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**The Presence of Sign Language Translation and Interpretation in the
“Great Time” of Culture/ *Presença da tradução e da interpretação das
línguas de sinais no “grande tempo” da cultura***

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Indeed, in playing I experience another life without exceeding
the bounds of my own self-experience and self-consciousness and
without having anything to do with the other as such. And the same is
true when I am conscious of an illusion, for once again I experience
another life, while remaining myself.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Please, never despise the translator.
He’s the post-horse of human civilization
*Aleksandr Púshkin*¹

Mikhail Bakhtin and his Circle offer Humanities significant contributions to the understanding of culture as a social-historical process. In *Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staff* published in 1970 by *Novy Mir*, Bakhtin (1986)² reflects on the dialogic nature of human culture and its inscription in what he named *Great Time*, a concept derived first from his doctoral dissertation, *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, defended in 1946 and published in 1965. *Great time* corresponds to a universal historicity of human existence or in the words of Bubnova

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¹ JOLY, J-F. Preface. In: DELISLE, J.; Woodsworth, J. (Eds.). *Translators through History*. Revised and expanded by Judith Woodsworth. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, pp.xx.

² BAKHTIN, M. *Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staff*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin, Texas: Texas University Press, 1986.pp.1-9.

(2015, p.11), a “semiotic space of culture in which the simultaneity of historic meanings, the dialogue between them, is possible.”³ Bakhtin (1986)⁴ argues that it is the human creative activity, in and through an ethical and responsible relation with *the other*, that allows the simultaneous dialogue between given history and present time. From his perspective, creation crosses both art and life as fields of human culture next to science, unifying them singularly in the answerability of the subject (BAKHTIN 1990),⁵ “[w]orks break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives there are more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.4; emphasis in original).⁶

In this essay from the 1970s Bakhtin discusses literary production in the scope of a scientific “umbrella” and highlights that a literary work is created in a given time and a specific period, but it becomes a part of History by outgrowing its meaning, enriched with new significance because just as it is enclosed in its own epoch, it also absorbs past times and might be read, (re)visited in future times, ahead of what has been created. Temporality of literary creation, the *small time*, allows the dislocation and emergence of the *great time* of culture, promoting exchanges between subjects, communities and peoples. It makes *great time* possible because “the work cannot live in future centuries without having somehow absorbed past centuries as well” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.4).⁷ Therefore, *small time* related to communities and local cultures in concrete conditions and times infuse *great time* with human production making them History. It is a dialectic relation. *Great time* feeds each epoch’s life time and is constituted by their small temporalities because “[s]uch a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.7; emphasis in original).⁸

³ BUBNOVA, T. What Could the “Great Time” Mean? *Bakhtiniana*, v. 10, n. 2, pp.6-16, 2015. Available at: [<https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/bakhtiniana/article/view/23260/17074>]. Access on: 30 Jul. 2018.

⁴ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. Art and Answerability. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1990, pp.1-3.

⁶ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁷ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 2.

Nonetheless, the cultural transit promoted by the dialogue between times does not only happen through familiarity and belonging of the creative subject to their cultural and linguistic community. Bridges have been built between peoples in History to assure that, in spite of their differences, the transit between them was established and the present time subject, an ethical agent also responsible for the construction of human historicity, could access what adds to the “[...] immense treasures of potential meaning that could not be fully revealed or recognized in his epoch” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.5).⁹ Subjects in their creative processes establish “[...] interaction with the works (imprints) of the past is only possible taking into account its historical enrichment” (BUBNOVA, 2015, p.11),¹⁰ that is, they reach for references of and dialogue with *great time* through cultural “products” of their own time, visiting and resuming the past. “It is almost impossible for the ordinary citizen to get anything like an accurate picture of the historical past without having it costumed, landscaped and ‘themed’ into the ‘culture of heritage’” (HALL, 1997, p.215).¹¹

Among the bridges that allow the dialogic and cultural transit, translation is said to represent by excellence the discursive practice that makes circulate most of the cultural plurality of *great times*. Translating as an activity of enunciative-discursive mediation might be seen as a social and historical practice that allows the cultural interchange between peoples and communities, promoting a dialogue of meanings between *great time* and different times. Undoubtedly, “the circulation of texts in history has been achieved by their translation” (PONTES JR.; BATALHA 2004, p.28).¹² Such activity is, as Jakobson (1959)¹³ discusses, at the core of language. Then, in the “universe of ‘communication’ which is our own, it is everywhere” (OUSTINOFF, 2003, p.68; our translation).¹⁴

Both in its written – translating per se – and oral dimension – interpreting – translating (in its specificities) realizes the plurality of world views by making possible

⁹ For reference, see footnote 2.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹¹ HALL, S. The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolutions of Our Time. THOMPSON, K. (Ed.). *Media and Cultural Regulation*. London: Sage Publications, 1997, pp.207-238.

¹² Original: “a circulação de textos através da história se deu pelas suas traduções.”

¹³ JAKOBSON, R. *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959.

¹⁴ Original: “Dans l’univers de la ‘communication’ qui est le nôtre, elle est partout présente.” Reference: OUSTINOFF, M. *La traduction*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003.

the breaking of boundaries and the flow of different forms of human existence in their local cultures. Translation, then, gives rise to difference. It is an activity through which otherness emerges as it exposes the other in their heterodiscursiveness and cultural plurality. In history, translation and interpretation were responsible for promoting cultural exchanges and the movement, from the sacred to the profane, of religious, literary, scientific and popular diversity of different times and places.

What is to be said about it in contemporaneity? What cultures and forms of existence has this discursive practice mobilized in the flow of History? In post-modern times, the era of consolidation of human rights, translation makes room for what Bakhtin (1986, p.3)¹⁵ has named the “powerful deep currents of culture,” the ones that “remain undisclosed, and sometimes researchers are completely unaware of them.” The so-called popular cultures, dismissed and neglected until the middle of the last century, have been gaining space also due to the strength of translation throughout the 21st century as an activity that promotes difference. Among the popular cultures, to use a Bakhtinian terminology, Deaf cultures have emerged from the *great time* of culture to the *small time* of the present.

Deaf communities have always existed in History. Throughout time they have been silenced and forbidden through institutional education and narratives from a place of cultural and linguistic difference. In the times of formal prohibition, from 1880¹⁶ to mid-1980s, they were not given the right to perceive and promote their own characteristics due to the acculturation to which they were submitted in order to become hearing impaired communities. Prohibition of sign language and attempts at cultural erasure, however, prevented neither their self-perception as different subjects nor their resistance with other deaf people throughout History. Consequently, in the domain of post-modern discursiveness, there is a great rupture – from the medicalization of their condition as non-hearing towards their affirmation as linguistic and cultural minority

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 2.

¹⁶ The notorious Congress on the Education of the Deaf held in Milan approved, in plenary attended by deaf educators from all over the world, the superiority of the oral over the gestural systems used in deaf schools. The gestural system was proposed and promoted by Abbot Charles-Michel de l'Épée at the National Institute for Deaf Children of Paris and adopted by several educational institutions for the deaf. After the Congress in Milan, the gestural system was forbidden and educational institutions started using spoken language and discarded sign language in schools. For details on the history of education of the deaf, cf. Moura (2000).

with their own particular productions, cultural artifacts and world views. Due to contemporary movements promoted by multiculturalism to resignify the concept of identity as stable and unchangeable for identity as culturally plural, marked by ethnic, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic differences (HALL, 1992),¹⁷ the deaf have presented narratives of their self, since the middle of the 1980s, in their own language as a community. If *great time* is for Bubnova (2015)¹⁸ a semiotic space of culture that establishes a dialogue of meanings in History, it is logical that the deaf appear in post-modernity through the material singularity of their language which, contrary to what has been defined as language in Modern Linguistics (referring to the Saussurean notion of signifier as *acoustic image*), is realized by the semiosis of corporal gesture and visuality as a channel of access to the discursive world.

The emergence of the deaf as cultural and linguistic subjects has also given rise to mediation practices that allow for what is produced in the *small time* of deaf cultures to echo through the *great time* of human culture. In other words, deaf communities, by resisting from the margin to the center through sign languages and different cultural expressions, have also enabled other discursive practices to answer for their interactional necessities. Translating and interpreting are some of these practices born out of communicative demands and are interrelated to the existence of the deaf in art, science, and life. Despite prohibition, acculturation and historic oppression, deaf resistance has mobilized and inscribed in History an enunciative network constituted of different discourses that contemporarily echo from the “basement” of *great time* to the “authorized” visibility of our time.

Although there are innumerable factors hidden from researchers in popular cultures, as Bakhtin stated, deaf cultural productions as well as translation and interpretation of sign languages, which have a community nature and guarantee basic communicative rights in the daily ideology of the deaf, have been gradually observed and described from a scientific perspective. Concerning translation and interpretation, the emergent disciplinary field named *translation and interpretation of sign languages* (RODRIGUES; BEER, 2015), an academic confluence that relates many

¹⁷ HALL, S. The question of cultural identity. In: HALL, S. HELD, D.; MCGREW, T. (Eds.). *Modernity and its Futures: Understanding Modern Societies*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992. pp.273-325.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 3.

methodological approaches from Translation Studies (TS) and Interpretation Studies (IS), which on their turn are interdisciplinary to several fields in Humanities, has allowed the description of processes and revealed the realities of these practices in the flow of current time history.

On the other hand, it must be highlighted that even though a specific field has been “born” to study translation and interpretation processes of these languages and the main features of linguistic modality and professional spheres, such movement can be seen as a symptom of the systematic denial of sign languages in traditional disciplines (PEREIRA, 2018) and other fields of Humanities. Important studies (PEREIRA, 2010; SANTOS, 2013; RODRIGUES; BEER, 2015. among others) have been done to show the emergence of a singular space as well as to map and assert the presence of translation and interpretations of sign languages in academic productions such as dissertations, theses and papers in Brazil, thus showing that the “effort made to erase a presence [...] only reinforces that presence” (AMORIM, 2004, p.30; our translation).¹⁹ Silencing and marginalizing sign languages in Humanities specially in fields that could adopt them, each in their epistemological specificity, as object of investigation and description (specially Linguistics, Education, TS and IS), forces upon the margins a strong, powerful and assertive mark of the deaf as a linguistic and social minority in *great time*. If life is born in the margins of a river because of the flowing water, it is at the margins that studies involving sign languages and deaf communities, as well as translation and interpretation of sign languages in Humanities, have been born and resist. However, marginal life has invaded disciplines and shaken what is traditionally called, from an epistemic perspective, community, people, culture, and language. It is the deaf presence as difference dislocating from *great time* that promotes new historical senses in art, science and life, resignifying the meanings of translating and interpreting languages and cultures in our *small time*.

The current issue of *Bakhtiniana* shows a fraction of translation and interpretation of sign language studies in our time as well as the forms through which these activities have moved the presence of the deaf as difference from and towards the *great time*. The works by researchers from different national and international

¹⁹ Original: “esforço empregado em apagar uma presença [...] só faz confirmar essa presença”

institutions describe and analyze translation and interpretation, each in their particular theoretical-conceptual approach, as activities that promote the dialogue between *great time* and reality. The papers here articulate, in that historical tapestry, these practices as contemporary human activities sustained by post-modern discourses of difference. They also reveal that the legitimized scientific movement promoted by Brazilian public policies and the struggle to professionalize their practice of translating and interpreting cause an important detachment from an essentialist view through which they were historically characterized in favor of a social perception of these activities as sponsors of human, social, and linguistics rights.

In the first paper, *The Roles of the Educational Interpreter: Between Social Practices and Education Policies*, Neiva de Aquino Albres and Carlos Henrique Rodrigues (both from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina), based on the contribution of Bakhtin's concept of text for Humanities, analyze excerpts of documents published by the Florianópolis City Department of Education to reflect on the different roles played by educational interpreters for Libras-Portuguese in the context of inclusive education. The inclusion of the deaf, a latent issue in the 21st century, is approached by the researchers to bring the reader to consider the extent to which official statements determine daily life.

Discourse, Interpretation and Translation: The SLI Occupation and its Current Meanings by Ângela Russo and Dória Maria Fiss, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, promotes a prolific debate between Michel Pêcheux's French Discourse Analysis and Translation Studies to observe new conditions for the production of discourses about sign language translators and interpreters currently. Due to a movement of professionalization, their debate allows the reader to approach the most recent meanings of translating and interpreting sign languages as a professional activity.

Katia Andreia Souza dos Santos (from Universidade do Estado do Pará) and Cristina Broglia Feitosa de Lacerda (from Universidade Federal de São Carlos), in *Libras-Portuguese Interpreter in the Context of Conferences: Reflections on Their Work*, share the results of a research study from a Bakhtinian perspective on the performance of an interpreter of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) during an academic conference. The research employed self-confrontation methodology originally proposed

in the French Clinic of Activity to position subjects of the interpretative activity face to face with their practice. The authors question the tradition of interpretation studies on conferences from a cognitive perspective by defending several factors besides cognitive processing involved in the context of the interpreting act.

The paper *Education as a Path: For an Active, Creative, and Inventive Mastership in Deaf Education*, by Vanessa Regina de Oliveira Martins (from Universidade Federal de São Carlos) and Sílvio Gallo (from Universidade Estadual de Campinas) reflect on the learning of the deaf by processes of interpretation in the educational context. Based on the French philosophy of difference, these authors observe schooling episodes to articulate theory and the literary works *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* by Jacques Rancière and *The Inventive Schoolmaster* by Walter Kohan. Their discussion is oriented towards the claim that learning processes involve, somehow, teaching positions, which means that in the education of the deaf, the sign language interpreter assumes such position and is invested with pedagogical discourse and praxis.

Vinicius Nascimento (from Universidade Federal de São Carlos) presents, in *The I-for-myself of Experienced Sign Language Interpreters in Training*, a portion of his doctoral research, which discusses higher education for Libras-Portuguese interpreters. Using an adaptation of the self-confrontation method proposed by the French linguist Daniel Faïta, the author exposes how the position of subjects facing the “other of themselves” leads to the constitutive otherness of work and to the necessary and constant movement of confronting the self as other for professional improvement. The paper also discusses the necessity of considering in-service professionals who started working without specific pre-service education and, after graduating in different areas, have pursued an education that considers in-service knowledge and the resignification of knowledge from educational environments.

Problematizing the performance of sign language interpreters for the first years of school is the goal proposed by Ana Claudia Balieiro Lodi (from Universidade de São Paulo) and Leonardo Peluso (from Universidad de la República Uruguay), in *Reflections on the Presence of Sign Language Interpreters in the First School Years*. They discuss the implications of these professionals in the assimilation of sign language

by deaf students as well as in their school learning. The authors argue that it is necessary to resignify the current concept of inclusion, which reduces the insertion of the deaf in school spaces, in favor of one that guarantees social, cultural and linguistic recognition of deaf individuals in every social sphere.

In *Verbal-Visuality and its Effects in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) Interpreting at the Theater*, Carolina Fernandes Rodrigues Fomin (from Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo) observes the activity of simultaneous Portuguese-Libras interpretation in the theater by means of the theoretical dialogue between interpretation studies, theater studies and Bakhtinian studies. The author investigates verbal-visual relations in discourse and their effects for the interpretation of Libras in an analytical-descriptive qualitative study of two plays in which sign language translators and interpreters were present to guarantee accessible communication for the deaf audience.

The last paper, *Over the Tipping Point: Using the Diagnostic Discourse of Standardized patients to educate medical interpreters*, Robyn Dean (from Rochester Institute of Technology), brings the use of videos of medical encounters in teaching hospitals for the training of sign language interpreters to work in healthcare service settings. The research takes place in an online learning environment for a graduate-level medical interpreting course and displays the different uses of the videos to train interpreters for medical interpreting.

The current issue of *Bakhtiniana* offers its readers the chance to observe that translation and interpretation of sign languages constitute a great part of the translation field (even though researchers from different disciplines in Humanities, both classical and emergent, will deny it), which, from a social and academic perspective, allows the interchange of cultures as a human activity. Therefore, they mobilize, in our time, the historical presence of the deaf as a sociolinguistic community in *great time*. The practical result of such movement is the inevitable (and positive) discomfort that the presence of the deaf, translation, and interpretation of sign languages have caused in traditional scientific centers of several disciplines in Humanities around the world. It is life from the margins, in the present time, giving back, to the rivers of science, the power and strength that tried erasing it at different times of *great time*.

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