

# Cultural translation in education: experiences of difference in deaf writing

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## Abstract

This article presents an investigation of narratives by deaf authors intended to an audience of young people and adults, which circulate in Brazil through books written in Portuguese. Considering the study of ten books (MÜLLER, 2012) of different genres, which have in common the constitution of a biographical space, our aim is to develop a discursive and documental analysis, in order to answer how and what cultural deaf marks are produced by these authors in their narratives. The investigation of the empirical material, which deals with difficulties experienced, which are also expressed in writing, allows making evident the main deaf cultural marks: the narrative of experience of the self, and deaf identity as difference. It is worth stressing that narrating in a second language, in this case, Portuguese, used by deaf users of *Língua Brasileira de Sinais* (LIBRAS - Brazilian Sign Language), allows translating the narratives into other cultures, legitimating the deaf discourse and increasing the potential of the deaf culture through the visibility and cultural diffusion allowed by these works. The books, here understood also as cultural artifacts, are a resource in a territory of political-pedagogical claims and negotiations. In connection with Cultural Studies in Education and with Deaf Studies, the present work continues and consolidates studies in deaf culture and education; it also problematizes power relations involved in the construction of meanings, particularly in the field of education, here understood as a process of construction of subjects' social and individual life. This investigation is part of the studies conducted within the project *Produção, Circulação e Consumo da Cultura Surda Brasileira* Production, Circulation, and Consumption of Brazilian Deaf Culture.

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## Keywords

Deaf narratives – Deaf culture – Deaf studies – Cultural Studies in Education.

# **Tradução cultural em educação: experiências da diferença em escritas de surdos**

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## **Resumo**

*Este artigo apresenta uma investigação sobre narrativas de autoria surda, destinadas ao público juvenil e adulto, as quais circulam no Brasil através de livros escritos em português. Considerando a pesquisa em dez livros (MÜLLER, 2012), de diferentes gêneros textuais, que se aproximam pela constituição do espaço biográfico, objetiva-se desenvolver uma análise discursiva e documental, buscando responder como e que marcas culturais surdas são produzidas pelos autores em suas narrativas. A investigação do material empírico, que tematiza as dificuldades vivenciadas, também expressas através da escrita, possibilita evidenciar as principais marcas culturais surdas: a narrativa da experiência de si e a identidade surda como uma diferença. Cabe salientar que narrar-se em uma segunda língua, neste caso, em português por surdos usuários de Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras), possibilita traduzir-se em outras culturas, legitimando o discurso surdo e potencializando a sua cultura através da visibilidade e da difusão cultural possibilitada por essas obras. Os livros, aqui também entendidos como artefatos culturais, constituem-se recurso em um território de reivindicações e de negociações político-pedagógicas. Vinculado aos Estudos Culturais em Educação e aos Estudos Surdos, este trabalho dá continuidade a e consolida pesquisas sobre cultura surda e educação; também problematiza relações de poder envolvidas na construção de significados, sobretudo no campo da educação, aqui entendida como um processo de condução da vida social e individual dos sujeitos. Esta investigação integra as pesquisas desenvolvidas no projeto Produção, Circulação e Consumo da Cultura Surda Brasileira.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Narrativas surdas – Cultura surda – Estudos Surdos – Estudos Culturais em Educação.*

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*The spoken word can be lost forever, but the word we record in writing or print tends to perpetuate itself. [...] Therefore, my feelings, put down in a sheet of paper, tell everything I feel. Printed words, many of them were experienced, tested in the day-to-day of this author that now seeks to immortalize her unique, special moments.* (OLIVEIRA, 2005)

*(...) it is a true life lesson to all of us, since these pages are a hymn to love, the purest manifestation of simplicity, of the struggle to make dreams come true, of the most sincere feelings that, now, in her writing made public, will make her immortal.* (POSSÍDIO, 2005)

*The texts printed in this first book can transpose into paper emotions, feelings, dreams. Deaf people's desire of being accepted as citizens, of participating in a society with equal opportunities, of sharing a world without differences, a world that needs to wake from silence.* (VILHALVA, et al., 2003)

*It resists time, and is expressed in the tenderness of glance, in the serenity of face, in the sweetness of gestures. "True beauty" is immortal. You read it, you realize it.* (VIDAL, 2009)

These excerpts, which form the paratext of works by deaf authors, make evident the authors' common desire to narrate in writing their life story, conveying emotions, feelings, dreams, experiences. As they revive unique and special moments, experiences are recounted, making it possible to immortalize them through printed text. The authors, by narrating their difference in the deaf experience of being, translate their culture by means of a second language (written Portuguese), while dialoguing with readers about their desires and inviting them to read.

In Strnadová's (2000, p. 12) book, for example, the deaf author shows her intention to dialogue with other cultures, thus affirming: the "only reason to write this small book was the desire to help hearing people imagine the life and feelings of someone who lives in a world without sounds". Similarly, by manifesting the importance of the written content as a form of record, in order to express that sign language is her first language, the one that allows her to communicate, deaf author Emmanuelle Laborit says nothing should be refused to deaf people, and that all languages can be used so they can have access to life. Moreover, she adds that her book

[...] is a gift from life. It will allow me to say what I've always silenced, both to the deaf and the hearing. It's a message, an engagement in the combat related with sign language, which still separates many people. I use the language of the hearing, my second language, to express that I am absolutely sure that sign language is our first language, it's ours, the one that allows us to be "communicating" human beings. (LABORIT, 1994, p. 9).

By bringing up the texts produced by deaf authors that circulate in written Portuguese, it is possible to analyze productions that emerge chiefly from the movement of hands, facial and body expressions, from deaf linguistic and cultural differences. In our view, Brazilian deaf people use Portuguese as a second language; therefore, the culture of recognition is important for this linguistic minority, who translates and asserts their cultural and historic traditions, giving visibility to both deaf culture and communities through these written records in Portuguese. In other words, the writings in Portuguese that form the deaf literature transcend deaf communities, and thus circulate and are consumed by other cultural groups. In this crossing of borders, this moving or immersing into other cultures by means of writing, the deaf are tensioning powers and legitimating their discourse in contested signification territories.

Moreover, as cultural artifacts, the works of deaf authors enable the socialization of subjectivities and experiences, allowing other deaf people to constitute, through reading, their deaf identity in the contact with other deaf ways of being in the world. After all, it is through subjectivation processes, particularly in the field of education – and not only in school – that subjects are conducted into a culture (in this case, the deaf culture): "In other words, we're also educated by images, films, written texts, advertising, cartoons, newspapers, and TV, wherever these artifacts appear" (COSTA, 2005,

**Table 1:** Productions written by deaf persons

	<p>In <i>O voo da gaivota</i> [The gull's flight] Emmanuelle Laborit builds an autobiographic narrative, with an account of her life experiences as a deaf person, describing childhood and adolescence as marked by silence, suffering, and failure. The so-called “gaivota” [gull] achieves her goals as a woman, an actress, and a writer, rising to flights of success and happiness and overcoming the limitations of deafness. Originally published in French, the book was translated into Portuguese by Leilita Oliveira, in 1994.</p>
	<p><i>Como é ser surdo</i> [What it's like to be deaf] by Vera Strnadová, is a book in which the author recounts her deaf experience and ponders on the interests, needs, education, and culture of the deaf. Originally Czech, the book was translated by Daniela Richter Teixeira in 2000 and is organized in three main parts: “Each ear hears differently”, “Feeling it in your own skin” e “You get used to anything”.</p>
	<p>Celso Badin, in his <i>A juventude, o carnaval e o Rio de Janeiro</i> [Youth, carnival, and Rio de Janeiro], presents himself as a deaf man proud of being the author of his first book, since his main dream has always been to write books and be a journalist. In this novel, published in 2001, romance and friendships predominate, while the traps of sex and drugs in youth are also discussed. The author of the book appears as the deaf character Pitty.</p>
	<p>The literary anthology <i>O som das palavras</i> [The sound of words] consists of texts of eighteen different genres in which the authors express: difficulties (particularly in communication); opinions about events of everyday life; messages of optimism, persistence, and religious beliefs; cultural marks (particularly the use of Libras); accounts of school and family experiences; and other stories. Published in 2003 by Litteris Editora, the book compiles texts from the “1st Literary Contest for Hearing Impaired Persons”.</p>
	<p>In <i>Despertar do Silêncio</i> [Waking from Silence] (2004), Shirley Vilhalva shares her autobiography, with notes written during her adolescence and events of her life such as: birth, family, school, dreams, college, motherhood, and the 2000 Education Award. Freely distributed at Editora Arara Azul's website, the book was originally published in 2002 by Gráfica e Papelaria Brasília, with the title <i>Recortes de uma vida: descobrindo o amanhã</i> [Takes of a life: discovering tomorrow].</p>
	<p>Ronise Oliveira, in her book <i>Meus sentimentos em folhas</i> [My feelings on pages], published by Editora Litteris in 2005, shares 67 poems about her life experience, through themes like: (non-)communication, “being deaf” in community, and the importance of the sign language interpreter; the book also has texts approaching religiosity, family, and the importance of dreams and striving to achieve them.</p>
	<p>In <i>No meu silêncio ouvi e vivi</i> [In my silence, I heard and lived] (2005), Olíndia Coelho Possídio shares her autobiography, produced during the workshops at Comunigraf Editora. Based on a notebook with narratives and photographic memorabilia, the author focuses on her life story, mainly since adolescence: dating, marriage, family life (particularly the bond with her father), motherhood, work, college (letters), and the coordination of works at deaf pastoral groups.</p>
	<p>Brenda Costa is <i>A Bela do Silêncio</i> [The Belle of Silence] (2008), who, in an autobiographic narrative, tells the story of a deaf girl who is now an international top model. The narrative, where she talks about overcoming her impairment, recounts: her parents' heroism; the lessons of life; the joys and difficulties of a period of independence and widening of horizons; and the pursuit of her dreams. The book had the collaboration of Judith Carraz, and was translated (from oral language to written Portuguese) by Mariana Echalar.</p>
	<p>In <i>A verdadeira beleza: uma história de superação</i> [True beauty: a story of breaking through], Vanessa Vidal, a beauty queen and model, presents her autobiography – birth, childhood, adolescence, early career, struggles, work travels, personal journals, achievements, the importance of her parents –, with accounts of a painful, yet bright and successful trajectory. The book was translated by Libras interpreter Diná Souza, and was published in 2009, with support from government, social, and business entities.</p>
	<p><i>Mãos ao vento</i> [Hands to the wind] (2010), by Sílvia Lia Grespan Neves, is a novel where deaf characters are protagonists, which allows readers to become familiar with a few situations experienced by deaf people, particularly in their interaction with the world of the hearing. The story is based on real events, with some characters signaling in Libras and others speaking Portuguese. The book includes quotes of Emmanuelle Laborit and Oliver Sacks.</p>

(Adapted from Müller, 2012).

p. 116). Therefore, education is understood as the process through which society instills norms, standards, and values – in sum, “culture” – into the new generations, in the hope and expectation that this processes will thus guide, harness, influence, and shape the actions and beliefs of the future generations (HALL, 1997a).

In view of these approximations between culture and education, the present text dialogues with data discussed in the Master’s dissertation of Müller (2012), with the purpose of investigating the main cultural marks of ten books by deaf authors intended to an audience of young people and adults, which circulate in Portuguese written in Brazil. In connection with Cultural Studies in Education and with deaf studies, this study continues and consolidates research in Deaf culture<sup>1</sup>, problematizing power relations involved in the construction of cultural meanings. This investigation also integrates the research developed in the project *Produção, Circulação e Consumo da Cultura Surda Brasileira [Production, Circulation and Consumption of Brazilian Deaf Culture]*<sup>2</sup>.

### **Productions written by deaf authors**

The works by deaf authors analyzed here materialize in various genres (autobiographies, novels, short stories, and poems) and are built through processes of second-language (Portuguese) writing, linguistic translation, and collaborative writing. Before deepening our analyses, we will first present a brief description of the written productions by deaf persons, which is organized in the table below, following the chronological order of publications found until 2012.

**1-** The phrase *deaf culture* is understood here in the plural, i.e., as deaf cultures, since we cannot affirm the existence of one single deaf culture; cultures hybridize, they are heterogenic and mobile.

**2-** The project was developed in accordance with Edict 07/2008: Capes/Min and Pró-cultura – *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES) and Ministério da Cultura (MinC) –, with the purpose of mapping and investigating Brazilian deaf culture production: published material (books, DVDs, CDs...), videos circulating on the internet, and works by students from the course of Letters/Libras (offered by the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC).

In general, we can see the recurrence of life testimonies in the narratives, in which accounts emerge about the experience of the self, with authors, in their singularities, assuming the deaf identity as difference, as will be deepened in the following sections of this text. In this perspective, we can also understand the productions written by deaf persons as places with a potential to produce meanings, particularly constituted in power relations – starting with speech being allowed in a work that circulates and is consumed in the publishing sector –, relations that function as a system of representation of concepts, ideas, and feelings (HALL, 1997b). Thus, it is through culture that we are “taught” to think in some ways, and not in others.

We do not propose to analyze these productions based on certain categorizations, nor define them as literary or non-literary. On the other hand, they are understood as a “biographic space” (ARFUCH, 2010) that comprehends one field: that in which classic generic-discursive forms intersect and hybridize; where biographical value assumes a protagonist position in the narrative course that gives consistency to one’s life; and where the appeal to stable references as an anchoring point is dislocated in relation with the various strategies of self-representation. This idea is productive as a horizon of analysis, in order to deal with the multiplicity, a place of confluence and circulation, family similarities, and proximities and differences in the intertextuality that forms these deaf narratives.

We should highlight that the number of books by deaf authors published and in circulation in Brazil has been increasing – particularly books by deaf women –, which is among the findings of this study. While in the 1990’s we can see only one book by a deaf author, translated from French into Portuguese (LABORIT, 1993), since year 2000, they have grown quantitatively, with nine books in ten years, i.e., nearly one book released per year. On the one hand, we could consider these

figures still not significant, in view of the entire Brazilian deaf population and the fact that most books were not reprinted, i.e., circulation still occurs through the first edition; some even circulate with financial support (public and private), as part of social projects, or even as home-made publications. On the other hand, this can be understood as a conquest of cultural territories, as well as a profitable path to cause the publishing sector to open up in face of the struggles and movements of deaf communities and the development of public policies for stimulating culture.

The analysis of ten books of considerable length, investigating “the whole discursive scheme” (written text, images, forewords, testimonies, among other components of meaning) would be a virtually impossible mission in this article. In fact, other looks could be directed toward this empirical materiality, in view of other goals and theoretical approximations. Therefore, in the present work, we direct or investigating lenses toward the main cultural deaf marks made evident in the narratives that form this empirical *corpus*. Thus, we now proceed by discussing one of these marks: the narratives of the experience of the self.

### **Narratives of the experience of the self**

Recounting fragments of the authors’ lives, the deaf narratives analyzed here: witness everyday practices in family, at school, and in the society, approximating informal and utilitarian accounts (giving advice and guiding conducts, for example); imprint the narrator’s mark and state of being (his body, story, and culture); and emerge as forms of resistance and possibility of telling another story about deaf people, showing their ability to overcome life’s difficulties. It is worth adding that the meaning given to what we are depends also on the stories we tell, in which we are, at once, the narrator, the author, and the main character.

As the experience of deafhood is narrated in a book, this experience of the self is also constituted during the process of writing in Portuguese for deaf people, in which both the subjectivity and an intense emotional load can be noticed. The subjectivity that accounts put into play, which is attested by the admission of the “I”, the insistence on real lives, and the authenticity of stories in the voice of their protagonists upon the inscription of the graphic word, is guaranteed by the veracity of these life testimonies. Moreover, the informative logic of “this happened”, applicable to the accounts investigated here, makes life – and, consequently, experience itself – an essential core of thematization.

The experience of the self, historically constituted as what can and should be thought, is bound to the subject that offers his own being to maintain a reflexive relationship with himself, in order to observe, decipher, interpret, describe, judge, narrate, and master himself (LARROSA, 2002). Therefore, agreeing with Lopes (2010), deaf narratives incite the subject to think about himself and get a writing about himself, which permits the self to see itself in its singularity within a collective, particularly the deaf collective. For this reason, the production of deaf subject positions occurs through a repertoire in which one narrates and constitutes oneself.

Considering the potentialities of language to recall, constitute, and transform the subject in the relationship between life’s fragments and the possibility to invent in writing, deaf authors’ works not only make evident their process of going through experiences, but these works are also marked by a discursive polyphony, i.e., the narratives are also built in relation to the stories we access and which, somehow, concern us insofar as we are compelled to produce our story in relation to them. The personal stories that constitute us are produced and mediated within more or less institutionalized social practices (LARROSA, 2002). It is within narratives – as cultural artifacts and, therefore, regulators of individual



and social conducts – that discourses defining the subject's truths intersect.

We can also see in the works investigated here that, regarding the constitution of the subject matter, in whatever genre they emerge, “real” or fictional events are “tellable” (SILVEIRA, 2005). In the relationship between life's fragments and the possibility to invent in fiction, deaf authors seek to share the experience of the self with other deaf people, as well as with family, friends, and professionals in the field of deafness who, in turn, are usually hearing people. Moreover, the knowledge that authors acquire from experience in the way they respond to what happens over life, both in the meaning and non-meaning they attribute to what happens to them, given their formative or transformation capacity, establishes a mediation between knowledge and the human life.

These are aspects of the productions analyzed here, in which we can see the passing of time throughout life. In this case, we can see the predominance of autobiographic narratives, such as the ones by Vanessa Vidal, Brenda Costa, Emanuelle Laborit, Olindina Coelho Possidio, and Shirley Vilhalva. “Telling” also takes place in others genres chosen by deaf authors, such as novels, poems, and short stories. With Vera Strnadová's work, the narration of experiences is accompanied by dissertative texts that present, and argue about, the “deaf way of being” in the relations with others. It is by discoursing about their experiences of the deaf difference that the subjects-authors translate their culture for other people, addressing and subjectivating their readers.

Usually, accounts of experiences can be found in the books' presentation texts or forewords that, in a way, seek to summarize the contents, sharing also the goals of the publication. Although these can be considered discourses that do not necessarily emerge from deaf authors, such introduction texts signal the book's position in a discursive domain where the author's intentionality in the process of producing the work becomes evident. We can also see this in the construction of texts that

approximate the fictional universe, such as the novels, which do not fully detach from events experienced by the authors.

One example of an experience from the author's life is in the book by Neves (2010), who is a researcher and participates in deaf communities. The author creates a novel based on events she experienced, bringing her memories into the book, particularly in the construction of the deaf character Paola. In about eleven pages, in the chapter “Memórias de infância: escola de surdos” [Childhood memories: deaf school], the protagonist describes her story, both in family and in schools, relating fragments of the experience of the self to produce the narrative. Based on events experienced, the author also marks the deaf difference, thus showing her interest in producing a novel with aspects of deaf culture, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

During pedagogy school, I researched deaf culture and did my final assignment on this subject matter. [...] That's where the idea came to write a novel with aspects of deaf culture, with deaf characters, hearing people, and interpreters of Brazilian sign language. [...] The characters' names are fictitious, but the narrative is based on real events, and in the voice of the characters resounds that of the real people who inspired this story. (NEVES, 2010, p. 5-6)

Therefore, still regarding the books' paratexts, where the purpose is to summarize their contents and share the goals of their publication, in the book by Badin (2001), we can see an instructional feature to the narrative, which proposes “to teach”, whether through fiction or reality, prose or poetry, the way of persistence and loyalty to life. This is built in a novel with teenage characters where the deaf author presents himself as a deaf character, Pitty, based on experiences of the person who produced the work, as we illustrate in the following passage:

In the book, I present myself as a deaf character: Pitty – with his suffering, sorrows, joys, and happiness. (BADIN, 2001, p. 13).

Similarly, as already observed in the epigraphs of the present text, the poetical work *Meus sentimentos em folhas* is characterized, in its preface, as a “mixture of joys and sorrows, love and disappointments; like a sincere, heartfelt x-ray image of a woman who has learned in a rich, special way how to love life and everything that’s part of it” (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 1). The author herself affirms that her book has come to show the importance of deaf people’s capacity to reveal their feelings to the world, exposing them on paper, where they are organized in poems. In other words, literature in Portuguese becomes a resource for deaf cultural translation.

Indeed, the narrative of the experience of the self becomes evident through the relation between authors’ experience of being deaf and the construction of the text, which occurs both in the body of the text and in paratexts. Generally, we can see the deaf person’s desire to tell about his own life: the marking events, difficulties, and victories that could serve as an example to someone else. And this takes place also in the novels, short stories, and poems which, although usually marked by more complex creation processes and linguistic resources, signal the experience of the person who writes the book, besides adopting positions about, and guiding other conducts based on, conventions that circulate in a discursive network.

Therefore, one’s narrating oneself to someone else can be understood as a process of subjection in which the narrator is called upon to confess moments of life, feelings, and desires. In this network of meanings, the deaf author allows others to know him, but he is also restrained in his expressiveness, as the circulation and consumption of some narratives also presuppose a discursive order, including with regard to rules and peculiarities of the

publishing business; in other words, the subject regulates himself through culture, through a regime of truths that delimits what can or cannot be said, or what is proper or not, in a discursive context.

It is worth highlighting that the books analyzed here allow the constitution of meanings that differ from representations normally attributed to deaf people, as they seek, in political movements, other forms of representation of deaf people and deafness. The power conferred to deaf authors in this privileged space of discursive constitution allows them to express themselves, letting them explain how things are, or propose the way they should be. Therefore, narrating the experience of the self can be understood as an act of self-knowledge, i.e., a process amidst a network of representations, translations, and production of meanings that is woven from the fragments of memory chosen by the deaf authors.

After all, what is narrated has both political and pedagogical implications, since the narrative is built from what the subject remembers or selects in order to tell his life, considering the way he wants to be seen and understood. Readers’ receptiveness to the works occurs in the cultural circuit, since identities and representations are built when subjects are called out by words. Therefore, it is important to problematize deaf identity positions that circulate in the works analyzed here, as will be seen in the next section, considering that the deaf identity is marked with difference.

### **Deaf identity as difference**

The identity integrates the dynamic through which individuals and groups understand the bonds, even imaginary ones, that keep them together; therefore, sharing an identity is participating with others in certain spheres of social life (MOREIRA, 2005). As we discuss deaf identity, it is important to perceive it as closely related – in a dependence relation – with difference, i.e., identity and difference



are inseparable, mutually determined, the result of acts of linguistic creation, and actively produced (SILVA, 2009). This is so because the affirmation *I am deaf* – made evident through cultural markers and through a process of being called out and convoked to a deaf identity (subjectivation) – implies saying that I am not a hearing person; therefore, I am different.

In the autobiographic space of the works analyzed here, deaf self-identification as difference is usually made as early as in the first few pages of the books, when the narratives describe the discovery of deafness, relating it to silence, the condition of not being able to hear, and the suffering caused by the lack of communication. At times, it is in a school education process, with hearing teachers and colleagues, while relating with different people (those who can speak), that the deaf person identifies himself as deaf. Connected to the condition of not being able to hear or talk using the mouth, i.e., as a physical mark, the difference is initially located in the body, based on a comparison with hearing people, who are taken as the normal reference, as we can see below:

I looked at my body head to toes, tried to look at people too, head to toes, and couldn't find anything different. My eyes suddenly fixed a scene where a teacher was talking to a student, I stopped, I observed something I knew didn't happened to me, when someone speaks, he opens and shuts his mouth while the other keeps his shut, and when the first's done speaking, the other opens his mouth, how wonderful, and yet I wanted to know why that didn't happen to me (VILHALVA, 2004, p. 17).

We observed, in the works analyzed, that the autobiographic accounts give priority to childhood and adolescence experiences, with descriptions of the hearing family's disappointment, frequent visits to doctors and speech and language therapists, the beginning of school life in regular (hearing) schools, and the

enterprises of parents who seek the deaf child's normalization and success. Also recurring is the search for a justification for deafness, in an effort to explain the supposed abnormality. Such justifications for the deaf difference are usually connected with hereditary or spiritual issues, as we can see in the excerpts below:

When my dad learned that I was deaf, he was I little sad, because it was the second time a daughter was born with this problem. In fact, this happened because my parents were legitimate cousins (POSSÍDIO, 2005, p. 20).

I'm a child of hearing parents, and I have deaf cousins on my father's side, which leads me to believe that my deafness is hereditary. [...] When I was little, I didn't know I was a (partially) deaf girl because hardly anybody talked to me [...] In that phase, I used to have this desire within me to be in a school where people were deaf like me [...] (VILHALVA, 2004, p. 15-23).

When I was started at the INES (Instituto Nacional Educação de Surdos), it was the greatest joy in my life, because I learned many things. Teachers were nice, there was a lot of kids like me, and it felt good to communicate in sign language like the deaf (VILHALVA et al., 2003, p. 35).

The constitution of deaf identity occurs chiefly from the approximation to another deaf person/other deaf people, by attending deaf schools, as well as deaf associations and communities. In those cases, the deaf person's "deafhood" is rediscovered as he meets peers who are same as him with regard to non-hearing, visual experience, and sign language use. In their books, deaf writers, as they are subjectivated to value the deaf experience, which is singular and occurs in the collective, attribute importance to the constitution of their deaf identity and the belonging to a deaf

community – which is also constituted in deaf schools – as is clear from the texts below:

I had this little deaf friend [...] Communication was easier between the two of us. We had personal signs and mimicry. [...] I also wanted to know the difference between my companion and me. [...] We were two deaf kids, but not exactly the same. The hope those people gave me in Washington, that positive side, it led me to a discovery, another, really important one about myself: I understood that I was deaf. [...] I am deaf doesn't mean the same thing as 'I can't hear'. [...] I belonged in a community, I had a true identity. I had fellow countrymen. In Washington, other people would tell me, 'You're like us, you're deaf'. (LABORIT, 1994, p. 12-67).

I was amazed at what I saw: those kids used their hands to communicate. [...] The feeling I had, it's hard to explain, but I felt something like: I am not the only different person in the world! (NEVES, 2010, p. 24).

Through the narratives, we can see that deaf identity also gets its markers from other characteristics that indicate potentials in the deaf subject. Representations become evident that the deaf person uses Libras, that he may not be able to hear, but he can oralize; he is not mute, he can talk “normally” with people who do not know sign language, among other representations, i.e., “it depends on each deaf person” since there are different deaf subject positions in the narratives analyzed. Borrowing Wrigley's (1996) words, “the members of these self-referenced Deaf cultures have no doubt about their culturally distinct identities”. This can be seen in the passages below:

My parents and family have always noticed how my personal growth was different in terms of inclusion. [...] They

used to ask me how come that I, even being “different”, was able to learn so fast and acquire my literacy like any “normal” person. [...] Natália, a deep deaf girl like me, differentiates from me only in terms of the identity she chose: I accept my deaf identity; Natália prefers the identity of hearing. (VIDAL, 2009, p. 61-67).

Luckily, she reacts, gets a pen and a paper from her purse and writes: “I deaf, but can read lips. I do speak, get used to my voice. I'm Paola”. [...] There are deaf people who can speak as well as we can, others more or less, and others hardly anything. It depends on each deaf person! (NEVES, 2010, p.14).

In the narratives, we can also see a binary opposition between hearing and deaf, in which the cultural difference between “two worlds” is marked, as well as the search for “normality”; in other words, the possibility of self-representing allows deaf people to have their potentials recognized by the hearing. Moreover, we highlight the “celebration of cultural diversity” – everyone is different from everyone else and, therefore, people can live and learn together – which differs from the anthropological conception that claims the deaf difference. The following excerpts corroborate these deaf identity position-takings:

Pitty saw and admired others: homosexuals, bisexuals, lesbians, rock'n'rollers, punks, lovers, etc. “People are really different than me, because I'm deaf, right?”, Pitty thought, alone. (BADIN, 2001, p. 68).

And recognizing difference, your difficulties, and the importance of the dialogue between the world of the hearing and that of the deaf in order to better develop the latter's self-esteem. [...] May sign language be a real strength to overcome solitude and discrimination of those who are different, making your

identity a worthy one. (VILHALVA et al., 2003, p. 17)

In multicolored Brazil, with its thousand scents and flavors, a country of all excesses paced by samba and bossa nova, [...] a star splashed its light on me way before I first appeared to the objectives of cameras. In my own way, I have rewarded that star, by shining for it, and never giving up, even in painful times, in those gaps where I lost, and still loose, my balance, because I'm 'different', therefore, often rejected. (COSTA, 2008, p. 11).

In a way, the deaf identity mark that stands out in the productions written by deaf authors approximates them to other minority cultural groups considered "different". On the other hand, the deaf subject narrates himself as different from other deaf people, considering other identitarian belongings, such as: hearing impaired, homosexuals, punks. Traditionally positioned in the margin, those usually "rejected" tend to mark their difference in works that circulate in the cultural market, narrating how they have overcome difficulties to achieve success.

After all, would we have a considerable market for a work that narrates the failure of a subject who does not fit in the social standards of normality? In view of this, it is worth considering the conditions of possibility for the construction and circulation of such works in Brazil, bearing in mind the purposes of authors and publishers, the historical and educational context of constitution of the narrative, among other subjective factors integrating the networks and discursive domains of the publishing business.

In general, the deaf difference mark that appears over the narratives is seen through lenses that approximate the anthropological conception of deafness, particularly in the discursive domains of deaf studies. Even though this can be seen particularly in more recent publications, the attempt is clear

to explain the cultural understanding of "deafhood" and deafness, so as to transpose clinical and therapeutic terms, such as "hearing impairment":

- In fact, "hearing impairment" is a clinical term. "Deaf" is a sociocultural term used by those who understand deafness as a difference. The deaf community prefers this term. [...] – Rose continues. (NEVES, 2010, p. 40).

In view of the process of construction, recognition, and marking of deaf identity as a difference, particularly in the border established between deaf and hearing people, this deaf identity is not constituted in one single, homogeneous, crystalized way. In other words, even though the deaf difference is claimed in each production analyzed here, we can see the impossibility of constituting one single way of "being deaf", which is in line with contemporary studies about changing, moving, transitory, and therefore not fixed, single, or stable identities.

### **Writing in a second language: a deaf cultural translation**

The cultural productions by deaf authors which circulate in written Portuguese can be understood as a rich space for self-representation and marking of deaf identity insofar as these authors revisit the individual and collective memory, translating themselves into a second language. These productions also indicate the potential of discourses that emerge from deaf people and legitimate these meanings, which have the "approval" of those who experience deafness and have the authority to, in a power-knowledge relationship, signify "deafhood" and their culture. And these discourses, materialized in books written by deaf authors, do not circulate only in schools; as a cultural curriculum, representations produced are put in circulation, "teaching" sets of knowledge, ways of seeing and knowing the world.

Producing and allowing the circulation and cultural consumption of narratives in a second language favors the diffusion and visibility of deaf culture. Given the potential to subjectivize the readers of these works by deaf authors, mainly through the constitution of “other truths” about deaf people and their cultures, their translating themselves into another language enables blurring borders and building niches so that a people can claim its difference, while also constituting a resource for struggles and movements. Therefore, readers are not only called out by those who are different, but they are also guided toward consuming deaf culture, which seeks recognition and imprints other images and meanings to the already existing ones. And it is important that this be verified also in school education, by problematizing single, stiffened, exclusionary truths.

Books, understood here as cultural artifacts, constitute a cultural resource in a territory of political-pedagogical claims and negotiations. One such example is that, in deaf cultural productions, failed school practices, particularly oralist ones, are often denounced. In parallel, these productions provide “teaching” on how deaf education should be, mainly regarding the learning of a written language like Portuguese. Thus, as in a process of cultural translation, this writing is a resource for the deaf, although narratives indicate that learning it can be difficult, considering the educational and linguistic policies, as well as their consequent pedagogical practices.

To some deaf authors, the writing of a book also allowed the realization of a dream, a rare opportunity, one meant for few, showing

that deaf people too can express their feelings and abilities to the world. Deaf author Celso Badin (2001), for example, in the presentation of his book, affirms that he is proud of his work and plans to write other books and be a journalist, since he is already the main editor at Deaf’s News newspaper, where he presents interviews, upcoming events, news, and tips for the whole deaf community. The back cover of Badin’s book reads: “[the author] conquered the great challenge of communication through written language”.

Another important point concerning the process of cultural translation is that the narratives analyzed here do not represent a homogeneous, still, determined position of a cultural group. Even with the bonds established in deaf communities, which strengthen the deaf people, the Brazilian deaf culture also hybridizes, generating different ways of being deaf and producing, putting into circulation, and consuming cultural productions. Based on this, we can also see that, in the books analyzed here, no space is opened for discussing other cultures, considering, for example, gender and ethnic issues.

Given the extent and complexity of the material analyzed here, the present text could stretch further; however, for the limits of this article, a few choices were necessary, mainly concerning the analytical looks directed toward the narratives. Other lenses could – and still can – be used, particularly in order to bring up deaf speech so that other stories, and more stories, can be told. Thus, an invitation stands for the reader to know the deaf cultural productions discussed here; as, of course, does a provocation for further research.

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