

## COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES IN DEAFNESS ACCORDING TO REPORTS OF DEAF YOUTH

### *PROCESSOS COMUNICATIVOS NA SURDEZ DE ACORDO COM RELATOS DE JOVENS SURDOS*

### *PROCESOS COMUNICATIVOS EM LA SORDERA DE ACUERDO COM RELATOS DE JÓVENES SORDOS*

Lidiane Ferrari BOTTEON<sup>1</sup>  
Maria Lucia Oliveira Suzigan DRAGONE<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This text aims to describe how deaf young people report the communicative process they experienced at home and at school with listener mothers/teachers. Three deaf young people, aged between 18 and 30, narrated their communicative experiences at home/school contexts, through video interviews recorded with the participation of a professional interpreter of LIBRAS (the Brazilian Sign Language). The results disclosed the non-acceptance of deafness at home/school environment, which was emphasized by the deaf people's perceptions of constant expectations from mothers and teachers of hearing improvement and speech development. It was evidenced that the communicative processes experienced by the young interviewees were difficult and interfered in the academic development and in the relationships at home.

**KEYWORDS:** Deafness. Communication. Family. Learning.

**RESUMO:** Este texto tem o objetivo de descrever como jovens surdos relataram o processo de comunicação que vivenciaram no lar e na vida escolar, com mães/professoras ouvintes. Participaram deste estudo três jovens surdos, com idade entre 18 e 30 anos, narraram suas experiências comunicativas em entrevistas gravadas em vídeo, acompanhadas por intérprete de LIBRAS. Os resultados apontaram a não aceitação da surdez no ambiente casa e escola explicitada, na percepção dos surdos, pela constante expectativa das mães e das professoras de que obtivessem melhoras da audição e no desenvolvimento da fala. Evidenciou-se que os difíceis processos comunicativos vivenciados pelos jovens surdos interferiram no desenvolvimento escolar e nas relações no lar.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Surdez. Comunicação. Família. Aprendizagem.

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<sup>1</sup> Padre Albino University Center (UNIFIPA), Catanduva – SP – Brazil. Master's in Processes of Teaching, Management and Innovation in the area of Education (UNIARA). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4479-268X>. E-mail: [lidi\\_ferrari@hotmail.com](mailto:lidi_ferrari@hotmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> University of Araraquara (UNIARA), Araraquara – SP – Brazil. Professor in the Postgraduate Program in Processes of Teaching, Management and Innovation. Doctorate in School Education (UNESP). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4567-0679>. E-mail: [mldragone@uniara.com.br](mailto:mldragone@uniara.com.br)

**RESUMEN:** El estudio caracterizó los procesos de comunicación entre la madre oyente y el hijo sordo, y el profesor oyente y los alumnos sordos matriculados en el ensino Regular, e identificó en la óptica de jóvenes sordos, como ellos vivenciaron esos procesos. Participaron tres jóvenes sordos que ya acabaron el ensino medio. En la colecta de datos fueron realizadas video grabadas con los jóvenes sordos, pues las respuestas de ellos fueron expresadas en Lengua Brasileira de Sinales (LIBRAS). Las encuestas con los jóvenes sordos estuvieron con participación de un intérprete en LIBRAS. Los resultados indicaron que tanto las madres cuanto las profesoras oyentes hicieron uso diario de lenguaje oral y de gestos usuales para comunicaren con los niños sordos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación especial. Sordera. Proceso comunicativo. Familia. Aprendizaje.

## Introduction

The communicative processes involved in the triad listening mother, listening teacher and deaf child/student are essential for the development and success in schooling. This theme was studied in research developed at the master's level, whose stage involving the perspective of deaf young people is reported in this article.

The deafness theme can be seen and rethought in the singularity of each case, always taking into account the interpretations of the other in the process of both language acquisition and, consequently, the subjective constitution of the deaf child. It is important to emphasize that the deaf subject and the process by which he goes from *infans* to a speaking subject depends much more on the quality of the interaction, on the interpretations of the other/mother and the place he occupies in the other/mother's discourse than on the quantity of hearing or auditory rest he may have (LIEBER, 2015).

Furthermore, the communicative processes permeate human interactions, which begin in the family environment where the children's initial capacities are developed, also being configured as necessary bases for the development of the deaf. Even in the case of prepared fathers and mothers aware of their role, it may not be possible to take advantage of all possible opportunities to be created at home (TAVARES, 2011). Therefore, the understanding of parents and teachers, involved in the development processes, about deafness is essential for the quality in the education of their deaf children, since the process of language acquisition is the child's subjective constitution.

From these perspectives, deafness itself does not define the development and destiny of the deaf individual, since the child depends on stimuli from the environment in which he is inserted, not needing limiting labels pre-established by the deafness.

## Communicative processes and child development

In the development of man, thought and language must be understood in different ways according to the conception of Vygotsky (1998), since when identifying thought with the spoken discourse, the possibility of understanding them is limited. This understanding gives meaning to the spoken word, which provides a union between thought and speech - verbal thinking.

Oliveira (1997) highlights two basic functions of language indicated by Vygotsky: social exchange and generalized thinking. The first of these, social exchange, is approached from the perspective that man, in order to communicate with his fellow man, creates and uses differentiated language systems. It is possible to verify this fact by observing the baby who does not understand and does not articulate the words, but communicates his desires and emotions through gestures and expressions, so it is through the need for communication that the baby drives communication. In the other basic function, generalizing thinking, language gives orders to reality, grouping all occurrences of the same class of objects, situations, among other elements according to the same class of concepts. It is this generalizing thought function that makes language an instrument of thought: language provides the concepts and forms of organization of the real that constitute the mediation between the subject and the object of knowledge. "Understanding the relation between thought and language is, therefore, essential for understanding the psychological functioning of human beings"<sup>3</sup> (OLIVEIRA, 1997, p. 43).

Regarding the development of language and human thought, heredity stands out, that is, the factors of human life passed from generation to generation, which are only possible using a language shared and understood by their peers. "The primary function of language is communication and social exchange"<sup>4</sup> (VYGOTSKY, 1998, p. 22). To paraphrase the author, in the absence of a system of linguistic signs, only the most primitive and limited type of communication will take place through expressive movements observed, above all, among animals. The function of language is to establish communication, it is the mediation between human thought and action, which the human being seeks out of necessity. This is what drives the development of language: the search for ways to be understood and make oneself understood.

Human communication processes are not limited to oral language, they extend to other forms, among which written language, which is one of the most relevant for favoring the

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<sup>3</sup> "A compreensão das relações entre pensamento e linguagem é, pois, essencial para a compreensão do funcionamento psicológico do ser humano"

<sup>4</sup> "A função primordial da linguagem é a comunicação e o intercâmbio social"

permanence of information for many generations and the complementation and expansion of knowledge through readings of the most diverse types on different subjects. Therefore, it can be said that human development is linked to the development of thought and oral and written language.

In the presence of deafness, this process becomes complicated due to the difficulty in developing oral language from early childhood or even in the long term, thus losing several stages of language development to understand the world, a fact that highlights the need for other differentiated forms of communication, such as the use of sign language.

### **Bilingualism and the development of the deaf**

In the 1990s, a different vision emerges in relation to deaf communication: Bilingualism supported by a methodology adopted from the claims of the deaf themselves for the possibility of access to two languages within the same context, involving Sign Language and Portuguese Language (GOLDFELD, 1997). The proposal of Bilingualism is to acquire Sign Language as the first language, as it is considered the natural language of the deaf and, as a second language, the official language used in the country in which they live.

The main justification for this proposal is that the deaf constitute a deaf community, with their own culture and language. Deaf children can acquire Sign Language, as long as they participate in the daily interactions of the deaf community, as with any other child in acquiring a natural language. The term “natural” does not refer to a biological spontaneity and natural language, in this context, it must be understood as a language that was created and used by a specific community of users, which will be transmitted from generation to generation and structurally transformed with the passing of time (SKLIAR, 2103).

Bilingualism does not aim to impose the learning of the oral modality of the official language of your country, nor does it aim to devalue deafness or to repudiate the use of the oral modality. There are even two distinct ways of defining bilingual philosophy. The first defends that the deaf child should acquire the Sign Language and the oral modality of his country and be literate in the official language of his country, and the other believes that it is necessary for the deaf to learn the Sign Language and only the written modality of official language of his country (GOLDFELD, 1997).

It is worth mentioning that the Bilingualism proposal provides that the deaf child acquires the Sign Language as his/her mother tongue, and considers that the sooner the deaf child is inserted in a deaf community, the better the overall development due to communication

by Sign Language. This early condition of access to Sign Language, to be taught with reference to the knowledge acquired through LIBRAS, in the case of residency in Brazil, favors more appropriate learning conditions (LACERDA, 1998).

Thus, it is understood that the deaf child may have intellectual capacity similar to that of hearing children, as long as they acquire and internalize a language from an early age, so that the first social communicative exchanges occur (SILVA; PEREIRA, 2003). Although cultural differences occur between hearing parents and deaf children, Goldfeld (1997) points out that the most appropriate solution for the education of deaf children seems to be even bilingualism, and to ensure linguistic and cognitive development it is important and necessary that they live with deaf community through a dialogue contextualized by Sign Language.

In line with the theoretical views on the subject involving communicative processes with deaf people, the relevance of studying is highlighted, as has been the use of sign language during schooling, reported by deaf young people.

## Method

To understand how the communicative experiences of deaf youth at home and at school took place, a qualitative investigative research was structured, whose project was duly approved by the Research Ethics Committee with human beings. Young people from deaf communities in a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo were invited to participate, taking into account, as inclusion criteria, that deaf young people should have completed high school in a state public school, be fluent in sign language, be part of hearing families, and who had hearing teachers during the school years. About seven deaf people were contacted, however, only three male deaf people aged between 23 and 30 years met all of these criteria, now called fictitious: João (J1), José (J2) and Jair (J3).

The script for the interview was structured by the researcher, containing eight questions about the communication process with hearing mothers and teachers from the perspective of deaf young people. The questions explored how young deaf people perceived and were able to expose the communicative processes they experienced since childhood involving both aspects of satisfactory and unsatisfactory communication, and their memories of interactions at home and at school. In this way, we sought to understand, from the perspective of the deaf, the relations of these communicative processes with the experiences lived in the family context and in formal learning at school. The first two questions turned to the communicative processes with the hearing mothers at home, from the third to the eighth question hovered over the

communicative processes experienced at school and its complications in the academic formation of the deaf and in the continuity of studies after high school.

The place for the interview was the researcher's residence, whose space was prepared to reproduce the video in LIBRAS for presentation to the deaf youth of the content of the informed consent form. After the formal acceptance of the participants, the interview was conducted and filmed on video, individually with each young deaf person, with the presence of the LIBRAS interpreter and the researcher. For data analysis, the answers of deaf young people were translated into Portuguese by the sign language interpreter, and duly transcribed to proceed with the survey of the most recurring themes, namely: modalities of communication with mothers, effectiveness of the communicative process at school and interference in school learning.

### **The perception of deaf people about the communicative processes experienced at home and at school**

In this methodological context, all participants were anxious with the interview to be able to express their opinions on the subject. João, using Libras and partially speaking, was more restrained with short answers, José, only through LIBRAS, was more enlightening, offering responses permeated by emotion, especially with the presence of sadness when remembering the communication processes with adults during his childhood, and Jair, using distorted orality, but often associated with LIBRAS, was always cheerful and emitting more complete responses.

Regarding communication with mothers, the three participants were unanimous in pointing out that it was guided by homemade gestures and orality, impairing interactions, making the communication process unsatisfactory.

*In the past, my mother didn't know any signs and was just mimicry, but I understood her. [...] I also used to mimic but my feelings were not understood, no matter how much I tried to explain them again and again, I was very sorry about that (João).<sup>5</sup>*

*[...] communication in my house was limited, mimes as simple as 'eating' I understood, no matter how much they tried to communicate with me, my feelings were still not fully understood (José).<sup>6</sup>*

*[...] Until I was 13 years old there was no good communication in my house, [...] afterwards my father sold the car to buy a hearing aid, which gradually*

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<sup>5</sup> *No passado minha mãe não sabia sinais e fazia apenas mímicas, mas eu a compreendia. [...] eu também fazia mímicas só que os meus sentimentos não eram compreendidos, por mais que eu tentasse explicá-los novamente, eu ficava muito sentido com isso (João).*

<sup>6</sup> *[...] a comunicação em minha casa era limitada, mímicas simples como 'comer' eu entendia, por mais que eles tentassem se comunicar comigo os meus sentimentos ainda não eram totalmente compreendidos (José).*

*helped in the communication [...] only after 14 our communication started to improve and my mother understood my feelings better (Jair).<sup>7</sup>*

The answers offered by the deaf to the questions about communication between them and their mothers in childhood, revealed the perception of the lack of full communication, absence of attempts at other forms of communication other than oral language and homemade gestures in the search to establish more significant communicative contacts. The tireless attempts at oral communication signal the mothers' non-acceptance of the condition of deafness, as indicated by Goldfeld (1997).

It was possible to perceive from the responses of deaf young people that precarious and inefficient communication with their mothers happened due to the lack of meaning attributed to language, because, when there is unsatisfactory communication, the sense of language is lost, that meaning that is particular to each constructed individual through dialogue and contextual relations and with the interlocutors, as put forward by Vygotsky (1998). In this way, the quality of the interactions and interpretations of the other, in the case of the mother, is lost to the various manifestations of the deaf and the place he occupies in the discourse, causing more damage to the process of constitution of the deaf subject than the limitation of hearing (LIEBER, 2015).

As a result of the questioning about the communicative processes at school, the deaf revealed the absence of interpreters in the classroom at the time they attended school, and the most interesting thing is that they opened the possibility of expressing their feelings regarding communication failures, demonstrating the extent of the problem.

João was upset that neither he nor the teachers had mastery of Sign Language, mimicry or indicative gestures were used without being able to learn anything, but he recalled that he started learning only when he mastered the sign language and when he had support from the sign interpreter in high school. José's family moved to another city when they understood his son's needs to learn sign language, which greatly helped his learning, but when he returned to his city for high school, the obstacles returned. Jair's testimony reveals the impact of the difficulties reflected in his negative relationship with the teacher who had little concern for this, and in better relationships with teachers who tried to minimize these difficulties in some way.

*[...] I saw the teacher talking and I felt discouraged, then I kept talking to the colleague next to me until the teacher said: 'Look here, attention' but as I*

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<sup>7</sup> [...] Até aos 13 anos não havia uma boa comunicação em minha casa, [...] depois meu pai vendeu o carro para comprar um aparelho auditivo o que aos poucos foi ajudando na comunicação [...] somente depois dos 14 anos que nossa comunicação começou a melhorar e minha mãe entendia melhor meus sentimentos (Jair).

*didn't hear anything I didn't care. [...] The Sign Language I would learn in the future and only then would my mind open to new knowledge (João).<sup>8</sup>*

*[...] I moved to Campinas. There was special, I had an interpreter only for the deaf, I was amazed. Gradually, other deaf people were teaching me simple signs like 'hi, how are you, good night, good afternoon ...' and I kept making progress. I came back [...] but, at school, communication was only oral, and that was difficult. I liked Campinas more (José).<sup>9</sup>*

*There was no interpreter (until high school) only xxxxx, a 'boring' teacher who sat talking on the microphone, sometimes she said that an interpreter was not allowed. I received help from a friend in the class (João).<sup>10</sup>*

*I attended high school at night, the teachers helped me a lot, I got good grades and even if they were not good there was no problem they still helped me, communication with the teachers was always oral, and they understood my feelings well, I was very thankful for that (Jair).<sup>11</sup>*

In this way, there was an expression of revolt, as the deaf pointed out that communication with teachers was always through oral language, emphasizing the difficulties when teachers were not attentive or concerned with making them understand. In addition to emphasizing that they were always at a disadvantage in relation to hearing students, a deaf interviewed compared his learning process without the presence of LIBRAS with a car that does not move.

The use of oral language as a basic means of communication by teachers returns to the problem of not accepting the deafness of their students as something non-retroactive, and the assumption that they will start to hear and understand the teacher's orality (GOLDFELD, 1997) and that the stimulation of orality would enable the learning of the Portuguese language, in addition to taking the deaf child to a rehabilitation towards normality. In this context, it is revealed the lack of preparation of teachers to understand the communication difficulties present, to trigger the intention to use other forms of communication and to promote interactions in the classroom.

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<sup>8</sup> [...] Eu via o professor falando e me sentia desanimado, daí ficava conversando com o colega ao lado até que a professora dizia: 'Olha aqui atenção' mas como não ouvia nada eu não me interessava. [...] A Língua de Sinais eu aprenderia no futuro e só então minha mente abriria para novos conhecimentos (João).

<sup>9</sup> [...] mudei para Campinas. Lá era especial, tinha intérprete só para surdos, fiquei admirado. Aos poucos outros surdos foram me ensinando sinais simples como 'oi, tudo bem, boa noite, boa tarde...' e continuei progredindo. Voltei [...] mas, na escola a comunicação era apenas oral, e isso era difícil. Eu gostava mais de Campinas (José).

<sup>10</sup> Não tinha intérprete (até o ensino médio) apenas a xxxxx, uma professora 'chata' que ficava sentada falando ao microfone, às vezes ela dizia que intérprete não era permitido. Recebia ajuda de uma amiga na classe (João).

<sup>11</sup> Cursei o Ensino Médio no período noturno, os professores me ajudavam muito, tirava boas notas e mesmo que não fossem boas não havia problema eles ainda me ajudavam, a comunicação com os professores sempre foi oral, e eles compreendiam bem os meus sentimentos, fiquei muito agradecido por isso (Jair).

From the perspective of the deaf, the school learning process was arduous and long, some report the difficulties in a very detailed way and always reveal a better interaction with their colleagues, since they always looked for some way to understand them and vice versa. There is a clear perception of some teachers interested in achieving a communication route and others totally disinterested, or without any knowledge about how important it would be to establish an interactive link with these students.

*[...] the teacher helped me, but some information was omitted. I wrote, but it was confusing, better if the teachers taught in Sign Language, it would be easier. [...] It seemed that the teacher didn't really want to teach me, communication was difficult. It was as if she had to be patient with me. (João).<sup>12</sup>*

*The communication with the teachers was oralized and with mimics, they had compassion and understood a little. (José).<sup>13</sup>*

*Because they did not know the Sign Language, the teachers did not teach and I did not learn much, it looked like a car running in the same place, I could not learn no matter how much they wrote or tried. I asked the teachers to teach me, because I wanted to progress in life, but they did not know my language and it was very bad for me. I noticed that the teachers were obliged to teach me and because they did not know the Sign Language, they got confused a lot, skipped subjects and were disorganized. (José).<sup>14</sup>*

*Communication with teachers and explanation of subjects such as History, Mathematics and others was normal. Since I am oralized, we got along well. [...] I was taught after the hearing students and with the use of resources (drawings, writing) to facilitate understanding [...] there were difficulties, but the teachers helped. (Jair).<sup>15</sup>*

Probably young deaf people could not perceive or understand that their teachers were not prepared to teach deaf people; that they did not have among the knowledge that they were taught other communication strategies other than oral language, nor any additional guidance on other types of communication that could help the interaction with their deaf students, facts that

<sup>12</sup> *[...] a professora me ajudava, mas algumas informações eram omitidas. Eu escrevia, mas era confuso, melhor se os professores ensinasse em Língua de Sinais, seria mais fácil. [...] Parecia que professor não tinha muita vontade de me ensinar, era difícil a comunicação. Era como se ele fosse obrigado a ter paciência comigo. (João).*

<sup>13</sup> *A comunicação com os professores era oralizada e com mímicas, eles tinham compaixão e entendiam um pouco. (José).*

<sup>14</sup> *Por não saberem a Língua de Sinais os professores não ensinavam e fiquei sem aprender muita coisa, parecia um carro rodando num mesmo lugar, não conseguia aprender por mais que escreviam ou tentassem. Eu pedia aos professores que me ensinasse, pois queria progredir na vida, mas eles não sabiam a minha língua e isso me fazia muito mal. Eu notava que os professores eram obrigados a me ensinar e por não saberem a Língua de Sinais se confundiam muito, pulavam matérias e eram desorganizados. (José).*

<sup>15</sup> *A comunicação com os professores e a explicação das disciplinas como História, Matemática e outras era normal. Visto que sou oralizado, nos entendíamos bem. [...] era ensinado após os alunos ouvintes e com a utilização de recursos (desenhos, escrita) para facilitar a compreensão [...] havia dificuldades, mas os professores ajudavam. (Jair).*

were reflected in attitudes of impatience or a feeling of impotence difficult to overcome for the teacher. Those teachers who managed to understand the difficulties of interaction between them and the deaf students, that is, accepted the deafness condition and did not succumb to discouragement, sought some other way for a more effective contact, even without sign language, and achieved some result positive.

It should be noted that by not understanding the communication limitations imposed by deafness, the idealized image of the teacher in relation to the deaf student disregards the student's difficulties and creates in the student the illusion that he is learning because someone is teaching, but in reality, the learning process is not consolidated (SILVA; PEREIRA, 2003).

In addition, it is necessary to recognize in Jair's speeches that orality, dominated by him, helped in the communication processes with hearing and oralized colleagues and teachers. In this sense, it reinforces the considerations of the theory that defends Bilingualism in which the Sign Language is the most recommended to be acquired and used by the deaf, however, there is a denial that the oral language cannot serve as an instrument of thought for the deaf (GOLDFELD, 1997).

It turns out that the inclusion process for the deaf does not yet have the support that privileges their needs, most likely deaf students should experience similar difficulties today. In fact, despite efforts made in specific legislation, the inclusion processes fail to see the issue of language interactions necessary for the development of deaf children, and their reflection in the future trajectories of these students. The language used at home and at school needs to be understood by them, enabling them to make choices and to be active citizens in the society in which they live. Teachers are often without support in the case of the insertion of the deaf student in their classroom, have little knowledge about deafness and have no mastery of Sign Language (NEVES, 2016).

The literature points out that, in order to serve deaf students in an adequate and satisfactory manner, it is essential that the teacher understands and uses Sign Language in order to offer better quality teaching (SCHIAVON, 2012). The acquisition of Sign Language by the deaf is advocated by Bilingualism because it can be acquired more spontaneously by the deaf child, who starts to develop linguistically and cognitively without difficulties. It is possible to avoid language delays by improving all complications such as level of perception, generalization, concept formation, attention and memory if the acquisition of Sign Language occurs at an age similar to that of hearing children who acquire oral language.

## Final considerations

It is necessary to emphasize that the deaf young people participating in this study were not exposed to Bilingualism, that is, the use of Sign Language and the written Portuguese Language since early childhood, which probably would have helped them in school development and learning. The deaf who participated in this research reported that they learned sign language late and only when they started to use that language did they begin to understand school content in a meaningful way. On the other hand, the oralized deaf reported to be better understood due to his oralization.

According to the participants of this research, the communicative process between hearing mother and deaf child occurs, predominantly, through oral language, orality and the use of habitual gestures associated with speech. Likewise, there is a communicative process between a listening teacher and a deaf student, that is, the predominant communicative process is established through oral language. It was evident that the learning of sign language triggered the understanding of the world in which they were inserted and the possibility of expressing emotions and being understood. The testimonies were marked with anguish of deaf young people about their regular teachers not having knowledge of how to communicate with their deaf students, so that the processes of interaction in the classroom were more effective. In addition, they clarified that they consider Sign Language as the language with which they communicate in a more satisfactory way and that facilitates concepts, context and emotions.

The themes that stood out in the testimonies of deaf young people about communicative interactions, at home and at school, were: the lack of information on the importance of the acquisition of Sign Language since early childhood, to avoid language delays in deaf children, and the non-acceptance of deafness by the denial of this condition in the expectation that hearing and speech will start to develop reaching normality, that is, for the use of oral language.

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