

## THE TRANSLATIONAL BODY: THEATRE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION IN BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE (LIBRAS)

Celina Nair Xavier Neta<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Rachel Sutton-Spence<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

**Abstract:** This article introduces and develops the concept of the “translational body” as a construct in the process of translation and interpretation of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), describing its relationship with the system of theatre. We show that Libras/Portuguese interpreters (TILSP) working in theatre settings are creative, political and artistic agents, with professional, didactic and activist profiles, all of which contribute to the polysystem created in Libras theatre translation. We argue that the translational body is a multiple, organic, procedural, dynamic and dialogic construct and that its presence in the theatrical polysystem organises, challenges and brings together the linguistic and cultural repertoires of theatre in new ways. Interviews conducted with TILSPs working in theatre, theatre producers and deaf audience members were analysed, drawing on Even-Zohar’s Theory of Polysystems (2018) together with Embodiment Theory and existing Brazilian research by Silva Neto (2017), Fomin (2018), Resende (2019), Rigo (2019) and Albres & Santos (2020). We show that the process of Libras translation and interpretation in theatre is a process of construction of a body which is presented with the actors on stage and which incorporates translation in its relationship with the different systems that form part of the theatrical polysystem.

**Keywords:** Theatre; translation; Libras; Theatre for the deaf; Polysystems Theory



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## O CORPO TRADUTÓRIO: TRADUÇÃO E INTERPRETAÇÃO DE LÍNGUA BRASILEIRA DE SINAIS (LIBRAS) NO TEATRO

**Resumo:** Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar o conceito de corpo tradutório como um constructo no processo de tradução e interpretação de Língua Brasileira de Sinais - Libras, compreender sua natureza e sua relação no sistema teatral. Mostraremos que os tradutores intérpretes de língua de sinais/português teatrais (chamados de TILSP) atuam como agentes criativos, políticos e artísticos, identificados pelos perfis profissional, didático e ativista, necessários para a mobilização do polissistema estabelecido na tradução de Libras no teatro. Defendemos que a natureza do corpo tradutório é múltipla, orgânica, processual dinâmica e dialógica e que sua presença no polissistema teatral mobiliza, tensiona e aproxima os repertórios linguísticos e culturais no teatro. As análises aqui apresentadas dialogam e reforçam os estudos já realizados na área no contexto nacional Silva Neto (2017), Fomin (2018), Resende (2019), Rigo (2019) e Albres & Santos (2020) e tomam como base teórica mais especificamente a Teoria de Polissistemas de Even-Zohar (2018) em articulação com a Teoria de Embodiment, possibilitou a compreensão de que o processo de tradução e interpretação de Libras no teatro se trata da constituição de um corpo, que incorpora a tradução na relação com os diferentes sistemas participantes do polissistema teatral e posteriormente a apresenta simultaneamente com os atores atuando no palco.

**Palavras-chave:** Tradução; Libras; Teatro; Surdos; Teoria de Polissistemas

### Introduction

The Statute of Persons with Disabilities (the Brazilian Inclusion Law<sup>1</sup> - Federal Law 13,146/2015), known as the LBI, establishes the public power to guarantee and promote the right to social inclusion for people with disabilities. Paragraph 42 of the LBI guarantees access for people with disabilities to museums, theatres, sport and other cultural activities, while Article 71 states that events financed by

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<sup>1</sup> In Portuguese, Lei Brasileira de Inclusão.

public resources must ensure accessibility. The proposals in the LBI, together with existing Brazilian legislation concerning incentives to promote culture – such as the Rouanet Law n°. 313 of 1991 – have opened a space for Translators/Interpreters of Brazilian Sign Language – Portuguese (TILSP) in the cultural context generally and, specifically for the focus of this study, in theatre.

These legal developments explain why cultural producers and theatre companies have recently begun to seek out TILSP professionals to strengthen their bids for public funding for theatrical productions. Prior to this, TILSPs (whose professional standing was only recognised in 2010 by the Federal Law n.12.319/2010) worked mostly in religious, educational, legal and community settings. Their presence in theatres, translating and interpreting shows staged in Portuguese into Libras, brings together different epistemological fields in a new way. The work involves linguistic processes of translating texts of varying degrees of complexity and specificity from one language to another, but, additionally, the TILSP generally *performs* that translation to the audience. This is unlike other theatre translators working between spoken languages who usually expect actors to perform their translations and it requires TILSPs to be particularly closely involved with the theatrical setting. The challenges of translating and interpreting Libras in the theatre have led to questions among TILSPs about how to act or perform and how to define the limits of knowledge of translating and theatrical performance, given that few TILSPs have had any theatrical training.

We interviewed TILSPs with experience in translation and interpretation in theatre, theatre producers who have worked with TILSPs and deaf people who attend interpreted performances. The analyses identified recurrent themes in the narratives about translating and interpreting shows, producing shows with TILSPs and the deaf community, and watching shows translated and interpreted into Libras.

In this article, firstly, we present an overview of existing studies on theatre translation and interpretation into Libras that have informed and developed the analyses presented here. Next, we

present the concept of the “translational body” that is constructed during the process of the textual and aesthetic translation-interpretation of a show, and which is the basis for the creative, political and artistic action of the TILSP in theatre. We argue that the translational body is constructed in a multiple, organic, dynamic, procedural, and dialogic way. Finally, we reflect on the tensions and changes within the polysystems that are created by the shifts and alterations in the linguistic and cultural repertoires that constitute the translational body.

### **Previous research**

The two processes of translation and interpretation contribute to the construction of the translational body in any theatrical piece. The theatre TILSP, when constructing the translational body for a given show, performs a task of textual and dramatic *translation* when reading the script and carrying out semantic, referential and theatre research to devise strategies to use when staging the show. Additionally, the TILSP performs an *interpretation* when mediating between the speech of the actors and the audience if there is any interaction or unscripted improvisation, or when dealing with the unexpected events that may occur in live theatre.

Thus, the theatre TILSP performs both processes. The process of translating textual and theatrical elements constructs the translational body, which is made real and presented in front of the audience simultaneously with the actors during the staging of the show. We emphasise that both processes – translation and interpretation – work together to create a robust and reliable translational body. The view that the work of TILSPs in theatre involves both translation and interpretation is supported by Rigo (2019) who sees the performance of TILSPs in artistic settings as “hybrid”, because they are expected to present their translation of the text by performing an interpretation of it. On a practical note, we should observe that carrying out simultaneous interpretation in

theatrical settings without the preparation and study consistent with the translation process, is not recommended.

In the USA, the document “Interpreting for the performing arts” (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013) sets out a standard for professional performance as part of its aims to raise awareness, educate and encourage good practices that are committed to standards of excellence in professional conduct. According to the RID document, “performance interpretation” covers many genres, including children’s theatre. The interpretation may take place in different spaces, ranging from the stage of a theatre to alternative spaces such as streets and squares. The document also highlights the importance of qualifying interpreters for the activity, the relevance of teamwork and the necessity of having feedback from the deaf community. It offers guidance materials to help preparation, refers to legislation that can support the professional’s arguments and, finally, emphasises the collaborative nature of theatre as an important principle for sign languages interpreters to follow, so they can provide the deaf community with a cultural product full of linguistic and aesthetic meaning (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013).

Gebron (2000) offers in-depth information and guidance, based on her professional experience in theatre interpreting. She highlights the creative aspects of the sign language theatre interpreter’s performance and emphasises issues related to corporeality as a particular aspect of this type of work. Horwitz (2014) presents a reflection on the complexity of the work of the American Sign Language translator and interpreter in the theatre. As well as the linguistic demands made by the script, Horwitz (2014) identifies paralinguistic demands which may require adjustment to the interpretation, because artistic expression in theatre takes many forms, and the translator-interpreter needs to prioritise the aesthetic and theatrical experience for deaf audiences. Mielke (2014) describes the historical trajectory of theatre translators and interpreters in the USA, and highlights best practices, drawn from documents and publications created by professionals in the field. She addresses accessibility issues because as a deaf theatregoer she has experienced lack of access to shows due

to the shortage of qualified interpretation professionals. King (2019) highlights, in the Scottish context, the creative aspects of translation and interpretation work in theatre and argues for situating TILSP's work within the field of dramaturgy, going beyond a process of interpreting the text objectively. This perspective offers the audience greater linguistic comfort and, therefore, greater satisfaction when watching a performance in the theatre.

In Brazil, Silva Neto's research (2017) focuses on the analysis of the curriculum of Letras Libras courses. As an experienced TILSP working in theatre, he investigates the aesthetic language training that Brazilian Sign Language translators and interpreters receive in their undergraduate courses. He presents a summary of what he considers to be the essential elements for a basic understanding of the theatre world and its aesthetics to give TILSPs an informed basis from which to create their translations. His analysis leads him to the concept of *translacting*<sup>2</sup> to define and distinguish the activity of the TILSP who works in theatre, from other (non-dramatic) performances of translations carried out in other spaces. Silva Neto bases the idea of *translacting* or *translation-performance* on the interrelationship between the practices of interpretation and the theatrical performance of the actors, which, in his view, cannot be separated.

Fomin (2018) describes and analyses the verbal, extraverbal and visual-verbal elements that mark the discourse of the TILSPs who performed in the shows she analysed. Her analysis highlights different possibilities for positioning the TILSP on stage, pointing out advantages and disadvantages of each position. The research also problematises ideological positions that arise from the interpretive choices made by the translator-interpreter. In her final remarks, Fomin (2018) points to a visual-verbal whole seen in the performed interpretations and emphasises how much the TILSP influences, and is influenced by, the theatrical setting, seeing the TILSP as a constitutive element of the show.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation note: Silva Neto's term "*tradu-atuação*" is a portmanteau term from "*tradução*" (translation) and "*atuação*" (which includes ideas of both acting and performance).

Resende (2019) addresses the concept of deaf theatre from the perspective of deaf culture. He argues that deaf theatre prioritises the subjectivities of deaf actors and the way they highlight deaf culture, giving emphasis and visibility to sign language on stage. He presents four categories of deaf theatre: 1) “Theatre of the deaf”: created and developed by deaf people or by the deaf community; 2) “Theatre with the deaf”: theatre by deaf and hearing people and with a mixed cast. The play may be authored by a deaf person and hearing people play the characters as interpreters; 3) “Theatre for the deaf”: the technical team is made up of hearing people, but the cast is deaf. Hearing people produce the play and write and organise its text which is delivered to deaf artists who adapt it to sign language on stage, focusing on the deaf audience; 4) “Bilingual theatre”: this is a new proposal, being theatre made up of deaf and hearing people, with a mixed deaf-and-hearing cast, who share the text and represent the two languages with equal value (Resende, 2019, p. 31). Resende (2019) also notes that translations made by a deaf interpreter are characterised by information that is guided by deaf politics and by the ideological and critical involvement that comes from their history of belonging to a community. He uses the term *deaf-translator*<sup>3</sup> to highlight the practice of translation and interpretation of Libras in theatre performed by deaf people, explaining that the term highlights the potential of a professional well-versed in both theatre and translation theories.

The three-volume collection entitled “Artistic and literary texts and contexts: translation and interpretation in Libras”<sup>4</sup>, organised by Rigo (2019), brings together articles, essays and other accounts concerning the experiences of artists, researchers and TILSPs working in artistic contexts. Rigo’s work (2019) contributes to the training of TILSPs who work in the artistic field by recording, promoting and documenting their practices and research.

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<sup>3</sup> Translation note: Resende uses the term “tradutor-surdo”, a portmanteau term from “tradutor” and “ator” – translator and actor.

<sup>4</sup> “Textos e contextos artísticos e literários: tradução e interpretação em Libras”.

Albres & Santos (2020) report on a TILSP's experience of the process of translation and interpretation in theatre, contextualizing it theoretically in the contributions of the authors already mentioned here. Their research reinforces the view that the work of the TILSP in theatre is a complex and specific hybrid activity.

### **Polysystems Theory**

Itamar Even-Zohar developed Polysystems Theory in the 1960s and 1970s to rethink methods for the study and translation of literature produced in Hebrew in Israel. The theoretical framework that he developed is useful for understanding cultural mechanisms in relation to literature. Polysystems theory understands culture as a large dynamic system composed of many other systems, or instances. Even-Zohar's term "polysystem" emphasises the idea of movement and dynamism, as opposed to a static notion of translation of literary works. The plurality proposed by the term implies the presence and representation of different cultural structures (linguistic, economic, political, military, culinary, etc.). Chang (2010) elaborates further on the notion of systems, stating that they are interrelated and that their relationships are determined by the positions they occupy in the whole to which they belong. Thus, a system is understood as an open and heterogeneous structure capable of interacting with other systems, overlapping, crossing and tensioning, simultaneously as a structured whole.

According to Chang (2010), the phenomena in a system can rarely be fully explained in isolation. Instead, the system must be seen in the context of every culture, even ultimately analysed in relation to world culture, the largest polysystem of human society. Thus, according to Baker & Saldanha (2009), when literature is placed in a broader sociocultural context, it comes to be seen not only as a collection of texts, but as a set of factors that produce, promote and share these texts, that is, in a literary polysystem. Translation and interpretation are embedded in cultural systems

and act directly in and on other systems, modifying, contributing, creating and stimulating artifacts, models and behaviours. Using this concept of culture systems, we can view the deaf community as a group of individuals who culturally produce their heritage through visual interaction and linguistic production. This view of the deaf community and its culture contributes to the idea of the cultural creation of the translational body in theatre, and its role and representativeness in the cultural system of the deaf community.

Polysystems Theory, with its movements of convergence, tensioning and divergence, allows us to think about the performance of TILSPs in theatre in these terms. The plurality of theatrical work, the different instances represented in the presence and actions of the theatre TILSP, as well as the make-up of a work that has been guided by the need for convergence and sometimes marked by tensions between those involved in the production, all allow us to think about the body of the TILSP as one of the systems involved in the process of Libras translation in theatre.

### **Discovering the translational body**

The research described so far led us to try to understand the practice of the Libras theatre translator-interpreter without being prescriptive about how the TILSP should act in the theatre. The infinite possibilities for theatre are such that a range of translation options must be open to translators when planning their strategies. The initial aim of our research was to understand how TILSPs carried out their translation and interpretation into Libras in the theatre, and to this aim, we elicited narratives from five (5) TILSPs with experience of translating and interpreting shows for Libras. However, when analysing the narratives, we noticed recurring themes such as: the physical existence of TILSPs on stage, the need for TILSPs to have an affinity with theatre and the relevance of the role of the TILSP as an accessibility mediator. It became clear that the TILSPs were telling us that their work in theatre was

not limited to the task of linguistic mediation between Portuguese and Libras. More was expected from them, and their narratives revealed the characteristics that TILSPs should have (and/or develop) to perform their role. Participants expected TILSPs to have the skills for which they were hired, that is, to translate and interpret from Portuguese to Libras with fluency and respect for the cultural repertoires involved in this process, but they also wanted the TILSPs on stage to express corporeally the staged narratives – without, however, replacing the roles of the actors. The research participants also saw that the TILSP had a social and artistic role to be fulfilled. From our analysis of expectations and what was considered important in the performance of the TILSP in the theatre, an image of their activities emerged. The image in figure 1 was distilled from excerpts from the interviews.

**Figure 1:** Visual summary of the activities of a theatre TILSP



**Source:** Illustration created upon request of the first author as part of her doctoral project (personal archives). Diogo Madeira (2018).

The illustration represents the knowledge needed when presenting the translation. The knowledge is of Translation and Interpretation Studies, sign language, deaf culture (the relevance of visibility), the functions of the two languages involved and their processing, bodily expression, the theatre setting and dramaturgy, and the expression of the text during staging.

The concept of the translational body is found through analysis of the interviews that point to an accumulation of knowledge and experiences on the part of the TILSP. The information they gave was often metaphorically related to the body: “I need to see if the text works *in my hand*”, “I can’t be there at the front with a wooden *body!*”<sup>5</sup>, “make the text happen *in the eyes* of the deaf person”. Their quotes pointed to the presence of a body that acted on stage differently from in other performance spaces. The analysis of the interviews found narrative evidence of a “corpus” of knowledge, forming, and acting in and beyond the physical body of the TILSP on stage, related to their claim that there is no specific knowledge, skill or preparation for their performance, but rather an organic construction, that is procedural and dialogic, and which happens for each show or presentation.

### **Profiles of the translational body**

The recurring themes identified in the interviews of the participants led to our categories of different representations of TILSPs in the theatre. The expectations about their work, its characteristics and responsibilities made it possible to think about their different profiles. Here we present three profiles which work together to make up the translational body.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation note. The original statement from the participant referred to the interpreter not accepting being “Durango” – with a rigid, hard body.

## **Didactic profile**

The didactic profile refers to the expectation and perception that the TILSP should play a tutoring role in relation to the artists, producers, technical team and hearing audience. The TISLPs' commitment to this responsibility is shown through recurring terms that refer to their didactic actions. This reinforces the image of a professional who can *teach, explain, show, argue, and dialogue* about their role with everyone involved in the production of the show.

## **Professional profile**

The professional profile was referred to by the interviewees. They mentioned aspects that refer to training, the professional trajectory of the TILSP, referential, technical and linguistic skills needed to carry out the translation and interpretation of the show staged in Portuguese for an audience made up of the deaf community. The most recurrent terms related to the performance of the professional activity were *competence, skill, ethics, and commitment*.

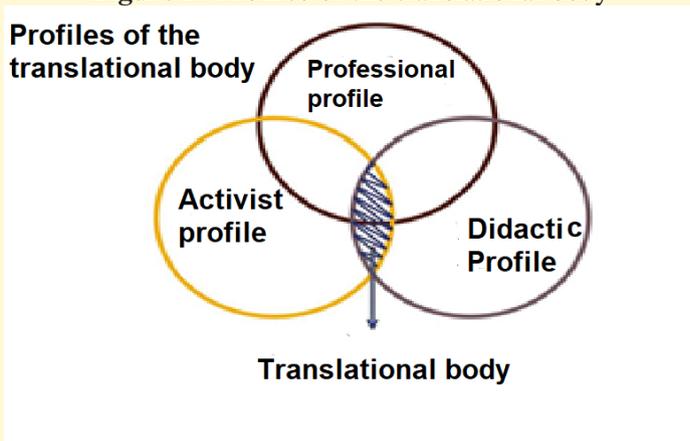
## **Activist profile**

Activism was highlighted by the recurring terms that imply this: *social commitment, defence of rights, representation, struggle, rights, and inclusion*. From the perspective of the interviewees, the TILSP's engagement in the deaf community's struggle for equality characterises their work, as the deaf community expects them to deliver an aesthetic linguistic translation-interpretation that highlights the visual nature of Libras. The interviewees mentioned that the presence of the TILSP on stage or during the staging raises the profile of the deaf community and its culture, helping to demystify Libras for hearing people. Representativeness was also mentioned by the production teams who look for TILSPs who are recognised and approved of by the deaf community, to help publicise the show and guarantee the presence of deaf people in

the audience. The provision of translation and interpretation as an accessibility resource and the presence of the deaf community at theatre events are usually recorded by photos and videos to demonstrate accountability for the use of public resources.

None of these three profiles excludes or overlaps with another. The order in which they are presented here does not imply any sequential order or hierarchy. The translational body is constituted at the intersection of the three, as in the image in Figure 2. The embodiment of a translation as the activation of all three profiles presented here, comes from the analysis of the participants' discourse. The construction of the translational body at the confluence of the three profiles presented here highlights one of the characteristics of its nature: multiplicity. The action of the translational body is at times predominantly didactic, clarifying, informing and arguing; sometimes it is professional, planning, studying and linguistically mediating; and at other times it is principally an activist, articulating, defending and fighting for the agenda of the deaf community. Thus, the translational body performs multiple activities, as we see in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Profiles of the translational body



Source: Created by the authors (2022).

The translational body is constituted in the conjunction of the three profiles and is presented, therefore, in our analysis, as multiple in its attributions, actions and representations according to the diagram.

### **The physicality of the translational body**

Having presented the subjective and symbolic characteristics of the translational body, we highlight here its material nature, or its physicality, that is, its constitution and presence during to the staging of the show. The translational body, as we have already shown, refers to the construct developed from an information repertoire constructed by the TILSP's involvement with the systems involved in the theatrical production. This inventory consists of:

1. technical, linguistic and referential information
2. translation and interpretation strategies
3. strategies resulting from textual study of the script
4. participation in rehearsals
5. aesthetic translation and
6. presentation

Bringing the physical, material nature of the translational body into its constitution allows us to incorporate the processes that the TILSPs listed as necessary to carry out the translation and interpretation of *Libras* in the theatre. The processes of textual study of the script were highlighted as fundamental to the early stages of the construction of the translational body. Actions highlighted as necessary for the in-depth, complete understanding of the text in Portuguese include reading, (alone or collectively, silently or aloud), text comprehension, and the search for semantics and reference information about its literary, historical and geographic context. Following from the understanding of the textual context in Portuguese, the participants referred to using

video to rehearse as they study, analyse and review their signed text. Clearly, this process of study, preparation and review occurs in Libras translation in any sphere of activity, not just theatre. We include this step in “textual translation”, considering that the video record of the signing is a textual record as much as a written record would be.

The process of textual understanding, however, is only the beginning of the translation process of the show. The TILSP also engages in the process of aesthetic translation, that is, researching references that underlie, drive and support the script and that characterise the show. Once again, these steps are not necessarily sequential, ordered or in any hierarchy. They can occur simultaneously, but we emphasise that they happen before the translation is presented during staging. Aesthetic translation includes the search for information about the theatrical aspects of the show: the style of the show, its genre, rhythm and prosody, the actor’s gestures, stage dynamics, marks, cues and space occupation; also, technical information such as lighting, sound (possibility of voice-over, sound return and soundtracks), costumes, makeup, scenery (predominant colours in the show, textures, scenery, props, and so on). All this information can be inventoried when participating in rehearsals.

From our own experience, we have learned that rehearsals are decisive moments for the TILSP to establish relationships with the production team and the rest of the theatre group. Interpreters should try to participate in at least two rehearsals, remembering that by custom, the final rehearsal is usually a “walk-through”, that is, a brief rehearsal only for last-minute adjustments and sound and light arrangements, so this may not be the best time for in-depth study of the show’s details. If the show is visiting the city as part of a tour, it is advisable for TILSPs to request video recordings of the show and establish contact with the producer and director in advance.

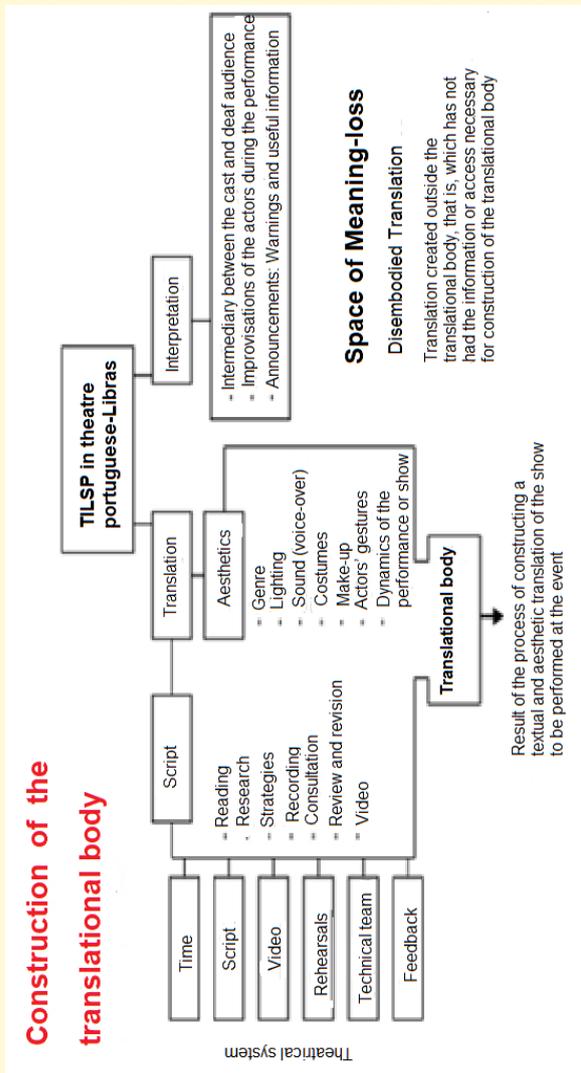
The physical make-up of the translational body, based on textual and aesthetic translation, is further highlighted by the research

participants when they report on the care that they take of their bodies on the day that they interpret the show. They mentioned taking care of food, hair, nails, makeup, costumes, well-being, rest, concentration, and stretching.

The physicality of the translational body is particularly evident when it presents the interpretation. After carrying out the textual and aesthetic translation processes, the TILSP, who has created and constructed this translational body, must now present it simultaneously with the staging of the show, presenting the research work, translation choices, and incorporation of theatrical and dramaturgical information that affords the deaf audience a theatrical artistic experience. This embodied characteristic of the work of the theatre TILSP, as well as the aesthetic translation, is what differentiates it from the processes carried out in other areas of translation. In addition to textually translating a text of the dramatic genre into a language of spatial-visual modality, the TILSP embodies the aesthetic elements and presents them during the staging. It is also possible that during the performance the actors and the audience will interact, or that there will be some sort of unforeseen but necessary improvisation, as is inherent in theatre. In such instances, the TILSPs perform simultaneous interpretation, again emphasising the hybrid activity of translation and interpretation.

The diagram below, in Figure 3, summarises the elements and processes of constitution of the translational body, highlighting the hybrid nature of the TILSP's work in theatre.

**Figure 3:** Processes of constitution of the translational body



Source: Created by the authors (2022).

The physical, material nature of the translational body shows the complexity of the activities involved in theatre interpreting. Although the participants were invited to think of a checklist, or a list of actions that might guide their activities in a general way, they all expressed reservations about doing so. The interviewees argued – each in their own way – that “each show is a show”, that is, that the actions and decisions taken for one show would not necessarily be effective in subsequent ones. This observation led us to appreciate that the translational body is constantly being constructed, deconstructed and resignified. The spectrum of theatre is so broad and diverse that the nature of the translational body for any given show, despite being based on the same set of procedures, is not fixed or constant. During a tour, the show could be adjusted or adapted, and this will imply adjustments to the translational body to match the new requirements. Conversely, there may be adjustments to the translational body for a particular show following insights or feedback from colleagues or deaf audience members. This will help the TILSP to review, deconstruct and recreate the translational body in a linguistic, cognitive and physical work of maturation and incorporation.

The material form of the translational body has three other characteristics that we identified: *it is procedural, organic and dynamic*. The translational body is *procedural* because it is based on an inventory of textual and aesthetic information, drawn from documentary research and from interaction with the theatre system. There is no hierarchy or sequence in carrying out the processes, but they need to occur so that the translational body can be a strong presence during the show.

The translational body also proved to be *organic*, considering that the different characters and narratives staged and translated on stage are *in the physical body* of the TILSP. The signed text exists and is performed there so the whole concept of accessibility is made real, materially, in the presence of this body. If a problem affects the physical body of the TILSP, the translational body will also be affected.

The possibility of construction, deconstruction, resignification and reconstruction of the translational body shows its *dynamic* nature. Initially, we thought it would be possible to create a single translational body, as a skill to be developed or as an objective to be achieved. However, the more we considered what our participants said in the interviews, the more we understood that the construction of the translational body is not a linear or fixed process, but a dynamic one of convergence, tensioning and distancing between the TILSP and other people involved in the show's production and performance.

Once again, we emphasise that, although the aspects related to the procedural, organic and dynamic nature do not follow any order, sequence or hierarchy, they are all essential characteristics of the translational body and lack of attention any one of these three will weaken it. Thus, it would be inadvisable to interpret theatrical performances without observing the processes presented here.

The physicality of the translational body leads us to another important question that needs addressing. The body occupies real space in the theatre during its performance, and an important and recurring question is where to position the TILSP for the presentation of the translational body. We will now turn to this topic, drawing on the responses and narrated experiences of the research participants.

### **The space in the theatre for/of the Libras translational body**

The physical positioning of the TILSP while the translational body performs in the show is of great concern to the TILSP. This concern is shared by the production team, which needs to reserve seats for deaf audience members in a comfortable field of vision, avoiding the “ping pong effect” of constantly shifting gaze between the TILSP and the actors. It also concerns dramaturgical directors, who usually want to minimise any interference in the action on stage and who often view the presence of an extra person

on stage (the TILSP) as a threat to the theatrical dialogue with the audience. The technical team needs to arrange sound and light for the presentation of the translational body without prejudicing the ideal lighting and sound project for the rest of the show. Deaf audience members want to be able follow the presentation of the translational body *and* the staging of the show without having to resort to uncomfortable vision strategies needed to accompany both. It is clear from this range of perspectives that the decision regarding the space where the translational body will be presented needs to be taken collectively.

The implications of that decision are important issues for theatre accessibility for the deaf community. Although the decision is a shared responsibility, the presence of TILSP in the theatre can trigger the tensions it brings. It is important for all parties to understand that they are all part of the debate, bringing together and distancing the different systems, testing their limits, and resignifying and reconstructing them during the process of assembling the show.

Previous studies have already shown the advantages and disadvantages of the different possible positions of the theatre TILSP, but our study uses the narratives of the interviewees to understand how their positioning in the theatre favours (or not) the presentation of the translational body. Analysis of the interviews, especially of the representatives of the deaf community, revealed that although the TILSP might present a clear, strong translational body regarding textual and aesthetic translation, the space in which it is presented can work against it. Recurrent observations on this topic highlighted that the deaf community expects the translation and interpretation of Libras to be integrated into the show and the TILSP should not be positioned in a corner of the stage in a way that decontextualises it from the show.

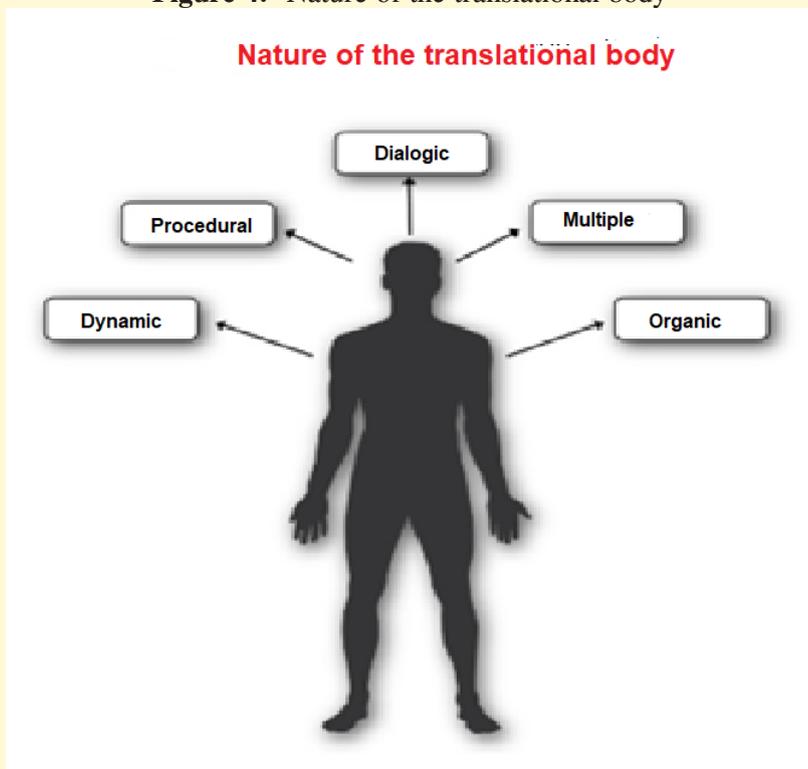
The space where the translational body is presented can lead to the translation being embodied or disembodied. Embodied translation is characterised by the integration of the entire translational body into the show. This integrated embodiment of the TILSP could perhaps be achieved through the actors themselves using signs, or

through the TILSPs' costumes and/or makeup. In many interpreting settings, it is generally expected that light-skinned TILSPs will wear black clothing for maximum contrast to make the signing easier to see. In theatre, they do not necessarily need to wear black, especially for children's shows. Thus, embodied translation makes the deaf community feel invited to watch the show and to feel that the show was designed to receive and welcome them.

Disembodied translation, on the other hand, is the opposite of the embodied translation, and is created by a translational body weakened by the tension and/or distance between the systems involved, and/or disconnected from the show. Disembodied translation creates a space of non-meaning within the theatre. This space of non-meaning was so named because even if deaf audiences are placed in what the theatre might regard as "good seats", it remains a space where the show's meaning cannot be constructed. It is a space which prevents the deaf audience from sharing the senses and cultural meanings proposed by the play, due to the fragility of the translational body and/or its disembodiment and disconnection from the show.

The need for dialogue between the systems (all the elements involved in putting on the show) to establish the best place to present an embodied translation, characterises the translational body as dialogic. All parties need to establish contact, dialogue, and negotiate throughout the entire process to strengthen the translation process of the show into Libras.

**Figure 4:** Nature of the translational body



Source: Created by the authors (2022).

Having presented the profiles, the physicality and the use and occupation of space by the translational body, we now address some final considerations.

### **Final considerations**

Thinking about the translation and interpretation of Libras in theatre makes us reflect on the processes involved in it. These processes are often unnoticed and may become unhelpfully

normalised and fossilised if they are unquestioningly adopted and repeated. Theatre presents us with infinite possibilities, colours and rhythms, and the beauty of the translational body in its entirety is hidden or revealed in the potential for applying it to another show with all its specificities. This makes it present, physically and materially real, and embodied in sign language. The processes of textual and aesthetic translation are identified by study, research and rigorous translation; but they also require curiosity and creativity to seek out the aesthetic possibilities in sign language that will delight the eyes with what originally aimed to delight the ears.

The translational body, although it is a construct – a repertoire made up of information and translation and interpretation strategies – becomes real and visible in each new presentation, accommodating different genres, characters and narratives. *An open and available* body is needed to shelter this diversity and plurality. *Flexibility* is needed to rebuild the translational body with each new presentation, as is *detachment* to be able to let it go when the curtain comes down. *Otherness* is needed for the TILSP to understand that all bodies, rhythms and processes are different and, therefore, that my body will not always be the best to house the translational body necessary for any given show.

Although in Brazil the TILSP in theatre is a legal provision to be complied with, our study highlights that the truly embodied translation of a show is not achieved by decree, but lies in the quality of the work, in resistance and in dialogue. The role of the translational body in the Libras translation polysystem in theatre is to affect, tension and mobilise, but also to be affected, tensioned, and mobilised. We hope that the reflections presented here can stimulate new perspectives on the subject and contribute to the training of TILSPs and the cultural experiences of the deaf community in theatre.

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Recebido em: 01/09/2022

Aprovado em: 19/01/2023

Publicado em março de 2023

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Celina Nair Xavier Neta. Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. E-mail: [celinaxavierlibras@gmail.com](mailto:celinaxavierlibras@gmail.com). <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3724-3463>.

Rachel Sutton-Spence. Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brasil. E-mail: [rachel.suttonspence@ufsc.br](mailto:rachel.suttonspence@ufsc.br). <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6575-9446>.