

**Cultural pluralism and diversity on public television: an analysis of the use of sign language on the BBC and TVE**

**Aurora Labio-Bernal**

*University of Seville, Spain*

**Victoria Garcia-Prieto**

*University of Seville, Spain*

**Abstract:**

The United Kingdom and Spain represent two distinct models of media pluralism, and their two different approaches have traditionally been the subject of comparative studies. This article extends this comparison to the question of cultural pluralism through the study of sign language on public television as a mechanism of representation and accessibility for Deaf viewers. Through a content analysis, this study examines the proportion of signed news programming on the BBC and TVE and describes the main features of each broadcaster's use of sign language. The findings reveal parallels and deficiencies in the incorporation of sign language and demonstrate that signed programming must increase to ensure universal accessibility.

**Keywords:** Deaf people, audio-visual accessibility, cultural pluralism, public television, sign language, cultural diversity

**Introduction**

Any study of pluralism in Europe must necessarily include a reference to Hallin and Mancini's seminal book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). In their introduction, the authors refer to the need for comparative analysis because it 'is valuable in social

investigation, in the first place, because it sensitizes us to variation and to similarity, and this can contribute powerfully to concept formation and to the refinement of our conceptual apparatus' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 2). Recently, other studies have also sought to advocate a comparative perspective (Hovden and Kristensen, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2013; Purhonen and Wright, 2013), arguing that the same object of study may have different characteristics when analysed beyond its national context. In our case, the United Kingdom and Spain represent two different models of pluralism, as this concept is understood in Hallin and Mancini's text, in ideological terms. The North Atlantic or Liberal model that these authors propose for the United Kingdom contrasts with that of the Polarized Pluralism model they posit for Spain. In the latter case, the fundamental characteristic is the highly politicised nature of the media and the influence of different governments on the structure of news broadcasting. In the Liberal model, on the other hand, state intervention is usually limited and, according to the authors, 'the role of the media tends to be seen (...) in terms of providing information to citizen-consumers and in terms of the notion of the press as a "watchdog" of government' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 299).

Hallin and Mancini's study thus makes it clear that the British and Spanish media systems operate under two very different models, at least from the viewpoint of political pluralism. However, as will be explained in detail below, we consider this idea of pluralism to be limiting, as it fails to address variables related to social and/or cultural representativeness.

Indeed, one of the essential issues in dealing with pluralism concerns its conceptualisation. When defining the concept, most of the academic literature attempts to establish the existence of internal and external pluralism (Almirón et al., 2012; Fernández Alonso and Fernández Viso, 2012; Powers and Benson, 2014; Valcke, 2014).

The European Union has also been referred to in these terms, with pluralism considered a variable that it is essential to protect in all countries at all times.

The notion of external pluralism first appeared after World War II, although it took on a larger dimension in the 1980s with the deregulation of the market and the growth of media groups (ERGA, 2019). External pluralism is understood to relate to the number of media companies and, therefore, editorial representations existing in a given system (regional, national or global). This definition has been updated in recent years, with the publication of the *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States* (European Commission, 2009), which introduced economic indicators, among others, to measure the degree of concentration in a market. In this context, pluralism is examined in relation to the owners of media organisations and the control they wield, in order to determine whether or not there is a high degree of concentration that might affect editorial independence. In contrast, internal pluralism refers to diversity of content (Doyle, 2002: 12) and voices that should be represented, in the context of the idea of the media as a public service (Klimkiewicz, 2017: 198).

The exploration of these two categories reveals the relationship of pluralism with another concept, that of concentration. A few decades ago, Meier and Trappel (1998) pointed out that Bagdikian's (1990) predictions about the growing power of the dominant corporations had been realised due to the deregulation of the market and the liberalisation of the sector. These authors observed six variables whereby increased media concentration had an impact on pluralism, including the political influence of these corporations as their power in the market grew, and the shift towards a situation of oligopoly. Meier and Trappel's study also pointed to the dangers of prioritising issues like the concept of competition policy over matters like freedom, editorial independence and the public interest in discourse on the media and communication policies. More

recently, there have also been studies of the importance of identifying the big media companies in order to better understand the information ecosystem. This includes knowing who their owners are, what kind of decisions they make, what content they offer, at what price, and who can afford it (Birkinbine, Gómez and Wasko, 2017: 5). A key idea behind this paper relates to the observation that a higher level of media concentration can affect levels of pluralism in terms of content variety, topics presented, and access to information. In other words, the level of media concentration can ultimately affect the very idea of democracy, as well as contributing to the consolidation of monolithic perspectives. As studies by Robert McChesney (2014, 2015) have shown, the existence of a global media system dominated by very few companies has contributed to the development of a neoliberal democracy that prioritises profits over public access to information. The gravity of this conclusion suggests that if democracy has been emptied of its meaning, we must also question the existing levels of pluralism.

### **Cultural pluralism and sign language**

Despite the important contributions made by the studies noted above, it is evident that they have all consistently favoured an analysis of pluralism from a political or ideological perspective, thus neglecting the kind of broader view that interests us for this paper. With this in mind, for this study we want to include an additional element of the debate, as we are interested in examining issues related to cultural pluralism and diversity. The aforementioned *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States* (European Commission, 2009) defines cultural pluralism in the media as follows:

Cultural pluralism in the media refers to the fair and diverse representation of and expression by (i.e. passive and active access) the various cultural and social groups, including ethnic, linguistic, national and religious minorities, disabled people, women and sexual minorities, in the media. It comprises a plurality of themes and voices being present in the media, socialisation through multiple forms of media access and participation, choice between different forms of interaction and the representation of different values, viewpoints and roles, in which citizens belonging to various cultural and social groups, including national, ethnic, and linguistic groups, women, disabled people and sexual minorities, can recognise themselves. (European Commission, 2009: 12)

Cultural pluralism in the media thus refers to the access and representation that diverse social and cultural groups have, including persons with disabilities. The European Commission cautions in its report that if this pluralism is not fulfilled, there is a risk that the media will be dominated by the social and cultural majority. In this respect, it warns of the dangers of media stereotypes, inadequate representation of diversity or segregated media exclusively for minorities, among other concerns.

The role the media plays in the social inclusion or exclusion of persons with disabilities is extremely important (Rimmerman, 2012). It is therefore essential to recognise the need for the media to promote inclusion, equality, and freedom as basic democratic principles in the production, representation and reception of its content (Siapera, 2010). In this paper we also seek to highlight the efforts made by persons with disabilities to receive public recognition, ‘to challenge unquestioned norms, assumptions, practices and social arrangements currently existing in a given society’ (Maia and Vimieiro, 2015: 178). Ferguson and Nusbaum (2012: 70) also show how

these efforts have led to the development of disability studies in recent decades, concluding that academic research in this area must necessarily be interdisciplinary. This is why it is essential to connect disability studies and media studies, especially on issues as important as cultural pluralism. As Lombardi and Lalor suggest, the aim should be to include ‘disability in the discourse to extend and advance the definition of diversity’ (2016: 159).

We would therefore argue that cultural pluralism in relation to disability should have three basic objectives. The first of these is to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in audio-visual content, both in the messages conveyed and in their participation as recognisable actors or presenters. In this respect, the proportion of programming dedicated to persons with disabilities in relation to the total will also be important (Labio-Bernal, 2014: 63). A second objective, identified in the European Commission’s 2009 study noted above, is the promotion of cultural pluralism through better representation of this community in paid positions in the media industry. Thirdly, it is essential for governments to commit to ‘continuously and progressively making their services more accessible to persons with disabilities’ and to ‘encourage media service providers to develop accessibility plans’ to achieve this, as recommended in European Parliament and Council Directive 2018/1808 of 14 November, amending the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2010. However, there is ongoing debate stemming from the non-obligatory nature of the Directive, leaving the specific degree of accessibility of audio-visual content up to the discretion of the member States.

One of the dimensions related to the production of audio-visual content concerns language (Marengi, 2017: 167-168). While explorations of this issue often come down to purely linguistic questions, for this study we are interested in defining sign language as a ‘distinguishing feature of a social group and as a cultural value’ (Utray and Gil

Sabroso, 2014: 119). Sign languages are the natural languages of Deaf people that form part of Deaf Culture and Identity (Ladd, 2003; Napier and Leeson, 2015). These languages have emerged naturally and independently of oral languages (Neisser, 1990; Scott-Hill, 2003), but have been ignored and undervalued throughout history (Kyle and Woll, 1985). There is currently a consensus on the existence of Deaf Culture and the Deaf Community, understood as a cultural and linguistic minority for whom the use of sign language is a principal characteristic (Parasnis, 1996). Deaf people are proud of their social heritage and of belonging to this linguistic minority (Emerton, 1996). Sign language on television is therefore not only important as an accessibility service, but also as a form of representation of and respect for cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity. The sign languages referred to in this research are British Sign Language (BSL) and Spanish Sign Language (LSE).

In the United Kingdom, the BBC began broadcasting its first weekly news programme with BSL for the Deaf Community, called *News Review*, in the 1960s (Stone, 2007). In 1979 the network launched *Signs of Life*, which was replaced in 1981 by *See Hear* (Deuchar, 1984), a news talk-show about the Deaf Community that is still broadcast today on BBC Two. However, in spite of this long history, in 2018 only around six percent of BBC programming was being broadcast with BSL (BBC, 2019), just slightly above the minimum five percent required by Ofcom (2017). According to Stone (2007), the reason for this is that television networks only include this service out of legal obligation, not out of an initiative of their own to make their content accessible. In Spain, the first programme to include LSE was a weekly news show called *Hablamos*, which began broadcasting on TVE in 1977. A daily summary of the most prominent news, *Avance Informativo*, followed in the early 1990s (CNLSE, 2015). In 1997, TVE launched *En Otras Palabras*, renamed *En Lengua de Signos* in 2008 (Utray,

2008), which is still being broadcast on TVE2. TVE has also been incorporating LSE into other content since 2008; however, in 2018 this still only accounted for two percent of its total programming, with some channels below the minimum required by legislation (García-Prieto, 2019).

Sign language on television should be considered an accessibility service on a par with subtitling for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH). However, unlike sign language, SDH has expanded considerably and is now offered on up to 100% of content on the BBC (BBC, 2009) and more than 90% on TVE (RTVE, 2015). SDH is not limited solely to the transcription of spoken dialogue as it also includes elements necessary to follow the audio-visual content, such as the use of colours to differentiate between characters and descriptions of sound effects and intonation (Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998). In short, SDH is all about ‘making sound visible’ (Neves, 2008: 177). Accessibility services on television also include audio description for people with vision impairments, involving the addition of voiceover narration that describes actions, body language, facial expressions, setting or costumes, inserted into gaps between the dialogue or important sound effects (Benecke, 2004). While SDH has expanded to cover most programming, audio description and sign language cover much lower percentages, and this influences both the demands of communities with vision or hearing impairment and the scientific literature on each accessibility service. The reason behind the difference in coverage is the fact that subtitling targets a much larger number of viewers (Díaz-Cintas, 2003; Neves, 2009), while audio description serves a relatively small audience and is more costly and difficult to include in certain content. These are the same reasons identified for the failure of sign language to expand to cover more content and time slots (Kurz, 2004).



Currently, since subtitling has attained such high levels of coverage, studies and examinations of the service have focused on the question of quality, which, according to authors like Remael (2007), has been undermined by the implementation of legislation aimed exclusively at increasing the number of programmes with subtitles. Without doubt, the issue of greatest concern is the quality of live subtitling, as demonstrated in particular by the research of Romero-Fresco (2012, 2018). Conversely, the demands of disability communities in relation to audio description and sign language continue to focus largely on the need to increase the number of time slots when these services are offered. In the case of sign language the BBC recognises that it has been even more difficult to expand the service on television because it cannot be activated or deactivated by the viewer like subtitling and audio description can. This forces broadcasters to integrate it into the programme so that it will be seen by all viewers, provoking complaints from viewers who prefer to watch programmes without an interpreter on the screen. This explains why content with sign language is generally only available in off-peak time slots (BBC, 2000).

### **Hypothesis and objectives**

In view of the data outlined above, the approach adopted in this study has been based on an implicit critique of the Spanish media model, especially in relation to governmental control of public television (Bustamante, 2013; Fernández Alonso, Fernández Viso and Blasco Gil, 2017), in contrast to the BBC's model of media independence (Hanretty, 2011: 89-124). The initial research questions posited for this study were therefore as follows: is the BBC a model of cultural pluralism in terms of accessibility? Can Spanish public broadcasting compare in this respect with its British counterpart? To what extent

is sign language incorporated into the content of the two networks? Do the BBC and TVE represent two distinct models of cultural pluralism in Europe?

The first answers to these questions came to light in 2019 (García-Prieto, 2019), with the finding that both the BBC and TVE had insufficient time dedicated to sign language, thereby undermining their levels of cultural pluralism. In 2020, shortly before the onset of the coronavirus crisis, we wanted to update this data, redefining our hypothesis as follows:

- The United Kingdom and Spain's public television broadcasters partially fulfil their cultural pluralism mandates by including sign language in a minimal part of their news programming.

To guide this study, we also set some objectives, the first of which involves a quantitative and qualitative analysis of news programming with sign language on the BBC and RTVE. We also sought to establish an interpretative explanation that would facilitate the comparison of the data gathered on the two broadcasters. And our final objective was to relate all this information to the quotas for sign language on television established in the regulations of each country.

## **Methodology**

This research has involved the application of a combined content analysis of both quantitative and qualitative variables. The quantitative variables are intended to identify the proportion of signed news content on each broadcaster, presented in the form of statistical figures, while the objective of the qualitative analysis is to describe the main characteristics of the sign language featured on the news programmes studied.

For this study, various news programme formats were considered: news and current affairs, specialised news (sports, weather, etc.), debates and discussions on current events, interviews, reports, and magazine programmes. Specifically, all the programmes on the news channels BBC News and 24 Horas were included in the study, as well as any programmes broadcast on the other BBC and TVE channels that belong to any of the formats mentioned above. The children's channels Clan (TVE) and CBeebies (BBC) were excluded from the study because their programming had no news content during the period analysed.

The presence of sign language was measured in all news content broadcast during the week of February 3-9, 2020. This amounted to 304.68 hours on TVE, and 255.83 hours on the BBC, which constituted the study sample. In this sample we measured the presence of sign language and the format used to insert it on screen, both in programmes presented directly in sign language and in programmes in English or Spanish with a sign language interpreter. The results describe these variables in the content analysed and also suggest possible formulas for increasing the use of sign language in news programming and improving accessibility to this content. In addition, the amount of programming with sign language, the format used, and the display size of the interpreter have been assessed in relation to the current regulations in each country: Ofcom's Code on TV Access Services (2017) in the United Kingdom; and the *Ley General de la Comunicación Audiovisual* (Law 7/2010) in Spain.

In addition to presenting the data obtained from this analysis, the results have been compared to the findings of the study conducted during the 2017 and 2018 seasons (García-Prieto, 2019). This comparison allows us to observe how the use of sign language has evolved in the news content of the BBC and TVE over the past few years.

## RESULTS

### Sign language on the BBC

BBC news programming that includes BSL is broadcast simultaneously on BBC One (without BSL) and BBC News (incorporating an interpreter). Specifically, the morning news show *Breakfast* and the afternoon programme *BBC News at One* are broadcast this way. *BBC News at One* is broadcast Monday to Friday from 1:00 to 1:30 p.m. and includes BSL on all content. On the other hand, *Breakfast* is broadcast Monday to Friday from 6:00 to 8:30 a.m. on BBC News, but an interpreter only appears on-screen for two blocks totalling seventy-five minutes (6:45-7:30, and 7:45-8:15). On weekends, BSL interpretation is reduced to thirty minutes a day (7:00-7:30).

If we consider that the BBC's news channel broadcasts news programmes—including the various formats of this type of programming—24 hours a day, signed programming accounted for 5.08 percent of the total. Thus, the BBC News met the weekly BSL minimum of five percent required by Ofcom (2017), although it did not meet that minimum every day, as can be seen in the following chart.

[Insert Figure 1. Percentage of BSL on BBC News by day of week]

In short, the news programming that can be viewed with BSL on British public television is scheduled exclusively in the early morning and daytime afternoon time slots on the BBC News network, and there is always a simultaneous broadcast without this service for those viewers who prefer to see the BSL-free version. Additionally, the midday news on Saturdays and Sundays does not include BSL interpretation, and the only signed news programming on weekends is the thirty minutes of interpretation on *Breakfast*.

Conversely, the six and ten p.m. news programmes are also broadcast Monday to Friday on BBC One and BBC News simultaneously, but neither channel features a BSL interpreter. This is also the case for the nine p.m. news programme, *Beyond 100 Days* (Monday to Thursday from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m. on BBC Four and BBC News), and the current affairs programme *Victoria Derbyshire* (Monday to Friday from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. on BBC Two and BBC News). This means that the same programming is presented on two different channels but with no difference between them. The inclusion of BSL on this content would increase the quantity and scheduled times of signed programming while still maintaining an interpreter-free version for non-signing viewers.

In addition to the programmes broadcast simultaneously on BBC News and other channels, the BBC also has regional news programmes, weather programmes, and sports programmes that are broadcast on a single network and do not include any sign language. This is also true of *Newsround* (CBBC), the only programme of this kind aimed at a young audience, which also has no BSL.

News programmes such as *Newsround* (CBBC) and *The Papers* (BBC News) are rerun several times throughout the day in different time slots. This strategy could also allow for one of these broadcasts to be reserved for the incorporation of BSL. In fact, this precisely what is done with programmes that are rerun on different days throughout the week, such as *Question Time* and *Panorama*, which are first broadcast during prime time without BSL, and are then rebroadcast on another day in an early morning slot with the addition of an interpreter.

The reason behind this system is that most of the population that does not need sign language to follow programming dislikes content featuring BSL because the main image is reduced and the interpreter's image creates visual 'noise'. As a result, programmes with BSL are broadcast on two channels simultaneously, or as reruns in the

early hours, while the unsigned versions air on the main network at peak times so that the non-signing population will view them without complaint. Deaf viewers are given the option to watch the programmes simultaneously on BBC News or to record the programmes broadcast in the early hours for later viewing. The following table summarises the percentage of content with BSL on all of the BBC's channels in relation to all news programming analysed in this study, categorised by channel and day of the week.

Table 1. Percentage of BSL on the BBC by channel and day of week

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Total
BBC One	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BBC Two	0	0	7.59	0	11.29	0	50	6.28
BBC Four	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CBBC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BBC News	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.29	2.08	2.08	5.08
Total	4.76	4.7	6.08	4.6	6.57	1.46	4.04	4.63

As an alternative to recording the signed programmes, Deaf people now also have the option of watching them on BBC iPlayer, where BBC programmes featuring BSL interpretation can be found on demand. One exception to this is the programme *Breakfast*, which is available on BBC iPlayer only for a single day, and the on-demand version is from BBC One and therefore does not include BSL. Conversely, both versions of *BBC News at One* can be viewed on demand (one with an interpreter, and one without), and the same is true of *Panorama* and *Question Time*. In all these cases,

the screen layout used is the same: the programme image is reduced, and a background that mainly occupies the lower right corner of the screen is inserted. The BSL interpreter appears against this background to the right, in all cases occupying a space larger than one-sixth of the screen, the minimum size required by Ofcom (2017).

News programming with sign language on the BBC also includes *See Hear*, a current affairs programme presenting topics of interest to the Deaf Community, broadcast on Wednesdays from 8:00 to 8:30 a.m. on BBC Two. *See Hear* is presented directly in BSL, with English dubbing and subtitles. It is the only news programme with these characteristics on the BBC, and the format is different from the interpreted programmes; on *See Hear*, the presenters and others who take part in the programme are themselves using BSL, so an interpreter only appears when there is a voice-over and the person speaking does not appear on the screen.

In total, the BBC incorporated BSL into 4.63 percent of its news programming during the week of February 2-9, 2020. Specifically, BSL interpreting was included on the morning news show *Breakfast* seven days a week and on the afternoon news show *BBC News at One* from Monday to Friday. *Panorama* and *Question Time* incorporated BSL into their reruns broadcast in early morning time slots and *See Hear* was the only programme presented directly in BSL.

As mentioned in the section on methodology, to contextualise this data in terms of its evolution over time we referred to an earlier study carried out during the 2017-2018 seasons. This comparison revealed that signed news content on the BBC remains the same now as then, with no change in the three years between the two studies. In addition, three organisations for Deaf people in the UK interviewed for the study—Action on Hearing Loss, the British Deaf Association, and the Royal Association for Deaf People—openly acknowledged that these levels of sign language were insufficient,

as they were limited to very restricted programme formats and broadcast schedules (García-Prieto, 2019). As there has been no change in recent years, it is clear that there is still insufficient news programming with BSL available for Deaf people on the BBC.

### **Signed programming on TVE**

TVE also uses the strategy of broadcasting news programming on two networks at the same time in order to incorporate LSE into one of them. Specifically, *Telediario Matinal* is broadcast Monday to Friday from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. on TVE's flagship channel, La 1, and on its news channel 24 Horas, with the latter incorporating LSE. The same strategy is used for the news programmes *Telediario 1* and *Telediario 2*, which are broadcast seven days a week at 3:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., respectively. TVE thus broadcasts news programming with LSE on the 24 Horas channel in the morning time slot from Monday to Friday, and additionally, in the afternoon and prime time slots every day of the week. However, the daily news show *La 2 Noticias* still has no LSE, despite being broadcast simultaneously on channels La 2 and 24 Horas, which means that a signed broadcast could be offered while still broadcasting a version without LSE. On *Telediario 1* and *Telediario 2*, all news and sports segments feature LSE interpretation, but the weather forecast does not. These two programmes are available in full on demand on the TVE website. In contrast, only the last block (from 8:00 to 8:30 a.m.) of *Telediario Matinal* is available online and includes all sections and weather information.

The statements and weekly press conferences by Spain's Council of Ministers are also broadcast with an LSE interpreter on 24 Horas. In addition, during the week studied in 2020, the statement made by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Thursday, 6 February between 1:55 and 2:20 p.m. after his meeting with the President of the



Government of Catalonia, Quim Torra, also featured this service. However, Torra's statement was made in Catalan and did not include an LSE interpreter. In total, the percentage of signed programming on TVE's news channel was 14.92 percent, well above the 5.9 percent (10 hours per week) required under Spanish legislation (Law 7/2010). The distribution of this programming by day is shown in the graph below.

[Insert Figure 2. Percentage of LSE on channel 24 Horas by day of the week]

In these programmes, the interpreter is included by reducing the programme's main image and inserting a dark red background in the lower right corner of the screen. The interpreter's window, which is always light-coloured, is placed over this background to the right, occupying almost one-sixth of the screen, which is the minimum required by *the Guide to Good Practices for the Incorporation of Sign Language on Television* (CNLSE, 2017).

Some of the programmes on La 2 also incorporate LSE. These include two current affairs programmes that are broadcast first without sign language and then rebroadcast with an interpreter in a low-audience early morning time slot. The two versions of the programmes, with and without LSE, can be found on demand, allowing recipients to choose the version that best suits their needs. On these programmes, the interpreter is placed to the right of the screen in a light blue window, but in a smaller size than the recommended minimum. The other signed programme on La 2 is *En Lengua de Signos*, a programme providing information of interest to the Deaf Community, presented in LSE with dubbing and subtitles in Spain, broadcast on Sundays at 8:45 a.m. This programme is rebroadcast on 24 Horas on the same day in an early morning time slot and is also available on demand on the TVE website.

TVE's primary network, La 1, does not automatically include LSE interpretation in its programming; however, it does offer an optional interpreter for the current affairs programmes *Corazón* (seven days a week at 2:30 p.m.) and *España Directo* (Monday to Friday at 7:15 p.m.). On both these programmes, LSE interpretation can be activated on a Smart TV by pushing the green button, using HbbTV technology (rtve.es 2019). This service was introduced in December 2019, although trials of the service had begun a year earlier. Unlike the other content mentioned, these programmes are not available on demand with LSE. The following table shows the percentage of programming with LSE on each TVE channel in relation to the total news content analysed in this study.

Table 2. Percentage of news programming with LSE on TVE

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Total
La 1	12.15	10.46	10.06	9.96	10.71	7.23	4.92	9.8
La 2	0	17.86	0	13.16	26.32	0	46.15	12
TDP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
24 Horas	16.25	21.81	16.25	17.99	16.25	5.9	10	14.92
Total	12.4	15.69	11.75	13.68	13.46	5.65	9.07	12

To summarise, TVE broadcasts its morning, afternoon and prime time news programming with LSE interpretation on the 24 Horas news channel, while this programming is broadcast on La 1 for non-signing viewers without an interpreter.

Complementing the sign language programming are the programmes *En Lengua de Signos*, *Para Todos La 2* and *España en Comunidad*, broadcast on La 2 without a simultaneous LSE-free version on another channel.

In contrast to the BBC, if we compare the LSE data from TVE with the findings of the study initiated three years ago, we find that the Spanish public broadcaster has made clear progress in incorporating this service into more of its news programming. Up until March 2018, TVE only included signing in *Telediario 1* from Monday to Friday at 3:00 p.m. Then *Telediario Matinal* was added, but also from Monday to Friday, so TVE still had no LSE interpreting on prime time or weekend news programming. This was added in October 2018 (cope.es 2018), and at the end of 2019 optional LSE interpreting was incorporated into La 1's current affairs programmes on compatible television sets. This is palpable progress, as TVE has gone from having a single signed news programme from Monday to Friday to having three daily news shows on 24 Horas, three weekly programmes on La 2, and two additional current affairs programmes on La 1.

If we compare the news programming with sign language on the two public broadcasters studied, we find that TVE incorporates more accessible content than the BBC. The following chart compares the results of the BBC and TVE using minutes as a unit of measurement. We chose this measurement to make the comparison because the percentage depends directly on the news programming broadcast, which is different in each country, while time is an absolute value equivalent in both cases.

[Insert Figure 3. Signed news programming on the BBC and TVE]

Finally, a comparison of accessibility through sign language on the news channels of the two broadcasters again shows TVE to be performing better, as it offers a more complete service which, as previously explained, is distributed across various time slots, including prime time, every day of the week.

[Insert Figure 4. Signed programming on BBC News and 24 Horas]

### **Discussion and conclusions**

The analysis conducted in this study points to some interesting conclusions that raise questions about the neglect of cultural pluralism on public television in two European countries in relation to the Deaf community and sign language. In terms of political and ideological pluralism, the British and Spanish media systems have notable differences. Specifically, while TVE has traditionally been used as a political instrument by different governments and has been criticised both for poor management and being leveraged by political parties, the BBC has been regarded as an example of independence and a model public entity in Europe.

However, there was no existing data on the role of these public broadcasters in relation to cultural pluralism and, specifically, access to sign language in news programming. We believe that there is a need for more academic studies like this one in order to broaden the concept of pluralism as it is described in the *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States*. This report, discussed above, details the risks and threats to cultural pluralism, ranging from the under-representation of minorities, including persons with disabilities, to the conditions for access to audio-visual content and services. As a recommendation, the report itself encourages studies to be carried out through ‘methods of measuring that may include independent monitoring of the media by organizations of disabled people, and national regulatory agencies’ (European Commission, 2009: 59).

This study is thus intended as one of the first approaches to this type of measuring method for two member states: the United Kingdom and Spain. Our findings

demonstrate clear similarities in the ways that the BBC and TVE incorporate sign language into their news programming. Both use simultaneous broadcasts to include signing in daily news reports on their news channels. However, the coverage offered by TVE is clearly superior, as in addition to morning and afternoon news programmes it also includes signing on prime time and weekend news. Both broadcasters also have a programme specifically targeting the Deaf Community, presented directly in sign language with dubbing and subtitling in the country's oral language. In both cases, it is a weekly programme broadcast on the second network (BBC Two and La 2).

Our hypothesis has been partly confirmed. The level of BSL that the BBC offers in its news programming is the same as it was in 2018 and is therefore still insufficient to ensure universal accessibility for Deaf people, as corroborated by users and associations representing the Deaf community in 2018 (García-Prieto, 2019). In contrast, TVE has clearly increased its content with LSE. At the beginning of 2018, it had only one signed news programme from Monday to Friday, while in 2020 it now has three news programmes broadcast in the morning, afternoon and prime time slots. It also includes LSE in two current affairs programmes on La 2, in addition to the above-mentioned news programme specifically targeting the Deaf Community. Finally, the inclusion of an interpreter as an optional service on La 1 represents a clear advance in the incorporation of sign language on the same terms as subtitles and audio description.

In fact, one of the biggest demands of Deaf people is that sign language be optional—possible for the viewer to activate and deactivate—because otherwise, all viewers would be forced to view the content with the on-screen interpreter, which provokes complaints from many viewers and hinders efforts to increase signed programming quotas. This is why sign language programmes are broadcast simultaneously on two channels or in early morning time slots. The direction taken by

TVE opens up new possibilities for sign language on television, although it is only available for compatible TVs.

In both cases it would be possible to expand signed programming. The BBC has many other news programmes broadcast on two channels at the same time (*BBC News at 9*, *BBC News at 6*, *BBC News at Ten*, *Beyond 100 Days*), or that are rebroadcast several times on the same day (*Newsround*, *Sportsday*, *The Papers*). These programmes could include BSL in one of the broadcasts while the others could continue to be broadcast without an interpreter. TVE could also incorporate LSE into other programmes broadcast simultaneously on two channels containing current affairs, interviews, reports and discussions, such as *Los Desayunos de TVE*, *Informe Semanal*, and *La 2 Noticias*.

The final point to reflect on, however, is whether there is a willingness to increase the proportion of programming with sign language, thereby contributing to the enhancement of cultural pluralism in the two countries. With reference to point C.10 of *the Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States*, related to the risk of limited accessibility for persons with disabilities, we also agree on the need to develop policies and support measures to improve this access, as well as to promote the availability of content and service applications to people with disabilities. It seems clear that, while in ideological terms the media pluralism models of the United Kingdom and Spain are different, in terms of cultural pluralism and specifically in relation to Deaf people both countries still need to improve the proportion of programming with sign language on public television. Indeed, the findings here reveal clear parallels between the two broadcasters in relation to the formats used to incorporate sign language, the clear deficiencies, and the improvements needed to ensure universal accessibility in line with pluralism and cultural diversity.

## References

- Almirón N, Llorens C, Segovia AI, Bas JJ, Grau H and Suárez R (2012) External Pluralism Protection in Five EU countries and the U.S.: The Regulatory Authorities Views. *Observatorio (OBS\*) Journal* 1(6): 129-157.
- Bagdikian B (1990) *The media monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- BBC (2000) BBC annual report and accounts 1999/2000. London: BBC.
- BBC (2009) BBC annual report and accounts 2008/2009. London: BBC.
- BBC (2019) Group Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19. London: BBC.
- BBC News at One* (1986-present). BBC One and BBC News. BBC.
- Benecke B (2004) Audio-Description. *Meta*, 49(1): 78-80.
- Beyond 100 Days* (2017-2020). BBC World News. BBC.
- Birkinbine B, Gómez R and Wasko J (2017) *Global Media Giants*. New York: Routledge.
- Breakfast*. (2000-present). BBC One and BBC News. BBC.
- CNLSE (2015) *Presencia de la lengua de signos española en la televisión*. Madrid: Real Patronato sobre Discapacidad. Available at: [www.siiis.net/documentos/documentacion/Informe.%20Presencia%20de%20la%20Lengua%20de%20Signos.pdf](http://www.siiis.net/documentos/documentacion/Informe.%20Presencia%20de%20la%20Lengua%20de%20Signos.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2020).
- CNLSE (2017) *Guía de buenas prácticas para la incorporación de la lengua de signos en televisión*. Madrid: Real Patronato sobre Discapacidad. Available at [www.siiis.net/documentos/ficha/529550.pdf](http://www.siiis.net/documentos/ficha/529550.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2020).
- Cope.es (2018) Canal 24 Horas TVE emite desde hoy todos los telediarios con lengua de signos. *Cope.es*, 16 Oct, 18. Available at:

[www.cope.es/actualidad/cultura/noticias/canal-horas-tve-emite-desde-hoy-todos-los-telediarios-con-lengua-signos-20181016\\_276336](http://www.cope.es/actualidad/cultura/noticias/canal-horas-tve-emite-desde-hoy-todos-los-telediarios-con-lengua-signos-20181016_276336) (accessed 16 October 2020).

*Corazón* (1997-present). La 1. RTVE.

Díaz-Cintas J (2003) *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación*. Barcelona: Ariel.

Doyle G (2002) *Media Ownership: The Economics and Politics of Convergence and Concentration in the UK and European Media*. London: Sage.

Emerton RG (1996) Marginality, Biculturalism, and Social Identity of Deaf People. In: Parasnis I (ed) *Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.136-145.

*España Directo* (2005-present). La 1. RTVE/El Torreón de Sol.

European Commission (2009) *Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States*. Available at:  
[ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/media\\_taskforce/doc/pluralism/pfr\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/doc/pluralism/pfr_report.pdf)  
(accessed 16 October 2020).

European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) (2019) *Internal Media Plurality in Audiovisual Media Services in the EU: Rules and practices*. Available at: <https://erga-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ERGA-2018-07-SG1-Report-on-internal-plurality-LQ.pdf> (accessed 16 October 2020).

Ferguson PM and Nusbaum E (2012) Disability Studies: What Is It and What Difference Does It Make? *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 37(2): 70-80.

Fernández Alonso I and Viso A (2012) Internal pluralism in the governance of public service broadcasters in Spain and the role of social groups and professionals. The case of RTVE. *Communication and Society*, XXV(2): 203-230.



- Fernández Alonso I, Fernández Viso A and Blasco Gil JJ (2017) Crisis de credibilidad y debilidad financiera de RTVE. In: Fernández Alonso I (ed) *Austeridad y clientelismo: política audiovisual en España en el contexto mediterráneo y de la crisis financiera*. Barcelona: Gedisa, pp.97-117.
- García-Prieto V (2019) *Accesibilidad y televisión pública en Europa. Estudio comparativo de los casos de España y Reino Unido 2017-2018*. PhD Thesis, University of Seville, Sp.
- Hallin DC and Mancini P (2004) *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hanretty C (2011) *Public Broadcasting and Political Interference*. London: Routledge.
- Hovden JF and Kristensen NN (2018) The cultural journalist around the globe: A comparative study of characteristics, role, perceptions, and perceived influences. *Journalism*, 00(0): 1-20. DOI: 10.1177/1464884918791224
- Ivarsson J and Carroll M (1998) *Subtitling*. Simrishamn: Transedit.
- Klimkiewicz B (2017) State, media and pluralism: Tracing roots and consequences of media policy change in Poland. *Publizistik*, 62: 197-213. DOI: 10.1007/s11616-017-0337-5
- Kurz I (2004) Television as a Source of Information for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. Captions and Sign Language on Austrian Television. *Meta*, 49(1): 81-88.
- Kyle J and Woll B (1985) *Sign language: The study of deaf people and their language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- La 2 Noticias* (1994-2020). La 2. RTVE.
- Labio-Bernal A (2014) El eterno debate sobre la concentración mediática en la Unión europea. Del plan Reding-Wallström a la Iniciativa Ciudadana por el Pluralismo. In

- Chaparro M (ed) *Medios de proximidad: Participación social y políticas públicas*. Girona/Málaga: Luces de Gálibo, pp.55-72.
- Ladd P (2003) *Understanding deaf culture: In search of deafhood*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lombardi A and Lalor A (2016) Including disability in the discourse. Extending and Advancing the Definition of Diversity in Higher Education. In: Pasque PA, Ortega N, Burkhardt J and Ting M (eds) *Transforming Understandings of Diversity in Higher Education: Demography, Democracy, and Discourse*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, pp.148-162.
- Maia R and Vimieiro AC (2015) Recognition and Moral Progress: A Case Study about Discourses on Disability in the Media. *Political Studies*, 63: 161–180.
- Marenghi P (2017) Apuntes metodológicos para un modelo de medición de la diversidad en Televisión. In: Albornoz L and García-Leiva T (eds) *Diversidad e industria audiovisual: el desafío cultural del siglo XXI*. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, pp.154-171.
- McChesney R (2014) *Digital Disconnect: how capitalism is turning the internet against democracy*. New York: The New Press.
- McChesney R (2015) *Blowing the roof off the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Meier WA and Trappel J (1998) Media Concentration and the Public Interest. In: McQuail D and Siune K (eds) *Media Policy. Convergence, Concentration & Commerce*. London: Sage, pp.38-59.
- Napier J and Leeson L (2015) *Sign language in action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Neisser A (1990) *The Other Side of Silence American Sign Language*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.
- Neves J (2008) Training in subtitles for the d/Deaf and the hard-of-hearing. In: Díaz-Cintas J (ed) *The didactics of audiovisual translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp.171-190.
- Neves J (2009) Interlingual Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing. In: Díaz Cintas J and Anderman G (eds) *Audiovisual translation: language transfer on screen*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.151-169.
- Newsround* (1972-present). CBBC. BBC.
- Nielsen RK, Esser F and Levy D (2013) Comparative Perspectives on the Changing Business of Journalism and Its Implications for Democracy. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(4): 383-391. DOI: 10.1177/1940161213497130
- Ofcom (2017) *Ofcom's Code on Television Access Services*. Available at: [www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/97040/Access-service-code-Jan-2017.pdf](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/97040/Access-service-code-Jan-2017.pdf) (accessed 16 October 2020).
- Panorama* (1953-present). BBC One. BBC.
- Parasnis I (1996) *Cultural and language diversity and the deaf experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Powers M and Benson R (2014) Is the Internet homogenizing or diversifying the news? External Pluralism in the U.S., Danish, and French Press. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(2): 246-265. DOI: 10.1177/1940161213519680
- Purhonen S and Wright D (2013) Methodological Issues in National-Comparative Research on Cultural Tastes: The Case of Cultural Capital in the UK and Finland. *Cultural Sociology*, 7(2): 257-273. DOI: 10.1177/1749975512473462
- Question Time* (1979-present). BBC One. Mentorn Media.

- Remael A (2007) Sampling subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH). In: Díaz-Cintas J, Orero P and Remael A (eds) *Media for All. Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description, and Sign Language*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp.23-51.
- Rimmerman A (2012) *Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities. National and International Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Romero-Fresco P (2012) Quality in Live Subtitling: The Reception of Respoken Subtitles in the UK. In: Remael A, Orero P and Carroll M (eds) *Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility at the Crossroads: Media for All 3*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp.111-131.
- Romero-Fresco P (2018) Respeaking. Subtitling through speech recognition. In: Pérez González L (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation*. London: Routledge, pp.96-113.
- RTVE (2015) Memoria 2015 sobre el cumplimiento de la función de servicio público y la responsabilidad social corporativa. Available at: [http://www.rtve.es/contenidos/corporacion/MEMORIA\\_SP\\_Y%20RSC\\_2015.pdf](http://www.rtve.es/contenidos/corporacion/MEMORIA_SP_Y%20RSC_2015.pdf) (accessed 24 March 2021).
- Rtve.es (2019) Corazón y España Directo incorporan lengua de signos a su emisión. *Rtve.es*, 12 Dec. 2019. Available at: [www.rtve.es/rtve/20191202/corazon-espana-directo-incorporan-lengua-signos-su-emision/1993037.shtml](http://www.rtve.es/rtve/20191202/corazon-espana-directo-incorporan-lengua-signos-su-emision/1993037.shtml) (accessed 16 October 2020).
- See Hear* (1981-present). BBC Two. BBC.
- Scott-Hill M (2003) Deafness/Disability – problematic notions of identity, culture and structure. In: Riddel S and Watson N (eds) *Disability, culture and identity*. Harlow: Prentice Hall, pp.88-103.

Siapera E (2010) *Cultural diversity and global media: The media of difference*.

Chichester: Willey Blackwell.

Stone C (2007) Deaf Translators/Interpreters' Rendering Processes. The Translation of

Oral Languages. *Sign Language Translator and Interpreter*, 1(1): 53-72.

*Telediario* (1957-present). La 1 and 24 Horas. RTVE.

*The Papers* (2017-present). BBC News. BBC.

Utray F (2008) Accesibilidad a la TDT en España para personas con discapacidad

sensorial (2005-2007). PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III, Sp.

Utray F and Gil Sabroso E (2014) Diversidad cultural, lengua de signos y televisión en

España. *Fonseca: Journal of Communication*, 9: 118-143.

Valcke P (2014) Challenges of Regulating Media Pluralism in the European Union: The

Potential of Risk-Based Regulation. *Quaderns del CAC*, 38(1): 25-35.

*Victoria Derbyshire* (2015-2020). BBC Two and BBC News. BBC.