

**Verbal-Visuality and its Effects in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras)  
Interpreting at the Theater / *Verbo-visualidade e seus efeitos na  
interpretação em Libras no teatro***

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, we examine the activity of simultaneous interpreting from Portuguese to Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) in the theatrical sphere, based on a dialogue between interpreting and theater studies, and theoretical formulations by Bakhtin and the Circle. Our objective is to investigate verbal-visual discourse and its sense effects on Libras interpreting by means of a qualitative analytical-descriptive study of two theater performances in which Sign Language Translators and Interpreters (SLTI) interpreted them so as to guarantee communication accessibility to deaf people. We investigated elements that influenced SLTI enunciations while interpreting in sign language, taking into account the texts that circulate in the theatrical sphere. These texts constitute a verbal-visual totality which creates an indissoluble whole directly influencing their forms of production, circulation, and reception.

**KEYWORDS:** Verb-visuality; Theatrical sphere; Libras interpreter

**RESUMO**

*Neste artigo, observamos a atividade de interpretação simultânea do português para a Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras) na esfera teatral, a partir do diálogo entre os estudos da interpretação, os estudos da teatralidade e formulações teóricas de Bakhtin e o Círculo. O objetivo foi investigar as relações verbo-visuais do discurso e seus efeitos de sentido para interpretação em Libras, a partir de um estudo qualitativo analítico-descritivo em dois espetáculos teatrais que contaram com a atuação de Tradutores Intérpretes de Língua de Sinais (TILS) para garantir a acessibilidade comunicacional para pessoas surdas. Investigamos os elementos que exerceram influência na enunciação dos TILS no momento da interpretação em língua de sinais. Os textos que circulam na esfera teatral foram considerados uma totalidade verbo-visual, criando um todo indissolúvel que interfere diretamente em suas formas de produção, circulação e recepção.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Verbo-visualidade; Esfera teatral; Intérprete de Libras

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## Introduction

Considering the cultural-educational potential of cultural spaces, there is an increasing number of professional Sign Language Translators and Interpreters (henceforth SLTI)<sup>1</sup> acting in the theatrical sphere – in which there are also musical performances – in order to meet a demand for accessibility in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) for the deaf public and to guarantee the presence of this audience in these performances. In this article, we present a study on the activity of simultaneous interpreting from Portuguese to Libras in that context, on the basis of a dialogue involving interpreting and theater studies as well as theoretical formulations by Bakhtin and the Circle.

There are different challenges and ramifications constituting the work of professional SLTIs in their task of mobilizing discourses from different genres and spheres of activity. These professionals work in several spheres: educational, legal, religious, mediatic, general lectures, among others. They face daily challenges regarding intermodal and interlingual translation and interpreting, since in both translation and interpreting they work with a language pair in which one of the languages is oral (Portuguese) and the other is visual-gestural (Libras).

If in every sphere there are many challenges affecting interlingual interpreting, all of which imply a complex web of relationships, when we deal with texts from the artistic sphere, and more specifically from theater, there are several factors to be considered in addition to cultural and linguistic transfers produced. Among them are text history, its impact in social life, and the sense effects it triggers.

In the theatrical sphere there is an “enunciation typical of the theater: that of a text uttered by the actor, in a concrete time and place and presented to an audience which receives it by means of a text and a performance” (PAVIS, 2015, p.124).<sup>2</sup> Libras interpreting must consider the peculiarities of texts produced in this context in a broad sense, which implies considering them by going beyond the verbal dimension of

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<sup>1</sup> This study adopts the term SLTI (Sign Language Translator and Interpreter), according to Libras Translator and Interpreter profession regulation (Act 12.319/2010). We will also consider the interpretative act, in other words, the interpreter in activity at the moment of enunciation in Libras, and not the specific activity of written text translation.

<sup>2</sup> In the original: “enunciação própria do teatro: a de um texto proferido pelo ator, num tempo e lugar concretos, dirigido a um público que o recebe no fundo de um texto e de uma encenação.”

dramatic texts,<sup>3</sup> because senses produced in theatrical performances are built, also and especially, by extraverbal elements that compose theatricalism: music, sound effects, scenery changes, characters' movement, actors' bodies and actions, image and video projections, the audience's reactions, etc.

The verbal-visual dimension, i.e., the articulation between verbal (oral and written) and visual (multiple semiosis used in sense production) elements (BRAIT, 2010, 2013) plays a central role in this paper, which considers it constitutive of theater texts, observing its effects in enunciations by SLTI during the interpretative act on stage. Thus, we will not observe separately the translation of a dramatic textual production, or theatrical visibility as art, but the verbal-visual dimension created by theater and the hybridization of visual art and verbal language in sense production (GONÇALVES, 2013). In this perspective, our research aimed at investigating how verbal-visibility and scenes as a whole pertaining to theatrical discourse are assimilated in interpreters' utterances during the discursive mobilization from the Portuguese language into Libras.

To reach our objective, we present, after this introduction, some theoretical and methodological assumptions which constitute the basis of our analysis. After that, we examine the relationship between texts' verbal-visibility on theatrical stage and interpreters' enunciation at the very moment it happens. Our research is a descriptive-analytical qualitative study of a corpus composed of two theatrical performances interpreted to Libras. Regarding theoretical and methodological assumptions, we will first of all present an overall panorama of translation and interpreting studies based on authors, such as Pöchhacker (2005, 2009) and Gile (2009), focusing on interpretation studies. In this analysis, we will observe the interpretative act from a dialogical perspective and as language in use, based on Bakhtin and the Circle's theoretical propositions, considering the activity of interlingual interpreting as a discursive practice that mobilizes speech genres, as Sobral (2008) and Nascimento (2014) propose. Afterwards, based on studies developed by Brait (2009, 2010, 2013), we will examine texts' verbal-visual dimension, understanding that the integration of verbal and visual

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<sup>3</sup> The term "dramatic text" will be considered here as the written text or script of a performance that is generally used as the base text for rehearsal and for giving actors and Libras interpreters information on how the theatrical performance will be staged.

languages produce senses. In data analysis, we will examine the unrepeatability of the theatrical scene (PAVIS, 2015a), the extent to which the verbal-visual dimension is constitutive of theatrical performances and its influence in Libras interpreting.

## **1 Translation and Interpreting from a Dialogical Perspective**

According to Brait (2005), the concept of language that stemmed from Bakhtin and the Circle's studies, is committed to a world view that does not identify with only one trend in linguistic studies or one literary theory. Rather, as it seeks forms to produce and establish senses, it traverses a series of dimensions: linguistic-discursive approaches, literature theories, theology, philosophy, and the semiotics of culture.

Our analysis is based on Bakhtin's dialogical theory of speech genres and verbal-visuality studies. Nevertheless, first, we must briefly consider a dialogue between this theory and translation and interpreting studies, following the idea that "every translation act is both translation and interpreting, because translating is always interpreting and because one translates whenever one interprets" (SOBRAL, 2008, p.88).<sup>4</sup>

There are many authors who understand translation and interpreting both as similar and distinct processes at the same time. But it is accepted that there is a difference between the specific activity of written texts translation -- which involves texts written in a source language and a substantial time for executing the work, the possibility of consulting dictionaries, correcting and adjusting the text that is produced in the target language -- and the activity of simultaneous interpreting, which happens in a given limited space and time and works with texts in their final version just as it is expressed in the target language (cf. Cokely, 1992; Romão, 1998; Pagura (2003) and Nascimento, 2016). This explains how important it is to consider interpreting studies as an independent disciplinary field.

According to Pöchhacker (2009), Translation Studies (TS) and Interpreting Studies (IS) appeared concomitantly in the second half of the twentieth century, but IS was only recognized in the 1990s. According to Gile (2009), the reason why TS and IS

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<sup>4</sup> In original: "todo ato de tradução é tanto tradução como interpretação, porque traduzir é sempre interpretar e porque sempre que se interpreta se traduz."

took different paths is easily understood. More specifically, conference IS focused exclusively on the process of interpreting and approached the challenges interpreters face during interpreting as essentially cognitive. Research in TS studies, on the other hand, did not concentrate on cognitive issues concerning the subjects' minds, but on issues relating to cultural and linguistic equivalence. In addition, TS appeared as a discipline from literature and cultural studies, whereas the pioneers in interpreting research had no academic background and wanted to establish an autonomous discipline.

In IS, there is the important contribution of Danica Seleskovitch and her *Théorie du Sens* (Theory of Sense), in which the notions of deverbalization and reverbalization are key points of the research published in 1975. Seleskovitch sought to explain the interpreting process from her first published works, having an avid interest in psychology, cognitive structures and processing operations, such as short-term memory and knowledge use. However, the notion of process was not considered sufficiently comprehensive, because until the end of the 1980s, this concept was restricted to linear movement from one point to another, involving some kind of transformation between departure and arrival (PÖCHHACKER, 2005).

Even understanding interpreters as agents who create bridges from source to target language, these theories did not approach the conditions or contexts in which interpreting happens or the countless variables that may affect the enunciation act. Several inquiries appeared in the field of conference interpreting from the 1990s, influenced by cognition studies, cognitive psychology and neurolinguistics, which, with empirical and experimental surveys, aimed at describing and presenting interpreting specificities as translation of oral texts in face-to-face interactions. Even so, the focus of these inquiries was only interpreting processes, training and quality. Only after the 2000s, when interpreting studies adopted a professional approach during community interpreting and public services, would research in this area advance into the exploration of aspects related to work conditions, the perceptions of the function and effects of interpreters' influence on interacting participants (GILE, 2009).

Sign Languages Translation and Interpreting Studies emerged in Brazil in a significant way after Libras achieved language status through Act 10.423/2002 and the

regulation of the profession of Translator and Interpreter, pointing to “the importance of theorization of existing practices” (NASCIMENTO, 2011, p.32).<sup>5</sup>

In this study, we take sign language translation and interpreting as a discursive practice which occurs in a concrete enunciative situation and mobilizes discourses from many different spheres of language use. It is, thus, different from studies that are based on linguistic theories of a structural or formalistic nature. We follow Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov’s perspective, which, “both in the domain of language theories and that of poetics, seeks a basis in philosophical approaches of language and the arts [...]” (GRILLO, 2017, p.14).<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin asserts that “language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well. The utterance is an exceptionally important node of problems” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.63).<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, it is important to consider the concrete situation of enunciation and the social environment in which it happens:

So, we may say that the *unity of the social milieu and the unity of the immediate social event of communication* are conditions absolutely essential for bringing our physic-psycho-physiological complex into relation with language, with speech, so that it can become a language-speech fact (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.47; author’s italics).<sup>8</sup>

By understanding that every utterance is part of a discursive chain, Voloshinov points to a continuous and organic unity between forms for communication, forms of utterances and their themes. He asserts that

Each period and social grouping has had its own repertoire of speech forms for ideological communication in human behaviour. Each set of cognate forms, i.e., each behavioural speech genre, has its own corresponding set of themes (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.120).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In original: “a importância de teorizações sobre práticas já existentes”

<sup>6</sup> In the original: “tanto no domínio das teorias da linguagem quanto no da poética, buscam uma fundamentação em abordagens filosóficas da linguagem e das artes [...]”

<sup>7</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee; edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.60-102. (Slavic Series; 8).

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

<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

Thus, we cannot isolate communication from its forms of manifestation, nor can we isolate signs from the concrete forms for communication or from ideology's material reality, because all signs are ideological, and only in the ideological context, in the context of utterances, is the linguistic form given to an enunciator (cf. Voloshinov, 1973).<sup>10</sup>

Approaching interlingual interpreting as a discursive practice, Sobral (2008) and Nascimento (2014) propose that it mobilizes genres in circulation; that is, interpreters, during their activity, mobilize discourses which are already part of social-historical ways of symbolically constituting the world<sup>11</sup> and are constituted by specific semiotic-ideological systems.

These genres manifest in contexts of cultural coexistence, and they convey the exchange of knowledge, cultures and traditions produced among different people and within the complex human language. Thus, when SLTIs are interpreting, there is a transition from a semiotic-ideological system to another, and, in this process, the elements produced in utterances from the first system, the departure utterances, must be transferred by SLTIs to the second one, the target language (SOBRAL, 2008; NASCIMENTO, 2014).

This discursive-enunciative perspective describes language as having a dialogical nature actualized in enunciative/interlocutive relations. According to Sobral (2008, p.117), a translator is the professional who integrates “the experience s/he has of her/his language and culture, the experience of the foreign language and culture and the necessary contact between them”; he adds that the translator occupies an “in-between position which allows her/him to create bridges between cultures” (SOBRAL, 2008, p.117).<sup>12</sup> In this perspective, Nascimento (2014, p.217) asserts that translation and interpreting are “bridges that integrate distinct architectonics of genres that seek to transpose themselves.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

<sup>11</sup> TN: In original: “recortes da realidade.” We believe “ways of symbolically constituting the world” is the definition of his expression.

<sup>12</sup> In original: “a vivência que ele tem de sua língua e cultura, a vivência de língua e cultura estrangeiras e o contato necessário entre elas.”

<sup>13</sup> In original: “pontes que unem as diferentes arquitetônicas dos gêneros que procuram se transpor.”

The task SLTIs have of mobilizing discourses from diverse, complete and complex genres presents countless challenges and nuances. This is due both to the totality of utterances produced in the source language and the utterances produced during interpreting and to that which will be understood by this discourse's addressees. When the language pair being translated or interpreted involves a visual-spatial language, it is necessary to think that the whole architectonic construction, the project of elements that compose this enunciation, the discourses, the cultural context and all the visual interferences in the physical space are highly relevant. Besides, all these elements compose the genre discussed here.

Brait (2005, p.93) asserts that Bakhtin and the Circle pursue the idea that “language is not spoken in a void, but in a concrete historical and social situation at the moment and the place where the utterance actually happened.”<sup>14</sup> For that reason, it is necessary to consider an analytical proposition that considers the peculiarity of the situation in which utterances are produced, an analysis in which “history, specific time, the place of utterance production, on the one hand, and the intersubjective involvements concerning a given discourse, on the other, are taken into account” (BRAIT, 2005, p.93).<sup>15</sup>

According to Vološinov (1973), “[...] *the sign and its social situation are inextricably fused together*. The sign cannot be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign” (p.37; author’s italics);<sup>16</sup> therefore, all utterances are connected with the sphere where they occur. Thus, discourse is not about a text in itself, but about language in use, which may produce “distinct senses according to who says what to whom, where and how” (SOBRAL, 2008, p.10).<sup>17</sup> For Sobral (2011), Bakhtin’s thought, which conveys the notion that language is dialogical, considers the organic whole of utterances and takes the enunciative project, or the specific enunciative/interlocutive relation, as the founding element of genre.

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<sup>14</sup> In original: “a linguagem não é falada no vazio, mas numa situação histórica e social concreta no momento e no lugar da atualização do enunciado.”

<sup>15</sup> In original: “sejam levados em conta a história, o tempo particular, o lugar de geração do enunciado, de um lado, e os envoltimentos intersubjetivos que dizem respeito a um dado discurso, de outro.”

<sup>16</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

<sup>17</sup> In original: “sentidos diferentes a depender de quem diz o quê a quem, onde e como.”



## 2 The Verbal-Visual Dimension of Texts in Theater Performances

Studies on verbal-visuality are developed in Brazil by several theoreticians who take Bakhtin and the Circle's language studies as a theory of discourse. Brait points that Voloshinov was even included in *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*,<sup>18</sup> an essay collection

which aims to study visual culture, demonstrating how ample his contribution is, for it goes beyond linguistic studies, being perceived as a *general theory* and as a semiotic-ideological language perspective (BRAIT, 2013, p.47; author's italics).<sup>19</sup>

If studies on verbal and visual communication are developed separately in several areas of knowledge with a respectable tradition, today the verbal-visual condition of language has a privileged place as social, cultural, discursive production and, for this reason, also as a study object (BRAIT, 2013).<sup>20</sup> According to this theory, which understands utterances as situated and always in tension, the dialogical relations are a founding category to analyze the verbal and the visual "woven between both *languages*" (BRAIT, 2013, p.60; author's italics).<sup>21</sup>

Studies on verbal-visuality seek

[...] to explain verbal-visuality as one sole utterance, whether artistic or not, organized in a gradual manner, for they may focus on one dimension over the other. However, these dimensions are organized in one plane of expression, in a combination of materialities, in an *organized, material expression* [...] (BRAIT, 2013, p.49; author's italics).<sup>22</sup>

For this study, we understand the verbal-visual dimension as an articulation of verbal (oral and written) and visual elements (multiple semiosis used in the construction

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<sup>18</sup> EFIMOVA, A.; MANOVICH, L. (Eds.) *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*. Translated by the editors. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> BRAIT, B. Looking and Reading: Verbal-Visuality from a Dialogical Perspective. Translated by Orison B. Melo Jr. *Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso*, v.8, n.2, pp.43-66, 2013. Available at: <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/bakhtiniana/article/view/16568/12910>. Access on: 25 Mar. 2017.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 15.

<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 15.

<sup>22</sup> For reference, see footnote 15.

of senses), which form an indissoluble whole and are constituted from an ideological sphere that directly affects its forms of production, circulation and reception (BRAIT, 2010).

In regard to sign language interpreting, Nascimento (2011), in his research on a television journalistic genre, discusses the totality established by sign language's visual-spatial nature that includes a "direct and essential relationship between the verbal dimension and the visualities that are external to it" (NASCIMENTO, 2014, p.219).<sup>23</sup> Thus, in every genre in which this linguistic materiality is organized, verbal and visual languages constitute the production of sense and are inseparable. In case they are separated, there is a risk of missing parts of the whole which produces sense in utterances (BRAIT, 2013;<sup>24</sup> NASCIMENTO, 2014).

To think about sign language interpreting in the artistic sphere, we reflect on the text produced in the theater, its peculiarities and ways of "saying." Analyzing theatrical discourse involves several aspects:

It is necessary to consider text in its broad sense, distant from the notion that it has only a verbal nature. This is due to the forms that may be adopted by the investigator in her/his dialogue with enunciative discursive materialities that stem from the most diverse elements of theatricality and to the sphere of theatrical procedures, a broader field than performance, including acts of scenic production and reception constituted discursively. Therefore, the dialogical analysis of discourse presents itself as an effective way of looking at dialogical relations as constitutive of the very theatrical event, which goes beyond the theatrical act (GONÇALVES, 2014, p.272).<sup>25</sup>

Regarding the translation of texts in this sphere, Pavis (2015) points out that what is important to translation is what happens on scene; it is not a mere interlingual translation of dramatic texts. The author presents two pieces of evidence: the first is the fact that, in the theater, translation comes through the actors' body and ears; the other

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<sup>23</sup> In the original: "relação direta e imprescindível entre a dimensão verbal com visualidades que lhes são externas."

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 18.

<sup>25</sup> In original: "é necessário considerar o texto em seu sentido amplo e descentrado de uma característica somente verbal, tanto pelas formas que podem ser adotadas pelo pesquisador ao se relacionar dialogicamente com diferentes materialidades enunciativo-discursivas provenientes dos mais diversos elementos de teatralidade, como pelo procedimento da esfera teatral como um campo bem maior que o espetáculo, que abrange etapas de construção e recepção cênicas constituídas discursivamente. Assim, a análise dialógica do discurso se apresenta como um modo efetivo de olhar para as relações dialógicas como constitutivas do próprio evento teatral. Evento este que não se esgota no ato cênico."

fact is that a linguistic text is not merely translated to a target language, but it is communicated, because of the stage and the situations of enunciation and culture, which are heterogeneous and separated by space and time.

In this perspective, translators and translation texts do not function as equivalents, but inevitably as mediators, since they are situated in an intersection of two sets to which they belong, being part both of the text and culture from where the mobilization of discourses occurs, and of text and culture into which the text is translated. This phenomenon is applicable to any linguistic translation; however, on stage there is also the need for an approach that considers the specific enunciative situation. In general, translators in this sphere work with a written text that was uttered in a concrete staging act and plan their translation knowing it is not possible to maintain the same starting situation, for it is to be enunciated in a yet unknown scene (PAVIS, 2015a).

As a consequence, during theatrical performances, we have “sets of texts” (BRAIT, 2009, p.143)<sup>26</sup> comprised not only of the verbal dimension, but also of diverse extralinguistic visual elements that constitute the language of performance. In this perspective,

[I]n certain texts or sets of texts, whether they are artistic or not, the articulation of verbal and visual elements creates an indissoluble whole, whose unity demands that the analyst recognize this peculiarity. They are texts in which verbal-visibility presents itself as constitutive, making it impossible to exclude either the verbal or the visual dimension and, specially, the forms integrated by these dimensions to produce meaning (BRAIT, 2009, p.143).<sup>27</sup>

It is necessary to think Brazilian Sign Language interpreting in the theater beyond the perspective of dramatic texts translation, taking interpreting into consideration, for interpreters are in an enunciative situation at the same time the theatrical scene happens, with all its verbal-visibility.

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<sup>26</sup> In original: “conjuntos de textos.”

<sup>27</sup> In original: “Em determinados textos ou conjuntos de textos, artísticos ou não, a articulação entre os elementos verbais e visuais forma um todo indissolúvel, cuja unidade exige do analista o reconhecimento dessa particularidade. São textos em que a verbo-visualidade se apresenta como constitutiva, impossibilitando o tratamento excludente do verbal ou do visual e, em especial, das formas de junção assumidas por essas dimensões para produzir sentido.”

### 3 Theoretical-Methodological Questions

Our analysis will proceed from the assumption that

Verbal-visuality helps build the object of knowledge from a theoretical-methodological perspective. The visual dimension, thus, constitutively interacts with the verbal dimension (or vice-versa), adding value to it. Without this visual-verbal play, it is not possible to build the object of knowledge, nor the subjects involved in the construction and the reception of knowledge (BRAIT, 2013, p.61).<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the verbal-visual dimension we have already discussed along the text, another basis for this study is the conception of the forms of utterances

[as] a whole entity, the utterance is implemented only in the stream of verbal intercourse. The whole is, after all, defined by its boundaries, and these boundaries run along the line of contact between a given utterance and the extraverbal and verbal (i.e., made up of other utterances) milieu (VOLOSINOV, 1973, p.96).<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the analysis to be presented here is based on the premise that visual and verbal dimensions are intertwined in the texts and that these utterances are part of a discursive chain in constant dialogue with other utterances. In this sense, we understand that the professional SLTIs who are on stage integrate the scene and, thus, dialogue with it and become part of the text and the theatrical scene.

For the Circle, the given world (the sensible) and the world's apprehension (the intelligible) are integrated; this principle denies the dissociation between the concrete realization of acts and the organization of the content of the act that produce a unity of sense. That way, every act integrates content and form, meaning and theme, theoretical elaboration and materiality, being in the world and categorizing the world, repeatability and unrepeatability, being perceived in a specific context and situation (SOBRAL, 2014).

Another important theoretical-methodological assumption we must point out is that no method for analyzing theatrical scenes exhausts all the possibilities of observing them, and, for this reason,

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<sup>28</sup> For reference, see footnote 19.

<sup>29</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

[...] it is with great humility and especially the most fundamental prudence that we must come into the land of the spectacular, a field mined by the most contradictory tendencies and the most insidious methodological suspicions, a waste land that has not yet seen the development of an adequate and universal method (PAVIS, 2015b, p.XVII).<sup>30</sup>

In other words, when dealing with the reality of language and observing an enunciative project for the establishment of sense effects according to the genre to which the textual materiality belongs, we cannot assume that we are able to register or describe all variables that an enunciation comprises. In dealing with a theatrical scene, especially, we must be aware of the unrepeatability of that scene, which is singular the moment it happens. We must also consider that the activity of simultaneous interpreting deals with immediacy and unpredictability. Thus, even when SLTIs rehearse or study the script of the performance, the interpreting act will only take place at the moment the scene is actually staged. In other words, enunciations, both the actors' and the SLTIs', are unique.

Accordingly, in order to observe some of the variables present in Libras enunciations, in this analysis we carry out a qualitative descriptive-analytical study of two performances in Sao Paulo, Brazil, which provided Libras interpreting by hired SLTIs. For data collection, we registered in video both the performance and the SLTIs' work, and we took notes in a field diary during the theatrical performances. In addition, we applied a questionnaire so that SLTIs could describe how they prepared themselves for interpreting and give their impressions about their own work at the very moment the performance occurred.

According to Brait, the adopted theoretical perspective imposes obligations to the analyst, since

verbal-visuality, inspired by the Bakhtinian thought, is possible and plays an important role to understand the contemporary world and to teach this understanding, which demands much effort and theoretical-methodological rigor (BRAIT, 2013, p.61).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In original: “[...] com a maior humildade, e sobretudo com a mais elementar prudência, que devemos avançar no terreno do espetacular, campo minado pelas mais contraditórias tendências e as suspeitas metodológicas mais insidiosas, terreno baldio que ainda não viu se desenvolver um método satisfatório e universal.”

<sup>31</sup> For reference, see footnote 19.

Because of the theoretical-methodological precision needed, the excerpts were selected after a long process of description both of the theatrical scene and SLTIs' interpreting work. Before we analyzed and interpreted data, we described (a) the characteristics of the cultural institution where the performance took place in relation to the concept of accessibility; (b) the information about each performance, such as its duration, synopsis and the means of publicizing it; (c) the description of the stage setting, costumes and lighting; (d) the issues related to actors acting and interacting with the audience and the setting elements; (e) the number of SLTIs, their positioning and work arrangements; (f) the interpreting strategies used by SLTIs to indicate deictic elements.

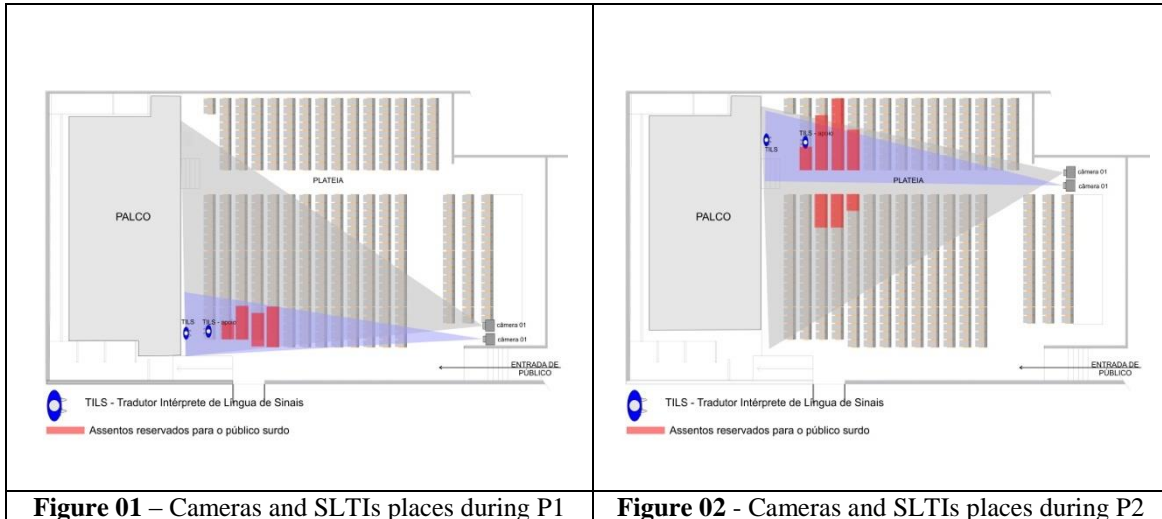
As research subjects, we chose two professional SLTIs hired by the cultural institution and the actors. Both SLTIs have more than two years of experience in interpreting. In the two theatrical performances – hereinafter P1 and P2 – the Libras interpreting was done in teamwork by the two professional SLTIs, who alternated between interpreting and support.<sup>32</sup>

In P1, the SLTI who was interpreting was in the orchestra pit on the left side of the stage (from the viewer's perspective), and in P2 the SLTI was on the right side of the stage. The SLTI that was not interpreting was in support, informing which actor / character had the turn, stage movements, etc. She was in the audience where she could see all the performance, in front of the SLTI who was interpreting (Chart 01). In both performances analyzed, the SLTIs were under a fixed-focus spotlight.

We registered the interpreters' work using two cameras, as Chart 01 shows. Figures 01 and 02 present SLTIs and the position of the cameras in P1 and P2, respectively. The two cameras were placed in those positions to help us observe the scene as a whole, and especially to record the production of utterances in Libras, as it is important to observe linguistic materiality in which utterances are produced.

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<sup>32</sup> The concept of “teamwork” was adopted on the basis of Nogueira's (2016) study, in which authors and reflections on alternation during interpreting were brought to the fore. One of teamwork characteristics is interpreting turns, in which a SLTI interprets and the other gives support.

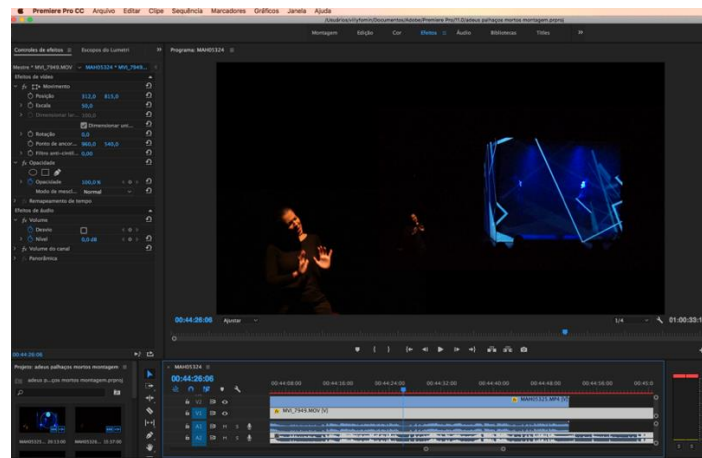


**Figure 01** – Cameras and SLTIs places during P1

**Figure 02** - Cameras and SLTIs places during P2

**Chart 01** – Mapping of the positions of cameras, SLTIs and deaf audience

The videos were synchronized using ‘Adobe Premier Pro CC’ video editor. During video montage (Figure 03) we used the video of the scene as a whole, but enlarged the video of the interpreters so we could better see the details of the production of sign language utterances.



**Figure 03** - Example of video montage and synchronization of the stage performance recording with the enlargement of interpreters

#### 4 Verbal-Visual Elements of the Theatrical Scene and Libras’ Interpreting

Among the many verbal-visual elements of the theatrical scene, for this study, we selected excerpts from those verbal-visual elements incorporated into SLTIs

enunciation at the very moment the scene happened. During the analysis, we were aware that “in fact, the analysis must not aim at guessing all these decisions and intentions; it is based on the final product of the work, no matter how unfinished and disorganized it is” (PAVIS, 2015b, p.XVIII).<sup>33</sup>

The scene presented in the following excerpt (Chart 02) belongs to a character who makes another one read a text composed of combined letters projected onto the wall of a cube, where, supposedly, the full name of the first character would be written. However, the letters are scrambled and do not necessarily form words. The character then leans in the direction of the text (as if she were trying to read), but what she pronounces with difficulty is not the projected text.

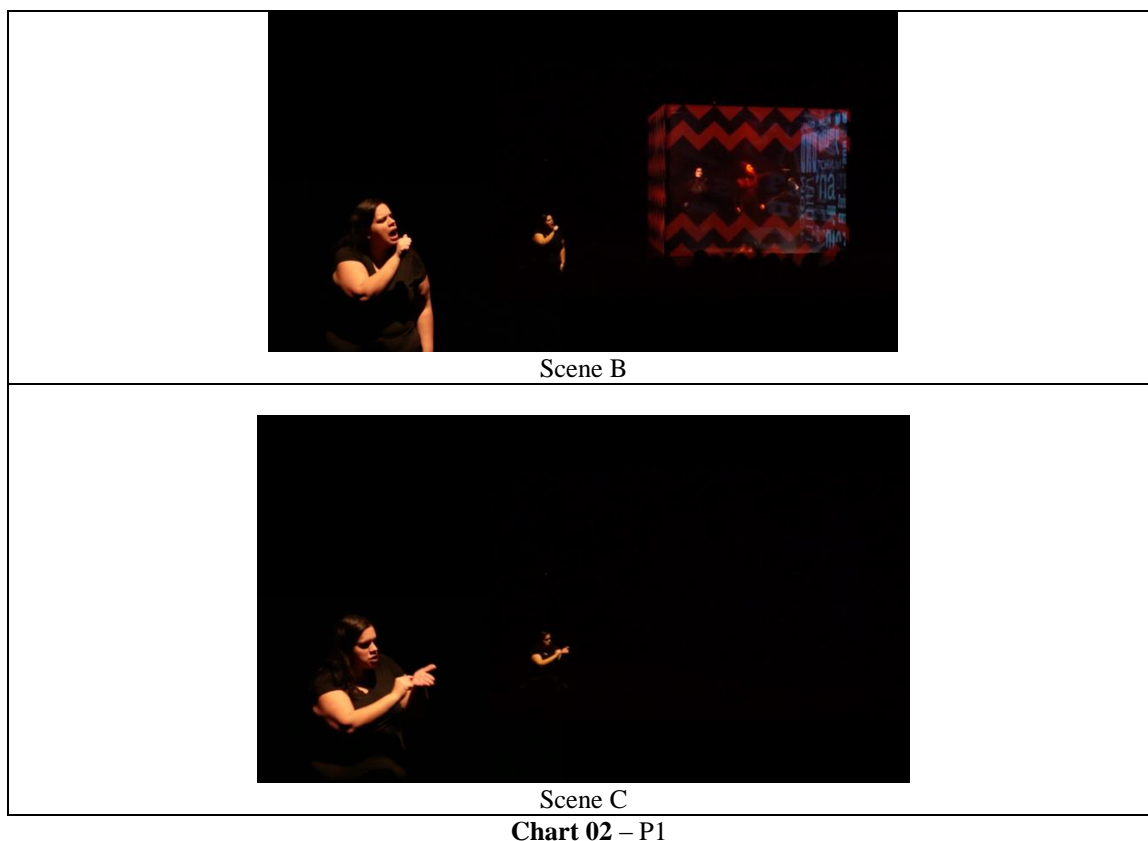
The Libras interpreter used the following strategy: with an emphatic gesture with her two hands, she pointed to the side where the wall of the cube would be, as if it were in front of her, using an emphatic facial marker to indicate authority (Chart 02 – Scene A). To indicate the character who tries to read the letters, the interpreter lowers her body, approaching the projection to read the projected text. The interpreter then begins to spell the letters in an attempt to form a word (Chart 02 - Scene B). Even after the projection stops, the narrated text keeps on making reference to this reading attempt, and the interpreter continues to sign as if the wall were in the same space that she had previously indicated (Chart 02 - Scene C).



Scene A

<sup>33</sup> In original: “a análise não deve, de fato, se obrigar a adivinhar todas essas decisões e intenções, ela se baseia no produto final do trabalho, por mais inacabado e desorganizado que esteja.”





It is possible to observe, in the excerpt presented, that the actors' position and their spatial relation with the scenographic elements (light, projections and objects on stage) had strong influence in the Libras enunciation, and that the interpreting choices had to take into consideration the visual aspect of the scene in order to produce coherent sense.

In the next excerpt, from P2 (Charts 03 and 04), we observe the same object on stage (a paper roll representing an architectural project) held by the character in different ways. In Chart 03, we observe Scene D, in which the character holds the paper that is on a table. The text spoken by the actress to refer to her architectural project is: "Here! Here! I started to understand that places are not made to dream [...]."<sup>34</sup> On Scene D, we realize that the interpreter, to understand to what "Here!" refers, feels she needs to see what is happening on stage, since her position in the pit limits vision. She turns her head and sees the actress holding the papers on a table. She then chooses to point and delineate the space the paper occupies on the table. In Chart 04 – Scene E, a similar

<sup>34</sup> In original: "Aqui! Aqui! Eu comecei a entender que os lugares que não feitos pra sonhar [...]."

process happens; in it, the interpreter looks again at the scene and sees the project paper in another position. This makes her adopt another strategy: she decides to reproduce the actress's gesture of holding the paper, and through pointing she circumscribes the space that the paper would occupy in front of her body.



Scene D – The SLTI looks at the scene and sees the paper on the table

Text in source language – Portuguese: *Aqui! Aqui! (...)* / *Here! Here! (...)*

Signing Sequence D – SLTI uses pointing, space demarcation, referring to the object in the scene, thus reinforcing pointing



Chart 03 – Scene D description



Scene E – SLTI looks at the scene and sees the paper in front of the body of the character

Text in the source language – Portuguese: *Esse daqui (...)* / *This one (...)*

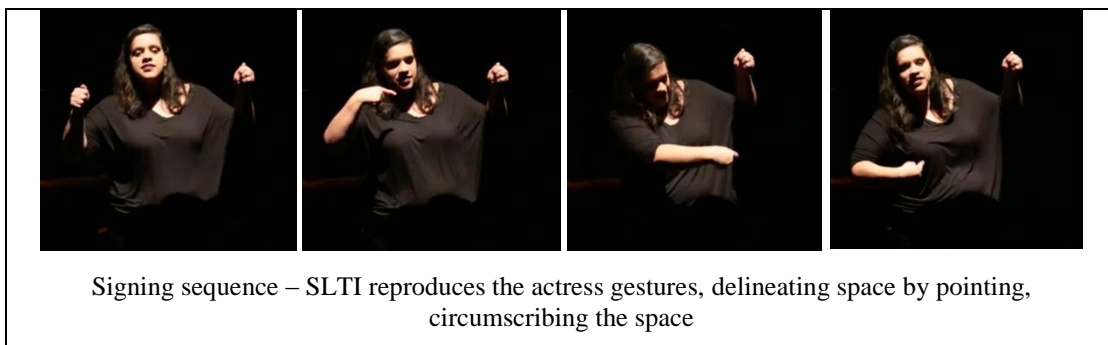


Chart 04 -Scene E description

According to SLTI's account, during the study period, they had access to videos and to the texts of the performances, and watched the tests of sound and light on the same day that the performance was held. All these study processes were fundamental for them to make decisions, since their position in the pit did not allow them to watch the whole scene at the very moment it happened. It is in these study periods that SLTIs explore and find out clues regarding the elements that will constitute utterances produced during the theatrical performance. In addition to studies, the partnership with the SLTI who is not on stage, but, sitting in the audience, is able to see the whole scene, is extremely important, for s/he can inform the partner about the theatrical scene at the very moment it happens.

During *corpus* analysis, we identified several verbal-visual elements in SLTI's enunciation, such as the representation of characters' physical characteristics in Libras, the use of pointing in the space that makes reference to objects in the scene and the position of signs according to actors' body positions.

What we have presented has not exhausted the description and analysis of the object; on the contrary, we use this reflection as a basis for opening new areas of discussion.

This way, it becomes very clear that language production constitutes a highly complex activity of sense production that not only actualizes on the basis of the linguistic elements selected and their forms of organization, but requires of interlocutors the mobilization of a huge set of socio-cognitive, cultural, historical knowledge, in sum, of the whole context, the way it is highly conceptualized, as well as its

reconstruction at the moment of verbal interaction (KOCH, 2012, p.140).<sup>35</sup>

We understand, dialogically, that every text is heterogeneous, filled by other texts, is in a discursive chain and is a place of interaction between social actors that constitute themselves and are constituted therein (KOCH, 2012). Thus, we cannot lose sight that “compositional finalization is possible in all spheres of ideological creation, but real thematic finalization is impossible” (BAKHTIN/MEDVEDEV, 1978, p.130).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, there will be a distinct theme for each member of the audience.

### **Final considerations**

In this article, we proposed a discussion on SLTIs’ work in theater performances and the observation of verbal-visual elements which are integrated into these interpreters’ utterances at the very moment theatrical scenes happens. The description and analysis of a small part of our research *corpus* do not entirely apprehend our research, but endeavour to contribute to sign language translation and interpreting, theatricalism, and verbal-visuality studies. We understand that the description of SLTIs’ professional practice is vital for reflections and theorizations on SLTIs’ professional performance in the several spheres of language use where they work.

Based on dialogism, as proposed by Bakhtin and the Circle, we examined utterances that are in a discursive and ideological chain and, for this analysis of Libras interpreting, took into account the text produced in theatre performances by actors and professional SLTIs. Investigating it beyond its verbal dimension, we considered it as an organic whole that is materialized at the very moment theatrical scenes happen.

In the analyzed texts, the visual and the verbal elements are fused, creating utterances in constant dialogue with other utterances. We consider the professional SLTIs that interpret during theater performances verbal-visual elements that are part of

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<sup>35</sup> In the original: “Em determinados textos ou conjuntos de textos, artísticos ou não, a articulação entre os elementos verbais e visuais forma um todo indissolúvel, cuja unidade exige do analista o reconhecimento dessa particularidade. São textos em que a verbo-visualidade se apresenta como constitutiva, impossibilitando o tratamento excludente do verbal ou do visual e, em especial, das formas de junção assumidas por essas dimensões para produzir sentido.”

<sup>36</sup> BAKHTIN, M./MEDVEDEV, P. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

the stage and thus dialogue with it, becoming part of the performance text, part of the theatrical scene. It is impossible to disassociate them from the whole that dialogues, influences and is influenced by the moment of enunciation and the relations that happen in this context.

In sum, we point out that the data analysis presented here reinforce the importance of the verbal-visual nature of texts produced in the theater and emphasize that this verbal-visuality, so present in theatrical scenes, is an essential material for Libras interpreting, especially because its target text is a visual-gestural language, a verbal-visual language in its own essence. Therefore, sign language interpreting in the theatrical sphere demands that these professionals be aware that both the verbal and the visual texts are inseparable.

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