

Written Portuguese as L2 for deaf children: relations between writing and oral language

Zilda Maria Gesueli*, Ivani Rodrigues Silva, Sabrina de Oliveira Maciel Guimarães

State University of Campinas-Unicamp

Abstract

Given the specificity of deafness that is founded upon visual experience and on the use of a visual-gestural language, how should one regard the relations between writing and oral language?

Due to the fact that they do not hear, the deaf follow a course that doesn't consider relations between writing/speech; for this reason, one must consider the visual aspects of writing as facilitating factors for acquiring Portuguese. Consequently, the graphocentric conception of writing, considered as a set of discursive practices, must be left aside (Souza, 2001).

Discursive practices are understood as meaningful social practices that the subject engages in through language. Where deaf children are concerned, interaction with writing must be founded upon using sign language – a language that is essentially visual. Thus, one can expect the process of acquiring written Portuguese by deaf students to be a complex task, since added to the challenge involved in teaching them to write is that of teaching them a second language (Gesueli, 2006).

Reily (2003) proposes visual literacy in the school curriculum; the author contends that “images have been used in school primarily as decoration, in order to dilute the tedium that comes from visually uninteresting graphic text displays” (p. 164). Considering the visual nature of sign language, this discussion should come to the foreground in the field of deaf studies.

In this qualitative study, educational activities were carried out with groups of children aged 6 to 10 who were enrolled in the regular school system and also came twice a week to the

outpatient center called Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas em Reabilitação “Prof. Dr. Gabriel Porto” - CEPRE at the School of Medical Sciences at the State University of Campinas.

The data was collected using video recordings of interaction episodes between deaf children/deaf teacher and hearing researcher. The reading and writing productions by the deaf children were analyzed.

The research subjects presented differences regarding hearing loss, but despite such differences, they did not look for relations between writing and oral language during reading and writing activities. We were able to observe from the data that both groups of children, those with residual hearing and those with profound deafness, sought meaning in the texts considering the visual aspects of writing; they did not necessarily seek support from phoneme/grapheme relations.

References

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* zgesueli@fcm.unicamp.br