This dissertation describes the history of the deaf during the period of Tsarist and early Soviet Russia from a sociohistorical viewpoint, focusing on the problems posed by communication types: sign language (SL) and oral speech (OS). We focus on the contribution of The All-Russian Association of the Deaf (VOG), an organization officially founded in 1926, which sought to represent deaf individuals' views on topics such as SL and OS. In this study, we attempt to highlight the importance of VOG within a wider social context and consider it an important social filter for understanding the deaf.

Chapter 1 describes the necessity and contemporary significance of this study. It briefly reviews previous studies and sets the framework of this study.

Chapter 2 confirms the legislative positioning of the deaf in Tsarist and early Soviet Russia.

Chapter 3 examines various social policies concerning disabled people. In the late 19th century, the methodology of education for the deaf was OS dominant, and at the end of the 19th century, educational institutions for the deaf were established in St. Petersburg, Moscow and other cities. The establishment of such educational institutions gave the deaf opportunities to form and deepen friendships with each other. Following the establishment of the Union of the Deaf in St. Petersburg in 1903, the Association for the Deaf in Moscow in 1912 and the other similar organizations were also established. Graduates of the few schools for the deaf in those days supported the founding of VOS.

Chapter 4 describes the "continuity" and "break" between Tsarist and Soviet Russia in terms of the major shift in social policies.

Chapter 5 considers the question, "What did the revolution mean for the deaf?" To answer,
we examine the memoirs of P. A. Saveliev, VOG’s first president, and decipher the sense of distance between the revolution and the deaf. Given the limited rights of the deaf in Imperial Russia, the establishment of VOG in 1926 was significant in that it represented an attempt to bring the concerns of the deaf community to the attention of the wider community. Although some articles in VOG bulletins cast doubts on the applicability of OS to the deaf culture, the resolution of VOG’s first conference (1926) encouraged its use.

Chapter 6 explains this contradiction. Moreover, Chapter 6 affirms that the deaf were given access to higher education in the late 1920s, a demand that was fueled by deaf graduates’ desire to continue their studies and VOG’s need to train its own cadres. Articles published in the 1928 bulletin demonstrate differences among “literate deaf people,” “late-deafened people,” and “the others: nonliterate” in the discussion of SL and OS. On the basis of these articles, we examine the 1926 resolution and attempt to describe the situation of the deaf in the 1930s. The resolution may have prioritized the goals of VOG’s literate deaf and late-deafened leaders, who had adjusted to the use of OS rather than SL.

The period described in Chapter 7 witnessed quantitative expansion (e.g., creation of cadres, realization of compulsory education) and VOG increased its membership and the number of companies it owned. Chapter 8 discusses two tendencies of the period: 1) “disability” was considered in official publications from an economic viewpoint—labor ability, and 2) VOG focused on achieving literacy and compulsory education for the deaf. Disabled people held two main attitudes toward (1): they were either i) being driven to labor market or ii) exploring upward social mobility. We hypothesize that attitude (ii) was generally seen among literate deaf and late-deafened people, whereas (i) was common among “the others: nonliterate.” We assume a soft correlation between the natural language ability (literacy and OS) and the attitude toward labor market.

To implement (2), VOG founded some liquidation points in local offices to educate its members, many of whom were nonliterate. Although the Central Committee indicated that education was insufficient for deaf students in 1931, we suppose that the problem was the method of literacy education.

In the 1930s, some VOG members advocated the requirement of SL in education. Pedology was banned in 1936 and Narkompros was forced to reconsider the implications of the educational policy.

Chapter 9 provides a situational overview based on the policies discussed and then focuses on specific topics.