



Exploring *BISINDO* (Indonesian Sign Language) in the Short Movie's Dialogues for the Deaf Empowerment

Riana D. Sitharesmi^{1*}

¹ Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia
rdsitharesmi@ung.ac.id

Abstract. The human body is the primary material for manifesting the hidden message into visual codes or signs. Using the arms, hands, head, and face, the deaf delivers the message representationally. In Performing Arts, on the other hand, non-verbal signs are primarily presented in a semi-representational to non-representational way (symbolic). When the Deaf dances, for example, he assembles sensitivity related to sign language and his special features used to see and experience the inner rhythm. This research was conducted while encouraging using Indonesian Sign Language (*BISINDO*) for the Deaf at Yayasan Tunarungu Helen Wimberty Gorontalo. Along with it, we made our first independent short movie starring deaf teenagers. The imperative is to optimize *BISINDO* as the main vocabulary in the whole film and to bridge communication in the emergency basic acting training. Referring to Stephanie Lim, Harlan Lane, and Mel Drake, who conducted dance drama performances for the deaf, I collaborated on basic acting techniques with the *BISINDO*. A short movie has been pragmatically produced, while the research also contributed to the ideals of inclusive education for Indonesian Deaf students. With the knowledge and skills of art, it is hoped that later, the talented Deaf youths themselves can be the agents of the humanistic nature of the arts.

Keywords: The Deaf, *BISINDO*, Short Movie, Basic Acting.

1 Introduction

The basic acting for film is not less than it is for theatre. The flexibility of body language is needed to deliver the messages through the dialogues (and monologues) in specific rhythm, tempo, and space. Although film dialogues mainly manifest in verbal language, gestures and expressions are still the main material for manifesting every hidden message into codes that can be read and captured visually. Most body parts active in presenting these codes are the arms, hands, torso, legs, head, and face. Film and performing arts such as dance and theatre presented the codes mostly semi-representational to non-representational or even symbolic. No matter how high its representational nature is, the movie is a fiction that conveys its aesthetic aspect: stylization, its dynamic depiction in space, time, and energy (dynamic image),

and cinematic degree. Representational codes are the most obvious for conveying messages, so they often resemble replicas and imitate significant forms. We can take pantomime as the most representational theatre performance that manifests a whole structure in non-verbal language. It uses complex yet clear and significant codes through expression and body language.

I adhered to my intuition to assume that deaf people also produce significant forms of representational codes through sign language. However, its manifestation depends on the common verbal language used in each place. Following Oliver Sack's description, Taylor [1] believed that sign languages for the deaf are highly conventionalized visual/gestural languages, functioning as a movement in time and space. The basic components of sign languages deploy the body as the vehicle for communication, posited movement through space to contribute to the transmission of meaning. Such utilization corresponds to the fundamental components of the physical languages developed by the performer on stage. It is iconic of gestures that establish recognizable pictorial images within sign structures.

Deaf people, as performers, can have sensitivity regarding sign language, which is their main means of communication. Deaf people have special privileges, namely that they are used to seeing and experiencing the true rhythms of the world, not rhythms resulting from worldly creations. So they usually excel at non-verbal performing art such as dancing and can surpass other people [2]. Although human vocals are also used to strengthen representation in dance, their presence is not to convey complete words or sentences. Vocals in dance are more of an aural component that accompanies movement sentences in sequences or are more often used with musical instruments as part of the musical accompaniment to dance. While dance is more "talking" and uses body language to present significant forms, symbols, and codes, theatre and film barely leave the presence of both vocal and body language. So, making a movie for those who are deaf, mute, or both is probably a good challenge for hearing people to attempt inclusive work with deaf people.

The power of symbolic language in dance, theatre, and movies can be maximized by deaf dancers/performers who have experienced sign language from a young age. It was also a consideration for Ellen Podungge, founder of the Sanggar Belajar Tunarungu Helen Wimberty Gorontalo [3], to plan movement-based arts training for the children and youth in her care. Ellen Podungge hopes that the talented deaf in her foundation can perform dramas and dances specially prepared for them. By learning to dance, practicing drama, and finally performing it in front of a wide audience, deaf people's self-confidence can increase and introduce the public to the work and creativity of Gorontalo's disabled people. Through this, it is also hoped that motivation will increase for deaf parents to participate in developing their children's talent interests in the arts [3].

In December 2022, the Sanggar Belajar Tunarungu Helen Wimberty Gorontalo has become the Yayasan Tunarungu Helen Wimberty Gorontalo (HWG). In March 2023, this foundation facilitated free Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) training for the deaf [4]. In early 2023, the foundation received an offer to be involved in making a film located in Gorontalo, with the main theme about the hopes and achievements of deaf people. For Ellen, a movie, whatever short it is, at this moment is a promise to

to HWG's members to e inclusion programs quickly quickly. To answer this challenge, the HWG needs fairly comprehensive training related to acting.

1.1 The Imperative

Acting, or what Suyatna Anirun calls the art of act (*seni peran*), capitalizes on skills and the channeling of creativity through the human body and soul. To be able to play a role well, a prospective actor must carry out basic acting training, which formally consists of bodily work, vocal work, and spiritual (soul) work, which in practice is united by imagination [5]. Therefore, I try to help prepare the young members of the HWG with practical basic acting training, which was limited to basic movement training, to achieve body flexibility and fluidity when playing a role.

This research must ultimately solve the problem of how far the movement-based arts training process, which relies on non-verbal language in both narration and communication, can produce a short film project with deaf actors. Hypothetically, because vocal is an absent part for deaf actors, body and facial expressions should be optimized through the intensity of sign language "pronunciation" in dialogues. Acting training can be carried out by collaborating basic dance practice with dramaturgy, which is the preparation stage for the film project being offered. The role of dramaturgy, as cited from Vass-Rhee [6], is a living presence that encourages everyone involved in theatre production to more carefully attend to what is ever present, that is, the inner workings of a play. The interplay between the performers' embodied drama- turgical practices, and the works' conceptual underpins the defining aspects of the creation from the first moment to the final performance.

The research uses Stephanie Lim, Harlan Lane, and Mel Drake's notes and writings on their experiences conducting dance and drama for Deaf performers. There are several strategies and approaches that are different but have some general similarities, especially those related to sympathetic but firm ways of dealing with deaf people. What is also very important is how these strategies can motivate them so that their hidden talents can be discovered and used to strengthen their expression. Based on simple acting techniques, training is carried out based on a dance theater model that optimizes the use of non-verbal language. Dance theater is a modern choreographic concept that was first introduced by Judson Dance Theater in America as an experimental project by individual dancers - choreographers who dismantle dance traditions. Yvonne Rainer created *No Manifesto*, the antithesis of the standard classical ballet performance, which said "No" to any spectacle, virtuosity, magic, glamour, imagery, and anything natural to the performance [7].

The basic acting involves dramaturgical aspects in the creative process. It contains elements of acting and representational gestures, or theater/drama that minimize verbal speech and present more narrative in composition and movement design (choreography). According to Bojana Bauer, 'Important implications for dramaturgical practice are the deeper involvement of dancers in the process of creation; dancers are invited to create material and thus to share part of the conceptual and dramaturgical responsibility within a given creation' [8]. With dance

theater knowledge and skills, deaf people can possess the essential elements of acting, which in turn can also grow their self-confidence as creative people. By mastering the basics of acting, deaf people can appreciate the script or narrative of the film they are studying and control their attitude when shooting according to the role they are playing.

BISINDO (Indonesian Sign Language) is a sign language commonly used by the deaf community to communicate both with fellow deaf and mute, as well as with hearing people in the surrounding environment (local level). *BISINDO* complements the existence of the Indonesian Sign Language System (SIBI), which is the standard language as a communication medium for the wider deaf community (or national level). Compared to SIBI, *BISINDO* is more local because the codes used are a development of SIBI by adopting general terminology and gestures that have developed in Gorontalo society. *BISINDO*, therefore, has rich and varied codes and signs that arise from using both hands, ten fingers, arms, and gestures involving the head and torso to convey letters, words, and general terms [9].

2 Methods

The artistic or practice-based research accommodates the studio-based inquiry more firmly and has a broader field of scholarly activity. Practice-based research, as Barrett & Bolt [10] believe, has a critical potential to generate "personally situated knowledge" so that it implies new ways of modeling, revealing philosophical, social, and cultural context, and intervening in the knowledge outcomes for extending the understanding of the role of experiential, problem-based learning, and multiple intelligences in knowledge production, in the form of creative art [10].

The basic acting training program was implemented within three effective months, with twelve meetings (once a week). In the process, however, we had to add additional meetings to adjust the need for reading film scripts and assistance when shooting scenes. The activities are estimated to take place from May to July 2023. The theater training material is prioritized to convey the basics of acting, including bodywork and facial expressions, to support the articulation of Indonesian Sign Language. In reality, the research took longer than planned, around 6 (six) months, with the number of uncountable meetings due to the inconsistency of the activity times, which could not be determined on scheduled days and times. Implementing training activities is genuinely effective in July 2023 and would have only been completed in mid-September 2023.

As a practice-based research, the data collection is inevitably subjective. However, according to Vincs [11], the research context allows the researcher to go beyond the dance practice as "texts to be read". The subjectivity is integrally laced within the rhizomic structures of knowledge to affirm the actual thinking process. The research data is collected from the facts and phenomena during the training, which is carried out in several stages. The first stage is selecting a short film script written by an

inclusive film scriptwriter from Jakarta, Budi Sumarno, with the title "Mimpi Yang Menginspirasi." The second stage is modifying and developing several dialogues and scenes in the film script to benefit more and varied involvement of HWG members. The third stage introduces the stages of the activity program for selected participants, as recommended by the HWG founder, with several considerations regarding the suitability to the film script. The fourth stage is casting the main actors, supporting actors, additional actors, and extras. The fifth stage is delivering the basic acting materials through demonstration and imitation of *BISINDO* part by part according to the dialogues of each role. The sixth stage is directing the practice of memorizing dialogues using *BISINDO* and instructing the participants in appreciation and imagination techniques to be trained independently at home. The seventh stage assists the participants in understanding the story's substance and message in the film script. The eighth stage is determining house production for recording the scenes and the film editing process. The final stage is filming.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Promoting *BISINDO* Through Art

The basic acting materials are reduced and adapted to prepare Hellen Wimberly's members to play characters. *BISINDO* played a significant role in training material, film dialogue media, and communication between the research participants and me. Implementing the training is to prepare the participants with basic provisions for acting in short films and not to push the demand of perfection and idealization both for the process and the results. The limited time and energy that participants can use to practice naturally caused the training to be implemented to produce emergent (instant) acting skills.

"Mimpi Yang Menginspirasi" is a short film script written to socialize in an inclusive environment. The script had to be developed slightly to accommodate more HWG members. Therefore, with the approval of the founder of Hellen Wimberly, I added several scenes and characters without changing the substance of the original story. The actors are deaf teenagers, and their sign language teachers must be. The involvement of several nondeaf sign language teachers is also crucial to bridge communication in the whole program and to optimize *BISINDO*'s clarity in the movies' dialogues.

Most of the actors do not have any specific knowledge or training regarding theater or movement for acting. Therefore, the participant's grasp of technical material and text structure was very slow. On the other hand, time constraints resulting from school hours and other routine agendas are reinforced by the limited access for deaf people to attend training according to schedule without coordinating first with their parents or tutors. Considering this, I decided to involve two active *BISINDO* trainers to help me communicate with the Deaf: Abd. Kadir Umar (deaf and works at Kominfo) and

Ainun Utina (hearing and works as a translator at TVRI Gorontalo).

Even though the gestures and movements are not significant enough, the film script has a logical structure, which can be manifested through non-verbal language, sign language, and body and facial expressions. The basic acting materials that are trained are reading, self-control or cultivating awareness, returning to oneself (constructive thinking), cultivating motivation in attitude and movement, carrying a role, and performing a role (in front of the camera) [5]. The dialogues are articulated through *BISINDO*, which must be presented as flexibly as possible by training participants to achieve the intent and message in each dialogue. This is a result of basic material construction for acting, namely reading, self-control or processing awareness, returning to oneself (constructive thinking), processing motivation in attitude and movement, carrying a role, and performing a role. At the 7th and 8th meetings, we carried out some footage for scenes, then edited by my young colleague from prodi Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Wira Pratama Rumambie.

The manifestation of emergent basic acting training for the deaf does not significantly show the form of an ideal movie. It is not surprising, though, since I know the consequences of dealing with such a "new world" – new for me as a nondeaf researcher and new for them as the deaf to learn acting. According to Suyatna Anirun, filmmaking is a technical work process of taking pictures piece by piece or shooting by shooting with a camera, where the main control is not the acting technique but the director and editing work. In shooting, actors have to deliver dialogue and behavior in pieces. They are often repeated if the angle or lighting is considered less than optimal or some things are not in accordance with the director's wishes. The director detailed every step, gesture, business act, and actor's response. An actor's play is not contained in a complete staging production, in which a dramatic progression of behavior is developed in his script delivery [5].

3.2 New Challenges

Various problems arising during the training process are challenges worth discussing. The first problem came from me, who - because of my inability to sign language – had created a communication gap with deaf people. This communication gap was felt when I started having to direct their expression and appreciation of the role they were playing. My minimal sign language cannot explain abstract things related to imagination and techniques for providing content. Fortunately, I immediately realized this weakness and reflected on it by following the rhythm of the social interactions of these deaf people. I was aware of applying what Mel Drake said about key points in developing an approach such as 1) attempting to meet halfway by using the primary sign language (level 1) allowed me to be accepted and respected by the group; 2) look at the person I am talking to, not the interpreter; 3) not touching people who are deaf or hard of hearing in the back, unless they are aware of my presence; and 4) speaking in a normal shape of my mouth rather than exaggerated way [12]. The aim is for my presence to become familiar to all members gradually of HWG. The next

thing is to give up your time and energy to continue preparing yourself to study *BISINDO*. Therefore, this training activity gave me new experience and knowledge that can be developed into areas of further research work.

The second challenge is the thinking paradigm of deaf people themselves, which is still influenced by cultural stereotypes in Gorontalo, which position them as "lonely" people who must be helped instantly, not to have their desires and aspirations understood. Of course, the goal of an inclusive environment is not to force deaf people to do whatever nondeaf people do. Therefore, anyone associated with deafness should shift their comfortable position as a "normal" human being into a more active approach in embracing the "silent world" of deaf people. Following Harlan Lane's notes, 'A Journey into the DEAF-WORLD seeks to fill this need and, in so doing, to contribute to reducing the gap between professional perceptions of Deaf people and Deaf people's perception of themselves [13].

People who are deaf or hard of hearing unconsciously fall into the circle of cared-for stereotypes, suppressing non-material aspects and prioritizing to fulfill more practical physical and material needs. The theater training does not promise to fulfill material (also financial) needs directly and instantaneously, so the absence is considered not to harm anyone. The final goal of the training is a short film entitled "Mimpi yang Menginspirasi (Inspiring Dreams)." At least, with a goal that offers deaf people the opportunity to become actors, there is motivation that can be built more concretely. More importantly, the movie is a kind of what Ledesma [14] said as neither narrowly defined to strive for a superficial idea of 'quality', nor for commercial success, but instead taps to eschew perfection into the legacies of independent marginal cinemas that and often transgress boundaries of 'taste'. The movie's distribution and exhibition were made possible only through YouTube; it empowered the local community and people with disabilities.

3.3 A Mutual Learning Process

Please The involvement of hearing research participants is crucial, as well as the enthusiasm of deaf people to learn and promote *BISINDO*. It is to prompt inclusivity for the small artistic project to enable a broadened theatre experience: equality for both deaf and hearing actors on stage (a short movie in this case), following Stephanie Lim emphasizing that theatre expression should not limit the involvement or experience for Deaf bodies, but, instead, find ways in embracing and give meaning to those bodies, both onstage and off [15]. Meanwhile, the unpreparedness of this research participant to apply *BISINDO* for dialogues in scenes, the difficulty of memorizing and understanding the script's contents, and the rushed duration of attendance prompted me to maneuver using emergency methods. The training method that is applied directly during filming is the "drilling" method, where the *BISINDO* master (Arif) trains the actors to "say" the dialogue over and over again (Fig. 1). When the Deaf's ability to concentrate started to become less supportive. At the same time, second by second the time continued to shrink, the "mirroring" method was used with Arif standing facing the actor to guide him through the dialogues in *BISINDO* during the camera action (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. The "drilling" method in pre-rehearsal for the *BISINDO* dialog preparation.(Doc. Sitharesmi, Gorontalo, 2023)



Fig. 2. The "mirroring" method was provided during the camera action. (Doc. Sitharesmi, Gorontalo, 2023)

A short film has been successfully made, and it will be helpful to promote *BISINDO* as a primary sign language amongst the Gorontaloese Deaf. Moreover, after following the artistic research process, both training in basic aspects of acting in the studio and the process of recording scenes in several outdoor locations, my research participants gained an increase in the skills (hard skills) and knowledge (cognitive/soft skills) aspects of communicating with *BISINDO*, and basics of acting at a general level. The appearance of deaf people in the short film "Mimpi Yang Menginspirasi" creates joy and pride in them and an increased sense of self-confidence. The movie can be watched through YouTube, as seen in Fig. 3 & 4.

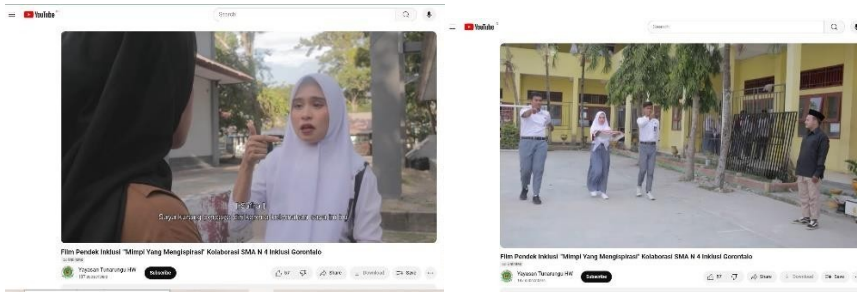


Fig. 3 & 4. The Movie "*Mimpi Yang Menginspirasi*" that can be seen at YouTube channel <https://youtu.be/HVmCkpMfCpg?si=IS5kxQldCi5Cj9nB> (Doc. Sitharesmi, Gorontalo, 2023)

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we aim to address the significant communication gap faced by the deaf community and explore the potential of *BISINDO* in bridging this gap, particularly within the context of short movie dialogues. The theoretical framework of this study draws upon sociolinguistic theories, including those related to language acquisition and sociocultural perspectives on language use. By examining the linguistic and cultural nuances of *BISINDO*, this research sought to shed light on its efficacy as a tool for empowering the deaf community and promoting inclusivity in media representation.

The analysis of short movie dialogues featuring *BISINDO* revealed several key findings. Firstly, it observed the expressive richness and linguistic complexity of *BISINDO*, which serves as a vibrant medium for communication among deaf people. Additionally, it noted the importance of incorporating *BISINDO* in short movie dialogues to foster greater understanding and appreciation of Deaf culture and identity. Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of short movies as a powerful platform for advocating for Deaf empowerment and social change. By featuring *BISINDO* prominently in dialogue scenes, filmmakers can challenge stereotypes, promote diversity, and elevate the voices of the Deaf community.

In conclusion, our exploration of *BISINDO* in short movie dialogues underscores its potential to promote Deaf empowerment and foster greater inclusivity in media representation. Moving forward, filmmakers, policymakers, and society must recognize the value of *BISINDO* as a vital component of linguistic and cultural diversity. By embracing Deaf sign language and promoting its use in various media forms, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all. Notably, the talented Deaf youths themselves can be the agents of the humanistic nature of the arts.

Acknowledgments. This paper is partially funded by Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, as an attempt in supporting or empowering the scientific work publication.

Disclosure of Interests. The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. The research was self-funded with the additional fund in a small amount by Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya, and implemented the research road map in the field of art, culture, and language.

References

1. L. Taylor, "Deaf sign language as a language for the stage," *Stud. Theatr. Prod.*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 65–81, 1995.
2. H. Youngmans, "How do the Deaf dance?," Jan. 2022. <https://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/deaf-and-dance.htm> (accessed Sep. 22, 2024).
3. Ivan, "Sanggar Belajar Tunarungu Gorontalo dapat Tawaran Syuting Film Dokumenter - Pojok6.id," Jan. 09, 2021. <https://pojok6.id/sanggar-belajar-tunarungu-gorontalo-dapat-tawaran-syuting-film-dokumenter/> (accessed Sep. 21, 2024).
4. S. Sako, "Pemprov apresiasi pelatihan bahasa isyarat Indonesia - ANTARA News Gorontalo," Mar. 14, 2023. <https://gorontalo.antaranews.com/berita/220287/pemprov-apresiasi-pelatihan-bahasa-isyarat-indonesia> (accessed Sep. 22, 2024).
5. S. Anirun, *Menjadi aktor: pengantar kepada seni peran untuk pentas dan sinema*. Rekamedia Multiprakarsa, 1998.
6. F. Vass-Rhee, "Distributed dramaturgies: Navigating with boundary objects," in *Dance dramaturgy: Modes of agency, awareness and engagement*, Springer, 2015, pp. 87–105.
7. J. Anderson, *Modern Dance, Second*. New York: Chelsea House, 2010.
8. B. Bauer, "Propensity: Pragmatics and functions of dramaturgy in contemporary dance," in *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, Springer, 2015, pp. 31–50.
9. A. H. Imaduddin, "Mengenal *BISINDO* dan Sibi, 2 Bahasa Isyarat yang Digunakan di Indonesia," Tempo.co, 2022. .
10. E. Barrett and B. Bolt, *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
11. K. Vincs, "Rhizome/MyZone: A case study in studio-based dance research," 2007.
12. M. Drake, " 'Next year's words await another voice': British Sign Language and voice work with D/deaf actors at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland," *Theatr. Danc. Perform. Train.*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 448–454, Sep. 2019, doi: 10.1080/19443927.2019.1677388.
13. H. L. Lane, R. Hoffmeister, and B. J. Bahan, *A journey into the deaf-world*. Dawn Sign Press, 1996.
14. E. Ledesma, "The blind gaze: Visual impairment and haptic filmmaking in *João Júlio Antunes' O jogo/The Game* (2010)," *Stud. Spanish Lat. Am. Cinemas*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 23–39, 2017.
15. S. Lim, "At the intersection of Deaf and Asian American performativity in Los Angeles: Deaf West Theatre's and East West Players' adaptations of Pippin," *Stud. Music. Theatr.*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 23–37, 2017, doi: 10.1386/smt.11.1.23_1.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

