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Deaf Education in Tunisia

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how deaf children are integrated in the Tunisian educational system.

During the research I have visited five special schools for deaf children called ATAS (Association Tunisienne d’Aide aux Sourds) and I have collected the data by interviewing schools directors and deaf individuals. In spite of the fact that Tunisia is facing many efforts to improve education for deaf children, results suggest that they are not receiving an adequate education. This is probably due to the Medical Model dominance in the Country, which builds an environment where deaf children are considered “different”, as individuals that must have recovered from their disability. In these specials schools, they mainly practice vocational activities and less importance is given to the development of their cultural and linguistic skills.

Moreover, the illiteracy rate for deaf children is alarming high and they are likely to be excluded from education. This limitation could be due to the imposition of the Oralist method: deaf children are not given sign language courses at schools and their chance to build a Deaf identity is at risk.
Introduction

The present work is a study of the Tunisian Deaf Culture and it specifically addresses the question of how deaf children are integrated in the Tunisian educational system. The work is a continuation of a previous research conducted between September and December 2010.

The first time I went to Tunisia I had no knowledge of sign language, but I was moved by a personal passion for the Arab culture and sign language, whose study I started after my return in Italy. The data I could gather with the help of the AVST (acronym for “La Voix du Sourds de Tunis”) dealt largely with cultural aspects of the Deaf community in Tunisia. With due permission, I took some photos and I made a research on the relationship between language and culture. In July 2013, I returned to Tunis to deepen my knowledge on the Deaf community in the Country, dwelling upon the educational system for deaf children and methods used in special schools. Starting from the researchers conducted on 2010, I have collected new data from interviews and video recordings, I have analysed the laws in force relating to education of deaf children, the programmes of social inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities in the Country. But before I specifically focus on education for the deaf in Tunisia, it is worthwhile to say a few words about deafness in other Arab Countries, in order to understand why disability is so much more common in these parts of the world than in the Western Countries.
The first part of the dissertation will focus on this and other aspects, such as the analysis of the concept of disability between culture and religion, aspects that significantly affect certain attitudes of everyday life.

In the second part, I will proceed with an analysis of the socio-economical situation of the Country, tracing the major events that have caused Tunisia to become a Country characterized by different linguistic varieties, varieties that can also be found in its sign language. Given the high percentage of deaf people in Tunisia, there are many associations created in order to enable deaf integration into society. The ATAS association (acronym for Association Tunisienne d' Aide aux Sourds) deals with Tunisian deaf education, it works with government agencies, NGOs and research centres. Among the research centres, one that worth to mention is ICHARA (acronym for International Research Institute of the Tunisian Sign Language) created at the end of 2012 and my host institution during the fieldwork in Tunisia.

At the end of the dissertation, I will analyse the results obtained by visiting institutions for the deaf, interviews and video recordings, highlighting the main issues related to the education system in use.

Referring to the population analysed during the dissertation, I will use the uppercase “D” to indicate the Deaf people with a strong identity and that constitute the core of the Deaf community. Conversely, I will use the lowercase “d” to indicate the audiologically deaf people with no awareness of deafness and sign language (Padden; Humphries, 1988).
Methodology

The analysis made in this paper is based on ethnographic research. Ethnography is designed to examine in detail experiences, situations, processes carried out in the everyday life, in order to understand and study the natives' point of view. Through the fieldwork, the ethnographer can study not only the different cultures, but also the different systems of education, health or the various forms of development (Agar, 1996). Regarding the specific case of education systems, I will rely upon the Ethnography of education, a branch of anthropology born in the United States around the late fifties, whose main purpose is to study the educational processes (Wilcox, 1982). In the Ethnography of education we can identify three different analysis orientations: the holistic ethnography, the ethnoscience and the ethnography of communication (Ogbu, 1981).

With regard to the present research, a more traditional approach of ethnography has been used. This approach is also called "old" or "macro-ethnography" and it is based upon a holistic orientation, defining culture as something consisting of three aspects: knowledge, behaviours and artefacts (Ogibu, 1981). This approach is useful to understand the general lifestyle of a group or a particular aspect, such as the school system in its relation to society. My research analyses these three aspects together. In this analysis, cognition
will be considered as a pattern, which includes ideas, beliefs, and values. As will be explained later, some aspects of cognition, such as religious beliefs and behaviours required in relation to the concept of disability in the Arab culture, influence largely the role of deaf people in society. These aspects also influence the school environment and the relationship between cultural context in learning and education.

I have done my research starting from this theoretical framework, always taking into account the specific behaviours and attitudes that a researcher must follow. During an ethnographic research it is important to maintain a good relationship with the studied population, and to make sure that the data collection is carried out in the most natural and unobtrusive way, in order to obtain reliable and valid data (Gobbo, 1996). This is not always easy, especially because interviewees often feel "under examination". For this reason, I have tried to conduct the interviews in the most possible informal way, as if we were having a simple conversation among acquaintances.

The Ethnography of education not only lets us understand and describe the processes of education, but it also provides the means to compare different education systems and plan substantial improvements on the basis of shared knowledge of good practices (Hymes, 1980; Pontecorvo, 1991). The comparative approach can be made keeping always in mind other educational references models, both in the developing and in the Western Countries, such as Italy, France and America, but also of other Countries belonging to the Arab culture, such as Jordan. Jordan is worth mentioning because it boasts the creation of the “Holy Land institute for the Deaf”, a specialized educational
institution with very useful methods for teaching deaf children that should be an example for a Country such as Tunisia, with an entrenched Oralist method.

Data collection and participants

Participant observation and informal conversations are the methods mainly used by Ethnography, but during my research I also used other methods, such as the visit of the special schools for the deaf, interviews with the directors and the staff of these institutions, meetings with deaf children and realization of video interviews to deaf people attending the ICHARA and the AVST centres, consultation of the documentation relating the protection of persons with disabilities in the Country and specialized education for children with disabilities. Everything has been made possible thanks to the availability of the ICHARA Institute and, in particular, of Mr. Lotfi Zekri, a member of the Scientific Reasearch Council of the centre and an expert in audiological implants.

Upon my arrival in Tunis, all the members of the Scientific Council of the ICHARA INSTITUTE warmly welcomed me. I have presented them my ideas, my goals and my fact-finding questions about the Institute. The starting point of the study was the high rate of illiteracy among the Tunisian deaf, data I already knew from my preceding stay in the Country in 2010.

Considering that some ethnographers of education focus their activities on the study of the practices and academic achievements of students (Gobbo,
1996), I thought the explanation for the high percentage of illiteracy among the Tunisian deaf children (about 98%) should be sought in the type of education adopted in schools (AVST, 2005). The interviews were conducted in a "discursive, unstructured" fashion. In this type of interview, in contrast to the structured type, the questions are not the same for all participants, and the order in which they are asked can be different for each interviewed. I started the interview by first making clear the aims of my research, then I asked the interviewee to talk about him/herself. The contents of the interviews have been both thematic and biographical. I proposed questions concerning the lives of deaf people, the education received in the institutions and their integration into the hearing society. The interviewees were all Tunisian deaf individuals and personal service in special education institutions.

Thanks to the interviews, combined with a careful study of the documents available in the schools and in the ICHARA Research Centre, it was possible to witness the personal experience and point of view of Tunisian deaf children, to compare the percentages and data already available from past years, and to build a more realistic picture of the situation of the Tunisian Deaf community. These slices of lives, representations and experiences of all the participants have been for me precious contents for the realization of this ethnographic research.

At the end of the data collection, video interviews and the visit of the special schools for the deaf children, I conducted an analysis of the documents produced, taking advantage of everything that I have collected during the fieldwork, including notes and personal reflections.
Data collection

The dissertation is based on data that were collected in July 2013, and were compared with data already obtained between September and December 2010. Before proceeding with the data collection through the interviews, I have introduced myself to the interviewed and I have communicated them my research objectives, asking the permission to record the conversation. The context in which the interviews had taken place has always been the most favourable: the people interviewed were in a familiar atmosphere and free of any pressure, in order to ensure a better result of the exchange of information. In addition to the interviews, many data were obtained through the consultation of documents relating to the effective policies on education and on the protection of persons with disabilities in Tunisia.

Interviewees

1. Individuals belonging to the Deaf community of Tunis;
2. Individuals belonging to the Deaf community of Bizerte;

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1 The Education for All National Plan, 2005. Loi d'orientation relative à la promotion et à la protection des personnes handicapées, 2005.
3. Directors of the institutes for the deaf;

4. Staff of the institutes for the deaf (speech therapists, educators);

5. Sign Language interpreters in Tunis;

6. Members of the International Scientific Research of Tunisian Sign Language in Tunis, ICHARA.

**Questions addressed to the staff of the centres and institutes for the deaf**

1. When were the school established and how many students are enrolled?

2. What are the teaching methods that you use?

3. Do the children learn to read and write?

4. What are the possibilities of finding employment at the end of the study?

**Questions addressed to the Deaf members of the Tunisian Deaf community**

1. Were you born deaf?

2. Do you use sign language within your family?

3. Which schools did you attend?

4. How did you get to school? Could you follow the lectures without any problem?

5. Did you get a job after your studies?
Institutes and centres visited

1. ICHARA (International research centre in Tunisian Sign Language)

2. AVDS (Association la Voix du Sourds);

3. ATAS Ariana

4. ATAS Bizerte

5. ATAS Hammam Sousse

6. ATAS Jammel

7. ATAS Ms'Ken.

In addition to the interviews with video and audio recordings, many photos have been taken. The purpose of all the gathered data was to document the reality of the environments dedicated to deaf children' education and to show the space in which children engaged in manual and creative activities.
Chapter 1

1 Introduction

This chapter addresses three important aspects: the history of Sign languages in the Arab World, the practice of consanguineous marriages, and how disability is conceived by the religion. Throughout the dissertation, I will consider LST (Langue de signs Tunisienne) as a proper language, like all sign languages of the world, and will observe that in many respects it is the L1 of the Tunisian Deaf community. Given the primary importance of sign language in a Deaf community, it is worthwhile starting with a brief historical overview of sign languages in the Arab Countries.

The second aspect concerns the cultural practice of consanguineous marriages. In the Arab Countries deafness is indeed much more widespread than in the Western Countries and there are centres and associations that provide assistance to the deaf. The high rates of deafness in these regions it is likely due to the cultural practice of consanguineous marriages, deeply rooted in these populations, which involves marriages between blood relatives,
especially between first cousins. Despite the fact that in recent years some Arab Countries are facing economical and social development and that prevention to decrease children’s birth with recessive disorders has increased, consanguineous marriages are still contracted.

Finally, the last part of the dissertation addresses a particular theme: the relationship between disability and religion. Religion for centuries had influenced people’s attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. This attitudes get to kept Deaf apart from society made them feeling as a burden and to discouraged their interaction onto it. This happened not only in the Arab society with Islam, but also in other societies where religion is seen as a powerful shaper of attitudes and culture. Nowadays, although many conceptions and beliefs have been overcome, still there are attitudes strongly connected to religious beliefs and I could experience that by interviewing the directors of the deaf institutes.

In summary, much attention is given to disability issue and the Arab Countries are trying to keep in step with the new policies concerning the protection of individuals with disabilities according to international agreements.

1.2 Historical Sources about Deafness and Sign Languages in the Arabic Countries

The first document that shows an interest in deaf people in the Arab world is from Egypt and is dated around 1500 years B.C. This ancient document is the “Papyrus Ebers” woven around Imothe and considered one
of the oldest medical documents of the world. In the Papyrus we can find special solutions given by Egyptians priests specialized in ear treatments: the treatments might include injections into the ear of olive oil, red lead, bat's wings, ant eggs or goat's urine (Bryan, 1930). With regards to the existence of sign languages in the Arab Countries, not many researches have been conducted on this field. The only published resources refers to a sign language used in the Court of the Ottoman Empire between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, and it goes back to Miles.

In his work, Miles states:

Deaf people, known as ‘mutes’, worked in the Turkish Ottoman court from the fifteenth to the twentieth century in various roles along with dwarfs and other entertainers. Their signing system became popular, was used regularly by hearing people including successive Sultans, and was reportedly capable of expressing ideas of whatever complexity (Miles, 2000).

Researches on sign languages in the Arab world are not so many and very recent. According to Al Fityani (2005), Arabic sign languages are now in a developmental stage and only recently efforts to study and document them have been done, especially efforts to standardize the language and spread it among members of the Deaf community. Only recently there has been the awareness of the existence of individuals with disabilities and the Deaf are include in it. In the Arab World, Deaf communities are closed ones and interactions between them and hearing individuals is mainly concentrated in families with deaf members or relatives of the deaf (Abdel Fattah, 2005). However, researches on the variation and the origin of Arabic sign languages
are not so widespread; this absence could be due to the wrong idea that in the Arab world just one unified sign language should exist. According to Abdel Fattah (2005) this should be due to the diglossic nature of the Arabic language and since it is diglossic, it was expected that there would be one sign language in Arabic instead of many. With diglossia, “we refer to the coexistence of two varieties of the same language throughout a speech community. Generally, one form is the literary or prestige dialect, and the other is a common dialect spoken by most of the population. Such a situation exists in many speech communities throughout the world, and in the Arab world too, where classical Arabic (as used in the Qurān) exists alongside the colloquial Arabic of Egypt, Morocco, and other countries”.²

The idea of a Unified Sign Language is not appreciated by scholars or by the Deaf community: local sign languages are highly recognized and appreciated and can be considered as a fundamental expression for the community (Al Fityani, 2005). The implementation of the Unified Arabic Sign Language would bring several problems to local Deaf communities in the Arab Countries.

The underlying assumption in the project to unify sign languages of the Arab world that sign languages of the region are similar enough to be standardized may in fact be wrong. It may be risky to devise a “standardized” sign language in the Arab world, given the difficulty of standardizing languages that are historically unrelated (Al Fityani, 2005).

² Source: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/163385/diglossia
This initiative has been criticized by the WFD (World Federation Of the Deaf), in an open letter to CAMSA (Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs) in which he states:

The World Federation of the Deaf has been asked to express its disagreement with the ongoing and extensive activities promoting the unification of Sign Languages in the Arab region. It is the position of the WFD that these activities endanger local/national Sign Languages. These activities are in defiance of WFD’s January 2007 statement that “any forcible purification or unification of Sign Languages, conducted by governments, professionals working with Deaf people, and organizations for or of the Deaf, is a violation of the UN and UNESCO treaties, declarations and other policies, including the recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” The persistence of the unification process despite the WFD’s expression of concern has prompted the organization to issue a second statement in June 2009, calling for its immediate cessation in the Arab region (WFD, 2009).

Although WFD expressed its disagreement with the extensive activities promoting the unification Sign Languages in the Arab region, in February 2007 the inauguration of the second edition of the dictionary in Qatar was set. At the inauguration, many auspicious comments were made by notable speakers: they express the dictionary was meant to unify sign languages in the region and that it provides a rich, complete language for deaf people to express themselves easily and be able to participate in the daily moments life (WFD, 2009). But the dictionary is merely a list of about 1200 signs borrowed from other sign languages, made without experts’ advice and with any accurate researches in every single region. This creation and imposition is considered as a threat for
the linguistic identity of every region, a threat for the future of the nation-state signs languages. AS matter of fact, one of the most important language functions is the identitarian one: language is a cultural exhibition that initiates the speaker’s identification process and the way through which he/her identifies him/herself as member of a community (Matera, 2013). Moreover, the dictionary has not been accepted from a linguistic point of view. Hearing people, in their efforts to create a common Arab sign language, ignore that signs languages are not universal: each country has its own sign language which is affected by different aspects, such as history, culture, religion and geography and not all Arabic Countries have the same history.

In the schools, many experience to spread Standard Arabic sign language have been done and educators use it with the deaf students. In addition, some Arab interpreters are trying to get approval from all the Arab Countries to use the "Unified Arabic Sign Language Dictionary" in the education of deaf children and they are claiming that, since the Arab Countries have one official language, Arabic, the Arab Deaf should use only one sign language. The most part of Deaf, as claimed previously, tends to reject this imposition by putting first their local signs languages instead, spread widely in all Arab Countries. This is an attitude that has been encountered in Tunisia too, as will be explain later in the chapter about deaf education in the Country. The presence of several local sign languages could be due to the fact that in the Arab Countries there are political, social, economical and cultural circumstances leading sign

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3 Source: Oral
4 Source: “Global Survey Report-WFD Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (WFD RSAR)-Global Education Pre-Planning Project on the Human Rights of Deaf People -Compiled by Mr Colin Allen -Project Co-ordinator -World Federation of the Deaf and Swedish National Association of the Deaf -Published in November 2008”, in www.wfdeaf.org
languages to be isolated from others. Furthermore, since educational systems are relatively young, signs languages develop mainly in familiar contexts, clubs and private deaf associations. In addition, in some Arab Countries, political factors of immigration regulations make it difficult for nationals of one region to travel to another (Al Fityani; Padden, 2010). In such context, Deaf people tend to preserve their own sign language, to appreciate and preserve it, by creating circles and clubs where they can stay all together and share their own language and culture. Since Deaf individuals are often kept apart by societal attitudes that discourage their interaction, sub-culture creation is a natural consequence in Deaf communities. Along these lines, a setting of real sub-cultures is generated, in which the Deaf have their own language, their traditions, their humour and their customs: these associations are widely spread in the Arab world, given the high percentage of Deaf people respect to the Western Countries (Hamamy, 2012).

In the Arab regions it is likely to find entire villages where most part of the population is deaf and it is more likely due, as previously claimed, to political, social, economical and cultural circumstances that lead sign languages to be more isolated from others. In the Cap Bon village, located in Tunisia, all the inhabitants of the village are deaf (Ben Arab et al., 2004). In the Negev desert of Israel, Al Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language is used in a village of some 3,500 people. They are descendants of a single founder, who arrived 200 years ago from Egypt and married a local woman. Two of the couple's five sons were deaf, as are about 150 members of the community today (Wade, 2005). Most of sign languages spoken in these region are not historically related: the mobility of some communities is influenced by
economic and social factors, leading sign languages to be isolated and to do not have much contact with each other. In a lexicostatistical analysis conducted by Al-Fityani and Padden (2010) in the Arab regions, similarities and differences among sign languages have been explored. From the analysis have been demonstrated that geography in this region does not map into that of spoken languages; moreover, the certainty that sign languages of the Arab world are similar or are dialects of a common sign language, must move away from, since they do not share a common origins (Al Fityani; Padden, 2010).

Considering the current situation, geography of sign language in the Arab world is characterized by creolization and standardization phenomena. This situation can be compared to the Costa Rica situation where there are several distinct signs languages among the numerous populations (Woodward, 1991). In order to prevent others situations as the creation of Unified Arab Sign Language, more research to investigate the nature and relationship of sign languages in the Arab world are needed. The researches should take in account linguistics aspects as the grammar of sign languages, starting from the dictionary that has recently been realized.

1.3 Deafness spread in the Arab world: the practice of consanguineous marriages

The presence of deaf people in the Arab world is widespread and far greater than those living in the Western countries (Bittles, 2001). Although there are not accurate data and figures on deafness and hearing impairments in the Arab world, some surveys have been conducted to have an idea of the total number of individuals with hearing impairments in these areas.
According to the World Federation of the Deaf in 1998 in the Eastern Mediterranean region there were around 8 million people with hearing loss.\(^5\) Since different statistics about deafness are in available, it is possible to find many data on deaf individuals for each country: in Egypt, some sources talk about two million hearing impaired children and in Lebanon, there are around 10,000 deaf people.\(^6\) On the basis of the country economic situation, it is possible to note that there are some differences: in the poorest countries, deafness spread is higher than in the richest ones. Indeed, where the sanitary system in more developed, the incidence of deafness is lower. In Israel the incidence of deafness is estimated around 1.2% per 1000: considering that Israel and Lebanon are countries with a better sanitary system than other Arabic Countries as Yemen, Jordan or Tunisia, in their areas deafness incidence is lower (Hendriks, 2008). Explanations for the high incidence of deafness could be in part due to the existence of consanguineous marriages. Consanguineous marriages are highly spread in the Arab Countries, Middle East, North Africa and South Asia regions; they are socially and culturally favoured and constitute 20-50% of all marriages with first cousins union accounting for almost one-third of all marriages (Bittles, 2001). With this term we refer to marriages between individuals who share at least one common ancestor and from a genetic point of view, consanguineous marriage is defined as a union between cousins or closer, with the inbreeding coefficient (F) equal

\(^5\) Source: http://wfdeaf.org/

\(^6\) Source: “Global Survey Report-WFD Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (WFD RSAR)-Global Education Pre-Planning Project on the Human Rights of Deaf People -Compiled by Mr Colin Allen -Project Co-ordinator -World Federation of the Deaf and Swedish National Association of the Deaf -Published in November 2008”, in www.wfdeaf.org
or higher than 0.0156. It is estimated that more than 690 million people in the world are consanguineous (Bittles, 2001). There are many reasons why these kind of marriage are still practiced but the most important ones are historical and cultural.

Other important explanations must be sought in ethnical, socioeconomic and cultural factors; the tendency to practice consanguineous marriages is related to the fact that they can preserve the inner structure of the family, by providing social and economic benefits within it. Moreover, consanguineous marriages are culturally favoured because, according to sociological studies, they could enforce the couples’ stability due to higher compatibility between husband and wife who share the same social relationship after marriage (Hamamy, 2012), they could be more favourable for the women’s status and, with cousins marriages, they may provide excellent opportunities for the transmission of cultural values (Sandrige, 2008). Indeed, women are often emarginated from male society and they can receive little consideration: a consanguineous marriage could create a more favourable relationship between the wife and her in-laws, for example, by helping her in bad times.

Despite the educational, behavioural and geographical changes that have taken place in the last years, marriages between relatives are still radicated in the society: this is not a positive aspect, considering that hearing loss can be inherited and about 75-80% of deafness cases are inherited by recessive genes and according to Hamamy, consanguineous marriages are associated with higher risk for autosomal recessive diseases. On the basis of a research made in

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7 (F) Represents a measure of the proportion of loci at which the offspring of a consanguineous union is expected to inherit identical gene copies from both parents. This includes unions termed first cousins, first cousins once removed and second cousins.

8 Source: http://www.iiz-dvv.de/index.php?article_id=137&clang=1
Tunisia in December 2012, it has been demonstrated that there is an increased risk of six times for developing a recessive disorder in families where the offspring are born from cousins couples (Ben Alim et al., 2013). This data confirms other results from Arab Countries, where is reported that consanguineous marriages increase the incidence of autosomal recessive disorders by five to ten times at the population level (Tadmouri, 2009). Concerning specific data about deafness, a report in North Tunisia has shown that the risk of being deaf is over ten times higher in families with first cousin marriage than in non consanguineous marriages. As for other countries, in a study conducted in Morocco among 176 patients with autosomal recessive disease, the disorders are associated with consanguinity. In Egypt, consanguinity is responsible for patients suffering from various recessive autosomal conditions and in Jordan, in according to a study conducted by the Ministry of Social Development in 1994, the most part of deaf student showed that the genetic factor played a role in 51% of them and the those of theme with genetic form of deafness, were born in a first- cousin marriage.

According to Henriks (2008) despite the fact that individuals know the risk they encounter with consanguineous marriages, the percentage of these marriages is lower only in the middle classes (Hendriks, 2008). This could be due to different reasons, specially economic and social. The percentage of consanguineous marriages is going up, both in the poor and in the rich families. The poorest ones can’t afford the cost of a marriage outside the family itself; conversely the richest ones want to keep the money of the family, so they support the intermarriages (Hamamy, 2012). The continuous growth of this practice is causing the disease risk and at the same time, it should alarm the
families and help them in raising the awareness of genetic diseases. Indeed, in some communities, premarital screening have been employed and always more are the couples that seek premarital and preconception counseling for consanguinity (Hamamy, 2012). In countries such as Tunisia, premarital genetic counseling is obligatory for all couples with a history of genetic complications and also in case of consanguinity. Unfortunately, sometimes there are couples who don’t know their family’s history, being less aware of the importance of premarital counseling and prenatal diagnosis. Consanguinity under second degree is often unknown or not defined: couples don’t know if their grandparents were related and, for this reason, many couples that are apparently nonrelated, may share a common ancestor and the genetic kinship become unrecognizable. In addition to this kind of problem, modern technologies that could improve hearing loss, as cochlear implants, are relatively uncommon.

The biggest problem with cochlear implants in the Arab world is that the necessary follow-up in terms of training and technical services is not readily available. Consequently, a number of cochlear-implanted patients never use their implants and function in sign language (Hendriks, 2008).

1.4 Religious attitudes to disabilities in the Arab Countries

Religions and belief systems are powerful shapers of culture and many habits, customs, stereotypes, hopes and fears of a community arise from the religious beliefs of that community, they play an important role and can influence any aspect of a culture, especially in Arabic societies. To understand the relationship between culture, religion and disability is necessary to
understand how people make sense of disability and how they explain the occurrence of it, to ascertain how communities respond to people with disability. In the Arab Countries religion plays a central role and Islam is the dominant faith for the majority of the population. In this context, much importance is given to the holy writ.

A core message of Islam is that anything that occurs and everything that exists in the world can be attributed to the will of God. Accordingly, impairment may be explained as an act of God, designed to test the faith of individuals and their capacity to accept that fate with gratitude and patience. This perception of disability as a test of the faith and as God’s will plays a major part in shaping attitudes towards disabled people (Turmusani, 1998).

Generally, in the past, disability was not seen in a positive way in many Arab Countries and it was looked upon with pity and shame. Sometimes, the existence of disability in a family used to be (and in some areas of the countries still is) denied, as if it was a disgrace to the whole family. Disabled children were kept hidden away by their parents in order to avoid this disgrace, making it impossible for them to receive education or other necessary services. These negative attitude towards disabled persons and their families causes many of these families to look for medical treatment or use mythical methods such as placing a talisman or blue beads (to ward off the evil eye) on the chest of a disabled child (Al-Zraigat, 2002). The relationship with the family is highly important in supporting people with disability and, usually, is the mother who provides all the necessaries cares. How a disables is treated within the family depends on the concerns of family’s members and is not the same in each
family. Some disabled can be loved and encouraged to improve their skills although their handicaps, some do not care about their children (MDAA, 2004).

To underline this statement, I can bring the voice of the director of ATAS school in Ms'Ken, presenting the deaf children situation, told me about a careless attitude from some deaf families: she claimed that in the most of cases, for the students attending that school, families do not give any kind of love to them and parents do not want to spend extra money on deaf children education, considering it as a “waste of time and money”. To understand why there is disability in their family, people search for reason in religion and some individuals feel that god must be punishing them for the past mistakes of family members. In some families, concerns may change depending on the type of disability: if for some people mental illness and intellectual disability caused greater concern than deafness or blindness or having a physical disability, for others, deafness can cause more worries than blindness. On the other hand in some communities disability was seen as a test from god and people with disability were regarded as having special gifts. Although all disabilities are considered negatively, some are less stigmatized than others. It well known that Islam gives a lot of importance to the Arabic language, because it is the language of the Holy Book, the Qur'an, so in this light it is the God’s language. For this reason, the faithful Arabs must be familiar with Arabic language, for being able to read and understand the Quran verses, for praying God. Most of deaf people are still not able in this task (Turmusani, 2003).

9 Source: Oral
Therefore, we can see from the vantage point of history that some of those blind people who have mastered skills of reciting Qur’an, have managed to reach positions of some power in their societies (Turmusani, 1998).

Thus, people with a disability that prevents them from learning and speaking Arabic well, such as the deaf, are more stigmatized than blind people or those that miss a limb. In some Qur’anic verses, those with visual, hearing and speech impairments are referred to as those who lack mental capabilities. In the following Qur’anic verses, previous claims are confirmed:

God sets forth (another) Parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good: is such a man equal with one who commands justice and is on a straight Way? (Quran: sura 16, verse 76)

An inner message of this verse, is that the dumb man is not on God’s straight Way and is not just. Additionally, in other Qur’anic verses, individuals with visual, hearing or speech impairments are considered as people with no mental capabilities. Not all verses in the Qur’an are negative about disabled people and in the Quran deafness can have a figurative reference, e.g. “the deafness to God's teachings”. Moreover, according to the Islamic scholar Sheikh Isse A. Musse, of the Islamic Council of Victoria,

Islam sees disability as morally neutral. It is seen neither as a blessing nor as a curse. Clearly, disability is therefore accepted as being an inevitable part of the
human condition. It is simply a fact of life, which has to be addressed appropriately by the society of the day.10

1.5 Current situation regarding disability

Nowadays, despite disability still being considered negatively, there are some attitudes’ changes. Disability is starting to be considered as part of the society and disables are seen as being humans who can contribute to the community and deal a good life. In 2002 the Conference on Disability in the Arab World was held in Beirut, mainly to discuss and launch an Arab decade for people with disability from 2003/2012. There are 10 areas of work for the decade which are: legislation, health, education, employment, accessibility, women with disability, children with disability, sports and leisure, media and disability, poverty and globalization.

For the countries belonging to the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Egypt, there have been great changes for a better accessible view in a short time. Since the Rehabilitation Conference in 1996 attitudes have changed and people with disability are now more visible in the streets. All the countries of the United Arab Emirates have specifically laws protecting people with disability and them will be probably extended to all the others Arab countries (MDAA, 2004) This change in attitude, especially over the last 25 years, has also made it possible for care and rehabilitation services to be set up. These changes in attitudes are especially occurring in the biggest Arab cities, where better

services and access services for people with disabilities are available (MDAA, 2004).

Whereas traditionally the care for a disabled person was solely on the shoulders of the family, it is now perceived as being the responsibility of residential institutions or the state (Turmusani, 1998). Other countries, where the social service system is not well developed, people with disability have to deal with a very difficult lifestyle; those with most difficulties come from poor families or families with no income and special schools of rehabilitation services, which are provided by religious charities (Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt), take them on charge. Since these special schools and services do not have many governments funding, they ask families to pay for their services but only a small number of disables really receive them.

Chapter 2

2. Introduction

Tunisia is composed of many different cultures and every culture portrays its characteristics as language, customs and history. The aim of this second chapter is to explore the culture of Deaf people in Tunisia, identified with the Deaf community and who use Tunisian Sign Language. After a brief introduction on the Country, I will specifically look at the main Tunisians associations dealing with deaf social integration and education and I will describe their main aims and proposals\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{11} ATAS (Association Tunisienne d'Aide aux Sourds); AVST (Association la Voix su Sours); ICHARA (Institute Internationale de Recherche en Langue des Signes de Tunis).
After the descriptions of the associations, I will discuss the current studies on sign languages in the Arab countries and specifically in Tunisia, taking into account the historical sources about Tunisian sign language (LST) and Tunisian Deaf community. Unfortunately, not many researches on these two fields are available; concerning at history, the only sources referring to Deaf are some local proverbs and the popular myth about the life of Feu Ali Louati, a Deaf man who lived in Tunis during the Sixties, known to be the “ancestor” of Tunisian Deaf community\textsuperscript{12}. Following the description of the historical sources, this will be the theme of the involvement of D/deaf people outside of the main associations in the Country.

Starting with the description of the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, also known as “\textit{The Jasmin Revolution}”, I will discuss how D/deaf people have been affected by this turmoil in the way to face their lives an to express their identities. The revolution has also led D/deaf people, especially the youngest ones, to go through new technologies to be connected with D/deaf from all over the world\textsuperscript{13}. I will later discuss the importance of theatrical activity for Deaf people and also the shortage that afflicts the interpreting service in Tunisia (AVST, 2005).

To conclude, the last part of this chapter will be committed to a more specific topic, concerning the legislation in favour of D/deaf people in the Country\textsuperscript{14}. This last part will also be important to describe, in the third chapter, the main theme of this dissertation: the education of deaf people.

\textsuperscript{12} Source: oral
\textsuperscript{13} Source: Oral source from ICHARA members.
- “loi d'orientation n° 2005-83 du 15 aout 2005, relative à la protection des personnes handicapées”
2.1 Introducing the Country: Tunisia

Tunisia is the smallest country in North Africa bordering on Mediterranean Sea to the north and the east, Libya to the southeast and Algeria to the west. It has a total area of 165,000 square kilometres and most of the country consists of fertile soil, 1300 kilometres of coastline and the south of the country build the northern extensions of the Sahara desert. The current population number is about 10.7 million and it is for a large part centered in some urban areas in the northern part of the country.

As far religion is concerned, 98% of Tunisians are Sunni Muslims, 1% of them are Christians and the remaining 1% is Jewish, living mainly in the capital city centre and in the Djerba Island. The World Bank as an “Upper Middle Income country” classifies Tunisia. The official language is Arabic but, since a classic diglossia situation exists in Tunisia, Derja, the vernacular Arabic dialect of Tunisia, is the one widely spoken in the Country. There are considerable differences in both grammar and vocabulary between the written form of Arabic taught in schools around the Arab world (Modern Standard Arabic, MSA or fuṣṣa) and the vernacular spoken on the streets of Tunisia (Dakwar, 2005). Writing the vernacular is considered unacceptable in most contexts, although it is becoming more

15 Source: http://www.infoplease.com/country/tunisia.html
17 Source: http://search.worldbank.org/all?qterm=tunisia
18 Source: http://www.ethnologue.com/country/TN
common among young people using communication methods supported by modern media such as text messaging on mobile phones or internet chatting (Dakwar, 2005). In formal contexts MSA is used as a spoken language, for example, by government officials, imams preaching in the mosque, in the schools, and in news bulletins on television.

Since its independence from the French colonial rule, in 1956, French is also adopted as language in the country, although does not have an official status. According to the Etnologue, it has the status of “dispersed” language: with Arabic, it is obligatory taught at public and private schools, widely used in commerce, government and among educated people.

2.2 Deafness in Tunisia

In Tunisia deafness has been investigated only recently and the estimated number of D/deaf people varies greatly. For this reason we have to take care in interpreting the available statistics cause they may not reflect the correct figures. Generally, in Tunisia deaf people constitute 10% of the population and 2% of this percentage is affected by profound hearing loss (AVST, 2005).

According to other studies the number of deaf people is estimated to be around 20,240 and among disabled Tunisian people the percentage of deaf people constitutes nearly 14.43% percent (UNESCO, 2000). The number of Deaf people using sign language as their first language is unknown: Tunisia states to have any information about that on a survey organized by the WFD—there is no accurate census statistics, and information about Deaf people as a group, who they are and where they live and also the extend of their hearing

19 Source:http://www.infoplease.com/country/tunisia.html
20 The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
loss can be difficult to trace\textsuperscript{21}. The causes of deafness can be different and in the table below it is possible to see some:

![Pie chart showing the causes of deafness]

\textit{Source: AVST, 2005}

2.3 Main Tunisian Deaf associations

In Tunisia there are several associations dealing with Deaf and each of them is specialized on specific fields, starting from education to specific academic researches. According to the survey conducted by the World Federation of Deaf, Tunisians regional associations are about 40 \textsuperscript{22}(WFD, 2008) and they are non-governmental organizations (ONG). Generally, these organizations are independent from governments and policies and they get at least a significant part of their income from private sources, mostly donations. The names of the Deaf associations, with their main proposals, are summarized in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Proposals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

\textsuperscript{21} Source: oral

\textsuperscript{22} Source: “Global Survey Report-WFD Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (WFD RSAR)-Global Education Pre-Planning Project on the Human Rights of Deaf People - Compiled by Mr. Colin Allen -Project Coordinator -World Federation of the Deaf and Swedish National Association of the Deaf -Published in November 2008”, in www.wfdeaf.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Main Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATAS (Association tunisienne d’aide aux sourds)</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Education/ vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASDA (Association de Sauvegarde Déficients Auditifs)</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Education/ vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVST (Association voix du Sourd de Tunisie)</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Social and cultural integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHARA (Institut International de recherché en langue des signes de Tunis)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Academic research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ATAS was established in 1970 and it is recognized by National interest from 1977. It is under protection of the Ministry of Social Affairs but it is not affiliated with the WFD since the president is not Deaf. ATAS consists of more than 150 boards members of 40 branches, it has a public session for the national office and also an administration body. The Government as an “Association with a National Interest” furthermore recognizes the association. The main purposes of the association are the education of D/deaf students and their vocational training.

The AVST was established on February 1983 and since 1984 it is affiliated with the WFD (the president is Deaf). The members are about 1500 and one third of them are females (AVST, 2005). The association mainly deals with the involvement of D/deaf people within society and in the daily life. It also organizes meetings for the families of D/deaf who want to learn sign language. The association creates surveys to analyse the situation of deaf people: in according to some statistics from 2005, only 1, 45% of D/deaf

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23 Source: ibidem
people reach an academic level of education, 1.7% have a secondary level education and 96.85% are illiterates. Moreover, 75% of D/deaf people in the association have no professional formation and 57.8% of them is unemployed. The D/deaf who work are mainly involved in manual and professional jobs and only 27.4% of them have a steady job. The AVST can be considered as a pillar of socialization of Deaf people and an important tool for language transmission, although younger generations of signers participate less in these organizations and initiatives: this could be due to the spread of new communication possibilities offered by innovative technologies (AVST, 2005).

A similar situation can be found in Italy, with the ENS, the main Italian institution that represents and defends the rights of Deaf people. ENS is the acronym for the National Deaf Association and as well as the AVST, it is considered a pillar for sign language transmission and a centre of socialization and leisure activities for Deaf persons. As already said, although these associations constitute an important role for Deaf families and provide leaders for the Deaf emancipation, it seems that recently the way Deaf individuals relate to Deaf clubs has changed. This change is probably due to the spread of new possibilities offered by the coming of new communication technologies such as chat or videophone (Mazzoni, 2010).

2.3.1 ICHARA institute: main activities and proposals

ICCHARA is an International research institute established in Tunisia in 2012 in order to fill the gap due to the lack of academic researchers in sign language and in the studies related to the Tunisian Deaf culture.
2.3.2 Mission and purpose of the Association

The association was created to undertake, organize and promote research in sign language in Tunisia, for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of communication for the D/deaf. For this purpose it revolves particularly in the following tasks:

- Research in sign language and teaching materials adapted to the D/deaf pupils;
- Training of specialized sign language educators and interpreters;
- Creation of a pilot school in sign language;
- Experience with new pedagogies and their dissemination in associations concerned with the training of the D/deaf;
➢ Research cooperation with associations, organizations and national and international institutions;

➢ Promotion and dissemination of LST for educational and intellectual needs of D/deaf pupils and adults;

➢ Development of sign language through artistic research (theatre, dance, film and photos, video, visual arts, etc.).

ICHARA works closely with non-governmental organizations, research centres, universities and associations working to promote the language and the Deaf culture as claimed by the article 21 paragraphs B of the Convention UN people with Disabilities 2006 (UN, 2006).

2.4 Tunisian Sign Language outside Deaf associations

2.4.1 Tunisian Deaf community after the Revolution

In 2011, Tunisia was protagonist of an important Revolution, known as “The Jasmine Revolution” or “The Arab Spring”. During the Revolution, Tunisians protested against poverty, political repression and especially against corruption and they forced the president Ben Ali to step down in January 2011\(^{24}\). This historical event marked a turning point for all the Country and also the D/deaf community have been affected with it. According to Mona

\(^{24}\) Source: http://www.britannica.com
Benhouane, before the Revolution the Tunisian Deaf community was considered as an ‘invisible community’ (Benhouane, 2012).

As will be explained in the following paragraphs, the role of D/deaf people in the society is not the most flourishing at all: they have always been feeling neglected, alienated and excluded from the ‘hearing’ society and often viewed as dumb and unable to speak and to communicate. Though they had the opportunity to study in the mainstream schools from a primary level\textsuperscript{25}, most of them could not reach high school level, because of the lack of adequate measures, the absence of sign language translators and the presence of a predominant Oralist method at schools that generated communication barriers.

As demonstrated by the AVST (2005) the majority of D/deaf that cannot reach a good education level, follow a more vocational path, such as hairdressing, sewing or design. The Revolution had been for the D/deaf an important turning point: they felt an intense need for self-expression and joined the protest to appeal for social justice and for their rights. After the revolt, the D/deaf took advantage of the voting right for the first time: they were able to practice their right to vote after having been banned for more than 50 years (Benhouane, 2012). This was a great surprise for the Country, considering that in other Arab Countries D/deaf people are not allowed to vote: this is the case of Saudi Arabia, where D/deaf women are not allowed to vote and of Egypt, where still there is a law which states that Deaf people are considered incompetent because they can't express their opinions through writing and reading (CAMSA, 2008). Moreover, the law states that the deaf and dumb

\textsuperscript{25}Loi d'orientation du 22 Juillet 2003 sur l'éducation et l'enseignement scolaire.
person is deficient and imperfect, because she/he has two disabilities: deaf and dumb.

During the electoral campaign were provided sign language interpreters by the Tunisian Electoral Commission and the programs on TV were very good to see thanks to the advertising. Despite the difficulty in understanding some signs referred to policy, the program was made accessible (Benhouane, 2012). The right to vote for the first time was an important achievement for the Tunisian Deaf community, but still much remained to be done. Politically, the Country is going through a transitional period on the way to the Democracy, a transition visible also on the field of disability with the introduction the rights of persons with disabilities in a draft Constitution (UN, 2006). This Constitution states “the Government should guarantee full access for all persons, to have the right to health care, education, employment opportunities, and to reinforce its commitment to provide the adequate measures to make information and services accessible for all persons with disabilities”. With the Revolution, the D/deaf acquired awareness of their rights and realized that their natural diversity can be accepted and overcome. Despite many efforts to assert their identity, the D/deaf are still feeling left out of conversations and they are trying to foster democracy and social justice by bridging the gap with the hearing world, and changing people’s perceptions on deafness. The bridging of this gap may be realized with the collaboration between the hearing world and the Deaf one, in order to obtain a natural understanding and an effective communication, a process that requires both parties to be committed (Belhouane, 2012).
2.4.2 Media and technologies

In Tunisia, the area of media and technologies is still a unknown territory but, after the 2001 Revolution, Deaf people started having the need to be more connected with others realities and others Deaf from all over the world. Few Deaf people in urban areas have access to timely interpretation services and they are not offered adequate provision of sign language interpreters. The total number of interpreters is estimated to be around 60 and the University of “Sciences Humaines“ of Tunis, at the Translation department, is the only one to provide courses to became interpreter: according to surveys made in 2005, the number of students enrolled in this field was around 19 for the third year and only 8 for the fourth year\textsuperscript{26}. The total number of hours for each year is estimated to be around 200, a non-adequate number to develop all the competence an interpreter should have\textsuperscript{27}. Moreover, time and space dedicated to D/deaf Tunisian television public is not enough to satisfy the need of knowledge. Newscast and news summaries for the D/deaf are available only once a day, 20 minutes daily at 18:30 in the evening, on one Television station TV7\textsuperscript{28}.

In today's world, communication is extremely important, and for D/deaf it is a fundamental requirement: the interest of communication is not limited to the field of mass media, but also in all other areas of society such as the cinema, theatre, lectures, political debates or cooking classes. A good subtitling is therefore indicated in these areas, so that all D/deaf people can have the

\textsuperscript{26} Source: oral
\textsuperscript{27} Source: ibidem
\textsuperscript{28} Source: - “Global Survey Report-WFD Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (WFD RSAR)-Global Education Pre-Planning Project on the Human Rights of Deaf People - Compiled by Mr Colin Allen -Project Coordinator -World Federation of the Deaf and Swedish National Association of the Deaf -Published in November 2008”, in www.wfdeaf.org
same access to culture, knowledge and communication. The problem of interpreting at the television is not only found in the insufficient number of hours allocated to programs subtitled, but also in the comprehension of signs by D/deaf people who are the audience of these programs: in a group of 50 Tunisian D/deaf, only 10 out of 50 are able to fully understand the information given by the interpreters, 4 of them do not understand it at all, and the remaining 36 D/deaf claim that they have great difficulty in understanding it (AVST, 2005). These figures demonstrate the difficulties that Tunisian D/deaf have to access to television programs and this is mainly due to several factors. Firstly, the certificate taken by SL interpreters, unfortunately does not prepare an adequate communication and, often, the signs they use do not reflect the true reality of the signs used by the population: the interpreter translates a text written using signs which are not all belonging to LST. As already said in the previous chapter, a process of standardization of sign languages has been set up and the result of this unification is the LSAU (Unified Arabic Sign Language).

The idea of the creation was forced by hearing individuals, but they ignored that signs languages are not universal: each country has its own sign language which is affected by different aspects, such as history, culture, religion and geography and not all Arabic Countries have the same history. The consequence of the LSAU in the Tunisian TV channel lead D/deaf people to not understand the news. Moreover, International Sign Language also influences LST because the country is lacking national programs to protect and develop LST (Belhouane, 2012). In addition, the space dedicated to SL interpreters is very limited and does not allow D/deaf TV audience a careful view and understanding of signs used. A consequence of this not adequate
service is that D/deaf people still miss out vital information on politics, daily life and health issues. The major challenge for D/deaf in developing countries is the poor economic situation that prevents technological advances that would transform D/deaf people’s lives and would tear barriers to communication down (Lule; Wallin, 2010).

2.4.3 Tunisian theatre and cinema

There has been a strong and lively theatre and poetry recital tradition among Tunisian Deaf. Through this activity Deaf find a way to express their identity and to affirm it, but they also find a way to externalize their feelings and communicate with the rest of society. Moreover by theatre they can reject the idea of “dumb” people that have always been them conferred. The theatre is the meeting point between the world of silence and the world of speech, and at the same time, the arrival point between the world of the Deaf and the one of the hearing.

In the past in Deaf theatre in the Arab world, hearing people have always played the roles of the D/deaf characters and the image of the D/deaf appears to be regarded negatively. That of the D/deaf becomes a stereotypical image of character marginal, oppressed and picturesque. Nowadays, these attitudes have changed and Arab deaf theatres, and specially the Tunisian one, can boast of some talented characters. In terms of cinema, it is worth mentioning two famous Egyptian actors: Nour Chérif and Fraouk Fichaoui. 29 Always speaking about cinema, for Tunisia, two famous actors have played the role of deaf characters in some films and soap operas. In 2004, the actress Aziza Boulabiar

29 Source: http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=8653
played the role of a deaf mother raped and dispossessed who, with his daughter, found protection at the mausoleum of the saint patron Sidi Mahrous. Zahira Ben Ammar, with Mohammed Driss (the director of the National Theatre of Tunisia), played the role of a deaf at the thermal bath (hammam). Within theatre, some prestigious names stand out, as Fatma Ben Saidane and Mokhtar Hachica. The first one is a comedienne who in the eighties played the role of a deaf woman nicknamed "asfour" (bird). The theatre piece in which she starred was entitled "Arab" and it was produced by the troupe "Al-Masrah to jadid" (the new theatre) and it was later made into a full-length film.

To conclude, Mokhtar Hachica, together with a group of comedians, wrote and starred in the seventies, the play entitled "La surdité est une sagesse", a work that borrowed its name from a popular Tunisian proverb. In this drama, deafness plays a key role, as it is no longer seen as something that conveys compassion, but as something smart and wise. The protagonist is in fact a young father who pretended to be a deaf in order to test the love of his family.

2.5 Tunisian Sign Language

Information about LST, its transmission and its communities is scarce and very difficult to access, because very little researches on this field have been done and interest in research began only in recent years. In principle, all the Arabs Countries are characterized by paucity of research on sign languages: the only study available concern LIU grammar (Jordan sign language) (Hendriks, 2008), a lexicostatic analysis on sign languages in some Arab Countries.
conducted by Padden and Al Fityani (2010) and some researches made by Ulrike Zeshan on Lebanese sign language. It is also noteworthy recalling that in the Arab Countries, and that is the case also for Tunisia, only dictionaries have been published and they are broadly wordlists rather than dictionaries, since they contain no grammatical information or sample sentences, as mentioned in the previous chapter (Hendriks, 2008). As regards the specific case of Tunisia, the sign language that will be discussed here is historically related and influenced by French Sign Language (LSF): this happened because Tunisia was under the French rule from 1881 to 1956 and the two countries still have much contacts. Moreover, considering the contacts the two countries still have nowadays, many Tunisian Deaf brought in their Country the knowledge of LSF they acquired during their stays in France.

In Tunisia, the groundwork on sign language and Deaf community studies, have started only recently. Not academic studies or specific researches have been done on Sign Language and the fundamental grammar structures are unknown. According to the individuals I have interviewed, LST is a poor and essential language mainly use on familiar and restricted contest. On the other hand, according to the Ethnologue classification, the status of LST appears to be “vigorous”\(^30\): that means that the language is in vigorous use among all generations but it is unstandardized.

What has emerged from the interviews is in contrast with what is reported in the Ethnologue classification: this is probably due to a scarce awareness of the language importance. Considering that most part of D/deaf institutions on the Country do not use Sign Language as education method, this

\(^30\) Source: http://www.ethnologue.com/profile/TN
attitudes could lead D/deaf individuals to underestimate the importance of their language and their community. Moreover, some of deaf individuals were hesitant about whether or not they can be considered as an independent linguistic minority group. For this reason, LST is mainly used for social interaction among Deaf members. No study of grammar, structure of the sentence or syntax are available for LST and only since 2012 have started an awareness of the need of research on this issue with the ICHARA research institute.

Despite the lack of academic studies, nowadays LST is highly valued and it is considered as a symbol of identity to the extent that many positive attitudes toward Deaf have been manifested. Many teachers, D/deaf and researchers have been transformed into actives participants with the intent to promote LST nationally, since there is no yet a law that recognized it as national language. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in a study conducted by C. Padden and K. Al Fytiani (2010), the linguistic situation of sign languages in the Arab world can be compared to the situation in Costa Rica, where phenomena of creolization and standardization have been started since the nineteenth century. In their study, the two linguistics made a lexicostatistical analysis and found out that sign languages in the Arab world are not related historically and social, political and economic circumstances can reduce contact among communities. The main result of this study was that the history of sign languages in these regions presents a geography where standardization has began and families are beginning to share a common sign

31 Source: “Global Survey Report-WFD Interim Regional Secretariat for the Arab Region (WFD RSAR)-Global Education Pre-Planning Project on the Human Rights of Deaf People -Compiled by Mr Colin Allen -Project Coordinator -World Federation of the Deaf and Swedish National
language (Padden, 2010). A phenomenon of creolization for sign languages has been also notice by Kamei (1996) for African sign languages. In according to the researcher, “the group of sign languages that have arisen in francophone countries in Africa leave open the possibility that generic term may turn out to cover a group of distinct but related sign languages”. In the countries she visited (Gabon, Benin, Cameron), Deaf people are reported to use American Sign Language (ASL) but with strong connections with French language. Given its unique linguistic characteristics, its original history, and its wide use in French-speaking Africa, Kamei proposes naming this language “Langue des Signes d’Afrique Francophone” (LSAF) (Kamei, 2008). The language the author observed has characteristics that suggest the existence of creolization phenomena. These languages show a vocabulary similar to ASL, the mouthing of spoken French, the finger-spelling of ASL, loan words from written French, modification of signs (adapting them to written French), formation of idioms borrowed from French, and indigenous signs. This is probably due to the combination of French literacy education and the use of ASL (Kamei, 2008).

On the basis of these phenomena, we could claim the same attitude for LST: LST is a language that probably exist only in Tunisia and it has arise by the combination of several factors as the coexistence of French and Arabic in schooling and the presence of LSF (about the 42%). Deaf Tunisians tend to use mouthing of both Tunisian Arabic dialect and French words to different degrees and the use of mouthing also depend on their level of hearing loss and education (French is understood mainly by people with a high level of education). It is likely that in Tunisia, mixed home sign and other elements of sign languages that D/deaf people may have already developed or adopted
form previous contacts with other signers, creolized into early forms of the language. This language becomes, over time, a national sign language of the country. This remains just a hypothesis given to the existence of similar studies on a common situation and very little researches has been done into this field. Much remained to be learned about LST and specially a major investigation on grammar is needed.

2.6 Historical sources about Deaf in Tunisia

Not much are the historical sources about Deaf culture in Tunisia. The little data that we can analyse are correlated with proverbs, simples and concretes sayings, popularly known and repeated, that express a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. Proverbs stem from popular wisdom and their existence shows how D/deaf people have always existed in Tunisian society, and are a great source of cultural and social, whereas there are many more testimonials about the deaf community in the country, should be considered carefully

- **Heureux toi le sourd** - عَرْشُ سَعِيدَكَ يَا لَطِيفَ - the D/deaf is happy about all voiced expressions (ICHARA, 2013).

- **Serment du sourd est ancré dans son cœur** - يَمِينُ البَكِّيَشَ فِي صُدُورِ - This proverb means that when a D/deaf person wants something always manages to get it. With patience, waiting for the opportune moment he will get what he wants (ICHARA, 2013).

- **La surdité est une sagesse** - الْطَرْشَ حُكْمَةُ -

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32 Source: oral
This is also the title of a famous drama in the Tunisian theatre. The proverb puts deafness on a high level and in a positive situation, considering D/deaf people with their own capabilities and skills (ICHARA, 2013).

Seule la mère du sourd peut comprendre son langage

That proverb means that only the mother of the D/deaf is able to understand his language (ICHARA, 2013).

Regarding other sources about Deaf culture in Tunisia, it is worth mentioning the popular myth of Feu Ali Louati, (1938-2004), a Deaf man and pioneer of the AVST. He was born in Tunis, precisely in Bab Jedid Street, a poor working class district. His family was quite modest and all the components were deaf, his parents were both without any education: the mother was a housewife and the father worked as municipal guardian. Since he was affected by a recessive profound deafness, and all his family was deaf too, they communicated with a “home signing”33. Given the social and spiritual richness of the working class district he lived in, Feu Ali found not difficult to experience a first social integration in a world far from the Deaf one. At the time Feu Ali was a child, no educational institutes for deaf children were available, he was thereby compelled to get no education and to start his professional life quite early for a child. He started working in a slaughterhouse standing along side a livestock farming. There is every likelihood that in this work environment Feu Ali started feeling the need to communicate with others and to affirm his Deaf identity. He worked both with deaf and hearing people

33 Homesign is a system of gestural communication that deaf pupils use to communicate with the hearing people around them. It is a system that sometimes can develop a basic vocabulary, especially when homesigners continue to use it into adulthood.
and took advantage of that peculiar mixed environment to improve his social background and to state his Deaf identity. With some friends, and especially with the support of deaf workmates, Feu Ali moved to France where he had the opportunity to experience French sign language and to gather new possibility for Deaf in Tunisia. Because of the lack of interest on Deaf studies by hearing people, we have no written sources that can prove the richness of all the material gathered by Feu Ali and his friends. Although he was illiterate, Feu Ali is today considered an icon for the Deaf Tunisian community and he has the merit for have been the first Deaf to shed light on the importance of sign language's use (ICHARA, 2013). He started organizing sessions aimed at unify local signs used by different Deaf in Tunis: indeed, language users from several local districts, sometimes they have different ways of signing the same thing or concept, and the result in a not unvarying sign language in the same Deaf community\(^{34}\).

Thus, the establishment of these sign language's sessions; it reinforced the Deaf as a group with its social ties. Feu Ali allowed these ties of a Deaf personal nature to be reinforced by membership in local and national organizations such as the AVST, and he encouraged deaf to use sign language during the football matches organized by the AVST\(^{35}\). Thanks to Feu Ali, Tunisians deaf enforced their rights and raised awareness for their language, the language actually used in the Deaf community.

\(^{34}\) Source: oral
\(^{35}\) Source: oral
2.7 Legislation about Deaf people in Tunisia

The number of persons with disabilities in Tunisia amounts approximately to 152,273 (about 1.56% of the population) and of this percentage 14% is D/deaf (UNESCO, 2000). In the Country, there is no a specific law that covers only D/deaf and hard of hearing people, rather, some laws address deafness and hearing loss as a disability. The main Tunisian law referring to persons with disabilities is the law n°83-2005 called “Loi d'orientation relative à la promotion et à la protection des personnes handicapées”. The law has proposed a series of initiatives in order to facilitate the maximum access by D/deaf to education, employment and social life. From 2006 Tunisia is part of the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities“ implemented by General United Nations, whose main purpose is to promote, protect and ensure all human rights and freedom for all persons with disabilities, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society (Belhouane, 2012). The articles 21, 24 and 30 of the Convention particularly highlight the promotion and use of Sign Language, the promotion of the linguistic and cultural identity of D/deaf persons to safeguard a full integration and participation in cultural life and to have the possibility to develop and enhance their creative and artistic skills.

Article 21 refers to the "Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information” and in the point b) and e) it promotes the use and adoption of sign language (UN, 2006):
b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;

e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

Article 24 refers to Education and put emphasis on the promotion of the linguistic identity of the Deaf community respectively in points b) and c) (UN, 2006).

b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community (UN, 2006);

c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development (UN, 2006).

Finally, article 30 refers to the participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport and claims that States Parties should recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities, respectively on points a), b) and c) of the law (UN, 2006):

a) Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;

b) Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;

c) Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as
possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

Tunisia is making many efforts to improve its legislation related to persons with disabilities and the law adopted in 2006 on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities is a prove of that (UN, 2006).

Moreover, Tunisia was elected on November 4, 2008 in the Committee of Experts on Disability Rights in the United Nations and with the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a new approach that change the view towards the disabled. Tunisia has nowadays adopted several measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and the first one was to promulgate a law and to create High Council for the Disabled, chaired by the Prime Minister (CNDH, 2008). The Council meets annually to assess the situation of persons with disabilities and make recommendations, ensuring access to medical and social services and ensuring the basic training necessary for social integration. The Council try to ensure effective integration in employment, entertainment and sport, to create an institute for the advancement of persons with disabilities, which provides academic training for education specialized staff along with other missions and to support associations. Another purpose of the Council is to ensure the integration of persons with disabilities in the world of new technologies, to raise awareness of the problem through the media and to develop scientific research on this field. Regarding the specific issue of research on disabilities, several studies have been launched in 2005 in Tunisia including research centres, laboratories, universities and associations. As regards D/deaf people, in 2007, a scientific research unity was nominated for the identification of deafness among newborns. The research was created within the Institute for the Promotion of the Disabled (UN, 2006).
Although it seems that Tunisia is doing a lot for disables persons with its policies, still there is a strong presence of the medical model approach (Areheart, 2008). That means that there is a preference for specialized solutions as transports or schools and much less focus on ensuring full accessibility of mainstream services. Focusing on the *IDA Submission on List of Issues for Tunisia Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* the article 21, which is titled “access to information”, puts light on the paucity of attention given to the recognition of sign language in Tunisia (IDA, 2010). The article states that while there is reference to TV programs with subtitles and sign language, there is no reference to the official recognition of sign language in the Country. This lack on the application of policies is in part due to the political upheaval happened in January 2011. During the Revolution, as mentioned previously, the President Ben Ali left the regime after an extended period of a strongman rule. The circumstances in Tunisia changed after that, and especially programs and projects that were implemented before the revolution have not received the same political priorities. This happened for some programs that began before the revolution and now are not receiving the budgetary financing that they need to be able to continue (Person, 2013).

### Chapter 3

3. Introduction

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36 “The medical model relies on normative categories of "disabled" and "non-disabled, and presumes that a person's disability is "a personal, medical problem, requiring but an individualized medical solution; that people who have disabilities face no 'group' problem caused by society or that social policy should be used to ameliorate"., available in B.A, Areheart: “When Disability Isn't "Just Right": The Entrenchment of the Medical Model of Disability and the Goldilocks Dilemma”,2008.
In this third chapter I will focus on the content of education. Education plays an important role for deaf children: with it all children are prepared to live successfully within society and for them, it should be important for the transmission and dissemination of SL.

During my stay in Tunisia, before starting with the visits of the institutes for deaf children, I have searched for literature and facts about special education and specifically about deaf education, but I did not find any material, since the field have not been researched yet. Given the lack of sources on this field, the first part of the chapter will be dedicated to some elucidations on special education, starting from the Salamanca declaration. Tunisia, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and on the Salamanca Statement of 1994, applies policies in order to ensure the best education for deaf Tunisian children.

Once having outlined the main policies regarding disabled children’s inclusion, I will proceed with a description of the main international model of integration, which have been proposed by the OCSA (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development) researches\(^\text{37}\). The Institutes I visited in Tunisia are special schools aimed at preparing deaf pupils for the mainstreams schools. As described in the fourth article of the Tunisian Educational Act (The Education for All National Plan, 2005), these institutes guest disabled children who are not able to follow a program in the normal school.

Article 24 of the Act. No. 2005-83 of 15 August 2005 states that “the State shall ensure that appropriate conditions exist to permit disabled children

and those unable to receive an education and training in the ordinary system to receive adequate teaching, special education and vocational rehabilitation appropriate to their specific needs” (The Education for All National Plan, 2005). After these elucidations on international statements about inclusion, I will turn the attention on the Arab Countries, describing when the idea of educating deaf pupils was conceived both in Tunisia and in others Arab Countries.

The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the visits of ATAS schools, the Tunisian centres that are responsible for deaf education.

3.1 International statement for inclusion

3.1.1 Salamanca Declaration

The Declaration of Salamanca took place in Salamanca in June 1994, in order to discuss about special needs education. The Declaration is now considered a fundamental reference frame for those who want to deepen the meaning of special education. The intent of the declaration is to promote the right of education for by an "inclusive education". In the perspective of an inclusive education, the school should modify itself in order to accommodate, to know and to respond to every child's needs. In order to implement the system of inclusive education, the "Salamanca Statement" states that the ordinary educational system has to be modified and should adopt a child-centred pedagogy, a pedagogy based on the innovative idea that differences
should be regarded as "normal." Everything in the schools must be organized in order to bridge differences and to include children, starting from school educational programs to the different courses. The main purpose of inclusive education is to transform the school into a place where the openness and acceptance of differences becomes precisely what characterizes and estimates the organization and the new educational strategy (Lascioli, 2008). The main purposes of the Salamanca Statement which are asked to the Nation involved in the project, are the followings:

- Enhance teacher education in this field by getting support from teacher unions and associations;
- Stimulate the academic community to do more research into inclusive education and disseminate the findings and the reports;
- Use their funds over the five-year period, 1996--2001, to create an expanded programme for inclusive schools and community support projects, thus enabling the launch of pilot projects (UNESCO, 1994).

### 3.1.2 Special Education and inclusive schools

Special education, or special needs education, is a complex subject, which refers to the practice of educating students with special needs (SEN), a concept emerged with the introduction of the Salamanca Statement. The introduction of this term shows the need to change the concept of education: in this perspective, the school is no longer seen only as an organization capable to accommodate disabled children, but also as an organization able to consider the specific needs of each child with his own special educational needs (Lascioli,
2008). Special education can be analysed in two different perspectives: one relational and one categorical. From a relational point of view, special education examines the effects of the environment, the skill of every child, especially focusing on the interpersonal dynamics of the child’s family and the school’s organization and staffing. On the other hand, special education seen from a categorical perspective has much in common with the fields of medicine and psychology (Rosenqvist, 2007). This view of the Western world has dominated since about 1950 and is adapted from the scientific and medical perspective in special education. The child was removed and separated from the classroom to a get adapted treatment from a specialized teacher.

The relational perspective explains that environmental circumstances determine how the child manages and integrates into the school system. In the form of the relational perspective the genetical aspect has no effect at all. Politicians, advocacy groups, school administrators at various political and hierarchical levels, and teachers are integrating the two perspectives, categorical and relational, into a comprehensive approach towards the inclusion of the subject of special needs children into the educational system (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 2005). One of the most important purpose of special education is to eliminate obstacles from the children’s learning and knowledge development according to their different conditions.38 In this way we see how these interventions, aimed at promoting knowledge development, personal skills and at removing communication barriers, referring to the concept of “inclusive education” (Pacone, 2000). Different aspects, such as normality and difference, participation and communions, characterize inclusive

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38 Source:http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/what.shtml
education and its main purpose is to avoid social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, physical ability and mental capability (Ainscow, 2006). The inclusive school is a system open to any kind of difference. In order to make sure that it functions in an appropriate way, it would be useful to assessment and to identify every child's special educational needs through an evaluation model that reflects the one proposed for the ICF disabilities (Pacone, 2000).

3.1.3 The need of a new language

Often, unfortunately, special education is conceived as a kind of educational alternative aimed at disabled people. Often, when we speak about special education, a reference to the concept of handicap is made. This terminology is against special education and when we refer to this special field, we must take careful look at the terminology chosen. The handicap, according to the classification made by WHO\textsuperscript{39} in 1980 with the publication of the first ICIDH\textsuperscript{40}, and still in progress with the publication of the documents of the ICF, is not the disability (Lascioli, 2008). The use of the word disability instead of handicap can generate ambiguity: say to someone that he is a disabled it is not as saying that he is a person with a handicap. This ambiguity make us fall into the error that handicap and disability are the same thing and that the two terms can be used as synonyms. Disability is something that is difficult to overcome.

\textsuperscript{39} Source: http://www.who.int/en/ - Impairment: any loss or abnormality of psychological or anatomical structure or function.

Disability: any restriction or lack of ability (resulting from an impairment) to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

Handicap: any disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from impairment or a disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal for that individual.”

\textsuperscript{40} Source: http://www.who.int/en/
It may be a result of a congenital disease or an accident. On the other hand, handicap may be a limit because of educational or occupational drawback and can be removed. While the terms disabled and handicapped reflect the same shortcomings, people with disabilities dislike when referred to as handicapped as handicap is a politically incorrect word and hurts the feelings of individuals. For this reason, people generally prefer to be called “people with disabilities“ than being referred to as disabled or handicapped.\(^1\)

The difference between the two terms is substantial and can have consequence also in education. This distinction refers to the purpose of the educational approach that considers disability as an opposing force against the human development. Upon this force should be taken some actions in order to minimize the risk of disability. The main purpose of special pedagogy referring at deaf people is to remove communication barriers and we can see it in the work of some important representatives of this field. Considering for example the work of Charles- Michel de L'Epée, he wanted to teach sign language to deaf children in order to overtake the communicative handicap and to reduce their disability condition. The state of disability, considered from a special-pedagogical approach to the problem, is the condition a person can succumb to, whenever special education fails or it is not implemented. In the ICF language, disability includes multiple meanings, and in particular it expresses the outcome of a system in which the factors that contribute to quality life of the subject did not work in the best way. Special educational intervention, as focused at handicap, (what hinders the pro human development process), is emerging as preventive intervention against the occurrence of a disabling

\(^1\) Source: http://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-disability-and-vs-handicap/#ixzz4Fyry6JQC
condition (Lascioli, 2008). When special education intercepts prematurely the handicap, and it is reduced and bypassed, there is the possibility that in the course of the subject human development, disability may be either mild or not present at all.

3.2 A new approach toward special school integration

The distinction between the concept of disability and handicap has a strong “programmatic” value (Pacone, 2000). When new terms become part of our language, they are not considered merely as words, but they bring new attitudes about. In turn, the change in attitudes brings with it the need for new practices, for example, with the formulation of new models concerning at school special integration. OCSE researches are particularly interested on attitudes and projects referring at children, with special needs. According to the researchers, a new look at special school integration can be explained with four main models. The first two models consider disability as an intrinsic characteristic of the person; the other two models consider it as a provisional condition of his environment.

In Tunisia the definition of person with a disability is clearly a medical model definition. The term mainly refers to permanent physical, mental and sensory impairment. While there are some references to persons with mental health conditions, it is not clear what is the criteria for an individual to be deemed disabled and hence to receive a disability card; it is only those disability card holders who are considered in the collection of data and statistics on persons with disabilities (IDA, 2010). The disability card can demonstrate the degree of disability and allow the disabled to receiving various
concessions. It also facilitates the verification of entitlement to benefit. The definition confuses this concept with general accessibility and it is not clear what is the State’s definition of “permanent” impairment and what is the criterion on being granted a disability card.

3.2.1 The Medical Model

The medical model of disability considers disability as a “problem” that belongs to the disabled person. It suggests the presence of biological deficit and a therapeutic intervention aimed at a partial or total recovery: it directly refers to the disease and suggests therapeutic interventions to be achieved in ad hoc structures (Barton, 1989). This model is not seen as an issue to concern anyone other than the individual affected and it aims at the acquisition of certain basic independence prerequisites for subsequent integration into normal life contexts and relationships. In the medical model, the child's separation from the other environment is conceived as a temporary necessity: this separation will make the child acquire the skills that will enable him to be integrated into the mainstream school. This process of integration is particularly chosen in Countries as Germany, Austria and Belgium, which conceive a big part of their integration policy as a reintegration of the child into the regular educational system. This type of model also affects the individual level, because it gives to the child the role of a "sick individual" by reducing the positives effects of the interaction between his peers (Pacone, 2000).

3.2.2 The Social Pathology Model
The social model of disability is based on the dichotomy mismatch/match and aims at the acquisition of some social autonomy, through a gradual "normalization" of the child. The model rejects the direct relationship between the deficit and the biological problems ensued from disability but are likely to give to the child a status of "geek " . It draws on the idea that it is society that disables people, through designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled. According to the social model, the society should be the responsible for reducing and removing some of the disabling barriers, rather that the disabled child (Pacone, 2000). This approach encounters several difficulties. In some Countries, such as Sweden, some deaf associations contest the attempts aimed at normalization, by assuming that it is not possible for their members to have a normal life in the hearing environment. Swedish deaf are asking for the recognition of a minority status and for the right to have an identity that is no longer perceived as imperfect: they consider themselves as people able to live within an environment with its own culture and its own language, as other minorities.

3.2.3 The Environmental Model

In this model, the disabled child can be perceived as an individual whose abilities to learn can be compromised by deficiencies or inadequacies of the education system. In this context, what is important is not settle the student, down but experiment some changes on the educational school system. This model is particularly used in Spain, in the United States, in Great Britain and in Scandinavia, countries which highlight the importance of early integration.

42 Source:http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/accessability/staff/accessabilitytutors/information-for-accessability-tutors/the-social-and-medical-model-of-disability
Schools, according to the environmental model, should accommodate all children and offer them differentiated services within a single and coherent curriculum. The change in this prospective requires an improvement of means: educational materials, school staff and operators training. Other solutions consist in establishing close relationships between special and regular education (Pacone, 2000).

3.2.4 The Anthropological Model

This model shares many principles with the environmental one, but differs from the idea of disability as social consequent. The main purpose of this model is to ensure the best environment and the search of the best interaction. In this model, the child acquires the status of a person whose specific way of being enrich others experiences and has a positive impact on the learning process of the whole group. Moreover, the positive results of children's integration depend on the quality of teaching and on the class environment in which the children are involved. In this method, learning process depends more on personal discovery, experimentation and discussion, rather than on traditional practices of normal teaching. Countries where this model is adopted are Italy or The Basque Countries in Spain (Pacone, 2000).

3.3 General consideration about disabled children and inclusion system in Tunisia

Tunisia, as others Arab Countries, is facing the challenge to improve education for children and adults with disabilities. These Countries are now missing the right opportunities for disabled persons' education and this fact
may contribute to the high percentage of illiteracy in the region. According to UNESCO, the illiteracy rates in these regions are 46% for women and 25% for men (Al Thani, 2006).

In Tunisia, the illiteracy rate for deaf persons is around 98%, a very alarming date (AVST, 2005). Deaf children and adults are being deprived of their right to education due to lack of interpretation services in schools and higher education institutions, generating a high illiteracy rate (Al Thani, 2006). Additionally, teacher training in special education, as it will be shown in the further sections, is also relatively scarce. Tunisia is nowadays facing the challenge to create new institutions based on the respect of human rights and to formulate new laws for persons with disabilities. This “wind of change” started in the beginning of the 2000s: since then, the Country has been trying to guarantee to disabled individuals the most important rights in order to be integrated in the society and many experiences have been raised to enhance this change.

As already said in the previous chapter, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Tunisia takes into account the matter of inclusion for persons with disabilities in the normal school. Inclusion is considered an entitlement for equal rights and an important tool to remove barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities as members of the national community. Regarding the specific field of education, the Country created a reform, dated May 28, 2003, aimed at integrating children with disabilities in regular schools. The law has been established at a ministerial council and it consists of a project of individualized education called *Le projet éducatif individualisé*, which main objective is improving the
quality of primary schools and make them more integrated for disabled children (Person, 2013). The main purpose of this program is to develop the environment in which the child with special needs is integrated and to convey it the most comfortable possible. The success of this strategy is however very complex and to be realized it requires the collaboration of governmental institutions (education, social affairs, health) and the cooperation between different professions (psychologists, speech therapists, medical personnel, etc.). All these professional figures work together in special centres and cooperate each other in order to guarantee the best environment for the children.

The Country is now protagonist of a favourable international environment. Recently in the Country has been proclaimed the CRPD and a Partnership with the UN in order to promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, has been launched. This last partnership is responsible for the creation of the UNICEF project on Inclusive Education: the expected result of this project is the creation of a more strengthened society where policies and laws will be improved in order to support inclusive education for all children with disabilities.

Concluding, much more importance will be given to all non-governmental organizations which support and advance inclusion for disabled children and youth with disabilities. Unfortunately, since the recent political changes in Tunisia dated 2010, the project of individualized education is lacking financial resources and the aim to guarantee full access to normal schools for children with disabilities has not been reached so far (Person, 2013). Despite the continuous economic progress that Tunisia is now facing, the lack of accountability and transparency, the restrictions on the rights and
freedoms of people with deep inequalities always lead to social unrest. Although many efforts have been made and other are still in progress, according to the office of the Special Rapporteur, children with disabilities in the Arab regions are not integrated into the mainstream educational system\textsuperscript{43}. Schools have not been made accessible nor are there educational materials in accessible formats, and this is the case also for Tunisia, as it will be explained later.

\textbf{3.4 The role of Social Affairs and Education Ministry}

It may seem weird, but in Tunisia, the Ministry of Education does not cover children with disabilities but is only responsible for normal education. Conversely, the Ministry of Social Services (\textit{le Ministere des affaires Sociales}) act in defence of deaf and children with disabilities and it is also responsible for their education. It covers children with disabilities who cannot take part in the mainstream school system and who participate into the special education system. Moreover, as already mentioned above, the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for social prevention, equality and solidarity. And collaborates with the Ministry of Health (\textit{le Ministere de la Santè}) in order to guarantee the best solution for disabled children's inclusion. Unfortunately, it is not clear how many children can participate to the inclusion project and which are the criteria to be unable to be part of the mainstream school (Person, 2013).

The Ministry of Health is responsible for the medical health of the students in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools and it has a special program for medical investigation when the child is five years old (Person, \textsuperscript{43} Source: UNYouthVolunteerinEducationandPromotionofRightsofPersonswithDisabilities.pdf)
The most common handicaps or impairments, which are identified, are handicap of movement, visual and hearing impairment, mental disability or any language impairment. The Ministry is also responsible of a program, which promotes good health and try to avoid handicap: a vaccination program. Finally, the Ministry of Health has a special screening program for four different handicaps to follow the children’s skills and development.

3.5 Education policies for children with special needs in Tunisia

In the Country, there is no a specific law that covers only D/deaf and hard of hearing people but there are some laws addressing deafness and hearing loss as a disability. The Tunisian Law referring at children with disabilities is the Educational Act N° 2002-80, dated July 23, 2002 (IDA, 2010). The content of Education is debated in the fourth article of the Act, which states that: “It is incumbent on the State to provide the appropriate conditions that will enable pupils with special needs to enhance their right to education” (IDA, 2010). The trend about concerns and care on disabled children did not start with this Educational Act, but with the law N° 81-86, dated 1981, which were later implemented with the law N° 89-52, dated 1982, as follows:

Article 1. “Protecting and promoting disabled is a national responsibility in order to guarantee their social integration, reinsure their vocational integration and also guarantee social support to live in dignity”.

Article 6. [...] Disabled have the right to education, physical therapy and adequate vocational training”.

69
Article 10. “Education and physical therapy will be achieved, when possible, in educational institutions or in specialized centres.”

In 2003/2004 a national programme has been drawn up for the mainstreaming of disabled persons in ordinary schools; it is known as “the national strategy for the integration of disabled children at school”. The program was launched by the involvement of the Ministries of Education, Public Health and Social Affairs, Solidarity with an initial programme that covered 126 schools.

In Tunisia preschooling is provided either by ordinary kindergartens or by specialized centres. Children who cannot be included in ordinary schools, because of the degree of their disabilities, are cared for by institutions specialized in the education, rehabilitation and vocational training of disabled people. These specialized centres provide comprehensive care, including medical, psychological, social, educational, academic, occupational and leisure activities for the disabled. Their activities are aimed at ensuring the intellectual, affective and physical fulfilment and development of the disabled, to the fullest extent possible. They allow the disabled to acquire a maximum of independence in everyday life, with a view to permitting their integration in society mainly through State subsidies and contributions from the social security funds (IDA, 2010).

Whenever disabled children are considered well equipped to attend the ordinary school programme, the classes called “preparatory” receive them. The State has made a considerable effort to equip receiving schools with the resources required to guarantee an accessible school environment and appropriate programme content. The first results of these efforts are shown by
some statistics from the year 2002/2003. The data show that in the year 2002/2003 4824 disabled children were integrated in normal schools; 3293 were integrated in ordinary primary schools and 1531 in junior high and secondary schools.

Regarding the integration of disabled children in specialized education centres, the data show that 12092 children were enrolled in 211 different centres: 2886 children were deaf (IDA, 2010)

3.6 Education for deaf in the Arab Countries and in Tunisia

Historical sources about D/deaf education in the Arab Countries are not so much and schooling for deaf children was introduced very late as opposed to the Western Countries. As reported by Padden (2010) the pioneering educator of deaf people in the Arab region was Brother Andrew: he established the first school for deaf people in the region of Lebanon, in Beirut, during the late 1950s. After, a Dutch Anglican missionary, in 1964 created the Holy Land Institute of Deaf (HLID) in Salt, Jordan, considered now a model school for deaf people in the Arab world (Padden, 2011). Other sources come from Israel, where the first deaf school was established in 1932 in Jerusalem, followed by another school in Tel Aviv in 1941 (Padden, 2011).

Generally, in the Arab world institutions that deal with disabilities have been built only recently and, before their establishment, deaf children or individuals with other disabilities tended to stay in their families, without any form of state aids. Arab populations such as Bedouin Arab44 are a significant

44Bedouin Arab is a general name for all nomadic groups in the Arab regions.
subgroup in the region, which experienced education exclusion till 1980. Those populations are among the most disadvantaged in the regions cause they live in deserts and providing them education is challenging. Currently, the Syrian Arab Republic Ministry of Education is working on a project focused on providing 102 floating schools/caravans, and 47 educational tents moving with the parents, with teachers living among the students and families (Saad, 2008).

Nowadays, in some Arab Countries the situation has improved and some of them have specific association or school dealing with deaf education. In Egypt, for example, a Deaf Unit was established in the late seventies. The Deaf Unit is a school, which provides bilingual primary school for deaf children, kindergarten through primary levels and a house for students who do not live locally. The Deaf Unit also offers vocational training in carpentry, metal work and sewing. The main purpose of these vocational activities is to improve the quality of life of young hearing-impaired people by providing and facilitating access to employment and income in order to promote their social and financial independence. In the Gaza Strip, there is a school for deaf children called Atfaluna. The school was founded in 1992 and offers different services among which deaf education, audiology, and speech therapy, income generating programmes for deaf children and vocational training. The school consists also of kindergarten, preschool and elementary programmes. In Lebanon, the Hayel Centre was the first one specialized at promoting services for children with visual and hearing impairment and was established in Taiz in 1995. It consists of a kindergarten for the deaf and a school for blind and deaf children. Vocational training for deaf male students (carpentry, electricity, health

45 Source: www.atfaluna.net
extensions, and plumbing), and a section for deaf and blind girls (sewing, handicrafts and home economics) are provided. Later, in 2003, the Rehabilitation Centre for Hearing and Visually Impaired was built. The Country is trying at a national level to improve services offered for children with disabilities, through training courses in deaf and blind education, promoting inclusive education and providing educational material and audio-visual aids. The Holy Land Institute, in Jordan, is cooperating with the Rehabilitation Centre in order to create some training courses for disabled persons.

The Holy Land Institute is a rare exception in the Arab regions, cause it favours deaf bilingual education. Conversely, most schools for deaf in the Arab regions emphasize oral method of teaching and communication, preferring them to sign language. This is also the case for Tunisia, as it will be shown in the following section.

3.7 ATAS centres and deaf Education in Tunisia

In Tunisia, the idea to educate deaf children was conceived in 1970 when the ATAS association was launched and Tunisians became involved in efforts to improve the situation of deaf children. Currently, ATAS centres, according to the CAMSA annual report in 2008 and how already said in the previous chapter, are about 40. They are organizations financed by the Government. Since 2001 they have provided a practical strategy, which has been officially approved for more than 5 years, to integrate deaf students in public schools. The association is a member of the National Committee for Inclusion of

46 Source: http://www.holyland-deaf.org/
Disabled Students in public schools and participated in writing the National Strategy Plan for Inclusion of Disabled Students in Mainstream Schools.

According to the CAMSA annual report, the main association purposes are the following:

1. Represent Deaf people and work toward their improvement;
2. Ensure the educational rights of the deaf;
3. Provide rehabilitation for those deaf students who couldn't continue academic studies through vocational training, which ensures their integration vocationally and socially;
4. Spread Deaf awareness among parents by assisting them in supporting their Deaf children and preventing any delays in their education and rehabilitation;
5. Contributing in early intervention of deafness;
6. Strengthening Deaf rights to access information by disseminating the information in sign language and showing the benefits from spreading sign language (CAMSA, 2008).

As I will show in the course of this chapter, there are contradictions between the ATAS purposes and the results of the interviews. Despite the fact that the dissemination of sign language appears to be one of the main interests of the association, the most part of the deaf who attended the centres stated the contrary. Indeed they complained about the adoption of the Oralist method in the school, and they consider it as a barrier to their learning process. For this reason, deaf students mainly acquire professional works but less importance is given to the spread of sign language in order to enrich their Deaf identity and their linguistics skills and competence. The most part of them do not receive an
adequate education and they will finish the school programs with no competence, neither in writing nor in reading.

3.8 Special Institutes for deaf children

ATAS centres are the institutes I visited during my stay in Tunisia. As it will be possible to see in the following section, the gathering of data was not a simple task, since no empirical data are available on the educational methodologies used in schools for deaf students in Tunisia. As already explained in the first part of the dissertation, the methodology I used for the study of the schools is ethnomethodology. The main purpose of my research was to investigate on the educational system for deaf children in Tunisia. For the visit of each school I prepared a questions list and everything was recorded with my camera. In addition to video recordings I also took some pictures to better describe the environment and the spaces.

3.8.1 ATAS Ariana

Fig1. School entrance
The first school I visited was the ATAS Ariana. The school is located in Ariana, a city in the north of Tunisia and considered one of the largest suburbs of Tunis with 97,687 inhabitants. I was played into the school along with Zhainab, a deaf woman who I met at ICHARA institute. I was introduced to the director, a woman who was hired in the school about a year ago. After a brief presentation and an explanation about who I was and which my visit in Tunisia was aimed at, I started with the interview.

The questions I proposed were the following:

1. When was the school established?
2. How many children are now enrolled?
3. Which kind of method do you use for deaf children's education?
4. Which is the main aim of the school?
The school was formed in 1989 and in the academic year 2012/2013 deaf students enrolled were 68, with different deafness degrees but the great majority of them had a profound deafness. Just one child wore a cochlear implant e the others had a medium and mild deafness. When I asked the director about the educational system used, she told me about a “bilingual” method. Actually, I do not certain affirm that she currently knows what bilingual education means, and probably she did not took in consideration the importance of sign language. In the CAMSA annual report for Arab Countries (2008), The Regional Working Group expressed with strong concern that “no country in the Arab Region understood that the definition of Bilingualism for D/deaf students means using the national sign language(s) with the oral language (French and Arabic in the case of Tunisia) in their schools (ICHARA, 2013).

The teachers are not deaf but, once a week, a LSAU teacher gives sign language courses to the children. According to the director, more hours of sign language courses would be needed but, given the lack of teachers on this domain, the course can be offered only once a week and it has to be divided for all classes’ levels47. As previously states in the paragraph dedicated to Educational policies for disabled children in Tunisia, ATAS institutes are “specialized centres funded mainly through State subsidies and contributions from the social security funds”(IDA, 2010). Sometimes, unfortunately, State subsides are not enough to cover all the cost that deal an institute requires and the school staff has to ask families some payment. Considering that most of the

47 Source: oral
children's families in the institute are poor, they are asked to pay the symbolic monthly instalment of ten Tunisian dinars.\footnote{Source: oral}

After speaking about the educational method and of the paucity of SL teachers, the director allowed me to visit some school areas. I had the opportunity to see the greenhouse, the hairdresser centres, the sewing and tailoring centres. All these activities give to deaf pupils the chance to work and to develop their vocational skills. The hairdresser centres is the most importance income source for the school and only deaf females pupils are enrolled on that activity. Conversely, deaf males pupils just work on the greenhouse. Finally, at the end of my visit, the director said me about a transportation service for the pupils that allow those who live too far from Ariana to be facilitate and attend classes.
3.8.2 ATAS Bizerte

The second school I visited was ATAS Bizerte. It is located in Bizerte, one of the most popular cities in north Tunisia with 230,879 inhabitants.
I had the opportunity to visit this school thanks to the members of the ICHARA institute: they apprised the school staff about my arrival and prepared everything for my visit into the school. The approach I followed was the same for the first school in Ariana: I introduced myself to the director and I did a brief presentation about what the purpose of my visit in Tunisia was. Conversely to the first time, a LST interpreter gave me the chance to communicate with some Deaf in the school helped me. During the interview the questions I proposed were the same of ATAS Ariana:

1. When was the school formed?
2. How many children are now enrolled?
3. Which kind of method do you use for deaf children education?
4. Which is the main aim of the school?

The school was formed in 1987 and during the period I visited it 187 students were attending the courses. The educational method utilized in the school is the Oralism and it is employed mainly for preparing deaf children for mainstream schools, according to the integration programs described in the previous section. With Oralism, deaf children in the school are not allowed to use sign language and they have to learn Arabic language by reading from the mouthing of the teacher (who is hearing)⁴⁹. I asked more information about the integration program for deaf pupils and the director told me that, in order to achieve this goal, many professionals figures have to cooperate: psychologists, speech therapists, welfare workers etc. They work in order to guarantee a full

⁴⁹ Source: Oral
integration of deaf pupils both in the ATAS centres and at a later stage, in the mainstream school.

In addition to mainstream school integration, an other important purpose of ATAS Bizerte is the deaf inclusion in job world: also in this school, as in ATAS Ariana, is indeed possible to notice the presence of several professional studios (*atelier professionnailes*), such as tailoring, hairdressing, manufacturing or painting where deaf pupils can develop their vocational skills and to learn a profession.

During the interview the director arose some problems. In recent years, and especially since 2007,a call to the use of SL had been noticed. According to the staff school, this could be due to the virtual revolution and the spread of the media and new technologies on the web such as webcams, mobile phones or laptop. All these changes have led deaf Tunisian young generations to communicate with other deaf from all over the world. The spread of this awareness and the need of using sign language it is contrast with the Oralist method used in the school: many deaf student are asking for SL course and, sometimes, they prefer quit the school because of the lack of interpreters or LST teachers.

Another problem the director arose during the interview refers the failure of specific training for the psychologists and the school staff. They, sometimes, appear not to be well prepared to satisfy all education needs.
Fig 6. Sewing center

Fig 7. Headphones used during the speech therapy
After visiting the school I had the opportunity to meet about ten deaf boys from Bizerte who attended the same school I visited. With the support of ICHARA members, we undertook a conversation. I proposed the questions for the interview in French and the interpreter translated my questions into LST to the boys. The questions I proposed were:

1. Did you find difficult stay in class during the courses?
2. Can you read or write in Arabic?
3. Are you working now? If yes, did you find your job easily?

The boys I interviewed were 8 and the conversation took about 30 minutes. I am glad I had the opportunity to talk with them helped me to have a clear awareness of how educational Tunisian system deal with deaf children. When I addressed them the first questions, most of them stated to have huge difficulties
to staying within the class, not because the other peers were hearing (they were all deaf), but because the teacher did not use sign language and tried to impose the same educational system used with hearing children in regular schools (Teaching of Arabic and then French). Some of them stated that had to forsake the schools because they found impossible understand the teacher’s mouthing and had to do huge efforts to follow the lectures.

The most part of them stated that do not have any competence neither in writing nor in reading and this statement is in accordance with the last statistics (2005) made by AVST. According to the association, the illiterate percentage among Tunisian deaf is among 98%, a very high and alarming element (AVST, 2005). Regarding the access to public services and the contacts with their hearing pairs, they complained about the paucity of interpretation service by stating that SL interpreters should be more efficient and more available, especially in the public services. Regarding the interaction with their hearing peers, they stated that found very difficult to interact with them: one of the boys even stated that he is not able to communicate with his two brothers, both deaf. This is an alarming element and it makes us understand that, when SL is not spoken in the familiar environment, the schools should foster the development of SL.

Deaf education is a privilege for some deaf students who attend schools, but it has be given in the proper manner: deaf schools should guarantee, specially in developing Countries, the establishment of Deaf communities, where being Deaf means using sign language as important element for communication and for self identity awareness (Lule, 2010).
Regarding the last part of the interview, the boys were asked to speak about their job situation. All of them are engaged in manual and professional work and none of them works in context were reading or writing skills are required. This is in accordance with the AVST survey (2005), which states that most part of Tunisians deaf are enrolled in professional and manual works. The boys learnt their professions at the specialized centres following the vocational path. They work as butchers, painters, cook's assistant or carpenters.

![Deaf boys in Bizerta](image)

**Fig 9. Deaf boys in Bizerta**

### 3.8.3 ATAS Ms'Ken

ATAS School is located in Ms'Ken, a city in the Sousse governorate, with 173,000 inhabitants. The director of the school is a Tunisian woman who only speaks Arabic: to make the interview possible, I was helped by ICHARA
members who translated my questions from French to Arabic. The questions I proposed were the same for the previous schools:

1. When was the school established?
2. How many children are now enrolled?
3. Which kind of method do you use for deaf children education?
4. Which is the main aim of the school?

Fig. School entrance
The school was established in 1982. At the beginning only nine students were enrolled and they were aged 9/10. Regarding the school staff, it consisted in just one teacher and one speech therapist. The director of the school only has competence in special education and does not know LST. At the time of my visit to the school the students enrolled were 35 and they were divided in five different classes. According to the school director, the teaching methods used are different: the school staff does not focuses essentially on the Oralist method, but it allows children to use manual methods, mainly used to reinforce the philosophy of Total Communication\textsuperscript{50}.

\textsuperscript{50} “Total communication is using any means of communication -- sign language, voice, fingerspelling, lip-reading, amplification, writing, gesture, visual imagery (pictures) ”, in J, Berke,” Using Sign Language and Voice for Total Communication: trying to Have the Best of Both Worlds”, 2001.
In order to enhance the use of sign language among deaf pupils in the school, the director experienced the idea of a sign language course. Unfortunately, this experience last only one week: the children refused the signs proposed by the teacher, because they did not recognized them as proper signs and preferred keep on using their own sign language.

This experience with the sign language teacher, even if for just one week, is a positive attitude toward the use of sign language. As said before, the school should guarantee for deaf children the best environment ever and give them the chance to foster their language and their Deaf identity; by allowing children to use sign language at school, ATAS Ms'Ken staff is experiencing positive attitudes on this sense. Anyway, the sign language used at school is a not standardized one, mainly composed by personal signs that the children “create” with their teachers. Regarding education at the vocational levels, ATAS Ms’Ken is mainly specialized in three training activities: sewing, painting and hairdressing. Female children are mainly involved in sewing and hairdressing activities, male children in painting activities.

The director told me that painting activities are source of income for the school. Unfortunately, once people interested on paintings purchases realize that deaf artisan has realized them, they pay a lower cost.
Fig. 11 Hairdresser room

Fig. Painting room
3.8.4 ATAS Jammel

ATAS Jammel is located Jammel, a city of the Monastir Governorate and it has 41,736 inhabitants. Also for the visit of this school I was with the ICHARA staff that contacted the school before my arrival and helped me to translate the questions from French to Arabic.

At my arrival in the school I have been welcomed with some presents realized by the deaf pupils: a wood penholder, a tablecloth with napkins and a handbag. After the presentation and the explanation of my visit purpose, I started with the interview. We were all sitting around a big table and all the school staff participated at the discussion. The questions I proposed were the same of the others schools:
1. When was the school formed?
2. How many children are now enrolled?
3. Which kind of method do you use for deaf children education?
4. Which is the main aim of the school?

The school was established 1982. The pupils enrolled are 42 and they are divided in 6 classes. The director told me that in the school all educational methods are used. They do not concentrate only on the Oralist method but try to encounter pupils' needs. Teachers did not have a background on deafness, they did not attend any sign language course but they stated to communicate with deaf pupils in sign language. I was quite surprise about this statement and I asked how and where did they learn sign language if they did not attend any course or special academic program. They stated that acquired sign languages

Fig. Handmade products
with the pupils from the previous academic years. Deaf pupils arrive at school with their own signs and teachers learn from them.

Signs that deaf pupils bring at school are probably homesign: homesign is a system of gestural communication that deaf pupils use to communicate with the hearing people around them. It is a system that sometimes can develop a basic vocabulary, especially when homesigners continue to use it into adulthood (Senghas & Coppola, 2003). Educators do not have neither scientific formation nor sign language and Deaf culture knowledge, but they seemed to be worry about the paucity of researches on this domain.

Concluding, deaf pupils from ATAS Jammel are given the possibility to foster vocational training skills in paintings and handicraft activities.
ATAS Hammam Sousse is the last school I visited. Unfortunately, the information I have about it is not many. At the ICHARA institute, where I did my internship, I met a young speech therapist form Sousse that gave me the chance to visit the school where she works. During the visit, she was working with a deaf child and I stay with Wissal, a deaf cleaning woman who works at the school. With the few words of LST I learnt, I was able to communicate with her. She told me that she attended the school but, once finished it, she could not find any job and the director offered her a job as cleaning woman. She cannot write nor reading and explained me that it was impossible for her follow the lectures, because the teacher did not use sign language. She showed me the school and allowed me to take some pictures. During the last part of my visit, I asked her the possibility to shoot her and she consented.

I realized three videos: in the first, she describes a typical day in the school, informing me even about the school time, in the second one she
describes all the building structure and in the last one she explains me how to do prepare a banana shake.

During the little tour I made with Wissal, I noticed that the building structure was almost the same of the other institutes: same speech therapy rooms, rooms for the vocational training activities and buses for the transportation services.
Chapter 4

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 The predominance of the Medical Model

Deaf education in Tunisia is influenced by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994). Its guidelines recommended rapid changes in education for children with disabilities by stating that the integration of students with special needs is the higher priority for each Nation (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca statement has also led to the emission of the Tunisian Educational Act, dated 2002 in which is underlined how preschooling is provided either by ordinary kindergartens or by specialized centres. Specialized centres for the deaf are the typology of institutes I have visited in Tunisia and they receive D/deaf children who cannot be included in ordinary schools. These specialized centres “provide comprehensive care, including medical, psychological, social, educational, academic, occupational and leisure activities for the disabled. Their activities are aimed at ensuring the intellectual, affective and physical realization of the deaf children. In this way, children can acquire their independence in the everyday life (IDA, 2010).

Visiting the institutes I had the impression that the main purpose of educators was to recover deaf children instead of giving them an adequate education. I have come to this conclusion specially visiting the speech therapy rooms in the ATAS Bizerte. I had the impression that too much attention is given to the rehabilitation programs and less to the results obtained by the deaf children. Despite the fact that the illiteracy rate is really high and deaf children finish their educational path with any competence neither in writing nor in reading, but only acquired vocational abilities, they keep using the Oralist method. Only a few schools, as the results of the research suggest, are experimenting the introduction of new methodologies such as
sign languages courses or bilingualism. I think that they should make more efforts to understand how really deaf children would like to be given lectures, and that hearing teachers and directors should take in consideration the deaf points of views.

In Tunisia the common responses of hearing people toward deaf individuals are based on a medically rooted concept and they tend to interpret deafness as a deviation from normality (IDA, 2010). Considering these attitudes, (the consideration about deafness, the extremely importance given to speech therapists), we can state that Tunisia adopt a severe Medical approach of integration.

As described in the previous chapter, the Medical model asserts that there is a strong correlation between the source of the problem and the disabled person (Barton, 2011). The Model assumes that the first step solution is to find a cure in order make disabled more "normal", since they are considered as if they were “lacking” fundamental capacities to face the school. Moreover, it seeks a solution within the individual by helping him/her overcome personal impairment and to help him/her to find a safe job opportunity\textsuperscript{51}. The large number of workshops devoted to the vocational activities in which deaf pupils are enrolled attests this: they mainly aim at allowing the deaf to find a work placement into society and the acquisition of an economic independence\textsuperscript{52}. Summing up, the Medical model adopted in Tunisia

[...] holds that disability results from an individual person’s physical or mental limitations, and is largely unconnected to the social or geographical environments. It is sometimes referred to as the Biological-Inferiority or Functional-Limitation Model\textsuperscript{53}.

\textsuperscript{52} Source: Oral
I personally think that the educational deaf system will fail if the implementation of this model will be still adopted. Those agree with this kind of model think that deaf children are sick and their conditions should be improved by remedial treatment. The solution the school staff should adopt is to accept the "abnormality" and provide the necessary care to support the "incurable" deaf children. Moreover, policies should not be limited to a range of options based upon a program of rehabilitation, vocational training for employment, and the provision of aids and equipment.\(^{54}\)

### 4.2 Inclusion or exclusion?

Sometimes education can increase the risk for pupils to be excluded from society: in Tunisia the education for deaf children can be regarded as inclusive in some respects and not in others. According to the Salamanca Statement the education shall be adapted to the children’s conditions and its most important aim is to promote an inclusive education in the mainstream schools. The Statement also states that schools

\[\text{[...]}\text{ can provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994).}\]

Tunisia, building its policies on the bases of the Salamanca Statement, is trying to move its educational system in a more inclusive direction but according to the IDA its efforts seem to be insufficient focused on this direction (IDA, 2010). As outlined both in the second and third chapter, Tunisian specialized education is provided by NGOs, which are covered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which finances them materially and technically. According to the IDA, most of the NGOs act as service

\(^{54}\) Source: Ibidem
providers instead of educational institutions and, since the financings from the State not always are enough to cover all the cost, they are compelled to ask deaf families a nominal fee (IDA, 2010).

The main purpose of specialized centres, and this is the case also for the ATASs, is to educate deaf children and give them the competences and skills to face the normal school. Speaking with the directors in the ATAS centres, not all the children manage to reach the sufficient preparation to be mainstreamed in the normal schools and they prefer to proceed their education on the centres. Conversely, others children, stating that for them it is impossible to follow the lectures, drop-out the school. Unfortunately, it is not clear up to which age children attend the special schools/centres and whether the qualifications obtained in special schools/centres permit children to continue on to higher education (IDA, 2010).

According to Ainscow when we refer to inclusion we should think that children with special disabilities are given education in special settings of schools, but one risk we may encounter adopting this view is the tendency for children to be marginalized (Ainscow, 2006). We can accept separated schools, as the ATAS deaf schools in Tunisia, if they offer an education adjusted to the children's needs and conditions. But, according to the data collected during the visits of the centres and the interviews, Tunisian deaf education system can be considered as a source of exclusion because it fails to adequately educate a portion of its students (Ainscow, 2006). The 98% of illiteracy rate is the prove that the education given to the children is not adequate. In addition, as seen during the interviews, many of them drop-out of the school without a degree and without any skills on reading and writing. Students who drop out without completing a degree or diploma are therefore excluded from the benefits offered by successful graduation and they encounter many problem,
specially looking for a job position. Whenever a deaf child would be considered adapted or educated enough to be enrolled in the mainstream school, he/she will probably encounter difficulties, since he/she will lack the basic writing and reading skills. More generally, the existence of a differentiated school system in Tunisia can be a source of social exclusion, particularly if the system works largely on vocational training. Visiting the schools I had the idea that the main purpose was to enable deaf children to work, ignoring the fundamental need of giving them a strong identity and a language, the language of the Deaf Community. In Tunisian deaf schools there is a limitation of the capacity of the school staff and educators are not able to give education to all deaf children. I personally think that such a separate school system can become a form of “double” social exclusion.

The first exclusion is from the Deaf Community, because the encounter with Deaf role models is really difficult to access if the teachers in the schools are all hearing. The educators, the teachers, should encourage D/deaf children to take active roles in their communities and eventually as empowered citizens in society.\textsuperscript{55} The second exclusion is from the hearing society and from the mainstream school, because the differentiation itself can lead not only to poorer education in the bottom level, but also to a less inclusionary education as children in the lower tier may feel less valued by society.

4. 3 Barriers in the deaf educational system

4.3.1 Teachers Formation

In order to reach an adequate education, teachers should be able to give the supportive teaching for groups of children in special educational needs. In the

\textsuperscript{55} Source: http://www.deafculturecentre.ca/Public/Default.aspx?I=484
Salamancan declaration (UNESCO, 1994) it is emphasized how important it is for creating inclusive schools that the teachers training programs are including courses in special education.

In Tunisia there are not researches at universities in special education or in deafness. The only studies relating to deafness are for interpreters, but they do not embrace the educational sphere\(^56\). Tunisian educators receive their formation with a curriculum of four years offered by the IFEM (Instituts des Metiers de l'Education et de la Formation) (UNESCO, World Data on Education, 2011): there they learn how to deal with children's failure in education and how to recover them. Unfortunately, teachers' education does not include modules where it is taught how to meet disabled children's diversity (Person, 2013).

Regarding the ATAS institutes for deaf children, the educators working there receive a three years education, they are all hearing and do not teach in mainstream centres. The fact that the teachers in the ATAS institutes are not Deaf can negatively affect the educational environment: I think that Deaf teachers in schools for deaf students are by far one of the most important roles models for them, especially for those children whose parents are hearing. As roles models, they could have a powerful impact upon student's social, linguistic or academic development, raising their expectations to fill the gap between the deaf and hearing world (Lule & Wallin, 2010). Teachers should be highly trained and should guarantee the best intervention for deaf children and their integration into the school environment.

Given the high rate of illiteracy for D/deaf individuals in Tunisia, (98% of illiteracy rate) we can state that both the educational methods and the schools staffs are not adequate to reach good results. Speaking with the directors in the ATAS

\(^{56}\) Source: oral
institutes, they stated that almost none of their students go on with the academic studies after the stay in the centres (apart from some rare exception, but in this case we are dealing with individuals with a mild or moderate deafness) but they prefer to find a job on the vocational fields they have been formally trained (arts or crafts training, training in sewing and hairdressing). The problem of teachers formation arose also during the interview with the D/deaf boys in Bizerte: most of them asserted to have no competences neither in writing nor in reading and this is due to the choice of the wrong educational method by the school staff. Some of the boys stated that for them was almost impossible try to follow the teachers during the lectures because they did not use sign language. This problem is linked with the adoption of the Oraslist method, which main purposes will be described in the later section.

Moreover, they exposed the problem of the lack of sign language interpreters, fundamental figures for them: some of them stated that their lectures would have been clearer if interpreters had been at schools, by allowing them to feel more comfortable in the educational environment. The incapacity to understand lectures, because of the lack of interpreters and the total exclusion of sign language as educational method, have led some deaf students to drop out of school and to find a job position by taking advantage of the vocational skills they acquired at school.

Moreover, most of them can rely in the State subsidies in favour of persons with disabilities in the Country: since 2005, the State have adopted special measures that have enabled about 4,017 persons with disabilities to find employment (CRPD, 2011). According to the article 30 of the General Principles Act No. 83 of 2005, public and private establishments with at least 100 employees shall reserve the 1% of
job positions and a minimum of 3% of places at public vocational training centres for persons with disabilities (CRPD, 2011).

As outlined in the chapter 2, according to the survey made by the AVST (2005) about 75% of D/deaf people have no professional formation and 57.8% of them is unemployed. The D/deaf who work are mainly involved in manual and professional jobs and only 27.4% of them have a steady job. These data confirm what the deaf boys stated during the interviews. Moreover, when asked if they needed more training in order to have better job positions, some of them stated that they needed computer and foreign language skills.

The necessity to improve in computer and foreign languages skills agrees with what have been said in the second chapter about the demand, especially in the last two years, of new technologies employments in order to be connected with deaf from all over the world. In addition, some participants indicated that they needed to take literacy courses, considering that they were illiterate or had forgotten the little they had been taught at school. It is also important that teachers dealing with deaf children have a positive attitude to teaching them.

According to the “Plan for the Development of Education in the Arab Countries” an action plan for the revision of the educational system in Tunisia is in operation (ALECSO, 2008).

[...] The revision of teacher education and training involves adjusting and modernising the teacher’s skills along the new concepts and definitions related to the involvement, interaction and content of education and learning, and to expectations in the field of advanced technologies, teaching methodologies and learner-based classroom interaction. The role of the student and the learner in the educational system will be redefined (ALECSO, 2008).
As regards with children with disabilities, the Committee on the Rights to the Child (CRC) recommend Tunisia to improve training for professional staff working with children with disabilities, such as teachers, social workers, and medical, paramedical and related personnel (ALECSO, 2008). The hope is that this advice will be implemented as soon as possible so that deaf children will have their best education (IDA, 2010).

### 4.3.2 The best educational environment for deaf children

Hearing children, conversely to hearing-impaired children, acquire the language in a natural manner and they are equipped for learning when face school for the first time (Sanders, 1988). On the other hand, when a hearing-impaired child face school for the first time, he/she is rarely equipped with the linguistics and cognitive abilities that are the basis for the education normally provided by school systems.

Although the problem that hearing impaired children can face, mostly because language limitations, the aims of education for them should be the same for all children and they are entitled to the best education their community can provide. The attainments of all this goals require the development of a special program for individuals with hearing-impaired, who are not thought in the same manner as hearing children.

Hearing impaired children should have programs planning that will allow them to obtain educational objectives at the highest level: to do this the learning environment and the educative process have to be modified, so that every single hearing impaired children can learn effectively in an accepting atmosphere (Sanders, 1988).
4.3.3 The Oralist method

In the schools I visited the main educational method used is Oralism. Visiting the web site dedicated to Tunisian health it is possible to check information about the schools for the deaf. Checking on the web site first page, regarding the purposes and the activities of ATAS centres, we read:

- Prise en charge précoce des enfants sourds et développement de leur potentiel à travers la rééducation orthophonique et ce en vue de favoriser leur intégration sociale;
- Insertion professionnelle des sourds;
- Education précoce: séance d'orthophonie en vue d'initier l'enfant sourd au langage dès son jeune âge.\(^{57}\)

What we find on the web site does confirm what the school staff stated during the interviews about the employment of the Oralist method. The main purpose of the educators is to start early intervention in order to provide deaf children of a language. But in the web site we do not find any reference to sign language use. With Oralism we refer to the employment of spoken and written language without any use of sign language. The method aims at developing acoustic training by using cochlear implants or conventional hearing aids. As a method of teaching it exploits the use of residual hearing in order to develop lip-reading (Bertone: Volpato, 2009). Oralism as a method of teaching is the planning of structured processes or sequences, involving the application of systematic intervention, understanding that oral language can, and needs to be, taught. Structuring of Oralism would apply to the acquisition of speech

\(^{57}\) Source: http://www.tunisiesante.net/fr/Fiches_Asso/atas.htm
the full use of residual hearing, the acquisition of speech-reading skills, the acquisition of reading and writing (Bertone; Volpato, 2009).

Petar Guberina firstly introduced the Verbo Tonal Method in 1954. It can be used both as teaching of foreign languages or as phonetic correction for deaf children. Its basic principles are the integration of the phonetic correction in the teaching and the importance of intonation and rhythm. The method gives priority to oral rather than writing and does not use any analytic consciousness of the learner.58

Data collected from the interviews indicate that the use of LST in educational settings is sporadic. Most of the schools I visited claim to be oral, although some of them are encountering some exception. In the ATAS Ms'Ken school, teachers profess to use Total Communication but it is loosely defined and it refers to sign language used along with the oral approach, since the main purpose is to make deaf children speak.

In the ATAS Ariana the school staff is pursuing bilingual education but I think that educators lack information about research on bilingual education. The first prerequisite for bilingual education is fluency in both languages, LST, Arabic or French, but most part of the deaf interviewed did not have any knowledge about the written Arabic. Hearing teachers interviewed in the schools expressed concern about the poor reading and writing skills of the students. They stated to have spent a lot of time lecturing about and revising student's writing and reading in Arabic and French but without satisfactory results. However introduction of widespread teaching of sign language is impossible because there are very few qualified teachers. Not even all the staff at schools for the deaf can uses sign language.

58 Source: http://www.cdila.it/cds/Index?q=object/detail&p=_system_cms_node/_a_ID/_v_62
59 Source: Oral
4.3.4 Why is Oralism adopted in Tunisia?

As we explained in the previous chapters, not many researches have been done on deafness in Tunisia and information is scarce and difficult to access. There has been a long-running debate in the educational system for D/deaf children in Tunisia. As seen during the visit of the ATAS Ms'Ken, deaf children tend to use their local and personal sign system and are reluctant to give them up in favour of standardisation. The methods used are a combination of oral or manual methods, but when the latter are used always along with the oral approach, in order to support Tunisian D/deaf children's learning and promote their written capacities. But, if we look at the illiteracy rate given by the AVST in 2005, almost the 98% of D/deaf pupils cannot neither write nor read. This alarming date is probably due to the presence of the Oralist philosophy adopted in the schools.

During the interview with one of the main responsible of ATAS schools, he stated the between 1978 and 1990 there had been a total accession to the Oralism, specially to the Verbo Tonal Method, due to a woman of the ATAS committee. She had a deaf child and her priority was to make him able to speak. She spent a training period in France where she learnt about that method and, once back in Tunisia, she organized a National seminary: during the seminary the Oralist method was adopted as official.

Another explanation for the introduction of Oralist Method in Tunisia can be found in the relationship that the Country has with Germany. The responsible of ATAS schools stated that the Country is trying to operate on the basis of the German model of education. Making some research, we will find that in Germany very few schools for the deaf operate with two languages, and there deaf pupils mostly only use Sign Language during breaks. Conversely, teaching employs phonetic language
and upholders of Oralism advocated a phonetic education for children with little or no capacity of hearing\textsuperscript{60}. In addition, also Germany adopted a philosophy of Medical Model, with specialized schools aimed at preparing deaf children for the mainstream schools.

**4.3.5 Cultural influences on Education**

Nowadays in the Arab countries, people with disabilities in the Arab region face a great deal of challenges and disability is starting to be considered as part of the society and disables are seen as humans beings who can contribute to the community and deal a good life (CAMSA, 2009). Despite this new attitude, some behaviours let us thinking that past considerations regarding disability can still influence some families attitudes toward their disabled offspring and specially toward deaf children.

As already outlined in the first chapter, although in the past all disabilities were considered negatively, and some were less stigmatized than others. It well known that Islam gives a lot of importance to the Arabic language, because it is the language of the Holy Book, the Qur'an, so in this light it is the God’s language. For this reason, the faithful Arabs must be familiar with Arabic language, for being able to read and understand the Quran verses, for praying God. Most of deaf people are still not able in this task (Turmusani, 2003).

Visiting the Country and specially the ATAS schools for D/deaf children, I had the impression that, to some extent, these negative attitudes are still well established among people. In the ATAS Ms'Ken, for example, I met a deaf child with his mum: she did not use sign language with her child and wanted me to talk to him in the hear with a residual hearing. The director of the school stated that the woman went into

\textsuperscript{60} Source: http://www.goethe.de/ges/spa/prj/sog/mup/en3693593.htm
depression because all her children were deaf. She spent her time crying and praying because God gave her that burden. The director told me that she never accepted her children's deafness and she refused to learn sign language in order to make their communication easier.

This event besides showing that religion can still influence some attitudes toward disabled children; it demonstrates in which situation the most part of deaf children grow up. Most part of deaf is born in hearing families. This means that they often remain with no sign language knowledge until they enter to school for the first time or until they meet other deaf peers who know sign language. In a Country such as Tunisia, where deaf institutes are mainly based on an Oralist education, the encounter with sign language can occur very late. This is not easy, since the schools do not permit the development of a proper Deaf awareness. Moreover, most of the educators I had interviewed and some parents, as demonstrated by the mother in the ATAS Ms'Ken, they have an unacceptable attitudes toward sign language. Some parents wish their children to be integrated in the dominant hearing culture and acquire speech (that is Tunisian dialect, the most spoken in the Country) rather than LST.

The school should foster the development of Deaf community and it will be stronger in those schools where being Deaf and use sign language plays a central role, not a reason for exclusion. It is necessary that both teachers and parents acquire deaf awareness and that they will get more in contact with the Deaf local community (that means participate to theatre or sport activities promoted by the AVST, or start sign languages courses).
Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to show which Educational method is available for the deaf children in Tunisia.

In order to investigate on the deaf Educational system in Tunisia I used the Ethnographic method: I have collected the data by interviewing schools directors and deaf individuals and I have taken both written notes and video recordings. Since the fieldwork has been limited to the period (The Ramadan) and the schools selection has been determined by the ICHARA Institute, it is difficult to state if the image of the deaf Education is representative for the whole Country.

The results show that Tunisia is nowadays facing different challenges in order to create a school where deaf children can have the best education. Despite the fact that there is a good knowledge and a great desire to develop education for deaf students, deaf pupils are not receiving the adequate Education. This is probably due to the Medical Model dominance in the Country, which builds an environment where deaf children are considered “different” and as individuals that must have recovered from their disability. In these special schools, they mainly practice vocational activities and less importance is given to the development of their cultural and linguistic skills.

The ATAS centres, the special institutes for deaf children, are thought as “ad hoc structures” where deaf children should be educated in order to be later mainstreamed in the normal schools. Unfortunately, as the data collected demonstrated, the illiteracy rate for deaf children is alarming high and they are likely to be excluded form to education.
A big limitation the deaf children encounter in their education, is the imposition of the Oralist method: they are not given sign language courses at schools and their chance to build a Deaf identity is at risk. Teachers should be considered as role model for the children: they could have a powerful impact upon student's social, linguistic or academic development, raising their expectations to fill the gap between the deaf and hearing world. Teachers should be highly trained and should guarantee the best intervention for deaf children and their integration into the school environment.

In order to achieve an educational environment less exclusive, I think that some areas should be developed. Teacher training should include elements in which students in special educational needs and deaf children are treated. Staff with expertise on students in special education should be educated and be available at each institute. Special education and deafness should be given room in the Universities as a topic and researched to develop and disseminate knowledge in general in the Country.

I think that Tunisia should safeguard the social acceptance that exists for individual differences. The competence in education and the child development in the Country, and the high ambition of professionals to develop education in order to better meet students in need of special educational support, will create the best possible environment for deaf children.
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Appendix

Pictures of the ATAS schools
Video interviews:

1

The girl interviewed in this video is called Jihen and she was born profoundly deaf. Her parents wanted her to attend the normal school and for this reason, she did not study with other deaf children. When she stayed at home, her parents did not want her to use sign language and every time she tried, they hit her hands. For this reason, she behaved in two different ways depending on the situation: she used sign language when she was with other Deaf and she tried to do lip reading with hearing people.

Now she can sign fluently and she got married to Hatcho Zrak.

2

Hatcho Zrak is Jihen's husband. He became deaf a few years after his birth due to meningitis. He attended the normal school and when he was 17 years old he went to Washington, in the United States, to study at the Gallaudet school for the deaf. He attended the DC program and concluded his studies at the MSSD program (High school). During the stay in the United States he could study both ASL (American Sign Language) and LSF (French Sign Language). When he was 20 he went to Paris and attended a private school of Chemical Science.

Finally, after he finished his studies, he returned to Tunis, where he met Jihen. He stated to be happy about his life in Tunis.
Walid is a deaf boy aged 30 and he was born deaf. He told me that he went to school but he did not understand anything when the teacher spoke. He said that his classmates were hearing and while they understood, he stood back because and copied what was written on the blackboard but without understanding anything. Growing up, he felt isolated because he did not understand, and while the other deaf guys had a work related to their studies, such as work in a bank or in the field of economics and business, he could only look for manual works, such as shoes cleaner or painter.

He told me that the biggest problem with schools for deaf is that interpreters are not present during the lectures and deaf pupils feel isolated. He thinks that more sign language interpreters should work at school to understand what the teacher says.

In this video Walid told me about his family. Now He is not working and He is quite worried because He is married with three children: two girls and a boy. He explained me that he has been looking for a job all the time but without success and without finding anything.

He told me about the problem in his family: his wife cannot nurse the youngest baby and they are forced to buy powder milk, which is really expensive and they cannot afford the cost. He told me that they tried to ask for supports to the Ministry but without success. He stated to be very worried about His children’ s future because living in Tunis for deaf people is not easy.
5

In this video I have interviewed the director of a hairdresser centre in Tunis. She explained me how she had the idea to establish the centre and how she was satisfy for the job opportunities she gave to the deaf girls. She told me that only girls are working in the centre and that they are aged between 13 and 17. All the girls started working after they got the professional licence.

7

In this video I have interviewed Moncef Ezzedine. He is 56 years old and he became deaf when he was 9 years old due to meningitis. He told me that he attended the normal school with hearing children but he found it very challenging.

Because of his difficulties, his father decided to change the school and to enrol him into a private school. Later, in 1982 he went to Paris when had the opportunity to discover the world of the Deaf community. He told me that before moving in France he did not have any competence in sign language and he started signing after the encounter with an old man who introduced him into the French Deaf community.

After two years he started signing fluently and decided to attend a school to learn how to teach sign language. Once back in Tunis he wanted to do something to establish a better Deaf community in the Country, following the example of the French Deaf community. He asked for the permission to create a national program for deaf in TV. He wanted the deaf to have the right to access information and he became an interpreter for the TV national channel. Unfortunately, the service was available only on Saturdays, not every day. He
was also given the possibility to organise a meeting with deaf individuals during a Tunisian TV program, in order to speak about deafness.

In 1993, with the collaboration of others deaf, he created the AVST for young and adults deaf, where all have the opportunity to perform various activities: sport, theatre, painting and travel. Unfortunately, most part of the member in the association is illiterates. He complained about the educational system in Tunisia and especially about the fact that the method mainly used is Oralism. He concluded the interview saying that he would like the situation to be better in future.

8

The boys interviewed were 8. They are from Bizerte and all of them attended the ATAS School. When I addressed them the question about how they feel at school, most of them stated to have huge difficulties to staying within the class, not because the other peers were hearing (they were all deaf), but because the teacher did not use sign language and tried to impose the same educational system used with hearing children in regular schools. Some of them stated that had to forsake the schools cause they found impossible understand the teacher's mouthing and had to do huge efforts to follow the lectures. The most part of them stated that they had any competence neither in writing nor in reading.

Regarding the access to public services and the contacts with their hearing pairs, they complained about the paucity of interpretation service by stating that SL interpreters should be more efficient and more available, especially in the public services. Regarding the interaction with their hearing peers, they stated that found very difficult to interact with them: one of the
boys even stated that he is not able to communicate with his two brothers, both deaf.

Regarding the last part of the interview, the boys were asked to speak about their job situation. All of them are engaged in manual and professional work and none of them works in context were reading or writing skills are required. The boys learnt their professions at the specialized centres following the vocational path. They work as butchers, painters, cook's assistant or carpenters.
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