

**Libras-Portuguese Interpreter in the Context of Conferences:  
Reflections on Their Work / *O intérprete de libras-português no  
contexto de conferência: reflexões sobre sua atuação***

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**ABSTRACT**

This research approaches the interpreting act and aims to better understand the performance of Brazilian sign language (Libras) interpreters who work in the mode of simultaneous translation in academic conferences. It reflects on this practice based on authors whose studies are founded on Bakhtinian concepts. Thus, a descriptive qualitative approach was developed using the simple self-confrontation technique during data collection. The study showed that a conference is a complex context for interpreters to work due to: (i) time required for decision making; (ii) highlighted physical exposure; (iii) interpreter positioning on stage (towards the side or the front of the stage), and (iv) need for advance preparation, which is not always possible. In-depth understanding of the interpretation context in conferences makes it possible to propose qualifying actions that can meet the demands of the interpreting act and points out the need for new studies in the field.

**KEYWORDS:** Conference context; Libras-Portuguese interpreters; Self-Confrontation

**RESUMO**

*Esta pesquisa aborda o ato interpretativo e tem como objetivo conhecer melhor a atuação do intérprete de língua brasileira de sinais (Libras), que atua na modalidade simultânea, no contexto de Conferências acadêmicas. A reflexão sobre esta prática baseia-se em autores que se fundamentam em conceitos bakhtinianos. Assim, foi desenvolvida pesquisa descritiva de abordagem qualitativa, usando a técnica da autoconfrontação simples na coleta de dados. O estudo mostrou que a conferência é um contexto complexo de atuação para esses profissionais, quanto: (i) ao tempo necessário para tomada de decisões; (ii) à exposição resultante do destaque físico; (iii) à posição, ao lado ou um pouco à frente no palco, e (iv) ao preparo, que por vários motivos nem sempre é possível ser previamente executado. A compreensão mais aprofundada do contexto de interpretação em Conferência favorece a proposição de ações formativas adequadas às demandas e indica a necessidade de novos estudos nesse campo.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Contexto de conferência; Intérprete Libras-português; Autoconfrontação

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## Introduction

The work of sign language interpreters (SLIs) entails establishing communication between speakers of two different languages, an oral-auditory and a gestural-visual. According to Quadros (2004, p.9), those languages are called Source Language (SL), the language interpreters hear or see and, based on it, translate and interpret it into the other language, called Target Language (TL). Still according to Quadros, translating and interpreting are tasks of different natures. “It is worth highlighting that the word translator is used in a more general way and it includes the word interpretation (QUADROS, 2004, p.9).<sup>1</sup>

We will use the concepts of SL and TL described by Quadros. However, we understand that the act of translating and interpreting are different and we will approach the Libras-Portuguese interpreters’ work specifically in situations of academic conferences, i.e., acts of interpretation.

An interpreter receives information in the SL and is supposed to choose how to enunciate the information in the TL. Making those choices is not a simple task because the information is not just composed of spoken words, but of ideas and opinions. There are no direct references from one language to the other, and thus it is necessary to interpret the meaning of what has been said in one language and maintain it as much as possible in the other language.

Therefore, the choices made should take into account more than the word *per se*, in its literal sense. During their work professional interpreters face moments when decisions have to be made and strategies have to be used in order to reach the source and target languages, for “one grammatical detail may, on occasion, change the whole purport of what is said” (VYGOTSKY, 1986, p.222).<sup>2</sup>

Most research studies related to the SLI’s work focus on the educational area, and few are interested in the interpreter working in other areas, such as in academic conferences. In this area we can mention the pioneering research of Barbosa (2014) and

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<sup>1</sup> In original: “Vale destacar que o termo tradutor é usado de forma mais generalizada e inclui o termo interpretação.”

<sup>2</sup> VYGOTSKY, L. *Thought and Language*. Translated by Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar. London: The MIT Press, 1986.

Nogueira (2016) in Brazil. As it is a little explored environment where there are several issues to be discussed, here we propose to explore this field of activity. Academic conferences are a more formal context, with its own dynamics where no interferences are allowed, which makes interpreters' work tenser and more tiring. In this scenario, depending on the number of working hours, sign language interpreters, as much as those of oral languages, are organized in shifts of two or more professionals every twenty or thirty minutes in an attempt to offer the audience the best interpretation possible.

Even in that configuration, interpreters' work is lonesome since, in spite of the shifts taken by interpreters, feedback is not necessarily given by the deaf attending the conference. There is no time to discuss interpreters' performance, something that is usual in informal contexts. In this sense, investigating aspects of that practice can be useful for those who work in the field.

This article has been organized as follows: Introduction; 1. Interpretation, making explicit the aspects of the theoretical discussion; 2. Simultaneous Interpretation and interpreters in their performance, characterizing a specific situation of interpretation; 3. Self-Confrontation, based on the theoretical assumptions of this methodological approach; 4. Methodological Path; 5. Data Analysis, Final Considerations and References.

## **1 Interpretation and Translation**

It is usual to find the expression 'interpreter-translator' used as a compound noun, which leads us to believe that both words have one single meaning. However, there are different characteristics in each. For Pagura (2003, p.210), in Brazil some authors use the words translation and interpretation as synonyms, perhaps mirroring the use of the expression interpreter-translator in Act 5692/71 (the 1971 Education Reform Act), where both activities are referred as just one. Another explanation would be that although people are aware that there are two different activities, they have the "idea that

the theoretical fundamentals are actually the same, both in translation and interpretation processes” (PAGURA, 2003 p.218).<sup>3</sup>

Although they are activities involved in the same process, each one has its own characteristics. In addition to their common origin, both professionals, translators and interpreters, need to be sufficiently informed about different subjects and to be able to express ideas related to them despite their not being specialists. In the context of conferences these aspects are quite evident because interpreters work at events related to the most varied subjects.

The context of conferences analyzed in this study is that of academic conferences, where interpreters usually translate scientific and research contents into the sign language. Usually they are rather experienced researchers/professors in their fields, speaking to an audience interested in increasing their knowledge about some specific subject. This context is peculiar as it is a moment when ideas are explained right then and there, which often leads speakers to speed up their explanations, to use quite specific vocabulary of their area of study and usually to deal with rather complex themes. The demand for SLIs’ work has been growing within this context because there has been an increase in the access of deaf communities to the academic environment. The context of a conference is different from others because the interaction between speaker and audience is limited and there are specific protocols requiring more formal explanations.

## **2 Simultaneous Interpretation and Interpreters’ Action**

Simultaneous interpretation (SI), initially used in courts after World War II (PAGURA, 2003, p.211), is the most used mode of interpretation at large international meetings. SI makes meetings dynamic and allows unlimited participation of languages. In the case of oral languages, simultaneity demands equipment<sup>4</sup> such as a booth where

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<sup>3</sup> In original: “ideia de que os fundamentos teóricos são, de fato, os mesmos tanto no processo de tradução como no da interpretação.”

<sup>4</sup> Recently, in sign language interpretation, proper equipment has started to be used at some events (cf. Nascimento and Nogueira, 2017).

interpreters stay, microphones and headphones so that only their voices reach the audience.

The *simultaneous* translation mode is the most broadly used nowadays [...] In this mode interpreters – always in pairs – work isolated in a glass booth that enables them to see the speakers and hear their speeches through headphones. After processing the messages they re-tell it in the target language through a microphone connected to a sound system that conveys their speech to the audience through headphones or receivers similar to portable radios [...] (PAGURA, 2003, pp.211-212, author's italics).<sup>5</sup>

SI is complex, difficult and tiring because it involves time restrictions, adequate choices, broad preparation on quite different aspects, in addition to matters related to the specific context of every situation. Among several other skills, interpreters are supposed to know the languages involved in an interpretation, i.e., they not only have to know the words in both languages, but they also to have wide grammatical, linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to be able to maintain the meanings intended beyond their literality. Their responsibility is significant in view of the difficulties that may emerge during their work. Sobral (2008), based on the Bakhtinian perspective, states that a professional in the area:

[...] expresses in another language what has been said in a certain way in a language by taking into account the correspondence between the ways both languages are expressed. This implies that understanding what has been uttered entails understanding not only the text or meaning of the “words” and “phrases” that compose that utterance considered individually, but what the subject who produced that utterance wants to indicate about how one should understand what has been uttered: as a statement, rejection, aggression, acceptance, order, obedience, joke, etc., just to mention some in general (pp.82-83).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In original: “A modalidade *simultânea* é a mais amplamente utilizada hoje em dia [...] Nessa modalidade, os intérpretes – sempre em duplas – trabalham isolados numa cabine com vidro, de forma a permitir a visão do orador e recebem o discurso por meio de fones de ouvido. Ao processar a mensagem, re-expressam-na na língua de chegada por meio de um microfone ligado a um sistema de som que leva sua fala até os ouvintes, por meio de fones de ouvido ou receptores semelhantes a rádios portáteis. [...]”

<sup>6</sup> In original: “...exprime em outra língua aquilo que é expresso de uma dada maneira numa língua, levando em conta a correspondência entre os modos de expressão das duas línguas envolvidas. Isso implica que entender o que é expresso é entender, mais do que o texto ou o sentido das ‘palavras’ e ‘frases’ que compõem esse texto, tomados isoladamente, aquilo que o sujeito que produziu esse texto quer indicar sobre como se deve entender o que exprime: como afirmação, recusa, agressão, aceitação, ordem, obediência, brincadeira, etc. para ficar numa descrição geral.”

Conference interpreters of any language work in teams, depending on the specificity of the event. They take turns every 20 or 30 minutes due to the high level of concentration required. Hoza (2010) and Nogueira (2016) clarify that teams are organized when long events are involved, or in complex configurations with unique needs, or even in emotionally and physically complex environments.

In the complex context of interaction, interpreters have the difficult task of translating from one language into another without being influenced only by their own cultural and historical backgrounds. No neutrality is possible because all subjects are constituted by their experiences and interactions in life, which cannot be eliminated. Interpreters have to pay attention to what the enunciator intends to say and to the meaning he/she can produce by taking into account their cultural experiences and how they interpenetrate each other in their interpreting act, because “the discourse comes into existence fundamentally through a process of production of meanings done by, for and among subjects” (SOBRAL, 2008, p.59).<sup>7</sup>

Individuals and their relations with the language are determinant in this process since language cannot be thought separately from human interactions composing it as a language. Language is made by and for speakers within a social context, who share the same associative conventions between signified and signifier to express thoughts and ideas. It is not ready, waiting to be used; it is updated while it is used. “In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*” (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.86; emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, interpreters should think about the elements involving language, its relations and interlocutors, because they will search, in another cultural, linguistic and historical *world*, for meanings expressed in a certain context. Therefore, interpreting involves much more than translating words from a certain language so that they can be

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<sup>7</sup> In original: “o discurso vem a existir fundamentalmente por meio de um processo de produção de sentidos realizado por, para e entre sujeitos.”

<sup>8</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. London: Seminar Press, 1973.

understood in another language because several factors are involved. They are not related only to language, but to the relations to be established based on and beyond it.

### 3 Simple Self-Confrontation

In self-confrontation the triad observation-activity-subjectivity allows new perspectives and internal changes that will be taken to the social environment, to new contexts, and “thanks to self-confrontation, very characteristic ways of doing it emerge and trigger a specific discourse” (FAÏTA, 2004, p.75).<sup>9</sup>

Proposed by Yves Clot (2010, p.138) as a dialogical method to analyze work, simple self-confrontation is a methodology that uses footage to confront a subject with his/her working practice, thus creating a possibility of reflection upon his actions, as it does not use experiments with simulated situations, but real working actions in which people are able to think about their actual ways of acting.

The situation of self-confrontation is that where operators, exposed to the image of their own work, start to put in words, to be used by the very spectator-partner, what they find to be their constants. Thus, they have a dialog with the other and with themselves in which they find themselves on the screen and verbalize the conducts they observe (CLOT, 2010, p.138).<sup>10</sup>

When facing their actions, operators try to verbalize them linearly. What is most important is what the subjects figure out about their activity, and even more when they are not able to express it (CLOT, 2010). When they discard words in an attempt to *explain* their actions, an actual self-discovery starts to happen, because they are able to see what they did, what they could and/or would like to have done.

The results of self-confrontation are broadened as the observation is no longer done only with one’s own eyes, but also with the eyes of an outside observer, who is not

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<sup>9</sup> In Portuguese: “graças à autoconfrontação, formas de fazer muito características aparecem e provocam um discurso específico.”

<sup>10</sup> In Portuguese: “A situação de autoconfrontação é aquela em que os operadores, expostos à imagem do próprio trabalho, começam por colocar em palavras, para serem utilizadas pelo próprio parceiro-espectador, o que eles julgam ser suas constantes. Assim, eles dialogam com o outro e com eles mesmos, ao se descobrirem na tela e ao verbalizarem as condutas que eles observam.”

the researcher, but the collective that is now in him to look at himself with other eyes. At this point the *new* observer may continue to contribute with the subject because now “he observes himself in the activity with the eyes of his “occupation” and observes the occupation with other eyes [...] or this “we” becomes an obstacle for doing the previous activity” (CLOT, 2010, pp.255-256).<sup>11</sup>

When we think about sign language interpreters (SLI), we can see that despite the shifts and supporting interpreter, they often act alone because they are in front of an audience participating in an event, without having the opportunity of seeing themselves and analyzing their performance. Thus, the opportunity of looking at themselves in a self-confrontation experiment enables them to think about the collective, what their occupation is, everything surrounding it, from the possibilities that do not exist in the actual activity to feelings retrieved at the moment of the self-confrontation. Evaluating their own practice in an actual work situation will enable them to learn better how a SLI works in the context of academic conferences.

#### **4 Methodological Path**

This paper was done from a qualitative approach: it is an exploratory-descriptive research since little<sup>12</sup> has been produced about the reality of the SLIs in conferences. In this sense, the objective is to describe the activities of Libras-Portuguese interpreters, thus collaborating to deepen the knowledge of this field.

The methodology used was the simple self-confrontation, and it was chosen because it enables professionals to reflect and re-signify their practices through the language by watching their professional practices filmed.

Three SLIs participated in the research: one man and two women, aged from 26 to 31 years. Two of them hold a bachelor’s degree in interpretation and one is still in college, majoring in a different area. The time they had worked with interpretation varied from one to eight years, but all declared to be experienced in conferences, congresses, etc., i.e., they had already done simultaneous interpretation in academic

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<sup>11</sup> In Portuguese: “ele se observa em atividade com os olhos do ‘ofício’ e observa o ofício com outros olhos [...] ou esse ‘a gente’ se torna um obstáculo para o desenvolvimento da atividade interior.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. recent research done by Barbosa (2014) and Nogueira (2016).



conferences several times. Two had learned to interpret in the deaf community in different situations, and one in a specific qualification course and in previous experiences. One of the participants without initial specific qualification had searched for qualification after the first performances, and the other had not. Two of them worked, at the time of the research, in the public sector and the other, in the private sector. All SLIs worked in the Brazilian southeastern region.

During a large national event in the special-education area the SLIs were filmed working in several places: speeches, round-table meetings and oral communication sessions. Footage extracts were selected insofar as they would trigger significant reactions in the interpreters, whether of dissatisfaction, anguish, or joy. For all participants we chose to use extracts that apparently had the same level of difficulty and had similarities, such as: the beginning of the main speech, presentation of speakers, significant use of dactylology, extracts in which speakers talked very fast, speeches with several technical words, etc. Thus, the material selected for the self-confrontation session was composed of four parts (four minutes each) for each one of the three participants. And in order to enable participants to better understand the context of each extract we chose to cut the footage when speakers started a new idea. It is worth stressing that the self-confrontation sessions were held six months after the event and, thus, the interpreters had forgotten most of the contents interpreted, which enabled them to search for the pieces of information in the footage for the self-confrontation sessions.

The self-confrontation sessions consisted of the following: i) extract 1 was played without sound – just showing the interpretation in Libras and further comments of the interpreter about what he understood from what had been said; ii) extract 1 was played, still without sound – with sign/voice interpretation; iii) extract 1 was played with sound – comments about the interpreter's performance. Four extracts were played to each interpreter. Thus, this sequence of actions was repeated four times, one for each of the selected footage extracts.

The 3- to 4-minute duration of the footage extract targeted at preventing their length to compromise the memory and execution of the activities proposed to the interpreter. Each self-confrontation session was recorded on videotape and they consisted of the material to be analyzed in this study. The sessions were transcribed

based on the interpreters' enunciation when they saw themselves working. The transcription was done in Portuguese, but there are some references in Libras because the interpreters would often speak (orally) and make signs at the same time, or they interrupted their speech and made signs to complete what they were saying, as the researcher is also fluent in the sign language and they knew they would be understood.

The analyses were done based on the videos of the self-confrontation sessions and the enunciations were later transcribed. The information contained in that material enabled creating categories to facilitate the understanding of the data. The analysis was done for the purpose of achieving the general objective of learning more about the SLIs' work in the context of conferences and of discussing strategies pointed out by the interpreters within the context of conferences.

## 5 Data Analysis

It is worth highlighting that by working with interpretation from Portuguese into Libras, we will try to understand some elements of that process. However, we are aware that certain inferential aspects, effects of the mode and some strategies present in simultaneous interpretation from an oral language into a sign language will be lost because they are not the focus of our discussion. It is known that:

[...] there are several specific elements involved in the process of interpretation between languages in different modes. This difference in mode between languages in an interpretation process impacts directly in the interpreting act, requiring that interpreters consciously monitor the elements and strategies made possible by the visual-gesture mode (RODRIGUES, 2013, p.267).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, out of the transcription of the footage done during the self-confrontation sessions, four main themes were listed, either due to a collaborative characteristic or because they pointed out some type of work loss. The themes were: (I) Time; (II) Exposure; (III) Position, and (IV) Preparation.

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<sup>13</sup> In original: “[...] diversos são os elementos específicos envolvidos no processo de interpretação entre línguas de diferentes modalidades. Essa diferença de modalidade entre as línguas envolvidas no processo de interpretação impacta diretamente a atividade interpretativa, exigindo dos intérpretes um monitoramento consciente dos elementos e das estratégias que a modalidade gesto-visual possibilita.”

As to *Time*, we know that the main objective of scientific events is to exchange scientific information. Thus, speeches usually introduce novelties in the area of study. They have to communicate topics for reflection within a limited time, and speakers or masters of ceremonies read texts previously prepared to optimize the use of time.

Additionally, speakers tend to speak fast because the time available often is not enough to give explanations in detail. In episode 1 Karina, after hearing her own voice, comments on the part of the opening of the event, when the board members, speakers and a summary of their résumés were presented.

#### EPISODE 1

*Karina:* Gosh, super tense, because in the heat of the moment of the event you depend on the speed of the speaker's speech, and that speed of the speech interferes directly in your interpretation. This is very crazy, and then you have to kind of follow that speed, but sometimes it becomes incomprehensible. I wasn't able to do the dactylology, for instance, and it is kind of funny because it is an interpreting strategy. Sometimes there is a very long word and you have a certain time to sign that word once you do it letter for letter. The strategy is sometimes you do the beginning and then you go straight to the end of the word, see? So it is a strategy an interpreter adopts, and when you adopt it, for me as an interpreter, it is great, but for those seeing it, it isn't, right? Tense, indeed. It is really self-confrontation because you use a strategy that will help you and you fail to realize whether the others really understand.<sup>14</sup>

Pagura, when describing the historical path of interpreters of oral languages, states that "Caldwell reached the perfectly correct conclusion that an interpreter should be able to hear a speaker's speech perfectly and that the speaker's speed should not be excessive" (PAGURA, 2010, p.43).<sup>15</sup> Karina says how complicated it is to follow a fast rhythm of speech, mainly when what is being said is a list of names and dates. Gile

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<sup>14</sup> In original: "Karina: Caramba, super tenso, porque naquele calor do momento do evento você depende da velocidade da fala do palestrante, e essa velocidade da fala interfere diretamente na sua interpretação muito louco isso e aí você tem que meio seguir essa velocidade, mas às vezes fica incompreensível. A datilologia eu não consegui pegar, por exemplo, então assim é engraçado porque é uma estratégia de interpretação às vezes, você tem uma palavra enorme e você tem um tempo para poder fazer essa palavra até que você fala letra por letra, é estratégia as vezes você faz o começo e vai logo para o final, não é? Então é uma estratégia que o intérprete adota, e quando você adota isso para mim enquanto intérprete é ótimo, mas é para os outros que estão vendo isso, não é? Tenso nossa, é autoconfrontação mesmo porque você usa de uma estratégia que vai te beneficiar e que você não se preocupa se o outro está de fato entendendo aquilo."

<sup>15</sup> In original: "Caldwell chegou à conclusão, perfeitamente acertada, de que o intérprete deveria ouvir o orador perfeitamente e que a velocidade do orador não deveria ser excessiva."

(2009, p.171) considers that the problem triggers (names, numbers, enumeration, fast speeches, strong foreign or regional accents, disjointed speech, bad sound, etc.) are associated to requirements for a more complex processing capacity which may go beyond the capacity available at that moment. Those triggers can cause problems involving attention, whether a momentary lapse arising from some distraction or the need to direct attention to a certain discursive resource used.

In an attempt to try not to miss information, the professional chooses to speed up the spelling of the words with her fingers, but when she was confronted with the footage she realizes that not all words could be understood and, due to that, she is concerned whether the audience was able to understand at the time of her interpretation.

Spelling the words with the fingers from Portuguese into Libras is called dactylogy and it is frequently used for names, addresses, i.e., situations when it is necessary to make some words explicit. Spelling with the fingers takes longer than saying a word or even making its corresponding sign, exactly because it is spelling. When she realizes that her strategy may not have been the most adequate (spelling part of the names), the interpreter reflects about other possibilities she might have had, but that she failed to consider at that moment due to the little time she had to make decisions.

Excessively fast speech of a speaker was only pointed out by interpreters as difficult when the discourse included a list of names and dates. Even if a speaker speaks fast, in no other episode was this pointed out as a challenge. We then realize that Time is related to which and how many pieces of information should be conveyed in a certain time interval. Rodrigues (2012) discusses interesting elements in the process of Portuguese-Libras simultaneous interpretation. Even if they are not specifically oriented toward the context of academic conferences, they come close to the situation investigated here.

Whereas signs have a production rate lower than that of words and that the sign language, on its turn, uses specific linguistic devices able to offset that low rate and keep the same production rate of propositions, it is possible to infer that interpreting from one mode to

another has specific implications that have to be better investigated (RODRIGUES, 2012, p.106).<sup>16</sup>

Then we reflect about other ways interpreters could organize this type of discourse in sign language since Portuguese is organized differently from Libras.

As regards interpreters' *Exposure*, here we approach the place where those professionals are located and its implications in their performance.

#### EPISODE 2

*Thamires*: So it seems more comfortable for me. Then I thought that I really should have remained cool, have listened to the speech and have signed. No, I think that the outside influenced my inside. This is awful. But, nevertheless, it is inexcusable.

*Interviewer*: Ah, so it is the first big event, I mean, the size you mention, because you had already worked in conferences, right?

*Thamires*: Yes, yes. But in a smaller room. That was OK that there were other languages, English and Spanish, but the room was smaller. I don't know, it seems that a smaller place is more comfortable than a bigger one. A bigger room seems that the size...

*Interviewer*: Because at those events you stand at a raised place, everybody can see you.

*Thamires*: Yes. But in the other you are not so highlighted, you stay more or less at the same level as the speakers, same height. Even if there was a camera in front of me, what has already happened, I was calmer in the other times because it was a place where I had been many times, so... Here there were also other interpreters. It was not just one more. There were many. And famous. It was worse. (laughs) Because then you go "oh my God, oh my God" (laughs). You are on your toes...<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In original: "Considerando-se que os sinais têm uma taxa de produção menor que as palavras e que a LS, por sua vez, emprega dispositivos linguísticos específicos capazes de compensar essa baixa taxa de produção e, assim, manter a mesma taxa de produção de proposições, é possível inferir que interpretar entre diferentes modalidades têm implicações específicas, as quais precisam ser mais bem investigadas."

<sup>17</sup> In original: "Thamires: Então, parece mais confortável para mim. Ai eu achei que realmente eu deveria ter mantido a calma, ter ouvido o discurso e ter sinalizado. Não, acho que o externo influenciou o meu interno. É horrível isso. Mas, mesmo assim, é indesculpável. Entrevistadora: Ah, então é o primeiro evento grande, assim, o tamanho que tu dizes, porque tu já tinhas feito conferência, né? Thamires: Sim, sim. Mas aí em sala menor. Tudo bem que tinha outras línguas, tinha inglês e espanhol, mas era menor, não sei, parece que um lugar menor é mais confortável do que um maior. Um maior parece que a magnitude... Entrevistadora: Porque nesses eventos tu ficas acima, alto, todo mundo te vê. Thamires: Sim. Mas no outro você não ficava tão destacado, ficava mais ou menos no mesmo nível dos palestrantes, assim, de altura. Por mais que tivesse uma câmera na minha frente, o que já aconteceu, eu já fiquei mais calma, porque era um lugar que eu tinha ido várias vezes, então... Aqui também tinha outros intérpretes. Não era apenas mais um. Eram vários. E famosos. Piorou. (-risos) Porque aí você fica: "ai, meu Deus, ai, meu Deus" (risos) Você fica atenta..."

Based on what the interpreter says in episode 2, we can realize that her exposure in front of a large audience made her restless and uncomfortable, even more because she was with people with significant academic titles (really knowledgeable, as she saw them) and people quite experienced as interpreters (who could see her and criticize her performance). Exposure as a factor able to compromise the performance is highlighted by Magalhães Junior.

If I imagine that I cannot make any mistakes and that everybody in the audience is there to judge me, I create a ridiculous amount of stress. At the beginning of our career what makes us most afraid is the audience. The more people in the audience, the worse [...]. The great limiting factor in simultaneous translation is emotional, not linguistic (MAGALHÃES JUNIOR, 2007, p.65).<sup>18</sup>

The interpreter herself concluded that her performance was compromised by exposure, when she says that *the outside has influenced the inside*, as she was standing before a lot of unknown people and with more exposure than the usual. It can also be observed that although she was experienced in simultaneous interpretation, she postponed her performance at a large event as much as she could because she states that the position of the people in the audience and the size of the event bothered her so much that she would not accept invitations to work at certain events. She would rather work at smaller environments that would bring her some feeling of tranquility. This exposure of the SLI could change as a result of an increase in some recent experiences of doing sign language interpretation into Portuguese by using amplifying equipment and booths (NASCIMENTO; NOGUEIRA, 2017).

According to her, in addition to the interpretation per se, there is a sensation of being evaluated by the target audience and other professionals who, according to her, were *famous*, more experienced and valued, making her more concerned about her own performance and contributing to increasing her tension. The third theme, *Position*, is specifically related to the place where interpreters stand while performing. In episode 3,

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<sup>18</sup> In original: “Se imagino que não posso errar, e que todos na plateia estão ali para me julgar, crio um nível de tensão absurdo. No início da carreira, o que mais nos mete medo é o público. Quanto mais gente na plateia, pior, [...] O grande limitador de rendimento na tradução simultânea é o emocional, não o linguístico.”

the Libras-Portuguese interpreter speaks when he watches the footage presented, already with sound, i.e., after he had watched it three times.

### EPISODE 3

*Bruno:* I didn't hear, that's what (unintelligible) I do: - "I didn't understand." And at that moment, that's interesting, it is the moment when she said "let's go together, you guys and you girls." Well, then she said "then let's start," and then I looked at her to see what "we" should "start" to have a general idea. It is important that we are able to see what the slide shows.

*Interviewer:* Yes.

*Bruno:* It has already happened to me when I wasn't experienced in conferences and I had to interpret "let's see both images," I would say "let's see these two images." Then there were not two images, there were TWO images [he shows his hands in two different positions that those "images" could be shown in Libras]. Then I started to understand that you shouldn't do it that way until you can understand what is going on. Taking a peek doesn't kill anybody. It is important for the sign discourse that you don't break your flow, that you don't trip.<sup>19</sup>

As this is about interpreting a visual-gestural language, we can understand that the SLI should remain in front of the audience; however, that place is not always adequate for interpreters because when they are on the stage they are usually at the side of the speaker or with their back turned to the speaker and the projection screen. This unfavorable position is evidenced in Bruno's speech, which points out how his performance was made difficult. He needed to turn to see what was happening or what the slides showed, which takes more time and breaks the rhythm of interpretation. However, according to him, that is necessary so that he can enunciate consistently what is being shown.

Since it is a gestural language, the space of enunciation is extremely important to understand what is being uttered contextually. Thus, interpreters, in addition to trying to

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<sup>19</sup> In original: "Bruno: Não ouvi, olha o que [ininteligível] eu faço: - 'não entendi'. Aí nessa hora aqui, olha que interessante, é a hora que ela falou 'vamos juntos e juntas'. Bom, 'então vamos começar' aí eu olhei para ver o que 'nós vamos começar', para ter uma geral. Importante que a gente consiga ver isso, o que está acontecendo no slide. Entrevistadora: Sim. Bruno: Isso já aconteceu comigo quando eu não tinha tanta experiência de Conferência eu interpretava 'vamos ver as duas imagens', eu falava 'vamos ver essas duas imagens'. Aí não eram duas imagens, eram DUAS imagens [mostra com as mãos as posições diferentes que as 'imagens' poderiam ter]. Então comecei a entender que não se faz dessa forma assim até se entender o que está acontecendo. Dar uma olhadinha para trás não mata ninguém. É importante para que o discurso de sinais não se trunque, não tropece."

interpret speakers' speech, also have to deal with the visual information mentioned, which can be ignored by the audience due to the interpreting choices made by the interpreters.

Pagura highlights, in the APIC<sup>20</sup> regulations, the section called *Working Conditions*, more specifically its Article 2, which “initially stresses the conditions of hearing, seeing and comfort [...], it is essential to know [...] which other visual aids are being used, in addition to speech” (PAGURA, 2010, p.88).<sup>21</sup> If for interpreting oral languages visibility in the environment is important for information exchange, for sign languages it is even more necessary because seeing is part of the language. In a conference an SLI cannot walk around trying to find the best place. This issue has to be thought about in advance, before the work starts, because it interferes directly with the interpreter's performance. Generally speaking, it is known that in conferences slides and videos are used and seeing this material is essential and contributes to an interpreter's performance, whether interpreting oral or sign languages.

The theme *Preparation* targets at discussing interpreters' preparation before interpreting. Whether at events or in a school environment, previous preparation is required when interpreters can look for information about the subject they are going to interpret. Additionally, initial and continued qualification is required and also constant improvement in several specific subjects in the field of performance.

Working as SLIs implies bearing in mind that they will be required to interpret about a myriad of subjects. Even if an interpreter knows that the speaker will talk about some adequate and healthy diet, nothing prevents him from giving examples, making metaphors and digressions when he talks about politics, judo strokes or any other unexpected subject for the interpreter. In this sense, qualification is essential because it offers interpreters tools to face situations and make the best enunciation choices.

#### EPISODE 4

*Bruno*: ...But I used some classifiers that I thought cool...studying conference speeches is very important, learning about the contents, but sometimes I was more fond of certain topics and searched for

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<sup>20</sup> APIC is the acronym in Portuguese for Association of Conference Interpreters of São Paulo.

<sup>21</sup> In original: “destaca, inicialmente, as condições de audição, visibilidade e conforto [...], sendo-lhe fundamental saber [...] que outros recursos está utilizando, além da fala.”



more materials also on the Internet, also to check how people say those things in sign language.

*Interviewer:* Do you get a summary of the speeches? Of all of them?

*Bruno:* Yes, we got all the summaries, including those we were going to interpret... those I had not been appointed to interpret them, but sometimes I had to go to that place, so we get everything...we would be prepared to be that flexible. Even... this is one of the difficulties of interpreting in such a large event. There are several options and you are not able to be specialized in one specifically, because the deaf are entitled to have access even here. But what helps is that if they said they would be here and we studied to be here, the speech in sign language is delivered in a much clearer way.<sup>22</sup>

In episode 4 the interpreter also stresses the importance of studying the words before interpreting them in an attempt to find the best way to perform in order not to be surprised with words or topics totally unknown. Nevertheless, remaining flexible is necessary in large events because several unexpected events may occur. It is ideal to prepare in advance; nevertheless, even considering the variables in the context of conferences, it is unlikely that everything can be thought about in advance. Even when the interpreter is prepared, he/she may feel more comfortable with some topics, which makes his or her performance flow differently, depending on the topic presented. In this sense Nogueira (2016) highlights that

One of the assumptions for any interpreting work is preparation, and this phase is related to the period Hoza (2010) called “pre-event,” which should take place soon after an interpreter accepts a certain interpretation job. Preparation is the phase devoted to studying materials related to a certain interpreting context (p.113).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In original: “Bruno: ...Mas eu usei uns classificadores que eu achei legais... estudar palestra é muito importante, ter acesso ao conteúdo antes é muito importante, todas elas eu tive acesso ao conteúdo, porém algumas eu tive mais afinidade para buscar mais material também na Internet e ver como se fala sobre isso em língua de sinais. Entrevistadora: Você pegava resumo das palestras? De todas? Bruno: Sim, todos os resumos a gente pegou. E inclusive aquelas que a gente ia interpretar... que eu não estava escalado para interpretar tal palestra mais em alguns momentos eu tive que ir para aquele lugar então a gente recebeu de tudo.... a gente estava preparado para esta flexibilidade. Até ... essa é uma das dificuldades de se interpretar um evento grande assim, que existem várias opções e você não consegue se especializar em uma especificamente, porque o surdo tem direito de ter acesso até aqui. Mas o que favorece é que se ele marcou que vai estar aqui e a gente estudou para estar aqui, o discurso em línguas de sinais, ele sai muito mais claro.”

<sup>23</sup> In original: “uma das premissas para qualquer trabalho de interpretação é a preparação, e essa etapa está relacionada com o período chamado por Hoza (2010) de “pré-evento”, devendo ocorrer logo quando os intérpretes aceitam determinada atividade de interpretação. A preparação é a fase de busca por materiais de estudo, relacionados a determinado contexto interpretativo.”

The SLIs face the same difficulties of oral-language interpreters related to the problem of obtaining information in advance, because the issue is *within* the context of the work, when organizers do not know the importance of preparation of professional interpreters and fail to give information adequately.

Thus, interpretation is the sum of knowing well the topic and knowing how to enunciate it, even when one knows it superficially, translating the content without being able to get excessively involved with the information. That general knowledge of what is being handled brings some comfort to interpreters when they are performing because if the topic is known and the interpreters have affinity with it, the work flows better. A familiar topic reassures the interpreter's performance, who is less tense and will deliver a more confident performance. How he sees himself and how he performs seriously interferes. Even in this context mistakes do happen: parts of the speech that he does not understand and translates them incorrectly into the TL. This is inevitable in this area of performance.

It is worth stressing that as it is an extremely complex process, interpretation should not be considered solely as conveying words from one language to the other. Under this perspective, not always what is produced in the SL can be literally "found" in the TL. There are elements in a text that do not make sense in the target culture, which need to undergo a cultural interpretation by the professional (BARBOSA, 2014, p.26).<sup>24</sup>

Knowing all linguistic varieties is an unimaginable task, but being always in search of knowledge in each linguistic variety is extremely important for the SLIs, because there are different ways of saying the same thing within a certain context. In the words of Sobral (2008, p.132) "an interpreter has to be a professional able to understand when he should say what to whom and how, depending on where he is and who is involved."<sup>25</sup> Not only does an interpreter find corresponding words of one language in the other, but s/he also translates discourses which "come to existence

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<sup>24</sup> In original: "Vale destacar que, por se tratar de um processo de extrema complexidade, a interpretação não deve ser considerada unicamente como a transposição das palavras de uma língua para outra. Nessa perspectiva, nem sempre o que é produzido na SL é "encontrado" na LA de forma literal. Há elementos no texto que não fazem sentido para a cultura de chegada, que precisam passar por uma interpretação cultural feita pelo profissional."

<sup>25</sup> In original: "o intérprete tem que ser um profissional capaz de entender quando deve dizer o que a quem e de que maneira, a depender de onde ele esteja e quem esteja envolvido."

fundamentally through a process of production of meanings done by, for and among subjects” (SOBRAL, 2008, p.59).<sup>26</sup>

## **Final Considerations**

The current social context has contributed to enable physically-challenged people to start to act more expressively in different social spaces and has caused an increase in the search of knowing better the subjects involved in this change. Thus, when the participation of the deaf is more active and they are able to advance in cultural engagement by participating in events in different cultural spheres, it is more important to get to know one of the professionals involved in this process – the interpreter. Thus, one of the environments where their participation has increased is in conferences, a place where simultaneous interpreting is required, creating new ways of acting.

In spite of the increasing work of the SLIs in conferences, there is a small number of specific studies (NOGUEIRA, 2016; BARBOSA, 2014), and few refer to oral language interpreters (PAGURA, 2003, 2010; MAGALHÃES-NETO, 2007). Therefore, the theoretical basis for the analysis presented here was found also in references about sign language interpreters in other contexts. The need of deepening studies in the theme was also identified in order to broaden the knowledge of this field of performance and further interfere in the qualification of those professionals. When we sought to learn more about this type of work, aspects emerged, indicating a characterization of the SLIs’ performance in this specific context.

Time proved to be the villain at the time of the interpretation because within the context of a conference there is significant information that has to be said within a certain period of time, which makes the work even harder. The research showed that when a speaker’s speech contains lists of names, for instance, the interpreter is found in a situation that requires dactylogy of words whose spelling s/he is not sure about, among other problems. Strategies are necessary to optimize time without allowing excessive use of dactylogy, which may hinder her/his performance.

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<sup>26</sup> In original: “vem a existir fundamentalmente por meio de um processo de produção de sentidos realizado por, para e entre sujeitos.”

Related to Exposure, in academic conferences, unlike the interpreters of oral languages, the SLIs are often exposed because, due to the mode of the language, they are supposed to stand in front of the audience (without using a booth), which puts them in an uncomfortable situation because the sensation of constant evaluation increases as all eyes are turned to them. Such discomfort is characteristic of the sign language interpreters, who work with their image exposed. To minimize this difficulty, training future SLIs to face those situations should be considered by providing them with tools so they can learn how to deal with the emotions emerging from exposure and also by increasing training practices of interpreting in booths. However, it is worth stressing that interpretation using booth resources is expensive, which would impact in many interpretations in academic conferences which are usually held at low costs.

As to the Position the professional occupies when working, it refers to the need of having the interpreter stay next to the speaker, or even a little in front of him, which makes it difficult for him to see what happens on the stage. The interpreter has to turn around to see information projected on slides or the speaker. This aspect points to a need of solutions so that interpreters do not need to move to see what is being projected. A copy of the screen in front of the interpreters, or other possible arrangements, could minimize that difficulty resulting from the place where the s/her is supposed to work.

Preparation before performing within a complex and dynamic context such as that of academic conferences is essential, because it would provide interpreters with the means to make better choices, as the theme would be studied in advance. However, often enough interpreters are not informed previously about the content to be interpreted and s/he can only rely on her/his experience and improvisation.

The self-confrontation technique as a methodology proved to be very efficient. In addition to reaching the objective of the research, it increased the knowledge of this activity and pointed to a formative path to be explored in future investigations.

This study configures the initial steps taken to understand this instigating theme due to its complexity and singularity, indicating the pertinence of deepening research since it involves the performance of a professional who is fundamental to ensure the linguistic right and accessibility to the deaf community.

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