

**LATIP 2021****International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm****DEAF STORIES IN THE DISCOURSE OF RESEARCHING  
CLOSED COMMUNITY CULTURE**

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**Abstract**

The article examines the state and prospects for the development of the Deaf culture in a situation of inclusion and new technologies. It is recognized that the Deaf culture retains its functions, and the presence of “Deaf stories” from the daily life of the Deaf, as integral sociolinguistic and socio-cultural constructs, demonstrates the presence of mechanisms of meaning formation. There are a lot of “Deaf stories”, so typologies according to different criteria can be created. Thus, it becomes possible to see the social behavior of the Deaf in different spheres of life. The article presents the results of a qualitative study – a sociolinguistic analysis of “Deaf stories” carried out on the basis of an original methodology at the Institute of Social Technologies and Rehabilitation (ISTR) of Novosibirsk State Technical University (Russia). ISTR enrolls more than 150 students who are deaf or hard of hearing. More than 80 “Deaf stories” were collected. 26 stories were selected for analysis. The article explains why stereotypes about the Deaf persist and describes the social patterns of interaction between the Deaf and the hearing. The existence of stereotypes with protective properties has been confirmed. Also, stereotypes connected with deviant behavior were discovered. Such behavioral patterns are anchored through “Deaf stories” in the behavior of the young Deaf who positively perceive and reproduce “Deaf stories”. The Deaf have a special attitude towards “Deaf stories”, which is confirmed by the emerging storytelling practices.

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*Keywords:* Deaf stories, Deaf culture, patterns of behavior, social inclusion, sociolinguistic analysis

## 1. Introduction

In the context of the development of an inclusive policy for people with disabilities, related to the humanization of societies, the interest in the Deaf culture was actualized. The Deaf generally stand out among other nosological groups, having a community built on the basis of their own specific language. It is the sign language that defines the features of the Deaf culture, being a tool for constructing a group system of values and value-oriented patterns of behavior, as well as a system of traditions, rituals, and symbols. The sign language, which is emotional in its essence, makes both the communicative practices and the intersubjective social space of the group quite emotional.

States and societies do their best to successfully include the Deaf in the general intersubjective space / culture. Cochlear implantation, intelligent digital translation technologies, defectological and pedagogical methods etc. are used for this purpose. The question arises: does this threaten the Deaf culture? Will sign language perform only the function of transmitting information? Is it going to lose the other functions, in particular, the functions of social integration and socialization? What will happen to the community and the identity of the Deaf in this regard? On the one hand, there have been periods of complete exclusion of the Deaf in the history of mankind, and a turn towards social inclusion can be seen as a blessing. But on the other hand, the erosion of the culture of the community will lead to personal problems (Padden & Humphries, 2006).

The “Deaf world”, which was historically formed as extremely closed, corresponds to the unfolding processes of social differentiation in modern society. However, these processes occur in parallel with the trends of convergence (integration) of representatives of various linguistic and cultural communities. This makes the established and emerging communicative practices particularly significant. Another problem, which is clearly sociolinguistic in nature, is related to the limitations and opportunities of the sign language with regard to the communication links required by modern people. It also has to do with the issue of expanding social capital through communication with representatives of other communities. At the same time, the presence of a closed Deaf community allowed the sign language to develop and construct a unique world that was relevant to their needs (Fusellier-Souza, 2004).

Researchers are already talking about the importance of preserving the Deaf culture and the problems of the socio-cultural approach. In the second half of the twentieth century a special academic discipline, Deaf Studies, appears, which studies various aspects of the life of groups and individuals from the Deaf community, their culture, history and human rights (Gertz & Boudreault, 2016). At the end of the 1980s various studies appear (Bauman, 2008; Ladd, 2003; Padden & Humphries, 1990) that consider deafness not as a pathology, but as a difference, within which the characteristics of the Deaf community are formed. They include national sign language, identity, behavior, historical experience, group marriages etc. The mechanisms of interaction within the Deaf community are described. Attention is also paid to the relationship of this community with the majority community, including cochlear implantation. Thus, Jokinen (2005) describes the contradiction between the medical and sociocultural views on the Deaf community and the development of cochlear implantation, which can lead to the destruction of the Deaf community. Similar questions related to the functionality of national sign languages in the discourse of developing intercultural communication are raised by Gregory, Russell,

Schonstrom, Walt and others. In the book "Are there Deaf People" Mottez (2006) describes deafness in the form in which it is experienced. Deafness is understood in the sociological sense as a relationship, or, more precisely, as a break in relationships. This rupture in relations with the world of the hearing is fueled by denial, intolerance and the analogy of racism towards the Deaf to the point of jeopardizing their existence. Researcher Fishman (1982) proposes to consider the Deaf community as a quasi-ethnic group, and this approach is used in modern research. Among Russian researchers, we find the formulation of this problem in Komarova, Palenniy (Palenniy & Bazoev, 2002) and others. Thus, Astakhova and Bolshakov (2017), studying the patterns of cultural consumption of the Deaf and hard of hearing, note that the Deaf culture in a certain sense contributes to the isolation of this group, but at the same time it is functional (Bolshakov, 2016).

An indicator of the state and functional potential of the Deaf culture, from our point of view, is presented by stories from the life of the Deaf, in Russian referred to as "baika". These are short, often anecdotal or instructive stories (narratives – signed "stories") that the Deaf tell and pass on to each other, including from generation to generation. A "Deaf story", or a "baika", differs from an anecdote in that it does not use methods of compressing and simplifying information. It focuses not so much on the comic situation, but on the description of the actions of the Deaf in specific, typical or non-typical situations. The "Deaf story" claims to be authentic, it is told with expressive details. This directly corresponds to the peculiarities of the Russian sign language. The fact that the "Deaf story" is a story that is transmitted in the form of a more or less complete signed "story" using the artistic capabilities of the Russian sign language allows us to attribute it to the folklore genre.

"Deaf stories" cover all spheres of the Deaf (work, sports, studies, meeting friends, shopping etc.). Thus, "Deaf stories" allow one to collect many social patterns of the behavior of the Deaf in a variety of situations. "Deaf stories" can be typologized according to the participants: "Deaf – Deaf" and "Deaf – Hearing". The first group of stories describes patterns of behavior within the Deaf community and the attitude of the Deaf to their community. The second group describes the relationship between the Deaf world and the hearing world, as well as the relationship of the Deaf to the hearing and their world. In general, "Deaf stories" reflect the state of the Deaf culture in the designated discourse of their inclusion in the general intersubjective social space. Since "Deaf stories" always teach something, they go a long way in socializing Deaf children and Deaf youth.

## **2. Problem Statement**

A superficial analysis of the offline and Internet space has shown that there are enough signed "stories" as well as videos with stories from the daily life of the Deaf. The number of "Deaf stories" found allows one to evaluate their significance for the Deaf and the stereotyped nature of their behavior. The conclusion suggests the need to study these "Deaf stories" and the relevance of sociolinguistic analysis. At the same time, the anthropocentric approach to the analysis of folklore stories becomes promising. This approach makes it possible to identify the generation, perception and impact of the stories on listeners (Stekolnikova, 2014). However, folklore stories are usually associated with ethnic groups, while the Deaf as a social group are unique in this sense. This is probably why the "Deaf stories" are practically not considered either in linguistics or in sociology / cultural anthropology. They are not

systematized, but today there is still some understanding of how they can be used in working with the Deaf.

It can be assumed that “Deaf stories”, or narratives, have always been with the Deaf. They appeared there and then, where and when at least a few deaf people gathered together. It seems that the number of “Deaf stories” has increased significantly with the formation of the Deaf community and the emergence of their associations defending the right of the Deaf to Deaf culture. Note that a closed community cannot but reflect on the distinctive behaviour of its subjects; this is the basis of its social identity. The isolation of the Deaf community became possible due to two circumstances. First, the exclusion of the Deaf has been taking place for centuries. Second, there is a sign language, different from the sound language. Thus, in all societies of the world, the Deaf community was isolated into an organized group with its own national sign language. The “Deaf stories”, passed down from generation to generation, constituted its specific folklore. Closed communities have a limited communicative space and trusting social ties are oriented inwards rather than outwards. That is why the number of folklore stories tends to grow, which reinforces stereotypes and the persistence of stigma.

New technologies made it possible not only to increase the number of “Deaf stories”, but also to multiply them, transmit them to a significant number of the Deaf, expanding the geography. The first video with “Deaf stories” in Russia was recorded and shown by Leonid Kamyshev. Later a whole project “One Deaf ...” by Viktor Palennyi appeared. With the development of social networks and videos “Deaf stories” began to appear on the Internet. In 2012 the All-Russian Association of the Deaf held a contest of sign storytellers. Interesting storytellers were discovered, acting in the genre of modern stand-up with “Deaf stories”. It was noted that all “Deaf stories” were told very emotionally and if the narrator himself lived through the story, then he would tell it especially vividly.

Thus, modern society – its socio-cultural environment and social space – is an absolutely new discourse for the development of the Deaf culture, accepting new challenges of the unfolding process of social inclusion. In this regard, it is in the double discourse of general culture and subculture that it is necessary to analyze storytelling of the Deaf and the “Deaf stories” which until now have been beyond the proper attention of scientists.

### **3. Research Questions**

The statement of this problem suggests paying attention to the following issues. First, a methodology for the study of “Deaf stories” should be developed and criteria for analysis should be selected. Second, behavioral patterns of the Deaf should be identified. Third, analysis of the state of the Russian sign language and its value for the Deaf in the modern society should be conducted. Fourth, sociolinguistic analysis should be applied to determine the degree of inclusion of the Deaf.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The stated goal assumes considering the current state of the Deaf culture with the help of sociolinguistic analysis of “Deaf stories”. The response of the Deaf culture to new challenges associated

with social inclusion should also be considered. The Russian Deaf culture is chosen as an example. Russian sign language is the basis of this culture, while the “Deaf stories” represent one of its elements.

## 5. Research Methods

“Deaf stories” previously did not actually fall into the field of scientific research. So, the development of a methodology was required. The stories themselves form the empirical object. The study can well be attributed to sociological ones, since “Deaf stories” were of interest as some material explaining social patterns. Interactions with listeners as well as social actions under conditions of inclusion were studied. So, it is quite natural that sociolinguistic analysis of the text was chosen as the research method.

The “Deaf stories” in this study were selected in the summer and fall of 2020, targeting offline in the Deaf Community and online in social groups of the Deaf. The materials from the social network *Instagram* and video hosting *YouTube* were mainly used. Among 80 “Deaf stories”, 26 were selected as the most popular among the Deaf. They were emotionally told and had an interesting plot, from our point of view. The “Deaf stories” were told by the Deaf of different sex and age – young, middle-aged and elderly. It was necessary for drawing conclusions about the entire culture of the Deaf community. The stories were analyzed according to the following criteria:

- Signed story video duration
- Type of story: “Deaf with Deaf” / “Deaf with hearing”
- Historical / modern story
- Comic / tragic story
- Discourse: the sphere of life, the situation
- Roles, how many and which ones
- To what extent the story demonstrates the identity of the Deaf, the Deaf culture
- The Deaf is at an advantage/ disadvantage
- Features of the social behavior of the Deaf, whether there is a typical behavior

## 6. Findings

The themes of the “Deaf stories” were not repeated due to the selection process for qualitative analysis. Most of the “Deaf stories” collected were short, up to 2 minutes in length. Such stories are often repeated, they are more convenient to disseminate in the Deaf community, including via the Internet. They contain stereotypes and group opinions about many situations. There were 12 stories of average length (3–5 minutes) and only two long ones (over 6 minutes). Most of the “Deaf stories” (16) clearly demonstrate stereotypical thinking, both in the Deaf and the hearing in relation to the Deaf. In this regard, it is fundamentally important for the Deaf community that “Deaf stories” reflect the relationship between the Deaf and the hearing. This is a matter of adaptation: 5 of the collected “Deaf stories” describe situations with the participation of the Deaf only. Just 2 situations were recorded in which only the hearing were involved (a Deaf person's view of the culture of the hearing). Thus, the communicative space of the Deaf community is indeed quite filled with folklore stories that are intensely transmitted.

These stories affect the assessments of the Deaf in relation to the world of the hearing, as well as the socialization of young deaf people. It became apparent that the “Deaf stories” supported the stereotypes that had been formed in the process of stigmatizing the Deaf world and increasing the isolation of the Deaf community.

The collected “Deaf stories” had different lifespans. The predominating stories were designated by us as “historical” (17). They describe the events of the Great Patriotic War in Russia in 1941–1945, as well as the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the coup in Russia in the 1990s. The presence of such “Deaf stories” indicates the existence of a historical memory in the Deaf community. It also indicates that the culture is functional. No “Deaf stories” related to earlier events have been recorded. Attention to the military theme of 1941–1945 shows, on the one hand, the connection between the Deaf culture and the general national culture and history. On the other hand, it shows the desire to emphasize the heroism or special position of the Deaf in wartime. The 1990s put the Deaf in a difficult situation. The whole group was largely deprived and stigmatized in the crisis of the Russian society. The Deaf were unemployed, some of them worked in a difficult situation among hearing people without the support of the Deaf community and without social services.

Modern “Deaf stories” are more positive and are of an everyday rather than eventful nature. In nine (9) modern “Deaf stories” we find comical interactions between hearing people and the Deaf. Such “Deaf stories” are given the following names “Minibus”, “Speech Therapist”, “Deaf and Hearing”, etc. The genres in the analyzed “Deaf stories” are mainly comedic (12), there are short stories (10) and several tragedies.

The “Deaf stories” describe different situations that occur at work, in the family, on vacation, in public transport, in a shop, at the hairdresser’s, in court, with the traffic police, etc. In most situations the typical interaction of the Deaf and the hearing in public places is described. Apparently, these are the most repetitive social practices associated with the constant random collision of hearing people with the Deaf. They are also associated with situations of confusion, non-adaptation of one and the other. The interaction between the Deaf and the hearing is based on common gestures that are misunderstood or difficult to interpret. As a result, the situation of avoiding each other is often described. On the part of the Deaf there is hope to come to an agreement and desire to get concessions due to disability. Goffman offers an explanation for this behaviour: “The stigmatized individual is inclined to use his stigma to obtain “secondary benefits” – as an excuse for his failure, which occurred for reasons not related to stigma” (Goffman, 1963, p. 182). As a result of this motivation, the Deaf demonstrate cunning, dexterity, and naivety in most situations. All cases of deviant, or even delinquent behavior are described as acceptable prank. There are also more dramatic “Deaf stories”, based on the fear of hearing loss (for the hearing people) or the fear of losing interaction with the world of the hearing (for the Deaf). In the overwhelming majority of “Deaf stories”, the Deaf make weak attempts to communicate with the hearing people so that the features of their behaviour are understood, but the impossibility of contact leads to avoidance tactics. As a result, there are “Deaf stories” in which a Deaf person seeks protection of his interests from the sign language interpreter and, as a rule, the latter takes the side of the Deaf person.

A number of “Deaf stories” reflect the realities of the special education for the Deaf. For example, where the Deaf are encouraged to use oral speech, and they try to speak in order to be understood by the

hearing people. It looks comical for the hearing people, and the Deaf are also able to approach themselves critically. The reaction of the hearing person's fright to the voice of a Deaf person is often described. There are also cases in the "Deaf stories" where the Deaf person does not suspect a real danger from the hearing person or, conversely, suspects a danger that does not exist in reality. Thus, the "Deaf stories" convey the fear of both. But since those who hear are the majority, their fear is situational. As for the Deaf, fear is a component of their behaviour patterns. It is quite rare to find "Deaf stories" with a rational attitude, in which a simple comparison of the pros and cons of different cultures, hearing and Deaf, is broadcast. There are also stories with a comparison of the sign language of Deaf Americans and Deaf Russians.

The different emotional presentation of "Deaf stories" is of interest: as a rule, it is exaggerated expression and aggression, pride and bewilderment, supported by sign language and facial expressions. When transmitting "Deaf stories" in sign language, the ability of the narrator to convey not only the main meaning, but also the subtext of the story becomes important. As a result, storytelling has a special artistry that enriches the Deaf culture. "Deaf stories" can be viewed as a mechanism for the formation of meaning in the Deaf culture. Being filled with meanings, the culture expands its capabilities and its boundaries. An "own" culture is a space for self-realization of the Deaf (Osmuk, 2018). Thus, "Deaf stories" exist not only to fill leisure time. They have a greater functional significance for the Deaf.

## 7. Conclusion

Sociolinguistic analysis of the "Deaf stories" confirmed that at the moment the Deaf culture persists despite all the socio-cultural trends that negatively affect it. This culture includes traditional practices and mechanisms of identity for the Deaf, (Varinova, 2020). "Deaf stories" confirm that the stigmatization of the Deaf exists. The worlds of the Deaf and the hearing are opposed to each other and in some cases may not intersect. The rather harsh opposition suggests continued social exclusion. Meanwhile, the discourse is expanding and new stories emerge. In these new stories the Deaf and the hearing not only collide, but also interact. So, the Deaf culture is "opening up", it does not stagnate and demonstrates the formation of new social practices. Based on the results obtained, one can conclude that the changes are very slow and the Deaf culture acts as a "defensive line" for rapid changes.

In conclusion, a few words can be said about the practical significance of "Deaf stories". They can be useful in the work with Deaf children and Deaf youth. These stories contribute to the social adaptation of the Deaf in the national culture while preserving the group (social) identity. "Deaf stories" are also extremely useful for intercultural communication. They allow representatives of different cultures to understand each other better. "Deaf stories" should be used as case studies in the training of specialists working with the Deaf of different ages. There is no doubt that the study of "Deaf stories" should be continued. A database of such stories will be extremely useful for this purpose.

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