



# “Us Talking About Us – Speech in the Daily Lives of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing”

“Nós falando sobre nós – a fala no cotidiano  
do surdo/Surdo/deficiente auditivo”

“Hablamos de Nosotros – El Habla  
en la Vida Cotidiana de las Personas  
Sordas/Sordas/Con Hipoacusia”

Maria Cecilia de Moura<sup>1</sup>

Maria Clara Giannini da Costa Pinto<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This research has investigated, through reports and responses from deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, the role of oral language in their daily lives. Basic everyday errands, such as using bank services or going to a doctor’s appointment, cannot be satisfactorily performed by people with hearing disabilities due to lack of proper access. We analyzed the responses by grounding them in the available literature on the topic. Our focus ranged from social relationships and bonds with family and friends, to interactions and relationships in academic and work environments. The investigation eventually demonstrated the urgent need for efficient measures and policies that meet the demands of the deaf community.

**Keywords:** Deafness; Orality; Language.

## Resumo

Essa pesquisa buscou entender, por meio de relatos e respostas de pessoas surdas ou com deficiência auditiva, qual o papel da linguagem oral no dia a dia delas. É sabido que muitos serviços básicos do cotidiano, desde o acesso ao banco até consultas médicas, não funcionam de maneira acessível. Buscamos analisar as respostas fundamentando-as com a literatura disponível sobre o tema. Foram analisadas desde as relações sociais e laços com a família e amigos, até as interações e relações em ambientes acadêmicos

<sup>1</sup> Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

### Authors’ contributions:

MCM: study conception; methodology; data collection; article draft; critical revision; orientation.

MCGCP: methodology; data collection; article draft; critical revision; orientation.

**Email for correspondence:** [mccostapinto@gmail.com](mailto:mccostapinto@gmail.com)

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e ambientes de trabalho. Ao final, foi possível perceber a urgência de medidas e políticas eficientes que atendam a essas demandas da comunidade surda.

**Palavras-chave:** Surdez; Oralidade; Linguagem.

## Resumen

Esta investigación buscó comprender, a través de los relatos y respuestas de personas sordas o con hipoacusia, el papel del lenguaje hablado en su vida cotidiana. Es sabido que muchos servicios básicos, desde la banca hasta las citas médicas, no funcionan de forma accesible. Analizamos las respuestas basándonos en la literatura disponible sobre el tema. Analizamos aspectos que abarcan desde las relaciones sociales y los vínculos con familiares y amigos hasta las interacciones y relaciones en el ámbito académico y laboral. Finalmente, identificamos la urgente necesidad de medidas y políticas efectivas para satisfacer estas demandas de la comunidad sorda.

**Palabras clave:** Sordera; Oralidad; Lenguaje

## Introduction

The place of the Deaf in Brazil's educational and political realms has changed significantly in the 21st century. Moving from a position of total reliance on the hearing community, the deaf began to have their rights respected through the enactment of laws and the activism raised by Deaf people themselves and by academics who specialized in this field. The multicultural movements of the late 20th century played an important role by stating that everyone has the right to be who they are and wish to be, without the need to submit to models imposed by the majority society, as stated by Lanna Junior<sup>1</sup>.

Also because of this movement, the Deaf community gained strength, particularly through its member associations and its federation, the FENEIS, which began to demand that sign language be used in professional interactions with Deaf people. And, according to Vianna<sup>2</sup>, this was driven by an idea that advocates that the Deaf be seen not as disabled, but as different and belonging to a linguistic minority group.

This movement resulted in the drafting and voting of laws<sup>3</sup> No. 10.436, which addresses the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), and Art. 18 of Law No. 10.098, which, once passed, were regulated by Decree 5.626<sup>4</sup>. This regulation now requires that new theoretical bases and practical forms of action be reviewed so that the law can be enacted.

But only a full paradigm shift, as proposed by Goffman<sup>5</sup>, will enable real change to take hold and make the legislation truly effective, says Moura<sup>6</sup>. As for the fields related to speech therapy and

education, we will have to focus on these issues to ensure, once again, that the law is being followed.

There are topics of crucial importance for speech therapists and education professionals in general, who should reflect on these subjects so that actions can be carried out that contemplate what the law establishes.

Let's look at some aspects included in the law. In Chapter II we have:

“On the Inclusion of LIBRAS as a college-level subject, Article. 3°:

Libras must be included as a mandatory subject in teacher training college-level courses for professionals working teaching high school and up, and in Speech therapy college programs, in public and private educational institutions belonging to the federal education system and the education systems of the States, the Federal District, and the Municipalities.”

Thinking about the Deaf individual and offering speech therapy today has become an obligation for professionals working in this area. Speech therapy college programs are now required to have LIBRAS as a subject in their syllabus, as defined above.

Few works have focused on speech therapy practice. We can mention Moura<sup>7</sup> and Moura et al<sup>8</sup>, who were concerned with demonstrating that speech therapy practice went beyond the mere administration of techniques and that the issue of identity politics, as advocated by Ciampa<sup>9</sup>, was part of speech therapy action. Nascimento<sup>10</sup> was concerned with understanding how speech therapists comprehended Deaf culture and how they incorporated it into their professional work. These two pioneering works, undoubtedly, show that there is





a need to expand research in this area. After all, with legislation in place that establishes important structural changes, the work with Portuguese as a second language needs to be very well understood so coherent approaches can be proposed.

The creation of a Committee on Sign Language and Bilingualism for the Deaf (CLSBS) within the Brazilian Society of Speech-Language Pathology (SBFa) by Moura and Begrow, in 2019, helped galvanize the idea that it is necessary for speech therapists to be engaged in this form of practice with Deaf – deaf – Hard-of-Hearing Individuals (SsDA).

Understanding how to work with SsDA while respecting Libras and its entire context (identity formation, the Deaf community, and Deaf Culture) must be part of the training and a major concern for Speech Therapists. If we consider already adult SsDAs who are (or are not) included in our society, a question arises: How does this social inclusion take place, and how is oral language configured in the lives of these individuals? They were not educated from a bilingual perspective for the Deaf. Some may have been educated using a bimodal approach, as Cicone<sup>11</sup> states, where oral language and Sign Language were used simultaneously (also called Total Communication – TC), with the main objective being the development of orality; many studied in oralist schools for the Deaf. Others were “integrated” into schools for hearing individuals.

Given the enormous demand presented by Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals in speech-language pathology clinics and the various approaches adopted by speech therapists to enable, rehabilitate, and include the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing in language and society, it becomes necessary to understand what they, the subjects who form the clinic of deafness and language, think about the result of the Speech-Language Pathology intervention.

We consider it important to understand what the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing adults think of the Speech-Language Pathology intervention they were a part of and which were the results, in their daily lives, of the skills they acquired.

Facing a past where the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing person was seen as handicapped and incapable, and the speech therapist as a paramedic accompanying this pathological conception of deafness, with this new reality in which Libras is seen not merely as a means but as an end in the constitution of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing self, it is important to understand

what they, the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing, think about the speech-language pathologist’s work concerning themselves. The data from this research will be able to have an impact on the professional practice with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals, enabling a greater and better understanding of how this action can be useful for the development of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing subject.

The understanding of how the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (SsDA) adults experience their own form of communication in their daily routine with family and at work can provide information that will be important for better outlining which approaches can and should be adopted by Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs). In this way, the speech-language pathology interventions to be drawn up can lead SsDA to feel respected in our society.

This research counts on the participation of SsDA individuals so that they can give their opinion and be the constructors of the paths to be taken on their behalf by professionals, adhering to the most legitimate wish and history of battles of people with differences that nothing should be done without their participation: “Nothing about us without us.” This aspect is highlighted by Siqueira<sup>12</sup>:

There was little or no space for them to participate in decisions on matters that concerned them. Although initiatives aimed at people with disabilities emerged throughout the 20th century, it was from the late 1970s that the disability rights movement (or people with disabilities movement) truly arose, considering that, for the first time, they themselves championed their struggles and sought to be agents of their own history. The motto “Nothing about us without us,” an internationally widespread expression, faithfully summarizes the history of the movement... p.14

## Objectives

To map the understanding that Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals have of their own form of communication within their family, at work, and in their social lives.

## Methodology

The project was submitted to and approved by the University’s ethics committee under number 73810423.9.0000.5482.

Initially, a bibliographic survey on the topic was conducted. Based on the issues found in





the articles and research, the student developed a questionnaire, together with the advisor and a professor from the field, to be applied virtually to the research participants.

The questionnaire was prepared on the Google Forms platform and contained both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

The link to the questionnaire was sent to selected groups on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Regarding the term of consent, attached to this report, the participants, instead of signing their names, selected an alternative in the questionnaire affirming their agreement to participate in the research. Thus, anonymity in the research was guaranteed.

The analysis of the data obtained in the questionnaire was performed qualitatively, based on Bardin's theory<sup>13</sup>, which organized the analysis into five chronological poles: pre-analysis, a deeper exploration of the collected material, treatment of results, inference, and interpretation. During the pre-analysis, all responses were read, and recurrent themes were identified, such as the lack of accessibility to daily services, the non-inclusion in the work and study environment, the lack of knowledge of Libras within families, leading to the exclusion of these people, etc. In the material exploration stage, the responses were grouped according to themes, allowing the results to begin to be treated. Finally, in the inference and interpretation stage, the findings were related to the data obtained during the literature review, enabling reflections that led to the conclusion.

## Results and Discussion

This research, conducted through an online form, aimed to understand the experiences and needs of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals in Brazil, revealing a scenario marked by challenges in communication, accessibility, and inclusion. Most respondents were from the Northeast region of Brazil, suggesting that the questionnaire was most widely disseminated in that region.

Regarding age, most participants are in the 40-60 age group. What we observe when analyzing the responses about their level of schooling is that 35.3% are in specialization (postgraduate study), and another 5.9% are pursuing a master's degree.

Regarding employment, 78.7% of the sample is employed, and of these, 61.5% have been work-

ing for more than 10 years. Furthermore, 51.3% of the people who work are employed in a private company. This may be a result of public inclusion policies and affirmative actions that encourage the hiring of people with disabilities. The Brazilian Law of Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 13.146/2015) and the Quotas Law (Law No. 8.213/1991) are examples of legislation that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in Brazil<sup>14,15</sup>. These laws establish that companies with 100 or more employees must reserve 2% to 5% of their staff positions for people with disabilities.

In this context, participants were questioned about possible alternative methods aimed at including Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals in their work or study environment. The responses, in addition to highlighting the importance of this inclusion, address communication and accessibility, the use of subtitles, Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), and interpreters. Furthermore, the theme of empathy stands out in the responses, mentioning active listening and dialogue to offer better accessibility. According to Silva<sup>16</sup>, the implementation of **assistive technologies** and the presence of **Libras interpreters** are essential to guarantee the full participation of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals in professional activities. Participants suggested implementing **Libras courses for all hearing colleagues**, with the goal of promoting **inclusive communication** and strengthening the bond with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing colleagues. This is fundamental to creating a more inclusive work environment and promoting communication among all employees. Research by de Sousa<sup>17</sup> indicates that training programs for hearing employees not only improve communication with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals but also contribute to the development of a more inclusive and respectful organizational culture.

Regarding speech-language pathology services, 84.8% of the respondents reported that, during the appointment, the professional did not know Libras and there was no Libras interpreter present. This raises questions about the efficiency and ethical nature of these services.

As for the family context, the research reveals that 75.5% of participants are the only Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals within their family setting, and 64.9% of family members do not know Libras (Brazilian Sign Language). It was expected that the family member who knew Libras would be





the mother, given their traditional role as primary caregivers, but 64.9% of the responses indicated "other family members." This may reflect the internal dynamics of the family, in which siblings, cousins, uncles, or grandparents may assume the role of communication bridges with the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing member. Despite the language barriers, 93.6% of participants consider speaking important for maintaining the family bond. According to Marschark<sup>18</sup>, effective communication between Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing and hearing members of a family is fundamental for building strong relationships and for the inclusion of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing member in family activities.

The literature highlights that the lack of communication can lead to feelings of exclusion and the deterioration of family relationships. Sign language is essential for the effective communication of many Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing people. When family members are not fluent in Libras, there may be a gap that hinders the relationship and mutual understanding. According to Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan<sup>19</sup>, the acquisition and use of a sign language in the family are crucial for the linguistic, social, and emotional development of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing child. The lack of knowledge of Libras by some family members can lead to the isolation of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing member and their exclusion from conversations and family activities.

When asked about the difficulties in accessing basic day-to-day services, the responses can be divided into a few categories, such as general accessibility, communication challenges per se, and systemic/structural problems. All responses are interconnected and always point to the problem of accessibility and inclusion. Specifically concerning service access, many reported that most services rely on telephone and audio calls, meaning they are unable to solve daily matters independently, such as going to the bank, the doctor's office, or any other service. Moreover, another highlighted aspect was lack of patience and prejudice against the Deaf/Hard-of-hearing.

When asked about the difficulties faced in appointments with health professionals, one of the top responses involved the use of masks, which prevents lip-reading. Furthermore, in many hospitals or clinics, patients are called by name to be seen, which also doesn't work when dealing with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing patients. This reveals the healthcare professionals' lack of knowledge,

misinformation, and failure to adapt their form of communication to the patient's needs, such as speaking slowly or speaking facing downwards. Another point raised by respondents was related to cases where a Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing person does not use Libras but Libras is used by others when trying to communicate with them. This makes us reflect on the importance of understanding the differences between signing and non-signing Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals. Another point brought forth was the lack of a Libras interpreter, which causes the service to be ineffective for the patient, generating a lack of understanding of the situation, in addition to insecurity about what was said and what needs to be done.

## Conclusion

In view of the results obtained, we can consider technology a great ally in promoting the inclusion of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals. Videoconferencing platforms with Libras translation resources, messaging applications with automatic translation, and audio description devices are examples of tools that can facilitate communication and access to information. It is fundamental that companies that promote an inclusive space, where diversity is valued and respected, invest in technological solutions and accessibility.

It is important to emphasize that the inclusion of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals is not limited to the work environment. Accessibility in public spaces, transportation, commercial establishments, and essential services is also fundamental to guarantee the autonomy and quality of life of this community. Creating laws and standards that ensure accessibility and raising society's awareness about the importance of inclusion are crucial steps toward building a more just and egalitarian society.

Inclusive education is another crucial point for ensuring the full participation of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals in society. It is necessary to invest in bilingual teacher training programs and in accessible educational materials. Furthermore, research in the field of deafness is fundamental for the development of new technologies and inclusion strategies. It is necessary to encourage the production of knowledge about the needs and challenges faced by Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals, to inform and guide public policies and professional practices.



Another important point to be considered is the need to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices regarding Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals. The promotion of awareness campaigns and the appreciation of Deaf culture are fundamental to change the way society views and treats this community.

In summary, the results indicate an urgent need for policies and practices that promote the inclusion and accessibility of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals, both in the work environment and in essential services, such as health. The implementation of Libras training for professionals and family members, as well as the adaptation of services to meet the needs of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing individuals, are fundamental steps to guarantee the full participation and integration of this community in society.

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