattentive body, the mute ears, the eyes that look into a direction we do not know” (Skliar, 2014, p. 158). In the space of deaf education, we need to stop pretending that the signing hands are invisible, to stop ignoring their clamors who denounce discourses defending an hegemonic

language, predominantly valued by the official language; a majority language among the hearing that dismiss and/or disconsiders the particular living ways of those that produce language with the body.

To do so, one needs to dislocate and recognize the own limits of identity; free oneself from the dogmatic representations that the monologic discourse in the predetermined orders dictate to express who we are; to be attentive and open to the *other*, after all

The words do not speak by themselves; they are inserted in complex and dynamic networks, in which the meanings and senses are always unstable and subjected to changes. The words mean what the uses make them to mean. However, the uses are not free or chaotic; they follow certain implicit rules, established in each culture throughout time. (Veiga-Neto, 2013, p. 9)

“Despite every prohibition, imposition and assimilation project, the deaf will use and communicate with each other in sign language, in everyday conversations, in exchanges with peers, among friends” (Lima, Sampaio, & Ribeiro, 2015, 99). But, after all, where and when do the deaf and hearing universes meet?

The Decree n° 5.296/2004, which establishes general rules and basic criteria to promote the accessibility with people with some type of handicap or reduced mobility, and the Law n° 13.146/2015 (Statute of the person with handicap) determine that the services of sound and image broadcast in Brazil should allow the use of a window on screen with a Libras interpreter as a resource to offer accessible programs. However, we question: why the documents do not envision a part of the problems in Libras, while hearing people would have the interpretation service to Portuguese? Why the hidden captions are not inserted in national movies? Why has sign language been offered as a resource to the deaf?

In our experiences in K-12 and higher education institutions we have seen the promotion of bilingual educational programs (Libras and Portuguese) and classes given in Libras, answering the Decree n° 5.626/2005. However, the initiatives are often stopped, deteriorated and, when optional, have only the presence of deaf, as the hearing people do not want to learn a language that is not theirs, the official oral language.

The suppression of hearing people participation in the deaf universe also happens when more radical *Deaf people* refuse to learn how to write the official oral language as a second language, when they reject their peers who opt for devices to amplify the sound, cochlear

implants, speech therapies aiming oralization, and when the fight for the obligation of Libras in the education of hearing people.

In the apex of this polarization, Coelho (2016) also adverts about the risk of erasing Brazilian Indigenous sign language- *Língua de Sinais dos Urubu-Kaapor* (LSKB); *sinais kaingang da aldeia* (SKA) and the signs of deaf *terenas* from the village *Cachoeirinha* – in school practices that, by the authorized discourse of linguistic and educational policies, use as means of instruction the Indigenous oral language of the community, Portuguese (officialized by the Federal Constitution of 1988), and Libras (recognized as a way of communication and expression of deaf people in Brazil by the Law nº 10.436/2002), ignoring the sign languages of deaf Indigenous.

About this, Pereira (2013, p. 28) argues in his thesis that “before teaching a language, it is taught a way of seeing, living, and acting in the world”. He then reflects on sign language pointing that, in the relations of the uses of these languages, the questions of social and political order gain life, guided by influences of studies which think linguistic diversity and the connection with other social and discursive standards. In his study, Pereira (2013) tried to draw a social process and the use of language in the community of *Várzea Queimada*, in the rural area of the city *Jaicós*, in the state of *Piauí*, Brazil. More specifically, he worked with sociability elements between mute and speakers, between mute and mute, and between speakers and speakers which allow, support, build, and reconstruct a gesture-visual language known as *cena*⁵, used in this place. More than lexical differences, the terms used in *Várzea Queimada* are also concepts put into use in the everyday life, creating a sense among the people in the community. In the conclusion of his thesis, the author confronts the perspectives built *in loco* and those proposed by public policies and Libras teaching.

⁵ *Cena* is a gesture-visual language used in the community that uses the whole body to produce understanding. It is associated to mute people because it is with them that the *cena* develops and advances itself, as they are its native speakers. It complexifies itself, in the everyday definition from its use, as *cena* is the totality of communication, and the fragments that compose it. In other words, *cena* is the transformation of social action into language.

About this, the impression is that

... civilization calms down in recognizing, at a safe distance, the existence of difference. But in a way that is shy, reticent, juridically even if not ethically. The language of rights reached its maximum aspiration and expression. However, we know that a certain type of subversion and radicalism is needed. It is not, anymore, about a new model of handicap, nor a new school organization, nor architectural innovations, nor the well-known policies of identity: the question to be asked is about oneself the problem is ourselves, every time the equal, the common, the normal are taken as the origin and center of the universe. (Skliar, 2014, p. 162)

The dialogue only exists when *myself* or when *ourselves* are affected and provoked in encounters, in differences, in alterity. It is in the challenge to “understand the understanding” of the *other*, also turning us into other, that we dive into hybridism, what means to metaphorically “cross borders”, moving freely among symbolic territories of identity without respecting the signs that – “artificially” – delimit the frontiers between those territories (Silva, 2014).

To Silva (2014, p. 77) “... it is only through speech acts that we establish identity and differences as such”. Skliar (2014, p. 157) suggests that “...if we talk, if we enter in a relationship that does not aim to make the other an insipid identical, maybe the difference is worthwhile, maybe the difference is what best narrates what is human”.

In the spaces occupied by deaf and hearing people, the meetings *between* the titling of the voices and the waving of hands allow wider experiences of knowing the *other* and not only about the *other*. In this direction, the hybridization of the universes through languages is what confuses the stability and fixation of identity and, in some ways, becomes a transgression of the monologic discourse and the isonomy in the crusades against alterity.

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