Mediterranean Europe

Josep Quer, Laura Mazzoni & Galini Sapountzaki

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at presenting an overview of sign language transmission and use in three Southern European countries in the Mediterranean area: Greece, Italy and Spain. As will become clear, the reality of signers and the vicissitudes of deaf education and sign language recognition are roughly comparable in the three countries, which is mainly amenable to the social and political similarities among them. In some aspects, the shared features differentiate them from Northern European countries, but at the same time the evolution observed is parallel to those of Western countries, albeit at a different pace at times.

The sign languages present in these countries are the following: Greek Sign Language (GSL; Ελληνική Νοηματική Γλώσσα, ΕΝΓ/Elinikí Noimatikí Glósa, ENG) in Greece; Italian Sign Language (LIS, *Lingua dei Segni Italiana*) in Italy, and Spanish Sign Language (*Lengua de Signos Española*, LSE) in Spain and Catalan Sign Language (*Llengua de Signes Catalana*, LSC) in Catalonia. Here we will adopt the established acronyms in the spoken languages of the respective countries, except for the Greek case, where we use the English acronym for typographical unification.

Research about different aspects of these languages is relatively recent and it often covers partial areas.[1] The results presented in this chapter are mainly obtained from the

[1] As is usually the case, the initial efforts of research into sign language focused almost exclusively on the elaboration of lexicons, as it seemed the most urgent need to be covered for deaf education. In many cases the first researchers came from psychology of education departments at universities, or from Deaf organisations. Nowadays, more researchers with a linguistic background are active. Research on grammar has always lagged behind, but

existing literature, but also from interviews and observations collected in the contact with the respective Deaf communities.

First we introduce the current demolinguistic situation of the different signing communities and we review the legal status of the respective languages in each of the three countries. Next, the core means of language transmission are examined, namely education for the deaf and social organizations within the Deaf communities. We also offer an overview of other means of dissemination that indirectly contribute to the transmission of these sign languages (artistic forms in sign language, sign language use in the media, sign language interpretation and second language teaching of sign language).

2. STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGES AND THE SIGNING COMMUNITIES

There exist no official statistics for the number of signers in these countries, because no specific question about sign language use had been included in the national census or a question was only posed about audiological status. Obviously, this does not correlate with the number of sign language users. Consequently the figures that are available at present amount to estimates provided mainly by Deaf associations or federations, who make projections on the basis of number of members of Deaf associations and clubs. Usually, a second figure is provided that includes hearing signers that have acquired sign language as a second language.

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particular aspects of the respective grammars have been described in depth. Educational needs, as well as computational applications in sign language are urging for comprehensive descriptions of the grammar. In addition, research is being carried out about bilingual education and learning processes in deaf children, as well as in sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics (mainly acquisition) and neurolinguistics (sign language processing).

In the case of Spain, the rough figure is 120.000 Deaf signers of LSE, not including CODAs or hearing signers that learned a sign language as a second-language (L2 learners).[2] For LSC, the Catalan Federation of Deaf People (FESOCA) estimates that there are 12.000 deaf signers, and up to 25.000 users if all LSC users are included. In Greece, 42,600 are estimated to be signers of GSL, of which 12.600 would be deaf children. No L2 signers are included in this total, although the numbers for this group grow steadily. For LIS, according to the statistics of the national association of the deaf (ENS[3]), there are about 40.000 deaf signers and a considerably increasing group of LIS L2 learners.

Although full legal recognition of sign languages has only been granted in Spain very recently (and maybe in Italy as well, as a draft bill for the recognition of LIS is going through parliament), partial legislation in all three countries had indirectly recognized the status of sign language in education or in public media, for instance. This is the case of Greece, where a Special Education Law from 2000 recognized GSL as the language of deaf and hard of hearing students. Sign Languages in Spain were legally recognized in 2007, when a Spanish State law concerning sign languages was passed. However, several autonomous regional goverments had already passed bills during the 1990's that aimed at promoting accessibility in LSE in different areas, featuring education as one of of the central ones. It should be pointed out that legal recognition is not equivalent to official status, because the Spanish Constitution from 1978 only grants official status to four spoken languages (Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Basque).

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[2] A much smaller estimate is suggested in Gras (2006:79, 101) on the basis of data projections obtained from a partial census and questionnaire surveys among deaf association members: approximately 15.685 deaf signers and 22.675 hearing and deaf signers (67% deaf, 12% CODAs, 21% hearing L2 signers).

[3] *Ente Nazionale Sordomuti* in Italian.

The new Catalan Autonomy Law from 2006 includes the right to use LSC and promotes its teaching and protection. At present (2008) a bill is being drafted by the Catalan Government in order to regulate LSC use in all areas of public life. However, the Catalan Parliament had already passed a non-binding bill in 1994 promoting the use of LSC in the Catalan education system and research into the language.

An indirect recognition of sign languages and the rights of signers has taken place through recognition, professionalization and funding of sign language interpreters, which will be dealt with in section 4.3.3 below.

The general ignorance of the surrounding hearing society about sign language and signers has been rapidly overthrown by the impact of deaf and sign language right movements and by the discussion of deaf demands in the media, often linked to law initiatives. A bigger presence of TV programs in sign language or with sign language interpretation has raised consciousness among a broader section of the population in the three countries. Despite the current differences in the degree of legal protection of sign languages and signers, a general advancement has been observed in this area during the last decades of the 20th century and in the 21st century. Deaf communities have used the goal of legal recognition of their languages in order to put the issue of civil and linguistic rights of signers on the political agenda. However, such attempts have often been counterbalanced by oralist lobbies that argue for spoken language as the basic communication system, if not the only one. This situation has led policy makers to adopt a compromising, complementary approach to the linguistic and social needs of signing and non-signing deaf populations.

3. SIGN LANGUAGE VARIETIES AND INFLUENCES

Despite the first attempts in this direction, none of the languages under consideration has been systematically standardized and diatopic variation is often reported. However, among signers

of the relevant linguistic community there is a shared sense that a common sign language is being used. This is a relatively recent situation, as the older generation of signers and deaf signers with a weaker link to the deaf community and deaf associations used to identify their language as “mimics”, “hands” or “signs”, and not as “language”; the use of a national adjective to describe it was far from a reality (see for instance Morales et al. 2002 for LSC). The emancipatory movements that took place in the deaf communities in the last decades of the 20th century contributed to the identification of the sign languages as such by their users and to the establishment of a name for them, mirroring ASL and other sign languages that had followed the same path.

As is often the case in many sign languages, differentiation results from having attended different schools in the country. But even for signers from the same area, minor lexical or phonological differences emerge as a consequence of having attended a male or a female school, when such divisions played a role in the organization of education. In addition, major urban centers (Rome for LIS, Athens and Thessaloniki for GSL, Madrid for LSE and Barcelona for LSC), where the most influential deaf schools were located, had a bigger impact in the development of a national variety of sign language. This process was intensified from the moment that materials on the language were produced (dictionaries, teaching materials, etc.), broadcasting in sign language started and population mobility and contact became easier and research into sign language started to produce results.

For GSL no major dialectal variation has been documented; still, deaf individuals belonging to the gypsy ethnic minority are reported to use a different sign language. Research on GSL agrees that the language has roots in ASL and LSF, as well as in various indigenous sign languages, which came together in the 1950s (Kourbetis 2005, Ethnologue 2005). An older form may have been used long before that time among deaf pupils of Asia Minor and it might have come into contact with preexisting varieties, as in 1923 ten deaf orphan children

from Asia Minor moved to the first school for the deaf in the island of Syros (Lampropoulou 1994a).

In the domain of LIS there are two main varieties that differentiate themselves from the form shared at national level: the one used in the Trieste area and the one in the Torino area. According to Corazza (1997), the former features both spoken and signed Austrian, Slovenian and Croatian influences. Till 20-30 years ago important lexical differentiation existed even within Venezia Giulia. Younger Triestian and Friulian signers are now abandoning the Triestian variety in favor of the LIS variety used in the Veneto, which is closer to the common LIS form. The other identifiable variety, the one from Turin, has less marked features and it has French and Swiss influences in the lexicon.

There is little known about differences among sign language varieties in Spain. The only piece of research so far consists in a preliminary study based on limited lexical comparison, mutual intelligibility and language attitudes (Parkhurst & Parkhurst 2001), which confirms that LSC is the variety that differentiates itself most from the rest. Still, comparative in-depth lexical and grammatical research is lacking and superficial comparison does not shed much light, as LSE and LSC are clearly related and in addition linguistic contact is playing a visible role mainly at the lexical level. There is no research on dialectal variation within the domain of LSC, but it is implicitly recognized that in Western Catalonia (Lleida) some lexical variants are used that differentiate themselves from the main variety, the one centered in Barcelona. However, beyond the connection to the LSF group of European sign languages, little is known about the diachronic development of LSC, LSE and LIS.

Nowadays, many signers have been exposed to foreign sign languages, mainly ASL, but also other European sign languages and International Sign. In Spain, Catalan signers have at least passive knowledge of LSE. This does not mean that there is a sign language bilingual situation in Catalonia, as LSC is the sign language used by Catalan signers almost

exclusively. This is for instance reflected in the curriculum for interpreter training in Catalonia, which devotes most of the sign language proficiency hours to LSC, with some additional LSE and IS learning.

It has been observed that Spanish signers show some degree of insecurity about their proficiency in the language, although they are clearly more proficient in LSE than in spoken Spanish (Gras 2006:187). The degree of insecurity is much higher with respect to the command of the oral language, and speaking is the oral language skill that they score best in. The younger section of the signing population is the group that feels most comfortable about their spoken language proficiency. Few individuals, though, characterize themselves as balanced bilinguals.

With the spread of sign language use to a wider variety of formal contexts beyond the informal ones, it is going through a process of register and lexicon widening. Neologisms are created by groups of specialists and disseminated in contexts of formal interpretation or in education. The register of the language used on those occasions also develops into new forms of discourse partially determined by the interaction with spoken language discourse. However, a big section of the signers is unaware of that process and feels that language is being created without enough consensus and collaboration with the Deaf community.

4. LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

As for most sign languages, the transmission in Mediterranean Europe relies on the pillars of deaf education and Deaf associations, because most deaf infants are born into hearing families, being thus deprived of native exposure to sign language during the critical period of language acquisition. In this section we will devote special attention to the evolution of educational policies and practices for the deaf. Let us mention here that as long as residential and special schools for the deaf existed, they contributed to sign language preservation and

transmission, as well as to Deaf community building. Nevertheless, since mainstreaming was imposed in the 1980's for deaf children, this means of language transmission has been seriously jeopardized.

4.1 Education of the Deaf

Maybe the oldest record in the area under review about institutional provision for deaf children can be traced in Greece. According to Lazanas (1984), during the Byzantine period there was provision for deaf children by social programs of the time such as asylums, but there is no evidence for educational settings or language policies. There is no readily available evidence for the status of sign language in Byzantine years. However evidence of St. Markos's life gives two important hints: St Markos was deaf and communicated through signs (or gestures) with the other monks in his monastery. Also, he was assigned full sainthood regardless of the fact that he could not use words in the sense that his monk peers could.

The first reports about education of deaf infants date back to the XVI century in Italy and Spain. Even though Bartolo della Marca d'Ancona (1314-1357), in his *Digesta Nova* already mentioned the chance for a deaf person to be able to express himself with signs and to understand other people's speaking through lipreading, Girolamo Cardano (1508-1576) was the first scientist in Italy to support the possibility and the social duty to educate deaf people, although he was not involved in this specific field himself. He was reproducing the position sustained by the early humanist Rodolphus Agricola, in his *De inventione dialectica* (1479), where it was narrated that a deaf that had been trained to understand and to communicate with everyone through writing. Cardano invented a code of teaching for which, unfortunately, no evidence remains. Later, Fabrizio Acquapendente (1533-1619), borrowing and sharing the statements of Cardano, argued, in his two essays devoted to the matter, that there is a

difference between mimics and the use of signs of the deaf people and that muteness was mere consequence of the lack of hearing.

In 16th century Spain the pioneering experiences of teachers of the deaf are documented.[4] The Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de León (around 1508-1584) is the first one about whom there is information. He taught several deaf children to write and to represent words manually, although little is known about his teaching method. Juan Pablo Bonet (1573-1633), with his *Reduction of letters and art to teach the mute to speak* (1620), is the next important character in the development of methods for deaf instruction. He taught noble children to speak with a method that would be well known in deaf education in the following centuries throughout Europe. In his work he included a version of the one-handed manual alphabet that has become the base for the international one used in most sign languages connected to a Latin alphabet. The later adoption of the alphabet by the L'Épée's school in Paris was decisive for its further spreading. The first record of this type of alphabet dates back to the one by Melchor Sánchez de Yebra , published posthumously in 1593. Contemporary to Pablo Bonet, Manuel Ramírez de Carrión (1579-1652) was later active as educator of the prince of Carignano.

While all this pioneering experiences had taken place in Spain, the lead in deaf education was taken by the Spaniard Jacob Rodríguez de Pereira (1715-1780), who followed Juan Pablo Bonet's method, although not much is known about his implementation. The French school of Abée de l'Épée (1712-1789) and Sicard (1742-1822), with its methodic signs, was much more influential. Deaf education in Italy remained however limited to the wealthy families up to 1784, when Father Tommaso Silvestri, trained as educator at De l'Épée's school in Paris, opened in Rome the first public school for deaf thanks to the

[4] For the history of the education of the deaf in Spain, see Plann (1997) and Gascón & Storch (2004).

financial contribution of a lawyer, Pasquale Di Pietro. Initially the school was established in lawyer Di Pietro's house and it was attended by a small number of students. After Silvestri's and Di Pietro's deaths, it became a school under the control of the Church. The school directed by Father Silvestri, followed a bilingual model of education in which written and spoken Italian were used togheter with sign language; this is documented in the posthumous published manuscript entitled "On the way to make speak and expeditiously instruct the deaf mute from birth",

In 18th century Spain special mention must be made of the multi-faceted Jesuit scholar Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (1735-1809). Among his enormous production, the work entitled *Spanish School of Deaf-Mutes or Art to teach them to write and speak the Spanish language* (1795) should be highlighted. The publication of this work certainly influenced education of the deaf at that time, as we will see. He had written it during his exile in Rome, where he came into contact with the school founded by Silvestri. His ideas were quite revolutionary, as he acknowledged the existence of "grammatical ideas" in the signing of the deaf and he recommended the use of the actual signs they used, next to the manual alphabet. He was involved in the creation of the first deaf school in Barcelona in 1800.

In 1795 a royal decree was issued that required the creation of the first classroom for deaf pupils. It was called Real Colegio de Sordomudos de San Fernando, in Madrid, and was hosted at the Colegio de los Padres Escolapios del Avapiés under the direction of José Fernández Navarrete, a disciple of Tommaso Silvestri. Unfortunately, the experience did not succeed. A new project is approved in 1802, but it is not until 1803 that the first steps towards the actual opening are taken. In this school Roberto Prádez (1772?-1836) will be active as one of the deaf teachers of the deaf.

Meanwhile, Joan Albert i Martí had opened the first school of the deaf in Barcelona. It was first private, but later received the support of the city council, and that is why it is known

as the first Barcelona Municipal School of the Deaf-mute (1800-1802). It was quite an unprecedented experience, as it was open to as many deaf children as necessary, irrespective of their social and economic status. In 1857 a law on public instruction led to the creation of different schools for the deaf and the blind in the second half of the 19th century. In addition specific training for teachers of the deaf was set up at the Colegio de Sordomudos de Madrid. In 1904 Emilio Tortosa Orero founded the Instituto Catalán de Sordomudos, a private school. The City Council of Barcelona also supported the Municipal School for the Deaf, where the phonetician Pere Barnils was appointed in 1928.

In Italy in the 19th century other institutes were founded in various Italian cities based on the model founded by Father Silvestri. They were managed by members of the clergy that maintained a good net of contacts between the institutes (Zatini 1993), and since then the history of deaf people mirrors the history of their institutes. In 1889 the Roman institute moved to the site of Via Nomentana, a site that still exists today as a center of culture and research of great relevance for the Italian deaf community.

In Italy more generally, before the 1880 Milan Conference, there was a widespread awareness of signs, their value and on the importance of their use in the education of deaf children and, in fact, many deaf people succeeded in reaching a "bilingual" linguistic competence.[5] Sign language was also used in didactic circles and some deaf persons had an important role in the educational field, among them Basso, Carbonieri and Minoja (Folchi and Mereghetti 1995).

Giacomo Carbonieri (1814-1879) in particular was a bright deaf psycholinguist who had grasped, before De Saussure works, that the language faculty was independent from its

[5] The influence of the French gestural method is proven by the existence of a grammar book for deaf-mutes, written by father Ciro Marzullo in Palermo in 1857, containing some methodical signs in the way they were intended by De l'Épeé.

modality and in his work of deaf trainer he mastered, used and defended sign language in a bilingual approach to education. He also tried to promote a not merely clinical perception of deafness. Among his production, the 1895 book *Osservazioni sopra l'opinione del Sig. Giovanni Gandolfi Professore di Medicina Legale della R. Università di Modena* has become the most famous, as he refered to the gestural system of communication used among the deaf as "Italian sign language". In 2000 the deaf writer and researcher Renato Pigliacampo devoted a book to Giacomo Carbonieri recognizing his profoundness of intuition and retracing the cultural and social debate, still actual, between oralism and sign language.

Paolo Basso (1806-1879) grew up in Genoa, where he attended Assarotti's institute. Extremely intelligent, he was able to learn and write several languages, ability that contributed to his fame. Although his position towards sign language is a bit controversial (it seems he had criticized the wide use of sign language that father Assarotti made in his institute), after his training he worked as instructor for deaf pupils first in the institute of Genoa and later in the institute of Turin.

Giuseppe Minoja (1812-1871) became a trainer for the deaf almost by chance: he was trained at the institute for the deaf in Milan and once back home he started sharing his knowledge whit other deaf boys of his town. He was extremely successful, and thanks to the support of father Don Gelmini, he founded a School for deaf in Villanova, close to Milan, where he started working as deaf trainer.He was author of several books about instruction and deafness, among which *On the need of education for deaf*[6] in1852 and *Compendium of religious, scientif and moral discipline to be used by deafmute*[7] in 1858.

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[6] *Sulla necessità di dell'educazione dei sordomuti* is the original title.

[7] *Compendio di dottrina religiosa, scientifica e morale ad uso dei sordomuti* is the original title.

Despite the recommendation to use the oral method in order to teach the deaf, the use of signing continued to exist outside the classroom in the deaf schools during the 20th century. It has been even reported that in Greece, for charity reasons, some of the child care workers at schools were deaf: some of the cooks in boarding schools, gate-keepers and bus drivers were deaf, and although they had usually only received primary education, they served as role models for the children, who could 'hear' the daily news from them, do some homework under their supervision, and even be told-off in sign language, by someone who would not consider them as handicapped.

In Greece, Andreas Kokkevis, member of Parliament and later Minister of Health and Welfare (1964-1974), who had a deaf daughter himself, supported legislative and educational means in favour of the deaf children. After 1956, the tuition fees for deaf children were to be paid by the public social security system. The first private school for the deaf was established by Iro Kokkevi in 1956. Amalia Martinou, the owner and life director of this school, was very much in favour of oral-only communication. In 1986 the school was transferred to the public system, as the Primary and High School for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing in Argyroupolis. Another private school establishment was founded by Sofia Starogianni, mother of two deaf sons, in 1973, under the direction of the devoted language teacher Victoria Daoussi. This school was also transferred to the public sector in 1982. Graduates of the Martinou-Argyroupolis school, even employees, use a form of GSL that is slightly more influenced by Greek, than graduates of the Starogianni, EIPK school.

In 1984 Total Communication was officially adopted in Greek deaf schools, and as of 1995 we find deaf teachers active in deaf schools (Lampropoulou 1995, 1999). In 1986 the first infant program that could introduce sign language to families of deaf children was established in the three largest cities in Greece.

In Italy and Spain, deaf education in the last quarter of the 20th century made the shift to mainstreaming, under the assumption that all children with any sort of handicap should be integrated in regular schools with the provisions for their specific needs. The consequences of such policies for deaf children are well known: lag in language development (both in sign language and in spoken language), lack of Deaf models, poor academic results and isolation leading to social and psychological difficulties.

With Law 517 from 1977 the Italian State defined this new schooling integration policy, leaving to the families the possibility to choose in what type of school to insert their own deaf children: special schools or mainstream public schools. This law triggered the closing of special schools, since the majority of parents chose to insert their deaf children in the "normal" schools (Caselli et al. 2006). The chimera of a new and more effective integration has, as a matter of fact, isolated the individuals that are often found to be the only deaf of their class and, sometimes, of the whole school. This new situation of linguistic isolation has brought deaf population to a situation of a heavy cultural impoverishment, depriving it of its primary means of linguistic and cultural transmission—the institutes—where values, behaviours, traditions and ideals were learned (Jacobucci 1997). The deaf institutes become progressively smaller and emptier and, as Caselli et al. (2006:34) point out, "so they have come to lack, with a lowered number of pupils, the communicative, linguistic and of cultural transmission context that existed in the past thanks to the existence of a widened deaf community."

Beginning from the 1990's, the special schools in Italy that somehow had survived the diaspora of deaf pupils have also decided to accept hearing pupils, offering experimental programs and, in some cases, a bilingual educational program, of which the more "famous" experience is represented by the Cossato school in Biella. In Biella's school the bilingual program provides teaching of different subjects in LIS or Italian, although only few deaf

students are hosted in each classroom as the number of deaf student is about 1/10 of the total. This peculiar and unusual situation influences sign language transmission in two ways: on the one side it guarantees LIS access to deaf pupils born in hearing families that otherwise would never be exposed to sign language but, on the other, considering the differences in numbers, it exposes sign language to the risk of modification and improper use because the high number of hearing users of it that is considerably larger than the deaf one. The teachers working in Biella, however, are very firm to assure that the linguistic competence reached by deaf and hearing students at the end of the school is analogous and native-like. Finally, in 2000, some special schools still active merged into a unique institute denominated ISISS (National Institute of Specialized Education for Deaf).

The developments in Spain in this domain were very similar. In 1982 a new Law for Social Integration of the Handicapped (LISMI) was issued. The educational regulations deriving from that law were deployed in a Royal Decree about Special Education Planning dating from 1985. As in the Italian case, it implied the inclusion of deaf children in regular classroms with some special support. Specifically for deaf pupils it regulated the possibility to provide a supporting teacher, a teacher in Special Education and a speech therapist, meant for speech rehabilitation. In a further reform of the overall educational system in 1990 (LOGSE), a modified perspective was introduced whereby the school obtained more freedom to organize its resources in order to meet the needs of its pupils with special educational needs. So there will be no specific curricula for those pupils, but just adapted ones. The goal of this new move is to become more inclusive and less homogeneizing. Given that many autonomous regional governments have powers in the arrangement of education, the reality of education for deaf students is very varied. One of the developments observed has been the progressive incorporation of interpreters in educational settings. This has been favored for instance in regular schools with preferential enrolment of deaf pupils, where small groups of deaf are

present. At the same time, in some of the bilingual projects Deaf coaches or teachers have been incorporated to the staff.

As a consequence of the pressure of associations of parents of deaf children in favor of sign language (e.g. APANSCE in Catalonia) and professionals specialized in deaf education, some bilingual projects were set up around the mid 1990's: in Catalonia (Col·legi Públic de Sords Josep Pla, CEIPM Tres Pins-Escola Forestier, CEE de Sords CRAS Sabadell-IES Sabadell, IES Consell de Cent) and in Madrid (Instituto Hispanoamericano de la Palabra and Centro Público de Educación Especial de Sordos Ponce de León, Colegio Público El Sol, Escuela Piruetas). Only a few of those are implemented for secondary school. A shared characteristic is that these bilingual programs are still experimental, as not all the needs have been met for fully bilingual education and they have been functioning for quite a short time. One of the main difficulties of the programs for effective bilingual education is the limited varying sign language proficiency of the professionals involved. Moreover, little specific instruction about sign language is being offered (Morales 2004).

The new LSE and LSC laws both recognize the right to full-fledged bilingual education, so important and rapid changes are expected as a consequence of their deployment.

The presence of sign language in tertiary education is really anecdotal, as most of the few deaf students that enroll for university studies rely on spoken language. Small scale provision of interpeters is present, though. A different situation arises in specific postgraduate programs for deaf teachers, where sign language is used.

4.2 Social Groups and Families

The other pillar for sign language transmission in the 20th and 21st centuries has been Deaf associations. Associations and clubs constituted not only the center of socialization and leisure activities for deaf individuals, where the sense of Deaf community took root and sign

language was used naturally as a default, but they were also the cradle of Deaf activism in defense of the status of sign languages and the rights of Deaf citizens. Deaf families, if they exist, have played an important role in some of these associations, as they tend to constitute the elite of the community, and they provided leaders that play a crucial role in Deaf emancipation. During the few past decades, there seems to be an ongoing change in the way deaf individuals relate to deaf associations and clubs. As a consequence of the possibilities offered by the new communication technologies (chat, videoconferencing, videophone, etc.), as well as the different schooling situations, the younger Deaf generation seems to be less prone to join Deaf clubs. In addition, the expansion of cochlear implants at earlier ages is reducing the number of children that might be candidates to follow specific education for the deaf, as there is almost no support for the idea that even implanted children should be exposed to sign language as well. Another factor that has been pointed out by Gras (2006) in connection with the deaf population in Spain is that the eradication of German measles from the 1960's, which was an important cause of deafness before the introduction of the relevant vaccine, has reduced the number of deaf individuals in the total.

In Greece, the first club to be established was the Greek Union of Deaf-Mutes, in 1948. It is now named Greek Union of the Deaf. This club also started publishing a newspaper in 1956 (The problems of the Deaf Mutes), but it was soon discontinued for funding and organizational reasons. In 1954 Iro Kokkevis and Sofia Starogianni (see above for her involvement in the establishment of deaf schools) formed the Organisation for the Welfare of the Deaf and coordinated a series of educational and social activities. In 1963 the club Prophet Zacharias, Friends of the Deaf Mute, was founded, where set the first sign language lessons and first GSL dictionary were organized (presented by a Deaf man). It started as a group of deaf boys and a hearing one, Nikolaos Grekos, who would become Bishop Nikodimos of Thiva an Livadia. During WWII about twenty five young men and

women studied the Bible every Friday, and this was informally established as the first gathering of adult deaf people who used sign language as their preferred means of communication for social purposes. At the same time, not only young adults but also schoolchildren had an opportunity to socialize with one another in sign language in an environment where this was not banned. A group of about 120 Deaf pupils of the National Institute for the Protection of Deaf Mutes (Maroula Katsibra, p.c. Jan. 2007) were accompanied with their teachers to attend the monthly liturgies in Greek sign language, although paradoxically sign language was not allowed at their school officially. Girls groups followed a similar path, and a group of up to 40 young post-teenage deaf girls also started similar Bible study and social activities, accompanied by 19-year-old hearing Maroula Katsibra. It should be noted that Bishop Nikodimos was the first to bless weddings of Deaf couples, which were forbidden at the time. This was the beginning of transmission of GSL from one generation to another through biological families.

The Greek Federation of the Deaf was established in 1968. It now has 19 member Deaf clubs. The two Associations of Parents of Deaf Children were founded in 1965 and 1980 and had a significant contribution to the improvement of deaf education, by assisting the deaf organizations and pressing the government.

The main Italian institution that represents and defends the rights of deaf people is the ENS (*Ente Nazionale Sordomuti*), acronym for National Deaf Association. It was founded in Padua in 1932 during the First Unitary National Meeting of Italian Deaf people, thanks to Antonio Margarotto's involvement and to the unanimous Deaf people's desire (Zatini 1993). The ENS is currently the only association of Deaf people recognized by the laws of the Italian Government. It has over 101 provincial offices, 21 regional committees and numerous local headquarters. In every provincial office and in the local headquarters there is a recreational

club that represents a place of meeting, information, socialization and enjoyment for the Deaf population.

In Spain the first first Deaf association was created in 1906 in Madrid, followed by the Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos entre los Sordos de ambos sexos de Cataluña in Barcelona in 1909. The latter was followed by the Centro Familiar de Sordomudos (currently Casal de Sords) in Barcelona in 1916. Valencia, Zaragoza, Oviedo, Sevilla and other cities followed within some years. At the National Assembly of Deaf-Mutes celebrated in Barcelona in 1935 the creation of the National Federation of Deaf Associations in Spain was proposed and commissioned to Juan Luís Marroquín. The associations existing before the Spanish Civil War met in 1936 in order to create the federation and Marroquín was appointed as its president. He stayed in charge till 1992. It is now called Confederación Estatal de Personas Sordas de España (CNSE) and represents the regional Federations and associations across Spain. It has had a very active role in the legal recognition of sign languages in Spain, and it also leads many social and educational initiatives for the Deaf community.

Despite the different chronologies in the establishment of Deaf clubs and organizations, it is clear that they played a central role in the 20th century in community building throrugh socializing and activism, and, more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, for the consolidation and transmission of the national signed languages. Nowadays, though, there seems to be a change in the way Deaf individuals from younger generations relate to such organizations, partly because of the impact of new communication technologies. In addition, current policies concerning cochlear implantation do not tend to offer sign language to the implanted infant after the intervention. Some of these implanted individuals only join the Deaf community at a later stage in their lives, thus becoming late signers and members with a less clearcut Deaf identity.

4.3 Sign Language Dissemination

In this section we briefly review the means by which sign language gets disseminated within the signing communities and the the whole of the societies they are integrated in: art, media, interpretation and second language courses.

4.3.1 Artistic manifestations in sign language

Theater has been the most traditional way of sign language artistic expression and dissemination in Western Deaf communities. Along with it, Deaf cinema and visual poetry have contributed to Deaf art conveyed in some form of artistic sign language. In Greece the Greek Theater of the Deaf was established in 1983. Its impact on the development of GSL was immense, as this was the first time that Deaf people used their language in order to express artistically and in public. The Greek Theatre of the Deaf held many performances all around Greece. For Italy it is not known when exactly the first Theater Company was created, organized and run by deaf actors.[8] According to some reports from the most elderly people, it seems that at the beginning of the 20th century there were already deaf actors that realized and put up performances and shows in Deaf clubs of their cities. Today there exist festivals devoted to Deaf theater and thanks to the new means of recording, shows can have widespread diffusion and popularity, both among the deaf and hearing public, which was unthinkable before. Together with staging of famous works, an original repertoire is proposed in which central themes of Deaf culture are represented: the recognition of the language, the traditions and the inherent cultural values, the shared school experiences, the sometimes painful educational background, the sense of exclusion and ostracism, the desire for approval, etc. (Christie & Wilkins 2007). Currently a large number of theatre companies exists, formed

[8] Some more detailed information about LIS theatre at

http://www.istc.cnr.it/mostralis/pannello22.htm

by deaf people acting in LIS, among which "Laboratorio Zero" of Rome, "Maschera Viva" of Turin, "Gestum" of Salerno, "Senza parole" of Milan, "Ciclope" of Palermo, "David" of Florence. In Spain theater in sign language by and for the Deaf has also a solid tradition and festivals are organized periodically.

Deaf cinema is an artistic genre of the latest generations where Deaf people are perceived and represented as "the cultural and visual linguistic minority using sign language."[9] Inside this genre short films have great success. In Italy a national festival is devoted to such short Deaf films whose second edition took place in 1996. The company DeafMedia (www.deafmedia.eu) is very active in this domain. In Catalonia the association *Cercle d'Artistes Sords Units* (ASU) produced over 100 films in sign language, many of which are adaptations of well-known movies played by deaf actors.

As for poetry, in Italy the first literary work of poetry was the CD-ROM *Sette poesie in LIS* (Seven LIS poems) poems containing some pieces of Rosaria and Giuseppe Giuranna (Giuranna & Giuranna 2003), refined poets and experts in the language. This work is known and appreciated at national level, so much to be considered the first official documentation of LIS poetry. This study has also made possible the first study of the key aspects of LIS poetry (Giuranna & Giuranna 2000) and its comparison with the vocal poetry (Russo et al. 2001). In Spain, translations of spoken language poetry into LSE are also available through the Internet.[10]

4.3.2 Sign language in the media and Deaf press

Television provided the first means to incorporate sign language in the media. In Greece a single newspaper of the Deaf was established and then discontinued after only some issues.

[9] http://www.lightkitchen.com/deafcinema.html

[10] http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/seccion/signos/psegundonivel.jsp?conten=literatura

TV news slots in GSL were only transmitted through one national television channel in Thessaloniki. This news slot was less than a minute long and transmitted once daily, in some form of Signed Greek. After 1998, GSL registered interpreters started appearing in all major TV channels, transmitting in the low commercial zones (very early in the morning) and for very few seconds at a time. In the following years and after pressure by GFD and the Interpreters' Association this improved significantly. As of 2007, news in GSL are several minutes long and appear daily in high commercial time zones (late afternoon or evening). A new cable television channel, called Prisma, addressing citizens with special needs was launched in 2005 and started transmitting programs of all kinds for more than 12 hours daily, with Greek captioning and interpreted windows.

On Italian national television there does not exist any program realized in sign language. Only some brief news interpreted into LIS are transmitted every day. From 1994 the message for the New Year by the President of the Republic is interpreted into LIS, although it is not subtitled. Many programs are subtitled in Italian. The services televideo and teletext offer some pages devoted to the deaf population. RAI 3, one of the three state networks, has also produced two documentaries about Deaf-related issues: "The man's brain. The Sign language" (1990) and "The computer in the service of deaf children" (1992).

Spanish public (and some private) TV stations include some program in sign language or interpreted into sign language. This is mostly limited to news broadcasting or to some specific program for a deaf audience and about Deaf issues, like State TVE's *En otras palabras*, which used to be the only program in LSE and Spanish for many years. In addition, captioning in spoken language has been increased in the past few years. Some political broadcasts or official campaigns are now interpreted into sign language. As for printed press, CNSE has been publishing the periodical "Faro del silencio" for many years now.

Since the Internet became widespread, accessibility to information through sign language has increased considerably. In Catalonia there is an Internet TV (Visual Web: http://www.webvisual.tv) in LSC. Several popular Deaf sites like Difusord (www.difusord.org), Diario Signo (www.diariosigno.com) or Minoría Sorda (http://www.deminorias.com/canal.php?canal=minoriasorda) provide community news by means of sign language and written spoken language. Moreover, some non deaf-related sites start to offer part of the information in sign language. CNSE is developing the possibilities offered by the Internet in order to establish a virtual Deaf Community, with initiatives like a virtual Deaf Town (http://www.ciudadsorda.org) or a Deaf Network (http://www.redsorda.com/presentacion.htm).

In Italy, web sites and portals dedicated to deafness are still few. Certainly first among all is the site of ENS (www.ens.it) where since 2004 it is possible to see LIS videos among which are messages of the National ENS President. Other portals of great success are www.dizlis.it and www.eurosordi.it. Various specialized periodicals devoted to the deaf population exist, some of which are managed by deaf people. The most popular periodical among Deaf people is the monthly newspaper of information, culture and politics of the Deaf Italian "Parole e Segni" (Words and signs), edited by ENS. It replaced "La settimana del sordo" and the most remote "La settimana del sordomuto". Other publications are "Il Sordoudente", "V. S. P. Voci Silenzi Pensieri" and "L'educazione dei sordi.".

It is clear that the introduction of audiovisual technologies and the Internet have had a very positive effect on the dissemination of sign languages, making them visible to a wider section of the population, but also facilitating non face-to-face contact among signers and distant access to sign language contents, including community issues. As usual, the form of the language used in these media has some standardizing effect, even if no explicit measures have been taken with respect to that.

4.3.3 Sign language interpretation

Sign language interpreters have constituted the traditional link between signers and non-signing hearing individuals, and as such they are an important vehicle of sign language dissemination. In all three countries we observe a progression from CODAs and volunteer workers realizing this mediating function in the beginning towards the officialization and professionalization of interpreters. Given their public role in the signing communities, together with the fact that many of them have learned sign language as a second language, their practice can influence the form of the language, mainly in the formal contexts where they are asked to interpret.

In Spain, although the first recognized sign language interpretation took place in 1987, it was not until 1995 that professional training for sign language interpreter was legislated and consequently implemented in 1998. Before that, many interpreters were of course active in connection with Deaf associations or sign language interpreter associations. Training at tertiary level is limited to postgraduate programs for professionals with a basic degree in sign language interpretation or with years of experience. In Greece the first interpreter training program for GSL interpreters and GSL tutors was established in 1990 in Argyroupolis (Lampropoulou 1994b, 1999). In Italy, such an indirect recognition of LIS and the rights of Italian signers also took place in 1982 by a special law regarding people with disabilities that recognized the right of having sign language interpreters at the University and signing tutors at the elementary and intermediate school.[11] Thanks to the scientific support of the National Council for Research (CNR) the first training program for LIS interpreters was established in Rome in the 1980's and after that various experiences of training have taken place (done by private schools, Deaf associations and universities), although at present there is no unified

[11] National Law 104/1982.

program. In Italy there exist two national associations of sign language interpreters, both founded in 1987, which are involved in training programs and professional support to sign language interpreters[12].

4.3.4 Second language teaching of sign language

Apart from the usual ways of sign language transmission described above, sign language teaching curricula have been established with two main purposes: sign language interpreter training and sign language proficiency for hearing parents and relatives, professionals engaged in deaf education and other people interested in learning sign language as L2.

Currently, outside of the university contexts it is possible to find in Italy LIS courses organized by the ENS provincial headquarters of many Italian cities. To this end, ENS founded several years ago a department devoted to didactics and LIS research activities denominated FALICSEU (Formation and Updating of the Language and Culture of the Deaf-School Education University), part of whose activities are devoted to the definition of programs and contents of LIS courses and teacher training. In such courses lecturing is generally commissioned to deaf teachers while the teaching of theoretical parts is sometimes assigned to hearing teachers. Currently, there does not exist an official qualification for LIS teaching. Even in the institutional centers (schools and universities) LIS teachers are selected on the basis of experience—i.e., anecdotal linguistic and cultural competences.

In Greece the first sign language classes in various settings were offered in 1988 (Local Authority of Argyroupolis in Athens, the University of Patras, the National Institute for the Deaf and some local Deaf clubs).

[12] For more information see www.anios.it and www.animu.it.

In Spain teaching of LSE and LSC has traditionally taken place through courses organized by Deaf associations or cooperatives. There is no official curriculum so far, and the programs vary between three and four levels of proficiency.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reviewed the general situation of the sign language communities in Greece, Italy and Spain and we have examined the patterns of sign language transmission and dissemination in those countries. Next to different instances of education for the deaf that go back several centuries in history, we find very important educational experiences and pedagogical approaches in Italy and Spain in the 18th and 19th centuries that involved sign language in the teaching practice. The decisive steps towards systematic (public) education for the deaf, though, were taken in the 20th century. After a period of schooling in specialised centers and boarding schoold for deaf pupils where different methods were applied and where sign language was transmitted basically among peers, in the last quarter of the century integration policies closed down many of those specialized schools. Mainstreaming of deaf students has weakened one of the basic sign language transmission links, but current attempts to consolidate bilingual/bicultural programs for signing pupils try to counter this trend. The other pillar for language transmission has been socialization in Deaf associations and clubs, which emerge at different points in the three countries during the 20th century. Younger generations of signers appear to participate less structurally in those organizations, as a consequence of the new communication possibilities offered by new technologies. Sign language dissemination, moreover, takes place through artistic forms like theater or poetry, through the media and the internet, sign language interpreting and in sign language courses for non-signers.

Despite the differences encountered in Mediterranean Europe, due in part to their particular historical backgrounds, it can be safely concluded that the patterns of language transmission and dissemination present rather similar traits in the three countries examined in this chapter.