SILENT SEA OF PARADOXES

Communication challenges of linguistic minorities and ideologies around Deafness and multilingualism in the context of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg

This document is an illustrated summary of the research carried by Raquel G. Ferreira and supervised by Prof. Dr. Julia de Bres in conclusion of her Masters in Learning and Communication in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts at the University of Luxembourg in May 2018.

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how the Deaf community of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg copes with the multilingualism that derives from the diversity of the multicultural environment. The research finds its support on the framework of Language Ideologies as to identify the most recurrent topics that appeared in both hearing and deaf discourses in relation to the topic of Deafness in Luxembourg. By analyzing the correlation and the position of the participants in relation to topics such as alphabetization, perspectives on employability and socialization, the investigation explores the possible answers and further inquiries derived from the following question:

How do ideologies and attitudes around deafness and multilingualism potentially contribute to the perpetuation of restricting linguistic strategies in education and communication in Luxembourg?

Theoretical background

A diagnosis or a culture

According to Agar (1994), a person who not only knows but also uses two or more languages can freely move between the cultures of those languages as well. On that premise, the author affirms that languages and cultures cannot be separated, coining the term *languaculture*. The term would be employed as to involve also elements such as past knowledge, local and cultural information, habits and behaviours of the speaker in what we call `language`, instead of the sole consideration of grammar and vocabulary Agar (1994).

Very much in line with this reasoning, Grosjean (1993) acknowledges not only the linguistic, but this bicultural character of Deaf individuals, for regardless of their main means of communication, they relate to both Hearing and Deaf worlds in the first place. In his words, `the majority of Deaf people are just as bicultural as bilingual`, and the same applies to Hearing individuals that keep a close relationship to the Deaf community.

However, claims of `belonging` from both Deaf and Hearing (whether Signers or related to the community in any way) don`t seem interchangeable when the biological component comes to the scene. Deafness, if taken as an exceptional physical feature, also carries the stigma of a disorder (Goffman, 2006) and its relation to the perception of misfortune and consequently marginalization and shame. Side-to-side with this notion, the idea of `bio-power` presented by Foucault (1998) also shows its pertinence at this point. It claims that basic biological features of the human species become the object of political strategy, which seems particularly aligned to the considerations on the concept of handicap (and its relativism) that we are about to discuss throughout the thesis.

Deafness – medical, social and why the upper case definition

Two essentially opposed definitions could be identified as the basis of any understanding (as well as potential misunderstandings) for the issues around Deafness approached in this thesis. Considering `deafness` as a limited or complete inability to hear, the **biomedical perspective** supports the idea of malfunctioning and deviance from the norm (i.e. the expected functioning of the auditory system). On the other extreme, the **socio-cultural model** focuses on the alternative means of living of Deaf people, where Deafness is regarded as a valuable and unique experience rather than the disability conception suggested by the medical discourse (Biseke, 2013).

With the purpose of providing a reference to one of these approaches throughout the text, an etymological note is in order. `Deafhood`, as defined by Ladd (2003), contrasts the medical category of `deafness` by circumscribing the existential idea of a Deaf `being-in-the-world`. Without digging into the phenomenological discussions on identity, bearing this nuance in mind will be rather relevant in understanding the social dynamics explored in this paper. For that purpose, capitals `D` and `H` shall be respectively employed for `Deaf` and `Hearing` in relation to their sociological positioning, rather than the medical labelling, following the Woodwardian tradition (1972).

This seems however an unbalanced parallel, given that the majority of people are Hearing individuals that, unless when directly concerned or sensitive to the topic, would likely follow the purely medical track. Just as presumable, it seems improbable for a Deaf person to grasp the perspective of lack when this involves a sense that they never missed, for they have never known it. It is however important to highlight that such discourses are hereby contrasted as to offer a basis for the analysis and a potential understanding of perspectives taken by different speakers, rather than being pointed out as a correct or incorrect one. In other words, although there is no direct correlation between the Hearing and the medical perspective, nor between the Deaf and the socio-cultural approaches, understanding each of these tracks do seem to require an empathetic movement, as they seem to come from and lead to completely different roads.

Most importantly, just as the well-known discussion on standard language, deconstructing the idea of a normal body seems essential to the Deaf (Biseke, 2013). This matter is particularly evidenced by the attitudes towards cochlear implants (CI`s) revealed both from Deaf and Hearing`s discourses. As we are about to learn from the examples provided by the Deaf participants, they feel just as whole and capable as any human being, and so they despise the concept of lack or deficiency. Yet, the availability of a `correction` seems not only to deny, but also to impose a choice to such approach. According to Biseke (2013), a common sense that deafness tends to fade out through early screening and implantation in time, basically counts on CI`s for integration, as an attempt to bring Deaf individuals into `normalcy`[1] by eliminating their difference. Moreover, CI experts and adepts of such reasoning also favour speech teaching only (in detriment of SL) which seems to justify the use of terms such as `genocide` (Lane, 1994; Ladd, 2003).

Also from the notion of malfunction and deficiency, pervasive paternalistic attitudes such as the perception of Deaf people as individuals in need of charity or objects of pity arise (Biseke, 2013). This matter is particularly exposed both by Deaf and Hearing respondents during interviews. The perception of Deafness beside the medical discourse seems however fundamental in understanding how the concept is for them nothing but an ascribed identity. As we are about to learn, their claims (both Deaf and those speaking for them) seem much less interested in the acknowledgement of a specific status than the actual dismissal of that status. In other words, their `fight` seems much more related to acquiring the means and resources to keep up with societal demands to which `hearing` represents a difference (for instance, the right to specialized education and professional education, in the absence of inclusive schools).

The place in time

Before having a glimpse of the context, it would also be pertinent to introduce some historical aspects that could help understand how certain episodes influenced their current outcomes to the Deaf community, especially in Europe.

Most of this information interestingly arose either from the respondents themselves or the material provided at the DGS course in Luxembourg. From the most recurrent, a good starting point drives us back to the 18th century, with names such as Abbé de L'Épée and Samuel Heinicke providing some understanding on the evolution on the pedagogics

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[1] Or a `Hearing Normalcy` of sorts, defined by the majority (the Hearing) in relation to the Deaf.

involved in the education of the Deaf. Not only essential historical aspects of education of the Deaf in Europe are revealed by these names, but also how the French and German-speaking/signing backgrounds relate to the context of Luxembourg.

Charles Michel Abbé de L'Épée (1712-1789), also known as `Father of the Deaf` was a French priest that dedicated his work to the improvement of the education of the Deaf through the use of SL, building the first school for the Deaf in the 1760`s in his own house in France. From this beginning, new methods based on manual SL started gradually to be spread around the world.

One example of this was a Deaf school opened in 1778 by Samuel Heinicke in Leipzig, Germany. Contrary to the French model, however, Heinicke`s school favoured the learning of speech and lip reading rather than manual signs (Biseke, 2013).  As confirmed during one of the interviews: `e*n France la personne la plus importante était **Abbé de L'Épée** et c`est lui qui a basé sa méthode sur (…) les signes disons eh…en allemand, en Allemagne c`était **Samuel Heinicke** qui était oraliste*`, these became distinguished as the French manual and German oral methods.

The French method remained popular and adopted by many Deaf educators until a century later, when a rather extreme decision forbid manualism in favor of oralism in schools. The Milan Convention, in 1880 was a reunion of Deaf educators that, among other arguments, decided that simultaneous gesturing and speaking were detrimental to the learning process of deaf-mute students, as well as implied the inferiority of SL in comparison to spoken languages (Biseke, 2013). The most evident of the consequences following years of the decision (e.g. in the words of C., *`il fallait mettre les mains sur le dos`)*, was not the prohibition per se. It actually related to the `wrongness` or inadequacy attributed to Deafness and SL`s, which is particularly evidenced by Deaf poet Willard J. Madsen (1971):

`What is it like in a corner to stand, though there`s nothing you`ve done really wrong, other than make use of your hands (…)`.

It was not before the 1960`s that SL`s started to resurge, coincidentally with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America (Biseke, 2013), meaning that the rebirth of the development of Deaf education in SL and culture can be considered relatively recent. Linguistic research conducted by William Stokoe in 1960, for instance, started opening the doors to the understanding of SL as `authentic` languages, following the criteria on complexity, structures and grammar peculiarities applied to spoken languages. Deconstructing ideologies and the inferiority attributed to SL`s seem a long and ongoing process, though, taking the appealing title `*Eine Sprache wie jede andere auch*` (in English, `*a language just as any other*`) of an article on the recognition of SL in Luxembourg 57 years after Stokoe`s research.

It is also important to account for the bilingual dimension of the Deaf, as pointed by Grosjean (1993). In this sense, simply accounting for gestures (i.e. the gestural approach through LBG at the CL) might not lead to the same outcomes as accounting for DGS and German as two independent languages, as it will be further analyzed in the discussion. Besides, whereas the evolution of Deaf schools has certainly played a big role in improving the perspectives of the Deaf historically, the exclusive signing environment risks to fall to the other extreme. Although comprising with `special needs` requirements, the exclusive approach could also to some extent represent a movement towards more segregation than inclusion, in the sense that it reinforces the distancing between signing an speaking communities rather than their association. Some of the alternatives proposed to this approach will therefore be further explored in the second chapter.

In addition, beyond manualism and oralism lies the concept of audism. In clarifying the concept, Lane (1994) establishes the interesting metaphor of audism as a form of colonialism: the Hearing way of dealing, describing, authorizing views about, teaching the Deaf (and about them) as dominating and restraining. She goes as far as to include the economic aspects of it – in regards to the new technologies and CI, for instance. This dynamic – and, above all, the notion of normality, within the medical and popular discourse will be critical in understating the positioning of the Deaf community before concepts such as handicap and autonomy, for instance.

Supermodality

Although the neurolinguistic sphere is not central to the present research, accounting for cognitive aspects demonstrated by recent findings in research on the processing and acquisition of language by Deaf individuals do offer some support in debunking common ideologies around their intelligence and intellectual potential that, as shown through some historical facts, has been carried out up to the present.

Not an incapacity or an illness, studies have revealed that Deafness can bring about interesting aspects and questions of neurobiological plasticity provided by the utterances of their different modalities of communication (i.e. the variance on brain area activation and processing between gestural and auditory comprehension and production).

Some of those relate to the contrasts and similarities between signed and spoken versions. A parallel between spoken and signed languages can be immediately stated from the predominately gestural and vocal modalities of each. As stated by MacSweeney et al. (2008), the essential visual and spatial components of sign languages also counts on a wider and different range of structural possibilities than those available in the spoken modality.

Recent research has brought interesting insights on possible differences and the relevance of understanding them. Interesting accounts of how Deaf signers differentiate linguistic and non-linguistic gesture, for instance, have been reported in the last decade (MacSweeney et al 2008, Dye 2012, Newman et al 2015).

The essential differences don`t finish there. For instance, the same signs are not performed in the exact same way – neither by different signers nor by the same signers at different moments. Besides, a parallel could also be made in regards to the way speakers also vary their pitch while saying the very same thing repeatedly (Dye, 2012).

Another interesting insight on the cognitive particularities that can be expected from signers, non-signers and bilingual signers was presented by a study conducted by Revaz & Gygax (2008). Based on the Sapir-Whorf Theory, namely the link between language and thought, the study aimed to study the performance of three different groups: French speaking, French Sign Language signers and Hearing signers (formed by bilinguals in the two modalities, such as interpreters). Although no significant difference was presented in the answers and the development of the task itself in terms of errors and precision of the answers, the Deaf population performed faster in recognizing and memorizing images and sequences than the Hearing group. The results of the study suggest that the usage of sign languages (in this case, French) would allow for the development of a particular spatial memory and thus a facilitated access to spatial relations, which would explain the shorter response time of the Deaf group. Interesting to highlight, however, is that the bilingual group was the slower group out of the three. According to the authors, this would be explained by a possible lexical activation of two different systems in a bilingual`s brain, just as it has been investigated in regards to the different lexical representations in each language also for Hearing bilinguals. Acknowledging such possibilities not only reveals interesting differences in terms of the spatial memory functioning in Deaf and Hearing, but also raises interesting questions for further investigation, such as the comparison of such processes in different sign languages (ASL, Spanish Sign Language, German Sign Language) and the possible impact of sign languages not only in spatial memory but also in visual memory.

Paraphrasing the concept of `superdiversity` (Vertovec, 2007), we could propose an analogy through the idea of supermodality as a door to understanding how contexts of involving `superdiversity`, especially in regards to multilingualism, top up the complexity involved in the multimodal communication employed by the Deaf. Instead of another terminology with academic branding (Pavlenko, 2016) through the positive response trigger suggested by the prefix `super`, the idea would be that of emphasizing the versatility of elements involved in SL`s that make Deaf Communication particularly complex and rich and thus, by no means, inferior to other languages. In other words, in place of a comparative competition with spoken languages, the idea beyond the term lies in highlighting the attention to a collection of components - lip reading, signs, gestures, grammar structures and vocabulary and, through the special case of Luxembourg, multilingualism (as it requires `filtering` the perception towards German, e.g. detecting when someone is speaking something other than that) - demonstrating the complexity rather than the primitive means of expression still prevalent in the common sense.
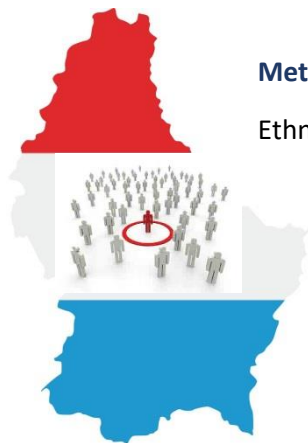
Method

Ethnographic Approach - Qualitative Content Analysis

→ 8 Semi-structured interviews (in EN, DE, FR and transcribed), field observations, 2 written questionnaires, document analysis

Snowballing recruiting (Streeton et al., 2004)

→ **Deaf and Hearing perspectives**
→ **Intermediate level** - institutions

Analysis

Intellectual Puzzles (Mason, 1996)

First moment: `mechanical`

Secondly: `comparative`

Why? How?

Same Boat

Deaf Island

The following set of parallels was presented as a result of this gradual analysis:

- Chapter 1) Deaf Island

  o Aiming to clarify the particularities of the Deaf community in the specific context of Luxembourg, the chapter discusses topics such as Deaf culture, stigma, relativism of the concept of handicap as well as ideologies around sign language and multilingualism. What is more, the analysis points out how such discourses exert a fundamental impact on perpetuating dynamics of social segregation and limiting educational and professional prospects to that population.

- Chapter 2) Same Boat

  o This chapter aims to reveal how issues in decoding messages goes beyond the capacity to hear. The Deaf perspective becomes then a noticeable illustration that often labelled as `problems´ brought by multilingualism and migration are actually highly aligned with linguistic issues equally applicable to other Hearing minorities of the country. Instead of problematizing, the parallel hereby aims otherwise to reinforce the call for measures of adjustment to effective integrative policies where the exception makes up for the rule.

Generalizability

While context-dependent, the highly relativist nature of the data plays a leading role to its generalizability and applicability to other contexts.

Needless to point out, Deaf communities, whether from the social or medical perspectives introduced, is always a minority issue. A little percentage can nonetheless represent a lot of people and, on the other hand, the low figures of the Deaf population in Luxembourg should not represent an excuse for the lack of measures at public level in every socio-economic aspect, hence the high generalizability of the topic. For the purposes of academic production, it should not be different: the pertinence of the investigation should be firstly primarily anchored on the relevance and interaction of discourses, rather than on the number of individuals revealing such fundamental arguments.

Besides, the scope of this approach shall be extended through at least two perspectives. Firstly, it is highly concerned to any multilingual environments in relation to its Deaf demographics, for it involves the analysis of measures of political, educational and social nature. Secondly, on the contrary lane, it applies to the study of Deaf communities in relation to their environment, be it multilingual or monolingual, for the essential contraposition between modalities and `culture` (rather than language) also seem to represent a source of miscommunication.

Further themes were identified through the process of coding similarities and contrasts within different discourses. Based on the criteria of pertinence in addressing the current research questions, they will be presented in the last section of the dissertation as the potential stages of further development of this research.

Chapter I – DEAF ISLAND

> `What it is like to be curious,
> To thirst for knowledge you can call your own,
> With an inner desire that`s set on fire
> And you ask a brother, sister or friend
> Who looks in answer and says: `Nevermind`?
> You have to be Deaf to understand. `

Madsen (1971)

Expressions of cultures – singularities of Deaf and Hearing communication

This first chapter will discuss how the differences between Hearing and Deaf modes of communication differ beyond the ability to hear. In other words, it aims to expose essential differences that seem quite obvious to each of these communities individually, but hardly understandable by one another, unless they had the opportunity to get a close view of the other groups (not only Hearing in relation to the Deaf, but also the Deaf in relation to the Hearing).

As expected, some of the most recurrent differences between Deaf and Hearing communication emerged from the data relates to the biological component – i.e. the ability or limitations to produce and perceive sounds, which forms the basis of spoken and signed languages in the first place. However, interesting insights were proposed not only around the visual component – as an important ground in both languages, but in terms of perceptual development. In other words, substantial differences can be presented between these groups in recognizing verbal and non-verbal elements, as clarified in the theoretical framework section.

Beyond these psycholinguistic aspects though, a sociolinguistic perspective is equally worth of highlight. A few discourses revealed an essential difference of the perception and formality applied by Deaf and Hearing people. Moreover, it also reveals the attribution and the sense of appropriateness we give to style, which, regardless of the language, seems to be a source of misunderstanding between and within each of these groups.

The classical illustration comes from the usage of `*duzen*` instead of `*siezen*`. In Sign Language, at least in the German `Gebärdensprache`, the difference between the formal `you` (in French, `*Vous*`) and the informal `*tu*` are just as irrelevant

as in English (making it necessary to explain it through these other languages). This was not only confirmed by the immediate informal responses to my `Sie``s on my first e-mails to Deaf respondents, but also promptly confirmed during our interview: `*Das ist ganz normal*`,`*Gehörloskultur!*`.

(In)visibility: source of stigma or invisible `superpower`?

As stated by some of the respondents, the fact that Deafness is not visible at first sight can be the cause of a few misunderstandings until some clues make it perceptible by the Hearing. Furthermore, as soon as recognizable, it is perceived as a handicap (in the sense of lack) for the Hearing´s eyes. For those that are on the other hand immediately visible (i.e. the users of cochlear implants), such visibility is however not as relevant, as the majority hears and the acknowledgement of any physiological difference (or else the label alongside the handicap) would be rather dispensable.

Beyond a communication impasse, however, the real problem becomes when this unawareness leads to the failing of Hearing people to recur to strategic alternatives to communicate with Deaf people in the case of an emergency, for instance. As a matter of fact, unless a visible auditory resource is in use, the inability to hear a sounding alert (such as a fire alarm) can become a potential life threat. This was also pointed out at the DGS class and it is widely diffused through sensitization and trainings involving Deaf communication.

The same applies to CI holders when they take their apparatus off – in a paradox, turning on their Deafness and off their visibility. One of these situations, as illustrated by N., is when a child goes to the pool (and takes it off for swimming). On this comparison though, it is interesting to point out is how on many similar situations the auditory sense is just as irrelevant to CI, Deaf and Hearing people, making them just as the same.

Daigle, M. & Daigle, K. (2016, March 17). *That deaf guy*. Retrieved from
http://www.thatdeafguy.com/?p=734

Cochlear implant – the limbo

CI´s seem to introduce a rather polemic discussion when it comes to the sociological perspective. On one hand, the benefits of the development of technologies designed to enhance and even restore the auditory capacity seem undeniable. On the other, the Deaf identity – that of a whole being with communication means different of the majority – seems to some extent threatened by such replacing apparatus, as exemplified by a protagonist of one of Biseke`s cases: `*Without CI I am a default. With CI I am something someone tried to repair*`.

The conflict between a first reaction to Deafness as a `blessing` or a `curse`, as introduced by Biseke (2013), seems to depend on whether a child is found to be Deaf in a Hearing family or a Deaf family. The polemic apparently starts from the assigned connotation of `deprivation` given to the denial of CI to their children by Deaf parents. In other words, the input of lack comes only from the Hearing and their perception of a sounding world. However, apart from the challenges they face themselves amongst the Hearing, Deaf parents don`t see Deafness as a punition or deprivation. Considering that

`hearing` is a complete alien aptitude for them, such decision does not have such negative weight - just as Hearing parents want the best for their child, they too want to raise them in a safe world: the one that they know.

Signers versus Deaf

Although Sign Language is a strong marker in Deaf Culture, a direct correlation cannot be strictly established between those. In other words, not all Deaf use sign languages, and not all signers are necessarily Deaf. Besides, as one interviewee reveals, the multitude of languages in Luxembourg makes it even more complex (some communicate in FSL, oral French, both, none or other languages on the top of German and DGS). What is more, aligned with the ideologies of SL as alternative, inferior or anything but fully fledged Languages (Wessel, 2003), is the fact that Deaf children do not learn the SL *per se* at school, which will be a fundamental basis of our discussion.

Whereas a note on the natural exposure as a valid mean of acquisition is hereby in order (there is to say, also Hearing do not necessarily depend on schooling to acquire a language), the fact that Hearing people do normally learn and reinforce different competences of their mother languages at school is also a point to be made. In the case of the Deaf in Luxembourg, defining `mother tongue` is what adds complexity to the topic. The impasse here goes beyond the absence of the instruction on SL, but on the many other factors involved on the first language of a Deaf child. Firstly, the acquisition of SL at home would depend on the pre-existence of signing parents or relatives (which is already statistically improbable, as seen by the literature). Secondly and alternatively, counting on the correspondence of the spoken and signed versions would mean to have German as a home language – which is also statistically less probable in Luxembourg.

The place (or non-place) of sign languages

One of the most fundamental elements of Deaf Culture and Communication could not be neglected in this chapter. This section is concerned with the understanding of some of the cognitive and sociological dynamics implied in sign languages, as well as its relation and opposition to Spoken Languages in general, but with a special focus on the particularities of the Luxembourgish context.

An interesting finding to highlight at this point is a common idea around SL revealed by people that are not particularly involved with the topic. Whereas dismissing the wonders around the existence of a Luxembourgish Sign Language can come with a drop of disappointment as a linguist learns about the prevailing use of the German SL in the country, non-specialists have a rather surprised reaction when learning about the Deafness subject for the first time. `So there exists more than one SL? Why do **they** make it so **complicated**?`!

While there is indeed an International Sign Language, the so-called `Gestuno` (Wessel, 2003), its usability would perhaps be closer to Esperanto (as an artificial attempt for a universal common vernacular) than English as a `natural` lingua franca (let aside the economical and socio-political triggers of the phenomena). Important to point out here though, is how this immediate response reveals the otherness component that simply wearing earplugs for one day would not give a Hearing the complete sense of Deafness. And yet the answer is not in the difference, but in the similarity between Hearing and Deaf. The reason why there is not just one universal Sign Language is thus the same as why there is not one sole spoken language: their sociocultural aspect.

Another point to be made involves the ideologies about sign languages that suggest that they could hinder the acquisition of Spoken Languages (which actually aligns to beliefs around bilingualism and multilingualism in general).

This ideology seems also to hinder the promotion of Sign Language – not to mention its endangerment, approached in the discussion, as confirmed by one of the discourses:

> *`Wenn die Ärzte den Eltern die Deutsche Gebärdenprache untersagen, da sie in der Meinung sind, sie würden die Lautsprache beeintrachtigen, dann würde die Gebärdenprache verschwinden.`*

Before any discourse of endangerment, the real problem arises when the educational discourse aligns with the medical, though.

Chapter II – SAME BOAT

This chapter aims to reveal how some problematizing discourses around Deafness are actually just as applicable to Hearing – as part of minority groups in Luxembourg. Moreover, it aims to illustrate how veiled ideological discourses on language acquisition and multilingualism do lead to specific impacts on those populations.

By exposing justifying discourses on the use of LBG rather than DGS, the linguistic choices in the education of the Deaf shall serve as an introduction to the comparison with other linguistic communities, so as to demonstrate the idea of changing the focus to the target (i.e. the need of the students) as the real ground of linguistic choices and not the other way around (the primacy of the system and official languages over interests of the public).

Linguistic Handicap

One of the first paradoxes around multilingualism illustrated by the data comes from being monolingual in an essentially multilingual world[2]. As clarified by the `vertical` multilingualism (Mason, 1993), the wide range of linguistic options in hand allows for the most comfortable choices between speakers in some contexts in Luxembourg. However, once one of the speakers lacks command of the predominant language of a particular setting (e.g. French at hospitals), it instantly becomes an issue, no matter how many languages are available in their repertoire.

As far as the Deaf community is concerned, the provision or reinforcement of such linguistic `basis` at home seems strongly compromised, as it requires parents to learn not only the signed version of their languages, but both a new language and its signs, in the case of non-speakers of German. This issue is rather recurrent among immigrant families they deal with. Timing (of acquisition of the local language) proves to be just as relevant to Hearing migrant families, in this case. As also acknowledged by M., it takes time: `*eine Migrant die in Luxembourg kommt…ist schwer. Du lernst es (Luxembourgisch), aber braucht Zeit (…) Langsam, langsam*`.

And this time can be crucial in determining such gaps, as clearly exemplified by a case of a girl described during the observations. As explained by her teacher, not only does she seem to be limited by the options offered for her education (being 100% Deaf), she also seems to suffer a significant distancing from her social nucleus. Born within a French-speaking family, she can barely communicate with her own parents, as they didn`t reach a good level of German yet, demonstrating the pitfalls of being somehow `monolingual` within such a multilingual environment.

Voilà das Menü

As the previous section presents, the variety of languages in Luxembourg seem very often perceived more as a threat than as an asset. The issue, however, seems less related to the plurality in itself and more to the assignment and predominance of certain languages to different sectors such as supermarkets, hospitals or at school, as recurrently expressed by different interviewees.

While these perceptions could be also interpreted in subjective terms, it is nevertheless interesting to point out how this `allocation` of languages per sector can explain the present complexity and need of `repair`. Firstly, given the strong presence of French in the Luxembourgish scenario, one could easily question why FSL is not `chosen` (rather than German) as the language of the Deaf in Luxembourg. As previously seen, this choice is justified with the argument of the law, based on the order in which children are alphabetized in regular schools. Furthermore, we see that just as it is wondered why there is not one universal SL, just as it occurs with spoken languages, the employment and development of SL`s cannot be imposed.

Such analysis also reveals thus the complexity of the Luxembourgish case through the circumstantial usage of languages. Firstly, the languages brought by migrants seem to be confined to a peripheral place, despite the multicultural character of the population. Secondly and ironically, the official languages themselves seem not to escape such hierarchy. As seen

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[2] Monolingual here, both in reference to individuals or environments, should refer to having one predominant language of communication only for the sake of comparison with multilingual contexts, as such definition have been strongly contextualized and, in essence, even Deaf individuals hardly count on only one language or modality of communication.

from the vertical and horizontal perspectives proposed by Mansour (1993), while multilingualism seems fairly omnipresent throughout the territory, the proficiency, subtle preferences and access to each of the official languages of the country seems highly context-dependent.

Inclusion versus integration

The recurrent adaptation of the minority to the majority is interestingly not only accepted as a fact, but also incited by discourses referring to spoken languages in the first place. Accounting for such ideologies seems fundamental to any attempt to promote any change, as it demands a shift of paradigm. It means transferring the root of the problems from the individual (i.e. the Deaf, because they are `disabled`) to the sociopolitical environment that disables them (Biseke, 2013). In this sense, other minority communities also serve as a good parameter to evidence the Deaf problematic: if not `deficient`, what would be their problem in acquisition, if not the bigger societal sphere in accommodating them?

Hereby arises the conceptual difference between inclusion and integration proposed by the Salamanca Statement (1994). According to this Unesco framework on special needs education, integration would imply the insertion of minorities (and/or people that for some reason don`t `fit` the norm of the majority). This definition would refer to an isolated bubble (either at individual or group levels, i.e. a physically disabled person or a whole community) immersed into the whole. Inclusion, however, should refer to the real participation of these individuals into the global picture, without a distinguishable delimitation between groups.
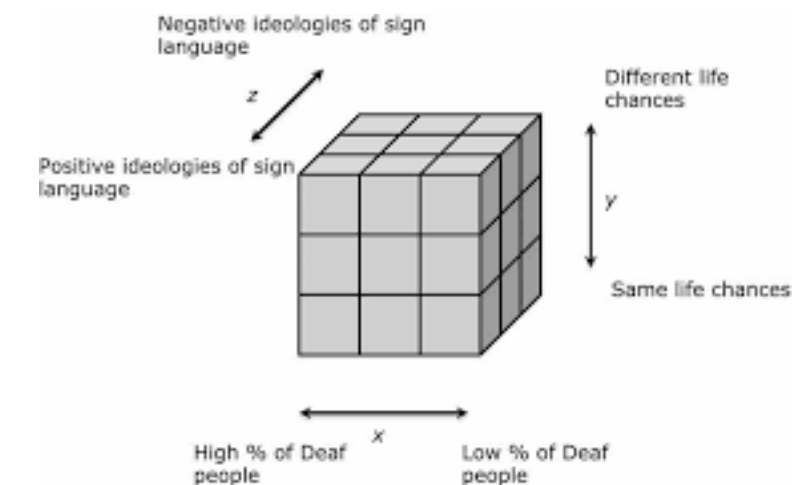
Extracted from Rayman, 2009

Conclusion

Problem on the individual or problem on the norm?

Through the example of the Deaf community, this study aimed therefore the real challenge that also applies to hearing communities: cultural clashes as barriers to connection and exchange, beyond language. The previous chapters aimed to expose not only how the issues on multilingualism apply to the Deaf community in Luxembourg, but, moreover, how they relate to relatively similar challenges faced by other linguistic minorities of the country.

What is more, the comparison aimed not only to bring such contradictions to the surface, but to point out how current ideologies disseminated about these issues have contributed more to their perpetuation than to their improvement, with very little and slow change.

The research was anchored on concepts around the stigmatization of deafness, medical and social discourses (Ladd, 2003, Cooper, A. C., & Nguyễn, T. T. T., 2015, Biseke, 2013), bilingualism and biculturalism of deaf people (Grosjean, 1993), as well as cognitive considerations on acquisition and processing of sign languages (MacSweeney et al, 2008; Dye, 2012, Revaz, R. & Gygax, P., 2007).

Concerned historical data (e.g. evolution of deaf education in Europe and worldwide) also served as a basis to the understanding of the related state of matters in the context of Luxembourg. Furthermore, insights of the linguistic anthropology approach on ideologies (such as how opposed discourses reflect interests and identity of different groups, their contradictions and subjection to contestation and, above all, their normative power in political decisions – De Bres, 2013) offered a highly pertinent frame of work for this study, considering the recurrent emergence of discourses on hierarchy of languages, acquisition, standardization, legal recognition, input in education from the data.

Upon contradictions and paradoxes evoked by the discourses, it became clear that if language, (whether spoken or signed) is not the real issue, multilingualism should also not be a problem in itself. Through the provision of measures towards communication empowerment (such as the promotion of bilingual education) current barriers to linguistic autonomy should be overcome not only by hearing impaired individuals, but also other linguistic minorities of the country.

Moreover, back to the basic principles of communication, its essential requirement would be first and foremost the existence of a sender and a receiver. In that sense, two people (hearing or not) should be considered enough for alternatives to be found, regardless of legal or informal measures to allow for that exchange.
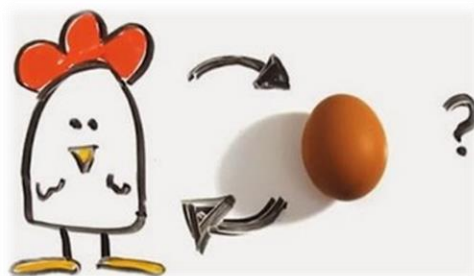
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