A NEW VIEW FOR THE TEACHING OF LIBRAS: A UNIVERSITY LISTENERS SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article discusses the teaching and learning of the Brazilian Sign Language - LIBRAS - under the understanding of university students of the Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná, Medianeira campus. The discussion is based on the assumption that LIBRAS is a natural visuospatial language, which, like any other, has its peculiar linguistic structure and can easily be taught-learned by listeners and/or non-listeners. Having the LIBRAS knowledge would be one of the first steps for the listener to enter the communicational world of deaf users of Sign Language. For the research, authors such as Mantoan (2008), Perlin (2011), Skliar (2011), Fernandes (2014) and Lopes (2016) were searched. Those authors present discussions that give a theoretical basis for the reflections approached in this study. Thereby, this article aimed to verify the conceptions of university students about learning LIBRAS as an optional curricular subject in the university. The methodology used was guided by field research technique and questionnaire application, which analysis of the collected data follows principles of the qualitative approach. The results show that LIBRAS becomes an important option as a second language in the university curriculum, due to its recognition as a language instrument for social and professional use.

Keywords: LIBRAS. Deafness. Second Language Teaching.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a retrospective look, one easily notes that until recently the Brazilian Sign Language - Libras - was not officially recognized and, therefore, that language was not in the curriculum matrix of any course of Higher Education. However, from the Federal Law no. 10.436, April 24th 2002, which acknowledged Libras as a legal means of communication and expression, broadened the discussion about the importance of this language within the context of Brazilian society. (BRASIL, 2002). On December 22nd 2005, the Federal Decree no. 5.626 - which regulated the aforementioned Law - defined as compulsory curricular discipline the provision of language training courses for teachers of middle and upper level. (BRASIL, 2005). This offer has allowed the emergence of new professionals: the teacher and interpreter of Libras. These new bilingual professionals became fundamental to the effectiveness of public policies of the country for the education of the deaf, which return to guarantee access and permanence of the deaf student in the national system at all levels of education. (QUADROS, 2005; 2006; ALBRES; NEVES, 2013).

Nevertheless, the actions of these bilingual professionals are felt beyond the teaching of basic level, in which there is the greatest demand for education of the deaf (BRASIL, 2013). However, it is present in different courses of Higher Education and Professional and Technological Education - EPT - aiming to contribute with the training, social inclusion of deaf and enabling greater disclosure of the Libras in different contexts outside the scope of education. This presence is due, mainly, to the fulfilment of §2nd, article 3rd, of the Federal Decree no. 5.626/2005, which defines the inclusion of Libras as subject choice in Higher Education and EPT. In the light of the legal definitions, the Libras for the student listener is to be conceived as a second language, whose processes of teaching and learning, according to socio-historical pedagogical trend-interactionist, should occur in the context that oportunizes bilingual situations of significant interaction. (DONATO, 2000; LEITE; MCCLEARY, 2009; GESSER, 2012).

The design of a second language for listeners relies in the fact Libras is considered a legitimate linguistic system (FERREIRA-BRITO, 1995; QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004), conceived as natural language of the deaf (SKLIAR, 1998; QUADROS, 2012), not being understood as the tongue of listeners.
The sign language, for listeners, is a foreign language (LANTOLF; THOME, 2000; WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005), since the goal of a second language is to boost the students beyond the boundaries of their own world, encouraging them to see through the language and the culture of other peoples". (BUGOS, 1980 apud WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005, p. 16).

In the class of Sign Language, "students are led to a long journey to a new and exciting world. They learn to talk about the family in a non-familiar way and to consider values that may appear questionable." (WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005, p. 16). In the Libras classes, the listeners apprentices enter into a world of predominance of vision, the gestures and signs; space in which the hearing is not relevant in the acquisition of language (LEITE; MCCLEARY, 2009). This world leads to knowledge and understanding of a new language, possibly, quite different from all that subjects apprentices already knew. (WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005).

Under the linguistic point of view, sign language has syntax, semantics and morphology of its own (Ferreira-Brito, 1995; LANTOLF; THOME, 2000; WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005), attributes that qualify Libras as a language that can be taught and learned with success and used in a variety of environments, in situations of interaction between listeners and non-listeners. (QUADROS, 2005; 2006; TABLES; PATERNAL, 2006; LEITE; MCCLEARY, 2009; GESSER, 2010).

In the scenario of national education, discussions about the Brazilian Sign Language prior to the legislation published in the 21st century, mainly because the official recognition of this language is the result of struggles undertaken by deaf several years ago by human and social rights (SKLIAR, 1998), the latter expressly guaranteed in Article 6th of the Constitution of 1988. (BRASIL, 1988).

Nevertheless, even if the language policies of the country, both in relation to the teaching-learning process of the deaf and the listeners, appear to be well defined and widely discussed mainly in the literature that deals with the inclusive education of the deaf, few national reports address issues relating to the teaching of Libras for hearing students in higher education and EPT, as well as the conceptions of students listeners about the learning of Libras. From this perspective, we sought to verify that the design of the academics listeners regarding the discipline of Libras offered as a choice in the curriculum of the courses of bachelor's degree from Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná - UTFPR, Campus of Medianeira.

2 METHODOLOGY

For the development of the research sought to authors as Mantoan (2008), Perlin (2011), Skliar (2011), Fernandes (2014) and Lopes (2016). These authors present discussions which give the theoretical basis for the reflections contained in this study. In this sense, the present article aimed to verify the conceptions of students on the learning of Libras as an optional discipline in the curriculum of Higher Education. The methodological path guided by technique of field research and application of questionnaire and the analysis of the data collected follows principles of qualitative approach.

3 RESULTS

Since the undergraduate students of the UTFPR, in their baccalaureate courses, have other elective disciplines in their curriculum, a research into the reason for the choice of learning LIBRAS seemed appropriate. In the analysis of the records of the answers, the main reasons for the choice of the LIBRAS discipline were: the interest of the subjects to know the Sign Language, to learn this modality of visuo-spatial communication and/or to increase the linguistic knowledge of LIBRAS previously acquired (42,5%), the need to complement the curricular core of the course, the opportunity to increase linguistic knowledge and the enrichment of the professional curriculum with the learning of another language (34,5%), to learn LIBRAS to contribute to the social inclusion of the deaf, enable interpersonal and professional communication and interaction with the deaf community (19,5%), the recognition of the professional utility of LIBRAS and the importance of this language in the Brazilian sociocultural context (4,6%).

For these individuals, the importance of learning Libras lies in the possibility of establishing interpersonal communication and training with deaf people (67,8%), contribute to the social inclusion of the deaf (20,7%), knowing another language for the enrichment of the curriculum and satisfy the curiosity about Libas (11,5%).

The relationship of the subjects with the learning of a visual-spatial language was another issue investigated. Some of the answers seemed obvious, as pointed to a singular meaning about the three
key parameters of the Libras: configuration of hand, point of articulation and movement of the hand (FERREIRA-BRITO, 1995; QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004), which was translated by the subjects as understanding and interpretation of gestures and signs, constituents of the language (5,7%). Other answers pointed to the understanding of the subject's relationships with the visual-spatial language outside the school context, in situations of interpersonal or professional interaction with deaf people (2,3%). Still other contemplated the learning of the Libras in the school context, and thus referred to the personal 'taste' in learning Libras despite the difference of linguistic structure in relation to the Portuguese Language (6,9%), but considered the social importance of sign language in the current Brazilian context. In short, despite the difficulty of visual-motor coordinating and unique understanding of signs, the pleasure of learning Libras as a second language was considerable (67,8%), being that learning admittedly easy (14,9%).

The main strategies adopted by the subjects to easily learn Libras were the following: viewing and memorization of signs learned in class, practical training through dialogs with students listeners and deaf relatives fluent in Libras (58,6%), attention, observation and association of signs with meanings which are already known - contrast of spoken and sign languages (26,4%), attention in the room, complementation of learning through individualized video classes and simulation of dialogs (13,8%).

In the opinion of the individuals, in the classes of Libras at UTFPR some aspects related to the teaching practice and the teaching methodology are highlighted, such as: teacher and students interaction, explanation of the teacher, interaction between the components of the class, the dynamics of teaching, the dialog and the visual-gesture practice (74,7%); the linguistic characteristics of their own language and/or the curriculum discipline itself, the learning of words and composition of significant phrases without the use of speaking or writing, little theory and rare need of written record (14,9%); the behavior of study and visible progress in learning, quiet, interesting and participatory classes, the exchanges that facilitate learning (9,2%).

In contrast, some aspects discredit the Libras classes. Among the responses recorded by the subjects stand: presentation of works relating to the production of dialogs in Libras, which generates excessive interactivity and little understanding of the sign/gesture 'right' or 'wrong' (26,4%); difficult learning due to the speed and the complexity of the signs/actions/expressions, difficulty in memorizing the manual alphabet, lack of orality in the classroom, the unavailability of written material on the basis of the shortage of textbook (10,3%). The subjects mentioned some difficulties related to the environment of the room and organization of supply of Libras in bachelor courses, such as, school desks, restricted workload and the time of the classes (6,9%), as well as the form of evaluation of learning of sign language (2,3%).

The question about the use of Libras outside the school environment, although some subjects did not identify any future perspective (13,8%), others have indicated that there are real possibilities of use of the Libras in the work environment (32,2%) and in the interactions between listeners and deaf, both fluent in Libras, in different social environments, including the church and the family (48,3%). In view of these subjects, 85,1% believe that the knowledge acquired in the discipline of Libras in the bachelor course at UTFPR will assist in the future professional career.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The study allowed some reflections on the inclusion of Libras as an optional discipline in the courses of bachelor at UTFPR, Medianeira Campus, offered as a second language to students listeners. In the analysis of the corpus of study, it became apparent that a large percentage of the UTFPR students never have or had frequent contact with deaf, and even less with the deaf community. But this fact is not only peculiarities of these students. Related researches show how rare are the direct contacts between the deaf and listeners apprentices of Libras, especially in the beginning of the process of learning the language. (MAEDA, 2012; ALMEIDA; VITALIANO, 2012; OLIVEIRA; CHIOT; XAVIER, 2012)

The understandings of the respondents of UTFPR focus on the complexity of the process of acquisition of a second language with different linguistic characteristics of the Portuguese language, mother tongue. However, the difference in modality between these languages, at the same time is a recognizable element generator of difficulties in learning the language visual-spatial, especially, it becomes a stimulus leading students to opt for discipline of Libras. But, the pleasure in learning Libras is not so apparent between scholars of different undergraduate courses, which have sign language as
It was observed that, if the difference between the oral language and visual-spatial is an incentive to opt for discipline of Libras at UTFPR, for the students, the importance of learning this language lies in the possibility of interpersonal communication and training with the deaf. This expectation is supported by the pedagogical proposal of the discipline of Libras at UTFPR for their courses of bachelor's and Undergraduate Degrees (UTFPR, 2009).

In the literature there is mention that the teaching of Libras in courses of higher education does not make the university fluent in that language. (QUADROS; CAPELLO, 2010). Mainly due to the structuring of the hourly load of Libras in graduate courses, for example, it is believed that academics who attended Libras in graduation, "possibly will not be fluent in the sign language to teach directly in that language, but will already have deconstructed some of the myths about deaf people and their language. This will have an impact in the classroom when before the student deaf". (QUADROS; PATERNAL, 2006, p.19).

Regarding the relationship of the subjects with the learning of Libras, for the great majority of the UTFPR students, admittedly, is still in the phase of adaptation with the linguistic structure of this language, it was observed that there is a great receptivity to Libras since this relationship was translated into concepts 'good' and 'very good', being still considered easy to learn Libras. But it is a fallacy to believe that, for beginners listeners learning sign languages is easy, in the same way that it is easy for the deaf to learn an oral language, because it comes from the acquisition of a second language, foreign language (WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005), in addition to that under the linguistic perspective, sign languages are completely different from oral language. (FERREIRA-BRITO, 1995; LANTOLF; OLIVEIRA, 2000; QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004; WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005).

Comprehension and memorization of signs, joints and construction of dialogs in Libras, in literature, are factors presented as possible generators of a greater or lesser degree of difficulty in the processes of teaching and learning this sign language for apprentices both listeners and deaf. (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004; LEITE; MCCLEYARY, GESSER, 2009; 2010; 2012; QUADROS; LILLO-MARTIN; PICHLER, 2013). The association of phonological parameters of Libras with the application of visual and motor skills becomes a relevant factor to the listeners, apprentices of Libras, accustomed with the tongue strongly linked to the orality and hearing. (LEITE; MCCLEYARY, 2009).

Learning strategies are used to facilitate the acquisition of a second language, enabling the ownership of the basic features of the communication signals, encouraging the expansion of communication between teacher and fellow classmates, to keep up with the pace of the lesson and grasp the knowledge addressed. Among the strategies adopted by the UTFPR students there is predominance of visualization and memorization of signs, practical training through dialogs with fellow listeners and family deaf fluent in Libras. The association of signs with meanings already known in both the spoken language - tongue - as of the sign tongue - second language - was another strategy mentioned. In this sense, believes that

[...] the success in learning a foreign language depends on a certain degree of maturity on the tongue. The child may transfer to the new language the system of meanings they already have in their own language. The opposite is also true - a foreign language facilitates the field of higher forms of tongue. (VIGOTSKY, 2005, p. 137).

Although controversial, in the literature there is a consensus that the mother tongue has an important role in the process of acquisition of a second language. (QUADROS, ALBRES, 2008; 2010; 2012), occurring interfaces with greater or lesser intensity of mutual interference of languages (QUADROS; LILLO-MARTIN; PICHLER, 2013). Good pedagogical use of the mother tongue is one which "leads the most efficient practices and intensive in the foreign language". (GESSER, 2010, p. 59).
In relation to the acquisition of languages in different ways - in case of signs and oral languages - studies show that these languages can be produced simultaneously during the process of acquiring one or another and present highly satisfactory results, because

[...] the languages are active cognitively, even when only one is produced. For bimodal bilingual, languages can be activated in the body as well, because the two do not need to compete for the articulatory channel: each one has its own articulatory channel. Thus, the two languages are always available to the intermodal bilingual, and may be produced simultaneously by no articulatory restriction (QUADROS; LILLO-MARTIN; PICHLER, 2013, p. 11).

It is appropriate to observe that the strategies adopted by the UTFPR students perfectly fit the types of strategies considered effective in the specialized literature that deals with the acquisition of a second language.

*Memory strategies that help students to store and retrieve information.* Cognitive Strategies, which empower the learners understand and produce new language (GEM). Compensation strategies that allow learners to communicate despite its shortcomings in knowledge of the language (GEM). Metacognitive strategies that allow learners to control their own learning through the organization, planning, and evaluation. Affective strategies, which help learners to gain control over their emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. Social strategies, which help learners to interact with other people. (GESSERT, 2010, p. 63).

In the analysis of the corpus of the study regarding the teaching practice and the teaching methodology of Libras, the UTFPR students recorded points discussed in theory and in research conducted in this area. Among them, the interaction between educator and learner, and these between themselves and the environment in the classroom. In the light of Vygotskian conception about the acquisition of language and Bakhtinian theorization of speech, it is understood that the valuation of interactivity between the actors, in the context of the classroom, leads to a dialectical interaction inter and intrapersonal, which in turn leads to the opportunity to use of language, the merger of the performance of the language and the development of linguistic competence in a second language. (JOHNSON, 2004). The origin of linguistic competence of second language cannot be found in a language acquisition device or in any other mechanism, or even in a system of resolution of problems (BLEY-VROMAN, 1990), but in reality, in social life in which occurs the use of language (JOHNSON, 2004).

This use of language does not occur in a vacuum or in a social context imaginary, but in a real context and perceived socially. [...] these contexts are not universal. They are very localized, and, therefore, the ability of language is also locally bound: reflects all the characteristics of a well-defined context, socio-cultural and institutional. [...] the capacity of language is not in the mind of the student, but a multitude of cultural and institutional contexts and in a variety of discursive practices that the student was exposed along our life [Translation] (JOHNSON, 2004, p. 172).

The lack of didactic material, with written record in Libras, is mentioned by students. But, this gap is also felt by teachers, mainly to assist in structuring of curricular proposals or course project in Libras. "There is a anguish caused by the lack of didactic materials expertise, which can ensure a repertoire and delineation of the ordination of the linguistic content that serve as 'north' to more advanced courses". (GESSERT, 2012, p. 123).

Regarding teachers of Libras, warns that these should be familiar with theories and methodologies in the teaching of a second language, since the language teaching enters into a special area in which the interaction is a preponderant factor. (LANTOLF; THOME, 2000; WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005). It is complete with assertion that to teach a second language

[...] It is not enough to be fluent in it, not even be a good teacher. The teachers of ASL [American Sign Language, our emphasis] can learn a lot about your practice through the study of the principles and methods applied by other teachers of second language; and they must always be attentive to the different learning styles and personality types of their students. (WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005, p. 173).

One last question concerns the importance of the acquisition of Libras for the future life of students. Considered the large percentage of recognition that the sign language is important especially in the professional life of these future alumni, we agree with the literature that intention: perhaps they can
"enter, and perhaps even share, the language and the way of life of deaf people". (WILCOX; WILCOX, 2005, p. 179).

REFERENCES


