



Why to write grammars of emerging sign languages

Por que escrever gramáticas de línguas de sinais emergentes

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the conceptions inherent to the processes of grammatization in emerging sign languages in relation to institutionalized sign languages. It is also discussed the case of some emerging sign languages and the discussion about variation and conventionalization in young languages and more consolidated sign languages. A reflection on the description, documentation and linguistic revitalization procedures suggested in the production of reference grammars of signed languages is applied to this study. Arguments are presented to theorize the concept of conventionalization based on Schmid's E-C Model (2020). As a result, it is shown that the grammatization of emerging sign languages in relation to the grammatization of institutionalized sign languages differs more by their glotopolitical and ideological aspects than by their linguistic ones.

RESUMO: Discutimos neste artigo as concepções de gramatização de línguas de sinais emergentes no Brasil em relação com a de línguas de sinais institucionalizadas, a Libras. Tomamos o caso de algumas línguas de sinais emergentes e o debate sobre variação e convencionalização em línguas ditas jovens e em línguas de sinais mais consolidadas. Aplicamos para este estudo uma reflexão sobre os procedimentos de descrição, documentação e manutenção linguística sugeridos na produção de gramáticas de referência de línguas sinalizadas. Apresentamos argumentos para o refinamento teórico do conceito de convencionalização a partir do Modelo E-C de Schmid (2020). Como resultados, demonstramos que a gramatização de línguas de sinais emergentes em relação com a gramatização de línguas de sinais institucionalizadas diferencia-se muito mais pelos seus aspectos glotopolíticos e ideológicos do que propriamente linguísticos.

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1 Introduction¹

With the publication of the SignGram Blueprint (QUER et al., 2017) as a guide for producing reference grammars of sign languages, and more recently a work focused on emerging sign languages in the Americas (LE GUEN; SAFAR; COPPOLA, 2020), issues of description, documentation, and maintenance of sign languages have entered the debate on the linguistic instrumentalization (grammaticalization and lexiconization) of sign language varieties, whether emerging or established. Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is a good example. As we mark the 25th anniversary of the first descriptive publication on Libras by Ferreira (2010 [1995]), Quadros (2020a) has compiled a collection of various linguistic studies on Libras, as well as a dossier on the documentation of this language (QUADROS, 2020b), which includes the first grammar of Libras, written in Libras (QUADROS; SILVA; ROYER, 2020).

As the process of formalizing Libras progresses, various emerging sign languages have been reported in Brazil (QUADROS, 2019; ALMEIDA-SILVA & NEVINS, 2020; SILVA & OLIVEIRA, 2021), with varying degrees of description and documentation. Some of these languages have been previously described in theses or articles, and because they are at risk of extinction, when a process of linguistic replacement toward Libras occurs, the work of codifying these

¹ This article is the result of discussions held during the course “Description, Documentation, and Linguistic Revitalization,” taught by the first author in the Graduate Program in Language and Literature (PPGL) at the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR) during the 2021.1 semester. Parts of the text were written by the second author, who, during the same period, was drafting her dissertation for the same graduate program (OLIVEIRA, 2021), and are based on research conducted by the third author on the Southern Rupununi Sign Language of Guyana, under the supervision of Professor Zoraide dos Anjos.

languages intersects with that of documentation and language maintenance (BICKFORD & MCKAY-CODY, 2018). In this article, we discuss the process of grammaticalization in emerging sign languages in relation to those already considered institutionalized (or established) sign languages, from the perspective of sign languages as languages at risk of extinction (CAMP et al., 2018). It is argued that the grammaticalization of emerging sign languages is necessary for a variety of reasons, given the unique characteristics of these languages and their visuospatial modality, in contrast to spoken languages, which have an oral-auditory modality.

The article is organized as follows: in Section 2, we present a typology of sign languages to define which sign languages would be considered emerging; in Section 3, emerging sign languages are situated within studies that seek to identify the degree of lexical and structural conventionalization of these languages (3.1); next, we present a usage-based theoretical model that allows for the study of both emerging and established sign languages under a single unified framework for analyzing them (3.2). In Section 4, we discuss cases of grammaticalization in established sign languages, specifically Libras (4.1), in relation to studies of emerging sign languages (4.2). Section 4.3 discusses the processes of linguistic instrumentalization in relation to the triad of language description, documentation, and preservation, as well as linguistic human rights and linguistic diversity. Here are the concluding remarks.

2 A classification of sign languages

The literature on emerging sign languages uses various terms to describe these languages: village languages, rural languages, hamlet languages, isolated languages, etc. An appropriate classification for the various sign languages existing in the world is still awaited; however, Le Guen, Safar, and Coppola (2020) suggest a “typology” of sign languages consistent with what appear to be

the two main types of sign languages in the world (BICKFORD; MCKAY-CODY, 2018, p. 255): sign languages of deaf communities and sign languages shared between deaf and hearing people in small communities. These languages would be classified as emerging sign languages based on the characteristics listed below:

(...) (1) These are languages with a relatively short lifespan (generally no more than two or three generations, that is, linked to the presence of deaf signers). (2) They have a relatively small (initial) number of primary users—as small as a single signaler in the case of home signaling systems. (3) They are not institutionalized languages; that is, no external institution determines how the language evolves. (4) Because they are emerging languages, these sign languages exhibit a high degree of change that is not observed in “established” languages that have existed for hundreds of years and are used by a large community. (5) In many cases, particularly concerning ‘shared sign languages’ (Nyst 2012), hearing signers outnumber deaf signers, indicating that past or ongoing gestural practices remain visible with the sign language. (LE GUEN; SAFAR; COPPOLA, 2020, p. 4) (Our translation)².

Based on this characterization, the authors aim to establish a typology of sign languages to standardize the diverse terminology present in the literature. The first would be: (i) institutionalized (or national) sign languages, which are those legally recognized in their countries of origin. For example, Libras and various sign languages as ASL, French Sign Language (LSF), etc.; (ii) deaf community sign languages, would be those used by a broad deaf community but have not yet received legal recognition or institutional intervention. Many

² Free translation from the original: “(...) 1) They are languages with a relatively short duration of existence (usually no more than 2 or 3 three generations, i.e., linked to the presence of deaf signers). (2) They have a relatively small (initial) number of primary users, even as small as one in the case of an individual homesign system. (3) They are not institutionalized languages, i.e., no external institution is deciding on the evolution of the language. (4) Because of their state of emergence, these signs languages may exhibit high rates of change that are not observed in “established” languages that have been in existence for hundreds of years and used by a large community. (5) In many cases, especially for “shared sign languages” (Nyst 2012), the number of hearing signers is higher than deaf signers, meaning that the gestural practices that were/are used as a background for the sign language are still visible.”

institutionalized sign languages are classified in this category, since the primary distinction lies in the implementation of language policies stemming from legal recognition. The authors point to Nicaraguan Sign Language (NSL) as an example; (iii) village/rural or shared sign languages; these, indeed, are the ones that exhibit the core characteristics of emerging sign languages, as cited earlier. In addition to these three primary categories, the authors also mention home sign systems and alternative sign languages³.

The pursuit of a comprehensive list of sign languages is ongoing, given that every country or territory worldwide likely has a widely used sign language within its local deaf community, not to mention younger, undocumented languages in isolated or remote communities. For instance, in Brazil alone, alongside Libras as the national language, there are at least 16 known emerging sign languages of which there is some record (ALMEIDA-SILVA; NEVINS, 2020, p. 1033-1034; OLIVEIRA, 2021, p. 23). Another example is the State of Roraima, which, in addition to its own variety of Libras, it is home to two potential emerging sign languages within indigenous communities: Macuxi Sign Language (LSMac) and Yanomama do Papiu Sign Language (LSYP) (ARAÚJO; BENTES, 2018). It also features an emerging sign language situated on the border between Brazil and Guyana, South Rupununi Sign Language (BRAITHWAITE; KWOK; OMARDEEN, 2017). Although the latter is not a language of Brazilian territory, it belongs to the Wapixana ethnic group, a population present in Brazil and who has constant movement between the two countries. Furthermore,

³ It is interesting to note that two major platforms dedicated to the world's languages classify sign languages quite differently. *Ethnologue* (<https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/sign-language>) categorizes them in to deaf community sign languages (128 languages), which includes national or institutionalized ones, and shared sign languages (21), including emerging sign languages. Additionally, the website lists International Sign Language, bringing the total to 150 signed languages. *Glottolog* (<https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sign1238>) classifies them into auxiliary sign systems (4 languages), deaf community sign languages (136), family sign languages (1), pidgin sign language (1), and rural sign language (60), currently totaling 202 sign languages. Naturally, these numbers are constantly evolving as new languages are discovered or identified.

beyond these indigenous sign languages, the state also has a migration sign language, Venezuelan Sign Language (LSV) (ARAÚJO; BENTES, 2020)⁴, a unique situation in which a single state has at least five different sign languages⁵.

The number of emerging sign languages is expected to increase significantly, driven by the attention of the linguists and new research initiatives focused on these languages. Consequently, several researchers have taken on the task of conducting initial descriptions of these languages, aiming at their documentation and potential preservation. In the context of description, the standard tools for this process involve the production of grammars and dictionaries (grammaticization and lexicography). It is quite common for the first documents produced for sign languages to be dictionaries, as seen with Uruguayan Sign Language (PELUSO, 2020) and Cena⁶. However, because they are relatively young compared to deaf community and institutionalized sign languages (some of which are over 200 years old), emerging sign languages typically span a maximum of two or three generations. The youthfulness of the languages is cited as one of the causes of the limited grammatical or lexical stability observed in them, sparking a debate about what types of linguistic tools would be valid for these specific languages, which are still viewed as endangered languages (BICKFORD; MCKAY-CODY, 2018) compared to the already institutionalized national sign languages. Some studies are beginning to lean over the process of standardization of signs and grammatical structures in

While LSV is not classified as an emerging sign language, its condition as a sign language in contact with Libras may spark new debates regarding the categorization of sign languages as either institutionalized or emerging.

⁵Given this diversity, the first author proposed the research project "Emerging sign languages, contacts, and borders in Brazil" (*Línguas de sinais emergentes, contatos e fronteiras no Brasil*) which was approved by CNPq (Universal Call 2021, Process 406831/2021-1), aiming to document and describe these linguistic varieties within Roraima.

Recently the Sunday TV show *Fantástico* aired a report on Cena and the work being done to produce dictionaries for this sign language. Available at: <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/10320183/> Accessed in: March 3, 2022.

emerging sign languages (OLIVEIRA, 2021; COPPOLA, 2020). Subject of the next section.

3 Situating the emerging sign language and their studies

With the knowledge of these emerging sign languages, linguists have been working to document and describe them. In some situations, the linguistic maintenance is still necessary (BICKFORD; MCKAY-CODY, 2018), as previously mentioned. The documentation and description work is primarily focused on the production of different types of grammars (grammatical outlines, reference grammars, pedagogical grammar, etc.) and the production of dictionaries. For linguistic documentation, textual works such as stories, short stories, poetry, etc., are also collected. As for institutionalized sign languages, such as Libras (QUADROS, 2020b), these processes are fairly common, but what about emerging sign languages that, in principle, are still being consolidated in the communities where they exist?

Even though the importance of emerging sign languages for the linguistic and typological knowledge of sign languages in general are undisputed (DEVOS; PFAU, 2015), we wonder if the particularity of these languages as young languages wouldn't make the description and documenting work an ongoing task, given that their lexicon and grammatical structures are still in the process of development. Some more recent works seek to determine the level of lexical and grammatical standardization of these languages in the communities where they are used. We selected three studies as examples about standardization in four emerging sign languages for discussion. After presenting the selected studies, a theoretical model specifically focused on processes of standardization is also presented as a way to suggest, at least initially, the possibility of treating the emerging sign languages alongside established sign languages in descriptive

studies with proper consideration given to linguistic variation and change in each particular type of language.

3.1 Standardization and variation in emerging sign languages

Some studies on sign languages considered young, such as the one by Meir and Sandler (2019) on two Israeli sign languages, Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL) and Israeli Sign Language (ISL); by Coppola (2020) on Nicaraguan Sign Language (NSL); and Ergin *et al.* (Manuscript) for the Central Taurus Sign Language (CTSL) they seek to identify the degree of standardization of signs and grammatical structures in these languages. The authors, in general, point to the differences in the lexical or structural standardization of emerging sign languages based on a combination of various factors:

It seems then that several factors lead a language towards a bigger standardization: the size of the community, its homogeneity/heterogeneity, the age of the language, and the functions and domains in which the language is used. Another factor that should be considered is the social status of the language. (MEIR; SANDLER, 2019, p. 359).

The study by Meir and Sandler (2019) approach how compounds and sublexical variation are formed, demonstrating bigger sign variation in ABSL compared to ISL, the latter being considered a Deaf community sign language, and the former is considered a village sign language, both considered young languages (around 90 years old). Some data are still being compared to the American Sign Language (ASL). Coppola (2020) conducted two studies: the first focused on the gestures and signs used by listeners in relation to the LSN signs, and the second study stemmed from the interaction among users of homemade sign language systems for LSN. The author concluded that participation in different communities contributes differently to the levels of lexical standardization in LSN. The manuscript by Ergin and colleagues is a compilation

of four studies. The first study is focused on lexical variation in CTSL, the second is about negation strategies, the third deals with sign order in the language, and finally, the fourth experiment explores the possible reciprocal constructions. The compilation of the four studies reveals outstanding differences in the level of standardization of the language's structures and lexicon, with negation being the most standardized and reciprocal structures showing almost no level of standardization. The authors left open several lines of research suggested by the four studies on CTSL.

Although they lack grammatical outlines, pedagogical grammars, or reference grammars, the four sign languages discussed in the preceding paragraphs have a considerable body of literature on various grammatical aspects. Such a lack of grammars for these languages appears to follow more closely the trajectory of most sign languages worldwide, including institutionalized sign languages such as Libras, which has only recently received its first grammar, written in Libras itself (QUADROS; SILVA; ROYER, 2020) in addition to numerous linguistic studies conducted over the past 25 years, as well as Uruguayan Sign Language (LSU) (PELUSO, 2020).

As studies on emerging sign languages around the world develop, the processes of sign conventionalization, through which a sign becomes more widely used within a signing community, thereby reducing individual lexical variation, are better understood. However, the impression is that only sign languages that reach the status of deaf community or institutionalized sign languages are considered capable of being properly grammaticalized, as they apparently display less variability in lexical and structural conventionalization. In this article, we argue that emerging sign languages (ESLs) can indeed undergo processes of linguistic instrumentalization, even in the absence of any operationalization of the concept of sign conventionalization in studies

addressing this topic (cf. MEIR; SANDLER, 2019; COPPOLA, 2020; ERGIN, manuscript). MEIR; SANDLER, 2019; COPPOLA, 2020; ERGIN, Manuscripto).

3.2 The E-C Model as a Theoretical Framework for Studies on Conventionalization

As noted, the studies presented in the previous subsection show little or no conceptualization regarding the processes of conventionalization. Ergin and colleagues (manuscript) state: “In summary, we find that conventionalization in CTLs is fragmented. There is no clear-cut line at which we can say ‘now it is conventionalized’” (ERGIN et al., manuscript, p. 51). The authors go so far as to suggest that it is common sense that certain linguistic features become “entrenched” in speakers’ minds and are conventionalized through the community (manuscript, p. 5). However, these claims merely reinforce the need for theoretical refinement regarding the processes of conventionalization. Such refinement can be found within strands of cognitive linguistics, particularly in the work of Schmid, who has sought across several publications (2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) to develop a construct that accounts for language use within a theoretical model. The author achieves this goal in a major publication (SCHMID, 2020), in which he details his proposal of the Entrenchment–Conventionalization Model. This model aims to account, in a unified way, for both the stability and the variation and change of languages.

In general terms, Schmid argues that the E–C Model predicts that “language is a dynamic, complex, and adaptive system, emergent and usage-based, derived from and feeding communicative structures, interpersonal interactions, cognitive processes, and social action” (SCHMID, 2020, p. 344). The author examines usage events and the forces that drive these actions, which, in a feedback loop, sustain the processes of (social) conventionalization and (cognitive) entrenchment in languages. These latter two processes, which give the model its name, revolve around usage events and are continuously reinforced

by them. What distinguishes Schmid's model for approaching studies on conventionalization in emerging sign languages lies in the theoretical framework adopted by the author, drawing on different functionalist theories of language, particularly usage-based approaches (SCHMID, 2020, pp. 9–10). Moreover, the processes of conventionalization and entrenchment are structured into subprocesses: usualization and diffusion (usualization and diffusion), and routinization and schematization (routinization and schematization), respectively.

Given the impossibility of providing a more detailed account of the model here, as it falls outside the scope of this article, we note the possibility of employing a theoretical model compatible with the particularities of emerging languages undergoing consolidation, despite the fact that Schmid's work (2020) makes almost no reference to sign languages. What should be taken from this brief presentation of the E–C Model is the suggestion that languages are in a continuous process of persistence (stabilization), variation, and change. Linguistic systems, including those of emerging languages, already contain within themselves through usage events, both conventionalization and variation, as a result of various factors and forces that interact throughout all processes, as mapped by Schmid (2020). This way of viewing languages as complex systems opens up the possibility for the production of grammars (grammatization), even in the presence of a certain degree of lexical and grammatical variation.

Studies by Meir and Sandler (2019), Coppola (2020), and Ergin et al. (manuscript) point to this interaction between variation and conventionalization at different levels of analysis; however, they do not theoretically and conceptually unpack what these processes are. The theoretical framework proposed by Schmid (2020, 2017a, 2017b, 2015) may contribute to a theoretically consistent grounding for the phenomena observed in sign languages undergoing processes of conventionalization (and, perhaps, entrenchment). It is also worth

emphasizing that a possible implication of the E–C Model is the absence of a categorical distinction between emerging and established languages, since, within this framework, the linguistic system is constantly being “re-produced,” rather than merely produced (SCHMID, 2020, p. 340). This perspective opens up a broader range of possible analyses for other language categories that may also be viewed as undergoing processes of stabilization/consolidation, such as creole languages and artificial languages acquired as L1, with Esperanto as an example.

Based on the arguments presented in the last paragraphs, the next section will proceed to a more direct discussion regarding the grammaticalization of emerging sign languages, using some case studies.

4 Grammaticalization of emerging sign languages in view of institutionalized sign languages

Due to being endangered languages, as well as emerging languages, village or rural sign languages are often labeled immature. A so-called mature sign language would possess all relatively stable linguistic levels—that is, phonological, morphological, syntactic, etc. features—and would have a more “fixed” configuration compared to newer languages that would present more irregularities at those levels of analysis. It is known that this aspect of stability is achieved through linguistic instruments (grammars and dictionaries) or political actions, those of which seek to reinforce an official standardization of languages, sidelining aspects of language variation. To illustrate these cases, we present two situations—that of institutionalized and of emerging languages—followed by some reflections.

4.1 The case of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as an institutionalized sign Language

As stated in the Introduction, linguistic studies of Brazilian Sign language (Libras) began in the late 1980s, with the first book-length publication by Ferreira

(2010 [1995]), more than 25 years ago. Over the past approximately three decades, the language currently has a reference dictionary by Copovilla, Raphael and Maurício (2009) with, more recently, a grammar written in the sign language itself, as reported by Quadros, Silva and Royer (2020), in addition to several works about specific aspects of grammar, as can be seen in Quadros (2020). Libras is also being cataloged as part of its documentation and corpus production by the National Inventory of Linguistic Diversity (INDL) of the National Institute of Artistic and Cultural Heritage (IPHAN)⁷.

Even with the wide range of information and studies on Libras, the language may exhibit different patterns in large urban centers. An example of this was the common complaint from those taking the PROLIBRAS exam (National Proficiency Certification Exam in Brazilian Sign Language, administered from 2005 to 2015) that signs specific to Santa Catarina were used, which negatively impacted signers from other states in the exam results. Sign languages exhibit dialectal variation just as any natural language (XAVIER, 2019) and the dynamics of different deaf communities contribute significantly to a greater dialectal diversification. Languages such as Libras and ASL, from countries with continental territories, or even languages from smaller countries such as Dutch Sign Language (NGT in Dutch) may exhibit striking differences in the executions of signs and grammatical constructions (XAVIER, 2019, p. 60). Bearing in mind specificities, we understand that the variation found in emerging sign languages differs from that of institutionalized sign languages or that of Deaf communities on account of being more related to iconicity and not being fully subjected to phonological constraints such as internal movement reduction or other morphological constraints; however, they may exhibit other features that do not directly depend on full conventionalization, such as the accent perceived by signers of ABSL (MEIR; SANDLER, 2019).

⁷Much of this information can be found in the dossier compiled by Quadros (2020).

While the variation in emerging sign languages lack a greater degree of arbitrariness in sign production, established sign languages seem to go through the same stages in the lexical creation process as those languages. The processes of conventionalization and entrenchment are similar in both established languages and emerging ones (SCHMID, 2020).

4.2 The case of emerging sign languages and the need for their linguistic instrumentalization.

In Brazil, in addition to Ka'apor Sign Language (LSK), which has been known since 1960, studies have emerged since 2008 indicating the existence of other sign languages in the country besides Libras. Quadros (2019), Almeida-Silva and Nevins (2020) and Oliveira (2021) provide information on the location and bibliographic references of at least 12 to 16 emerging sign languages in Brazil across different states. However, the types of studies attesting to the existence of these emerging sign languages vary widely, ranging from articles that only mention the possible language to relatively more detailed theses with initial descriptions of these languages. One example is the Terena Sign Language (LTS)⁸, which was “discovered” around 2010 and was first studied by Sumaio (2014) more recently followed by a brief preliminary description (SUMAIO, 2018).

LTS's case is emblematic because there was a significant shift in the author's attitude towards Terena signs, between her 2014 dissertation and her 2018 thesis. While the first study links the use of Libras to the (homemade?) signs of Terena, the author even devotes a four-line subsection to pointing out “counterevidence” that Terena signs constitute a sign language (SUMAIO, 2014, p. 104): “We have observed the use of Libras alongside Terena signs among deaf people who know that language. Another piece of counterevidence would be the

⁸This sign language has drawn attention after being featured in various media outlets following the news of the publication of a comic book in sign language, made by a student at the Federal University of Paraná.

fact that there is a passive knowledge of the signs—that is, a deduction-based understanding of these native signs among the Terena Deaf people.” In her thesis (SUMAIO, 2018), the author already faces the Terena signs as a distinct sign language. In her thesis, the author explains her change in position at that time by noting that she had conducted little fieldwork and had only had contact with indigenous deaf people who knew Libras during her master’s research (SUMAIO, 2018, p. 194-195). The author, based mostly in Pfau (2010), affirms that Terena signs are unique and different from Libras, constituting their own language. This means that there is further need for researching phonological, lexical and grammatical structures of Terena Sign Language. In her thesis, the author presents about 55 Terena signs, mostly in contrast with regular Brazilian Sign Language. The author also presents some minimal pairs and compounds, and signs for numbers 1 to 10 in the Terena Sign Language (TSL), although only signs for numbers 1 to 3 are shown. Mentions to conventionalization are made in an indirect manner. The author concludes that TSL is a natural language with its own linguistic system independent from Libras, even if the author shows that there is some contact with Libras through people that sign in TSL and Libras.

A similar process happened to Cena, an emergent sign language from rural Piauí. The first description of the usage of sign language by the deaf people of Várzea Queimada was made by Pereira (2013). With Almeida-Silva and Nevins (2020), the language got a preliminary linguistic description that showed some phenomena previously observed in other emergent sign languages such as ABSL (MEIR; SANDLER, 2019) and CTSL (ERGIN, *et al*, Handwritten): the variable use of compounds and variations at the phonetic-phonological level. With these studies, even if preliminary, we can see the undeniable value of the description of emergent sign languages to the then growing field of sign language typology (ZESHAN; PALFREYMAN, 2017).

4.3 The description-documentation-maintenance triad of languages and linguistic rights or why grammaticalize emergent sign languages

Here, we go back to the title of this article such that we may engage in some reflections on why to write grammar on emergent sign languages. The emergence and knowledge of a new language can always bring about new discoveries and the processes of linguistic description, documenting and maintaining⁹ are almost always present in the context of languages that are small and endangered, such as the sign languages discussed in this article. We suspect that, worldwide, many sign languages emerge and disappear without any documentation and description, since the maintenance of these languages occur due to the existence of deaf people in these communities. As an example, we have the Ka'apor sign language, which was until not long ago considered extinct, even with the knowledge that there were still two or three deaf people that could sign it, but with Godoy's (2020) thesis, thirteen deaf people that signed KSL were discovered, bringing about some relative vitality to the language. This led us to notice that documenting, describing and maintaining emergent sign languages are necessary so we can preserve the knowledge on these language categories.

The idea the emergent sign languages are still in development and don't yet represent a consolidated grammar gives the false impression that the only work to be done is to document the "birth" of a new language, postponing the description until after the language is actually consolidated. LSK's case seems to demonstrate a completely different picture. On this matter, it must be noted that it's not always the case that a rural or provincial language is an emergent sign language. That's the case of Adamarobe Sign Language (AdaSL), which, according to Nyst (2007, p. 23), must be about 200 years old, which might have

⁹ The distinction and interdependence between the description and documentation of a language is known since Gippert, Himmelmann and Mosel (2006) and its relation to the area of linguistic maintenance (GRENOBLE; WHALEY, 2005). However, and hyphen is used for all three areas as a way of emphasizing the necessity of all three fields for emergent sign languages specifically.

contributed to the detailed description made by the author. In CTSL's case, with the work laid down by Ergin (2017), since it's a young language, the author conducts experiments and elicitation in order to describe the language. It could be argued that, for younger languages, an effort for elaborating rough grammar rules is justified, but we reaffirm the need to produced grammar for emergent languages that are similar to consolidated sign languages, even in a comparative manner, such that the degree to which the difference in ages of any given languages contribute to its conventionalization and consolidation can be analyzed in detail. This kind of work that goes beyond promoting the description, documentation and maintenance of emergent sign languages can help in a more empirical foundation of theoretical models, such as Schmid (2020)'s E-C Model.

Another reason for producing grammar for emergent sign languages could be the premise that every human has the right to possess a language or its own language, in this case, linguistic rights. In the words of Skutnabb-Kangas (2018, p. 13): "Only language rights that are so fundamental that every individual has them because that individual is a human being, so inalienable that no state is allowed to violate them, and that are necessary for individuals and groups to live a dignified life are LHRs (...)". Being able to communicate with your parents and friends in your own language is a right that any person possesses. The grammaticalization of emergent sign languages might be a contributing factor to these young languages being more valued, while at the same time, interfering in its consolidation.

The matter of LSE's grammaticalization inevitably stumbles into its relation to the institutionalized or national sign languages. In Brazil's case, Libras' presence in so-called isolated Deaf communities has been a matter of debate in most research conducted on emerging sign languages (ESLs), especially in educational contexts. What must not go unnoticed is the possible and likely

influence of the country's majority sign language on other Brazilian sign languages. Regarding ESLs developed by deaf communities in rural areas, shaped by their life style, contact with Libras is bound to occur sooner or later, especially due to access to and the compulsory right to formal education. In situations like this, the linguistic systems created by small groups of Deaf individuals tend to be entirely ignored or avoided, to the detriment of emerging sign languages and in favor of the national sign language.

Teaching Libras in communities where Deaf groups exist is quite common, and there are even researchers who advocate for its introduction in such communities. Carliez, Formigosa, and Cruz (2016, page 142) note that “studies and the academic use of Libras overshadow the rich and complex sociolinguistic realities of Deaf communicative life in Brazil” (our translation)¹⁰. On the other hand, Giroletti (2008, page 144) argues that Libras has provided the possibility of structured communication, a language, and an identity for the Kaingang Deaf. The relationship between national sign languages and regional or local sign languages should be one of promoting linguistic diversity rather than mere assimilation, therefore, the grammatization of all signed languages should be pursued, whether they are emerging or established.

This leads to an important point: Libras in village or rural communities has served, for some, as “educational support,” in other words, deaf individuals in such communities are viewed as disabled (perhaps for not belonging to a larger Deaf community?) and in need of “inclusion,” namely into the national Deaf community. This stance calls into question the status of emerging sign languages as natural languages that should be studied, researched, and taught alongside the national sign language. The prevailing view, however, is that Libras should be used as an “aid” to educate Deaf individuals from rural or

¹⁰ Translated freely from the original: “Les études et l’usage académique de la LIBRAS offusquent des réalités sociolinguistiques à la fois riches et complexes de la vie communicative des sourds au Brésil.”

village communities, something similar to what was advocated by oral approaches to Deaf education, in which Deaf individuals were required to speak and learn the spoken language of each country, with due differences acknowledged. It is important to emphasize that, in most studies on emerging sign languages, Libras is already present in some form, especially in schools or urban areas near these communities. This is the case of LTS (SUMAIO, 2018), Cena (ALMEIDA-SILVA; NEVINS, 2020), among others. Therefore, what has been observed is that an apparent resistance to linguistically instrumentalizing an emerging language is more closely related to the ideologies of professional linguists and to glottopolitical actions concerning these languages than to strictly linguistic factors, factors that theoretical models of language conventionalization seek to demonstrate as part of a continuous process of “re-production” of linguistic systems (SCHMID, 2020).

5 Final Considerations

In this study, we discussed the process of linguistic instrumentalization (grammatization and dictionary-making) of emerging sign languages. To this end, a classification or typology of sign languages was presented, based on Olivier Le Guen, Safar, and Coppola (2020), placing rural or village sign languages within the category of emerging sign languages. These languages would still be at an early stage of grammatical consolidation, which raises the question of the feasibility or relevance of grammatizing emerging or very young languages.

With the publication of the SignGram Blueprint (QUER et al., 2017), a “revolution” in the grammatization of sign languages has been tentatively suggested (PELUSO, 2020), nevertheless, emerging sign languages have primarily been studied with regard to lexical and grammatical conventionalization. These studies have not yet adopted a theoretical perspective

that is fully aligned with the realities of these languages, particularly concerning the conceptualization of the processes of conventionalization and variation observed in them. The E-C Model proposed by Hans-Jörg Schmid (2020) may offer a promising approach to addressing emerging sign languages. By contrasting Schmid's proposal (2020) with the questions raised in this study, it can be argued that the E-C Model opens up the possibility of viewing emerging sign languages (as well as other emerging languages, such as creole languages or tactile-gestural languages used by deafblind individuals) as languages that can indeed be grammaticized, despite the high degree of variability found in young sign languages.

Finally, cases of grammaticization of Libras and of emerging sign languages (ESLs) were presented in order to suggest that the documentation, description, and linguistic maintenance of ESLs should follow all established procedures of grammaticization, grounded in the principles of linguistic human rights and in the status of ESLs vis-à-vis national or institutionalized sign languages. The grammaticization of emerging sign languages should be carried out on an equitable basis, in terms of the attention given to all such languages at their different stages of conventionalization. Even preliminary descriptions of ESLs make possible the preservation of linguistic varieties that might otherwise disappear without any record of their form and existence.

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