

OFFICIALIZATION, STANDARDIZATION, AND LINGUISTIC POLICIES IN SIGN WRITING¹

OFICIALIZAÇÃO, PADRONIZAÇÃO E POLÍTICA LINGUÍSTICA EM ESCRITAS DE SINAIS

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Resumo: Esta pesquisa discute a implantação da política linguística da escrita de língua de sinais no Brasil, considerando que não há uma legislação que regulamente a escrita de sinais para a Libras. Além disso, pretende-se verificar, com os professores de Letras: Libras, a possibilidade de se adotar um único sistema de escrita de sinais para a Libras, uma vez que há quatro propostas de sistemas de escritas de sinais no Brasil: SignWriting (SW), Sistema de Escrita das Línguas de Sinais (ELiS), Sistema de Escrita para Línguas de Sinais (SEL) e Escrita Visogramada das Línguas de Sinais (VisoGrafia). Discute-se também a legislação de outros países sobre padronização e oficialização das escritas de sinais

Palavras-chave: Políticas Linguísticas; Planejamento e Implementação Linguística; Oficialização e Padronização de Escrita de Sinais; *SignWriting*.

Abstract: This research discusses the implementation of linguistic policies for sign language writing in Brazil, considering that there is no legislation that regulates sign writing for Libras. Furthermore, we intend to verify with Libras professors the possibility of adopting a single sign writing system for Libras, since there are four proposals for sign writing systems in Brazil: SignWriting (SW), Sign Language Writing System (ELiS), Sign Language Writing System (SEL) and Sign Language Visogram Writing (VisoGrafia). The other country's laws on standardization and officialization are also discussed.

Keywords: Language Policies; Linguistic Planning and Implementation; Officialization and Standardization of Sign Writing; *SignWriting*.

Introduction

Law No. 10,436/2002, known as the Libras Law, regulates the use of this language in

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its signed form, but not in its written form. In Article 4, the Law determines: “Brazilian Sign Language – Libras may not replace the written form of the Portuguese language”. According to Quadros and Stumpf (2018, p. 23), this paragraph has caused some problems for the deaf in Brazil because the deaf do not have equal access to different public spaces in some states. There is still no choice of a single sign writing system. Consequently, the teaching of Libras focuses more on the skills of signing comprehension and production. Thus, reading and writing texts in sign writing may be left in the background. Therefore, although Libras is recognized by Law No. 10,436/2002 and regulated by Decree 5,626/2005, we still do not have regulations that advocate a sign writing system in Brazil.

This research presents a bibliographic review of some theorists on the subject. Among the main authors are Lagares (2018), Calvet (2007), Stumpf (2005), Quadros (2016; 2017), Barreto and Barreto (2015), Reagan (2010), Woll, Sutton-Spence and Elton (2004), Shohamy (2006), Leão (2019), Rajagopalan (2003, 2013), Oliveira (2007), Wanderley and Stumpf (2016) and Capovilla (2000). Topics such as language policies and standardization of sign writing, the officialization of sign languages and sign writing systems, language legislation and the relationship with the implementation of language policies are discussed.

Language Policies and Sign Writing

The discussion on language policies is linked to an interdisciplinary field of knowledge, as it is mainly related to political science and power relations (Rajagopalan, 2013). Rajagopalan (2013, p. 21) states that ‘Language policy is the art of conducting reflections on specific languages, with the aim of conducting concrete actions of public interest regarding the language(s) that matter to the people of a nation, a state or even larger transactional instances’ (2013, p. 21). Language policy aims to discuss, provoke reflections and propose actions to transform the status, value, registration, and dissemination of the various languages. It is not a neutral area of knowledge, as some researchers may imagine. There is always a position taken to represent a certain linguistic group or a proposal for implementing language policies. Controversial positions always permeate language policies, which are always considered highly controversial. In this context, Lagares (2018, p. 42) states that ‘it becomes necessary to distrust the expert discourse when constructing proposals for intervention in the field of language, questioning the supposed neutrality of the scientist’. In other words, language policies always have the purpose of implementing a change or even a profound transformation in the linguistic domain. This allegedly neutral perspective points to ideological positions that attempt to cover up hegemonic positions that devalue minority languages. Krausneker (2015) states that

The most fundamental ideological backdrop for attitudes constantly questions sign languages as such. The question posed (in various forms) is, Are sign languages real languages? Although the answer is short and sweet and definitive, widespread misunderstandings, misconceptions, and misinterpretations of sign languages still remain—even in the face of all the factual knowledge we now have. The devaluing ideology places sign languages low in an imagined hierarchy of languages or claims that sign languages have no morphology or simply states that they have no value for children. Even today, many people are not sure how they should imagine a grammar in space (and face) and whether the communities and the cultures that gave rise to signed languages can really be called “cultures.” (2015, p. 416)

Thus, ideological perspectives on attitudes towards minority languages can be negative, being a consequence for access to information and knowledge by deaf people. According to Rejagopalan (2013), the political linguist plays the role of intervention in languages in a given society. In this political context, this paper aims to discuss language policies in sign writing, to contribute to the discussion on the officialization of sign writing that can contribute to the use and standardization of signwriting system for Brazilian deaf people. According to Calvet (2007), more generally, language policy can be defined as a ‘determination of decisions regarding the relationship between languages and society’ (Calvet, 2007, p. 11). He states that

political power has always favored this or that language, choosing to govern the State in one language or even imposing the language of a minority on the majority. However, language policy (determination of major decisions regarding the relationship between languages and society) and language planning (its implementation) are recent concepts that only partially encompass these ancient practices. (2007, p. 11)

Thus, language planning can be defined as the implementation of language policies. First it is necessary to develop language policies. Then, language planning will implement these actions. In that sense, this research argues that it is necessary to create language policies that support language planning for the implementation of sign writing. Similarly, Oliveira (2007) conceptualizes language policy as

the attempt to structure language studies from the perspective of the political struggles of speakers, of language communities in their historical struggles: the struggles of both indigenous peoples and immigrants to maintain their languages, the struggle of those excluded from citizenship due to the disqualification of their speech, the struggle of speakers to develop new uses for their languages. It is up to the linguist to identify these linguistic communities, each with its own history and political strategies, and to ally with them, building with them, in partnership, the new theories that will set the tone for the 21st century (2007, p. 91).

Language policy can also be promoted by linguistic activism, which takes the form of social movements of specific linguistic groups that fight for the right to language, such as the deaf community in Brazil. According to Lagares (2018), ‘the most studied form of activism,

and perhaps the most evident, is that of small national minorities that seek to build their language according to the paradigm of identification between language-nation-State.’ (Lagares, 2018, p. 218). In the case of Libras, we can mention the deaf social movements that promote demonstrations in the fight for their linguistic rights. Furthermore, one must consider the contributions of critical language policies that have a more interventionist dimension and enable more incisive linguistic and political actions. Thus, as Rajagopalan (2003) argues, ‘working with language necessarily means acting politically, with all the ethical responsibility that this entails’ (2003, p. 125). Thus, a proposal for implementing sign language policies must be thought out ethically, involving deaf agents in the construction of this process.

In addition, there are also legislative language policies, which discuss and intervene in the status and diffusion of a language. Calvet (2007) points out that language policies can be:

structural language legislation (which intervenes in the status of languages) and functional language legislation (which intervenes in the use of languages). Among the latter, he [Turi] then makes a distinction between official language legislation (which intervenes in the official use of languages), institutional language legislation (which deals with the non-official use of languages), standardizing or non-standardizing language legislation, majority language legislation (which protects the languages of a majority) and minority language legislation (which protects the languages of a minority). (2007, p. 76)

There are many types of language policies that can lead to certain interventions in languages and their functions. Table 01 depicts some examples of language policy intervention in its social context:

Table 1 – Types of Legislative Language Policies

Type of Legislative Language Policies	Examples
Structural language legislation	Law 10.436/2002 – grants Libras the status of linguistic recognition.
Functional language legislation	Decree 5.626/2005 – determines public places in which Libras must circulate.
Official language legislation	Brazilian Constitution – determines that the official Brazilian language is Portuguese.
Institutional language legislation	Resolution No. 26/2018 – UFT – Regulates Language Policies at UFT, including actions for Libras.
Standardizing language legislation	New Orthographic Agreement of the Language of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (2009).
Non-standardizing language legislation	Decree 7.387/2010 – establishes the National Inventory of Language Diversity – INDL.
Majority language legislation	Brazilian Constitution – determines that the official language of Brazil is Portuguese.
Minority language legislation	Law 10.436/2002 – grants Libras the status of linguistic recognition.

Source: Leão (2019a)

Furthermore, according to Reagan (2010), language policies have different functions in each linguistic community. Furthermore, each of these functions of language planning and

policy can be reflected and manifested in practically all spheres of human life. Language policies are reflected in:

- *political sphere*: the language of political debate and discourse, etc.;
- *judicial sphere*: the language of law, as well as the language used by the police and courts;
- *religious sphere*: the language used for worship, as well as the language in which the main religious texts are written;
- *cultural sphere*;
- *commercial and economic sphere*: the language of business and industry;
- *educational sphere*: the language of instruction, additional languages studied by students, etc.;
- *interpersonal and family sphere*: the language used at home, with parents, etc. (Reagan, 2010, p. 148)

In the deaf linguistic community, sign language policies can be aimed at recording and disseminating works of literature, translation, terminology, education, publishing, and dissemination of knowledge and information. In addition, access to information and knowledge is favored through the sign language of Libras. Bilingual education for the deaf should be guided by a policy that values not only Libras in its signed form, but also in its sign language.

Meulder (2015) presents five categories of the most common types of explicit legal recognition of sign languages. In this sense, the author emphasizes that

Differences in the types of recognition can be explained by several factors determined by national contexts, including legislative issues (for example, some countries do not have a constitution or language legislation), a country's attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity, existing implicit recognition legislation, and the association of deaf people and other stakeholders. (2015, p. 499-500)

Thus, different social contexts can develop specific language policies for the implementation of its language and writing. Meulder (2015) states that there are five ways of recognizing sign languages: *1. Constitutional recognition; 2. Recognition through general language legislation; 3. Recognition through a law or sign language act; 4. Recognition through a law or sign language act, including other means of communication; 5. Recognition through legislation on the functioning of the national language council* (2015, p. 500).

Constitutional Recognition: According to Meulder (2015, p. 500-501), in addition to New Zealand, there are other countries that have constitutional recognition of their sign languages. The table below summarizes this scenario:

Table 2 – Types of Constitutional Language Policies

Country	Year	Constitutional Provision
Uganda	1995	Article XXIV, on cultural objectives
Finland	1995	Section 17, on the right to language and culture
South Africa	1996	Article 6, on languages

Portugal	1997	Article 74, on education
Venezuela	1999	Article 81, on the rights of persons with disabilities
Austria	2005	Article 8, on languages
New Zealand	2006	New Zealand Sign Language Act
Equador	2008	Article 47, on persons with disabilities
Kenya	2010	Article 7, on national, official, and other languages, and Article 20
Zimbabwe	2010	Article 6, on officially recognized languages of Zimbabwe
Hungary	2011	Article H, on language

Source: Adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 500-501)

As can be seen in the data presented by Meulder (2015), there are no records of language policies specifically focused on sign writing. Although language teaching may include sign writing, we found no evidence in research from other countries regarding sign writing, its recognition, officialization and dissemination in a more explicit way.

Recognition through general language legislation: Meulder (2015) points out that there are four countries that have adopted general language legislation for the recognition of their languages.

Table 3 – Constitutional Provisions

Country	Year	Constitutional Provision
Latvia	1999	Official Languages Law
Estonia	2007	Languages Law
Sweden	2009	Languages Law
Iceland	2011	Law on the Status of the Icelandic Language and Icelandic Sign Language

Source: Adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 500-501)

In this context, some countries have constitutional recognition of their languages through language laws. The inclusion of sign languages in these laws is significant for the dissemination of sign languages. Also, it is also necessary to disseminate sign writing.

Recognition through a law or sign language law: Meulder (2015) also presents countries that recognize their sign languages through a law or sign language law.

Table 4 – Sign languages recognized by act

Country	Year	Legal device
Slovakia	1995	Law on Sign Language for the Deaf
Uruguay	2001	Law n° 17.378
Brazil	2002	Federal Law 10,436 [Libras Law]
Slovenia	2002	Law on the Use of Slovenian Sign Language
Belgium, Wallonia	2003	Decree on the Recognition of Sign Language
Cyprus	2006	Law on the Recognition of Cyprus Sign Language
Belgium, Flanders	2006	Decree on the Recognition of Flemish Sign Language
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2009	Law on the Use of Sign Language in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Macedonia	2009	Law 105/2009 on the use of sign language
Catalonia	2010	Law 17/2010 on Catalan Sign Language
Finland	2015	Sign Language Law
Serbia	2015	Law on the Use of Sign Language

Source: Adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 503)

The table above presents that some countries choose to enact specific laws to recognize their sign languages, as is the case of Brazil. Brazil recognizes Libras through Law 10,436/2002. However, in the Brazilian case, sign writing is not included in this legislation.

Recognition through a law or sign language law, including other means of communication: According to Meulder (2015), some countries determine the recognition of their respective sign languages through a law or an act that also provides for the recognition of other means or methods of legal communication. In this case, deaf-blind people are included, in addition to other specificities.

Table 5 – Sign Languages recognized by laws and other means of communication

Country	Year	Legal Device
Colombia	1996	Law 324 of 1996, which establishes standards for the deaf population.
Czech Republic	2008	Law 384/2008 on communication systems for deaf and deafblind people.
Spain	2008	Law 27/2008 which recognizes Spanish sign languages and regulates the means of supporting oral communication for deaf people, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind people.
Poland	2011	Law on Sign Language and Other Means of Communication.

Source: adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 503)

Some countries adopt a linguistic policy for their sign languages with a view to inclusion, other disabilities and other means of communication associated with their sign language. The functioning of legislative devices in different countries can lead to the creation of laws in a broader way, including other specific social needs.

Recognition through the Operating Legislation of the National Language Council: Only two countries recognize their sign languages by a national language council.

Table 6 – Sign Languages recognized by the National Language Council

Country	Year	Legal Device
Norway	2009	Legislation regulating the functioning of the language council
Denmark	2014	Legislation regulating the functioning of the language council

Source: adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 504)

The cases of Norway and Denmark are quite different from those of other countries. The creation of national language councils can be positive if they are permanent and if their decision-making power has legitimacy at the national level. However, it is necessary to assess the scope of these councils, as well as whether they have members who involve the deaf community to propose and discuss actions aimed at their language.

Recognition through laws on disability, equality, and education: Meulder (2015)

mentions other specific cases of countries that have the recognition of their sign languages diluted in laws on disability, equality, or education.

Table 7 – Sign languages recognized by disability and education laws

Country	Year	Legal Device
Acts on Persons with Disabilities and/or Social Equality		
Lithuania	1991	Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities
Germany	2002	Law on Equality in Disabilities
Mexico	2005	General Law on Persons with Disabilities
Chile	2010	Law 20.422, which establishes rules on equal opportunities and social inclusion of persons with disabilities
Japan	2011	Revised Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities
Russia	2012	Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation
Law on Education		
Greece	2002	Law on Education
France	2005	Law on Education
Netherlands	2007	Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research
Government statement or decision (without explicit legal recognition)		
Australia	1991	National Language Policy
Thailand	1992	Government Resolution
United Kingdom	2003	Department for Work and Pensions Statement
Wales	2004	Assembly Government Statement
Northern Ireland	2004	Secretary of State Statement
Scotland	2011	Scottish Minister for Public Health Statement
Recognition in State and Provincial Legislation		
United States	-	No Federal recognition 40 States recognize ASL as a language in State Legislation Other States recognize it as a foreign language
Canada	-	Quebec Sign Language is mentioned in some legislation. No Federal recognition.

Source: adapted from Meulder (2015, p. 504-505)

The countries listed above have different language policies for the recognition of their sign languages. In the case of the United States and Canada, there is a language policy in some states of these two countries. In fact, there seems to be a more implicit language policy in these countries, which adopt their languages in the use that citizens make of their language. Even the English language is not included in their federal legislation.

In that sense, according to Reagan (2010, p. 56) and Shohamy (2006), language policies can also be considered implicit or explicit. Explicit language policies are those that have a clear objective of intervening in the language in various forms, such as laws, decrees, documents, or academic publications. Implicit or hidden language policies are not publicized in the form of laws, decrees, movements, but in the daily actions of the population, in social movements, associations of the deaf or institutions. For example, when a school adopts a sign writing system or a deaf movement acts in favor of sign writing in schools, these actions can be considered as implicit language policy. As Shohamy (2006) argues,

In some contexts, language policy is explicitly stated through official documents, such as national laws, declarations of certain languages as “official” or “national”, language standards, curricula, tests and other types of documents. In other contexts, language policy is not explicitly stated but can be implicitly derived from the analysis of a variety of de facto practices. In these situations, language policy is more difficult to detect, as it is subtle and more hidden from the public eye. Implicit language policies can also occur at the national level, as many nations do not have explicit policies formulated in official documents. In the case of the USA, for example, there are no explicit and declared language policies that specify the status and uses of the English language. (2006, p. 50)

In Brazilian Sign Language, the creation and dissemination of new signs expands the language’s lexicon and constitutes an implicit language policy. Another case is the use of SignWriting in teaching materials, which can be seen as an implicit language policy. There are several contexts in which sign writing can be promoted by explicit or implicit language policies.

The research by Behares, Brovotto and Crespi (2012) presents an analysis of the language policies of Uruguayan Sign Language (LSU). Behares, Brovotto and Crespi (2012) observe that LSU language policies, until a few years ago, did not include traces of official policies. According to them, ‘in general, Uruguay seems to have chosen policies or designs for language planning that do not include official, legal policies, declarations or organic administration of the State in this area.’ (Behares; Brovotto; Crespi, 2012, p. 519). In that sense, the authors point out that the language policies of the LSU in Uruguay ‘have always been ‘tacit’ (Behares; Brovotto; Crespi, 2012, p. 519), that is, they can be characterized as more implicit than explicit language policies. In that sense, Behares, Brovotto and Crespi (2012), the language policies of the LSU in Uruguay have three levels of constitution:

1. A legal level of autocratic government actions, apparently limited to marginal notes on official documents (e.g., laws, decrees, regulations) referring to linguistic prescriptions or recommendations;
2. The consuetudine (“custom” or “convention”) of linguistic actions and practices and the value given to these within the discourse of Uruguayan society;
3. The design of language policies within the framework of educational policies for state or public (as opposed to private) education, derived mainly from various prescribed curricula and teaching methodologies. (Behares; Brovotto; Crespi, 2012, p. 520).

Although the authors do not mention it, the legislation does not contain specific policies on sign language in Uruguay. Thus, even if Uruguayan language policy is more implicit, sign language is at risk of being disadvantaged in a broader language planning scenario. Thus, Behares, Brovotto and Crespi (2012) argue that there is a lack of clarity in Uruguayan language policy regarding LSU:

More specifically, we believe that the lack of explicitness in language policies and, in particular, the failure to integrate the linguistic question with regard to deaf people into a

more general language framework is negatively linked to the assumption that the education of deaf people follows assistance, medical, and therapeutic models. (Behares; Brovetto; Crespi, 2012, p. 520).

Since there is a language policy that is not very explicit, deaf education can be guided by medical and therapeutic biases. Consequently, a vague language policy can harm deaf education and access to knowledge through language and sign language.

In that sense, Behares, Brovetto and Crespi (2012) highlight that the General Education Law of 2008 makes a brief reference to the language issue in its article 40:

The purpose of language teaching is to develop people's communicative competence, to [enable people to] master the written language, to foster respect for language varieties, to reflect upon language, to foster consideration for the various mother tongues found in the country (Uruguayan Spanish, the Portuguese of Uruguay, and Uruguayan Sign Language), and [to provide] a plurilingual education through the teaching of second and foreign languages. (2012, p. 523).

Although the law mentions the status of LSU as a mother tongue, it does not detail a language policy, nor its planning and implementation. Only more recently has a set of legislation emerged in Uruguay that specifies the use and dissemination of LSU. Behares, Brovetto and Crespi (2012) state that the following legislation has been approved in the country:

- A specific law (Uruguay 2001) designated LSU as “the natural language of deaf people and their communities throughout the Republic.”
- The General Education Law (Uruguay 2008) includes LSU as one of the country's “mother tongues.”
- The ANEP (National Administration of Public Education) language policies make LSU-Spanish bilingual education mandatory (ANEP 2008). (ANEP 2008).

Despite more robust legislation, sign writing still needs a clear and more decisive language policy to promote the dissemination of a sign writing system. Among the few sources found, the SignPuddle website states that Uruguay uses the SignWriting system.

Behares, Brovetto and Crespi (2012) point out that Uruguay's language policy on LSU and the recognition of the deaf community was essential for other countries:

Uruguay was a pioneer country in the recognition of the Deaf community and of LSU, especially with regard to education. In 1987, after years of study by a special committee, the Consejo de Educación Primaria (Council for Primary Education) approved the *Propuesta para la implementación de la educación bilingüe en el sordo* (Proposal for the Implementation of Bilingual Education for Deaf Children) (CEP 1987), which was to serve as a model for other countries and which has guided the education of deaf children in primary schools ever since. (2012, p. 524).

Consequently, the Uruguayan deaf people have gained respect and recognition for their language, culture, and communities (Behares; Brovetto; Crespi, 2012). There has been a more systematic implementation of language policy at the primary level, ‘to a lesser extent in secondary education (with some deaf teachers and non-deaf interpreters), and at the university (where there are deaf teachers and effective interpreters).’ (2012, p. 527). As can be seen, Uruguay has a very robust language policy that provides access to knowledge in its language.

Behares, Brovetto and Crespi (2012) highlight how bilingual education policy is conceived and practiced in Uruguay:

Regarding the concept of education in these institutions, briefly one could say that what they propose is a type of bilingualism in which one of the languages (LSU) is used for orality and the other (Spanish) for writing and that the teachers overall do not speak their students’ language. The extent of this kind of bilingualism and whether this program may or may not be considered truly bilingual should be more widely discussed [...]. In both cases, although the same school program for nondeaf students is used, in practice the curriculum is adapted, and ongoing adjustments are made. Interpreters who work with this system, as we have stated, are graduates of a private institution and generally lack pedagogical training. So far there are no state-educated graduates and no training courses that incorporate the necessary pedagogy for this kind of interpretation. The contribution of these interpreters has been of greatest importance, but it is clear this is not the best solution, which is to hire deaf people who are pedagogically trained with the specific knowledge required to teach particular subjects. (2012, p. 533).

Thus, there are still limitations in bilingual education for the deaf in Uruguay: many teachers do not know LSU and, therefore, interaction is mediated by interpreters who do not have specific training, while Spanish is the predominantly written form adopted in teaching. Therefore, the space for the dissemination of sign writing in this scenario where, for the most part, teachers do not master LSU is much more limited.

In this same vein, the authors highlight the distorted view that LSU is seen as a mere instrument of communication between teachers and students, but not as a full language:

At present we are faced with a distorting trend (in fact, already present since 1970), one that promotes the idea of sign language as a didactic instrument that teachers or interpreters utilize to communicate with deaf people. This mistaken idea, closely linked to “hearingism,” is present in various forms within the didactic and pedagogical practices in primary education and is also quite noticeable in education for deaf students in secondary schools. Clearly, LSU is not an *instructional resource* but a language, with all of the cognitive, psychosociolinguistic, and pedagogical implications involved. One of the main impediments to progress is the disconnection of the processes from the curricular inclusion of LSU as a language of instruction in primary education, secondary education, and technical-professional education, as well as in the Teacher-Training Institute. (2012, p. 534, ênfase no original).

Consequently, the circulation of sign language and its culture may be hindered, since the language is still seen as an instrument of inclusion and of ‘compensatory functions’ for

‘people with disabilities’ (2012, p. 535). Likewise, if sign language is considered a mere teaching instrument and not a full language, sign writing may also be disregarded in the teaching and learning process.

Officialization, Standardization and Linguistic Policy in Sign Writing

An important concept for this research is that of standardization. The concept of standardization can be defined, according to Lagares (2018), as follows: ‘standardization is a political intervention on the written form of the language. It is this that, in modern societies, creates the language as a recognizable and perfectly delimited social object, allowing us to identify differentiated linguistic communities’ (LAGARES, 2018, p. 174). Thus, we argue that standardization is a way of defining and officializing a sign writing system with the aim of guaranteeing the deaf community the use of a Libras writing system, considering its linguistic variations. Standardization and officialization may be established through a specific law or one that complements the Libras Law.

In that sense, Adam (2015) conceptualizes the standardization of a language as follows:

Language planning may include status planning, corpus planning, acquisition planning, and attitude planning and may involve sign languages as well. Language standardization is one of the goals of language planning; others are language revival, language purification, and language reform. Specifically, language standardization is a part of corpus planning in that it involves the publication of a dictionary and a grammar and modernization of the grammar. (Adam, 2015, p. 434)

As Adam (2015) highlights, there is a diversity of spectrums that language policy can reach within the scope of language intervention. Therefore, it is essential to have a specific language policy focused on sign writing. For Adam (2015),

How does the standardization of sign languages take place? It occurs when certain dictionaries acquire status and are considered “standard.” Native signers rarely use them (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999), but second-language users who employ these dictionaries become educators and interpreters, and thus these resources have a standardizing effect on the sign language. (Adam, 2015, p. 435)

In that way, the standardization of sign languages can be achieved through dictionaries, grammars, and glossaries. In the case of Libras, there are already some actions such as the Libras SignBank⁴ and the **Dicionário da Língua Brasileira de Sinais do Brasil** (Capovilla,

⁴The Libras Sign Bank is a collection of signs from this language collected in the Libras Corpus that is being disseminated in several states in Brazil. For more information, visit the website <https://signbank.libras.ufsc.br/pt>

2017), which present the signs in Libras and Portuguese, respectively. However, the dictionary organized by Capovilla (2017) presents its base in Portuguese, sign dactylogy, sign design and the sign in SignWriting. This type of dictionary can be useful for hearing learners, but deaf students need dictionaries that have sign language as a basis for better understanding of concepts. In addition, this dictionary does not have examples of Libras in a real context of the language in use, which can make it difficult to use specific signs.

According to Lagares (2018), linguistic minorities demand the officialization of their language, ‘promoting its codification’. (Lagares, 2018, p. 218). In Brazil, there are already some research and documents on sign writing that demonstrate that the Brazilian deaf community demands an officialized sign writing system. As Calvet (2007) and Reagan (2010) argue, standardization can occur in the scope of vocabulary, grammar, spelling or writing system. As Calvet (2007) discusses, after the language has been standardized in its written form, its dissemination can be carried out broadly:

It is only after this technical and scientific phase, in which the language will be equipped in the graphic plan, that the practical phase begins: disseminating the selected writing system, through alphabet books, manuals, the organization of literacy campaigns, and the introduction of the newly transcribed language into the school system, in the graphic medium. (Calvet, 2007, p. 64)

One of the major problems in sign languages around the world is that sign writing systems originated very recently, compared to some oral languages that have been written for over a thousand years. Therefore, it is necessary to standardize, officialize, and widely disseminate a Libras writing system so that this language also has an official writing for recording and disseminating knowledge and cultural artifacts. Although there are already four sign writing systems in Brazil, the dissemination of a single system needs to be systematically expanded nationwide through the officialization of a system that should be used in the educational spheres, for the dissemination of knowledge and access to information for the deaf. However, the existence of four sign writing systems for the same language can generate practical problems that could hinder the implementation of an official writing system for Libras. For example, in the educational sphere or in public examinations, the existence of four sign writing systems can lead to budgetary limitations and issues in access to knowledge and examination tests. It is likely that most candidates do not know all the sign writing systems, which would result in losses in access to public examination tests, for example. Another issue is the dissemination of information and knowledge: if there are four sign writing systems, will the information be made available in all these systems? This multiplicity of systems hinders

practical and efficient linguistic actions in the educational, academic, information and knowledge access spheres. Therefore, it is necessary to formalize a single sign writing system for Libras. However, as Woll, Sutton-Spence and Elton (2004) argue,

There are no widely used written forms of sign languages and no sign language has a body of written research; therefore, any ‘standard’ form of a sign language would have a very different function from a standard spoken language with a written literature. Work is currently underway to encourage the written form of some sign languages [...]. However, it will be many years before we see that these sign writing systems have the same status and function as the written forms of the spoken language. (2004, p. 19-20)

Although there is still no single official sign writing system, it is possible for language policy to intervene in this scenario, contributing to the development of Libras sign writing. According to Reagan (2010), there has been an increase in sign writing systems in recent years. For the author,

The final type of corpus planning involving sign languages consists of efforts to develop orthographic systems to represent such languages in written form. These “sign writing systems” have become increasingly common and viable in recent years, because of the development of computer science. Such efforts, although interesting [...], have not yet gained much support from the signing community, which universally uses the writing of the majority hearing community as its written language. However, such efforts are useful in linguistic descriptions of sign languages and may have great potential for sign language dictionaries and textbooks. (Reagan, 2010, p. 169)

Reagan’s (2010) discussion emphasizes the fact that the sign language community does not use sign writing very much, as it is still necessary to formalize, standardize, and disseminate a sign writing system to ensure access to information and knowledge through this system in Brazil. Thus, we argue in favor of the use of a single sign writing system. Considering that research indicates that the SignWriting system is the most used and widespread in Brazil and in the world (Leão, 2019a).

Likewise, the dissemination of Libras can be expanded through the recording of sign writing, with the publication and translation of teaching materials, dictionaries, glossaries, and deaf literature. Thus, the deaf community must be very careful when people create other sign writing systems, since there is already a widespread system in Brazil. The creation of several systems can cause future problems in the implementation of linguistic planning and in the dissemination of knowledge. It is possible to make official and use a single system, since writing systems are open, flexible, and can be adapted to improve writing. What needs to be done is to increase linguistic policies to standardize an official Libras writing system in Brazil.

The standardization of languages in the world has always involved several

controversies. According to Calvet, standardization can involve both writing and speech. For Calvet (2007), standardization can be considered a very important linguistic planning instrument for languages in general. Consequently, as Calvet (2007) argues, ‘there is no linguistic planning without legal support’ (2007, p. 75). The author also asserts that laws have the function of making decisions about ‘spelling or intervening in vocabulary through word lists. [...] Laws that deal with the defense of languages, whether to ensure greater promotion (internationally, for example), or to protect them as one protects an ecological asset.’ (2007, p. 75 – 76). Thus, a deaf community needs to choose what type of writing will be adopted: whether it will be alphabetic or non-alphabetic (Calvet, 2007, p. 63). Calvet (2007) presents some examples of languages that have adopted different types of alphabets, such as Latin and Arabic. These choices tend to generate much discussion and controversy. According to the author,

These discussions clearly had an ideological basis: on the one hand, there is a close connection between the expansion of writing systems and the expansion of religions (the Arabic alphabet is linked to Islam, the Latin alphabet is seen as associated with Christianity), and on the other hand, the Latin alphabet was seen by some as a symbolic feature of the colonial era. (2007, p. 63)

Therefore, the debate over which writing system will be adopted gives rise to several controversies and always has an ideological basis (Calvet, 2007). Therefore, discussions about which sign writing system Libras should employ are controversial and have an ideological basis, which proposes sign writing systems based on an alphabetic structure. However, considering the visual and spatial modality of Libras, a system that is appropriate to the linguistic characteristics of this language should be adopted, as well as it is necessary to consider which system deaf people feel most comfortable writing in. To get an idea of this heated debate about sign writing systems, we can look at the case of the four sign writing systems proposed for Libras. On the one hand, a considerable number of deaf researchers defend the use of the SignWriting system; on the other hand, other authors, such as Estelita-Barros (2008), defend new systems created in Brazil such as ELiS, SEL and VisoGrafia. Leão (2019a) reports that some deaf people have already felt uncomfortable because there are four proposed sign writing systems in Brazil. While there is no specific sign writing system for Libras, the Brazilian deaf community continues to study Portuguese in written form, as a way of expressing their thoughts and disseminating information. Thus, Calvet (2007) argues that

Linguistic planning first involves an accurate description of the language; then, a reflection on what is expected of a writing system. Is it necessary, for example, to choose a phonological orthography, in which each phoneme corresponds to a grapheme or, if you prefer, each sound

corresponds to a letter? (2007, p. 64)

Sign language writing systems can use phonological parameters as a principle for recording the language, as is the case with the SignWriting system. However, writing proposals tend to be distinct, with some being more iconic, as is the case with the SignWriting system, and others using more symbols agreed upon by the creator of the system. Still others use alphabetic writing. The Brazilian deaf community, however, needs to discuss and decide which official sign writing system will be adopted for writing Libras.

In addition to sign writing systems, it is possible to indicate other ways of relating to writing. Video recording can function as a record of sign languages. It is another way of articulating the recording and dissemination of sign languages, but it requires technological resources for recording, in addition to access to quality internet.

Additionally, according to Calvet (2007), after a writing system is officialized, the dissemination of this written form should begin through the publication of dictionaries, teaching materials, and translations. Thus, it is possible to propose the dissemination of sign writing in the education of the deaf and the dissemination of knowledge in this writing system through the teaching of this system. Thus, it is essential to choose a sign writing system for the publication of teaching materials, books, and articles, to disseminate information through sign writing. In addition, various textual genres should be conveyed in sign writing, such as laws, information signs in public places, advertisements, academic and school publications. The publication of printed materials in sign writing is essential for the full education of the deaf to promote literacy and literacy in sign writing. Thus, it is possible to officialize and standardize a sign writing system so that deaf people can access knowledge through the writing of their first language.

Furthermore, officialization and standardization must be implemented through specific linguistic laws. According to Calvet (2007), legislation is of fundamental importance for encouraging linguistic policies in writing systems. Thus, sign writing, aligned with linguistic planning focused on teaching writing and literacy in first language, is fundamental for the dissemination of writing. Thus, legislation on sign writing is essential to promote publications in the language, such as the production of teaching materials and informational materials to improve the development of learning Libras as a first language by deaf people.

It should be considered that writing must always be a representation of spoken or signed language. In that case, it is necessary to problematize Law No. 10,436/2002, Art. 4, which states that 'Brazilian Sign Language – Libras may not replace the written form of the Portuguese language.' This law does not guarantee the dissemination of written Libras signs. Regarding

this paragraph of Art. 4 of the Libras Law, Quadros and Stumpf (2018) state that

Despite the recognition of Libras as a national language, this law includes a final sole paragraph warning that this language cannot replace the written form of the Portuguese language. This paragraph refers to the monolingual policy established since the period of Brazilian colonization, thus maintaining the status of the Portuguese language as a supremacist, even while recognizing the existence of another national language, Libras. This paragraph presents some consequences for deaf Brazilians. The most important is the establishment of bilingual education, recognizing Libras as the language of instruction and teaching and written Portuguese as the second language that should be taught to deaf people in schools. In some states, this paragraph has become a problem for deaf people, as it ends up determining the use of written Portuguese in some contexts that exclude deaf people from equal access to different public spaces. (2018, p. 23)

Lagares (2018) problematizes this limitation of Law 10.436/2002, conceptualizing it as a situation of *unequal bilingualism*. According to Lagares, it is

difficult to imagine in what situation this substitution could occur. In fact, with such a declaration, the obligation of *unequal bilingualism* for the deaf community is assumed, in this case, in the written form of the Portuguese language. [...] this form of bilingualism is a characteristic of the minority situation, which defines the minority condition of a linguistic community. (2018, p. 78)

In other words, the law provides for the recognition of Libras as the language of the deaf community, but the Portuguese language still prevails over its written form. There is no provision for Libras to be able to implement a sign writing system. This paragraph of Art. 4 of Law No. 10,436 brings a series of complications for sign writing, which suggests that Libras and Portuguese do not have the same value in terms of linguistic status, because sign writing is not mentioned or valued in this context, since the law only presents Portuguese. Regarding the restriction of Law 10,436/2002, sign writing does not replace or eliminate writing in Portuguese. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the coexistence of the two written forms, that of oral language and sign language. In this way, this alternative is more viable, as it places the writing of Libras within a more inclusive linguistic policy. It is not a question of choosing one or the other, but it should be considered that the deaf community can have access to the two written forms available in Libras and in the Portuguese language.

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss this paragraph so that there is room for the implementation of a linguistic policy focused on the writing of Libras signs. Thus, this Law needs to be changed and supplemented, so that the written form of Libras, in a sign writing system, and the Portuguese language are taught independently, which will allow both written forms to have the same value. Thus, the situation of Libras and its unequal bilingualism can be transformed into a situation of bilingualism in the written form as well. Therefore, it is possible

to adopt and officialize one of the sign writing systems such as SignWriting, which represents the phonological and morphosyntactic structure of Libras, whose linguistic structure is different from that of Portuguese. This is because they are different languages with distinct written systems. Sign writing, if taught with Libras, allows the understanding and learning of the Portuguese language, in addition to attributing equal value to Libras and Portuguese. Brazilian deaf population is deprived of their right to the language in the written form of Libras. Calvet (2007) argues that everyone has the right to his or her own language. According to the author,

These situations give another meaning to the expression ‘right to language.’ The fact of not speaking the language of the State deprives the citizen of countless social possibilities, and we consider that every citizen has the right to the language of the State, that is, that he or she has the right to education, literacy, etc. However, the principle of defending linguistic minorities means that, at the same time, every citizen has the right to his or her own language. [...]. Therefore, a language policy can simultaneously address the right to the State's language and the individual's right to the language... (2007, p. 85)

The published document *Human Rights of Deaf People: for Social, Cultural and Linguistic Equity* (2018) states, in its goal no. 8 on bilingual education for the deaf, that it is necessary to “ensure that deaf children learn to read and write in Libras, through sign writing – SignWriting, as a way of consolidating the relationship with writing” (2018, p. 16). Likewise, learning sign writing contributes to the development of written skills in Portuguese as well, which ensures the right to both languages in an equitable manner.

Thus, in Calvet’s view (2007), language laws, which have the function of regulating languages, are a fundamental instrument for the standardization and officialization of certain languages. In the author’s words, ‘law is one of the main instruments of linguistic planning’ (2007, p. 76). Thus, Libras already has some laws that ensure the recognition and dissemination of the language, such as the Libras Law, Decree No. 5,626/2005, and the Brazilian Inclusion Law, No. 13,146/2015, among others. These laws provide for specific actions and recommend access to information through Libras in public agencies, as well as the teaching of Libras in educational contexts. However, there is still no specific legislation that officializes and ensures the dissemination and bilingual education regarding sign writing. In this sense, Calvet (2007) states that ‘States frequently intervene in the linguistic domain, answering this question in a practical way and avoiding theoretical debate, but they do in fact intervene in linguistic behaviors, in the use of languages [...]: there is no linguistic planning without legal support.’ (2007, p. 75). Therefore, specific legislation focused on Libras and its sign writing system enables the development of language policies and language planning.

In that sense, the document, *Human Rights of Deaf People: for Social, Cultural and*

Linguistic Equity (2018), is an important mechanism that can contribute to and guide the creation of a specific linguistic law that ensures the teaching and dissemination of Libras sign writing. Thus, Calvet (2007) argues in favor of the right to language that every citizen should have. For Calvet (2007),

Regarding form and use, the law, if applied, constrains the citizen. It forces him, for example, to speak a language in a certain situation and in a certain way. On the other hand, when it comes to the defense of languages, the law can constrain institutions: here we enter the field of the right that individuals have to a language. At first, the expression “right to language” refers to the protection of linguistic minorities, and the very fact that we speak of protection shows the extent to which they are under threat. However, there are also a large number of countries around the world where citizens do not speak the language of the State. (2007, p. 84)

Calvet’s discussion suggests that the State and the legislation determine that people must use the official language of a country. In relation to the deaf in Brazil, they must learn Portuguese as an L2 in written form. However, there are still deaf people who do not feel comfortable learning written Portuguese, due to linguistic and cultural differences in relation to Libras, since the written form of the spoken language does not correspond to a written form that records Libras. In this sense, according to Quadros (2016),

For the deaf, the spoken/written language plays an important role, since they share the same territory as hearing people who use this language. However, in many countries, due to the medical view, the spoken language represents a real threat to the sign language of the deaf. Therefore, the tendency of deaf people is to defend themselves from this threat. This makes the relationship with the spoken/written language extremely complicated. If they must defend themselves against this language, they do not want to learn it. In the case of Brazil, some deaf people hate Portuguese. The result of this is that they really do not learn this language. This has been the reality for several generations of deaf people in Brazil. Currently, we can already see a change in this attitude. Multilingualism is starting to be part of the country’s linguistic planning, which includes Libras, which makes Portuguese less threatening. Language policies favor the strengthening of Libras through various actions that legitimize it in the country. (Quadros, 2016, p. 30-31)

This situation of the deaf in relation to written Portuguese may occur due to the lack of language policies and legislation that favor the teaching and dissemination of sign writing. It is expected that research into language policies in sign writing will contribute to promoting the dissemination and teaching of sign writing for the deaf, because it is a specific system that considers the linguistic and visual characteristics of sign languages, as well as enabling the recording of Libras in written form.

Therefore, another important document brings contributions on sign writing. This is the Report on the Linguistic Policy for Bilingual Education – Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese Language – Working Group, designated by Ordinances No. 1,060/2013 and No.

91/2013 of the MEC/SECADI, which suggests, among several actions, for example, the implementation of tests in sign writing, in item 7.1, in general goal 12:

Guarantee access for the deaf in Higher Education institutions through selection tests previously translated into Libras, recorded in electronic media, Portuguese as L2 test, essay in sign writing or filmed in Libras, in addition to Libras translators and interpreters, in entrance exams, institutional exams and other selection processes. (2014, p. 18)

Therefore, legislation must be discussed to ensure that the sign writing specific to Libras be disseminated, officialized, standardized, and guaranteed by means of specific legislation. Therefore, this research argues that the SignWriting sign writing system should be made official as Libras writing in Brazil.

Each nation generally determines the officialization of a language or, in rare cases, more languages for communication in all social contexts. In Brazil, Portuguese is the official language of the State. According to the 1988 Constitution, article 13: “The Portuguese language is the official language of the Federative Republic of Brazil.” (Brazil, 1988). However, the status of Portuguese as an official language in relation to other languages creates a situation of linguistic hegemony and prevalence, while other languages spoken and signed in Brazil are seen as minority languages. Lagares (2018) argues, in relation to the Federal Constitution, that

Article 210 establishes the mandatory use of the Portuguese language as a vehicle for regular elementary education, with the sole exception of the “mother tongues” of indigenous communities, which are also guaranteed the right to have their own learning processes. This point of the constitutional text does not contemplate either the deaf community or communities that speak immigrant languages. (Lagares, 2018, p. 77)

In that sense, one can discuss the role of the Brazilian State in determining a monolingual language policy that favors only one spoken language, although indigenous communities may have access to schooling in their local language. On the other hand, Libras and the deaf community have the status of a language of recognition, without having, as in article 210, the same prominence as indigenous languages. Although there is specific legislation on Libras, this sign language is not included in the constitutional text and is on the fringes of an officializing policy. Thus, Lagares emphasizes that ‘it is in the articles referring to the recognition of Brazilian cultural diversity that one can identify a timid commitment by the State to the linguistic realities coexisting in its territory, although these commitments have not given rise to concrete political developments in federal legislation.’ (Lagares, 2018, p. 77). In that sense, Brazil’s linguistic diversity is in an unfavorable situation in relation to policies that officialize these languages. The status of linguistic recognition, as is the case with Libras, entails

limitations in linguistic planning and implementation, since public agents may not value Libras as a language of access to knowledge and information by the Brazilian deaf community. This scenario brings considerable harm to the deaf people in Brazil.

Two interesting cases that have made their national and local languages official are Bolivia and Finland. According to Lagares (2018),

We find in Bolivia a more recent example, closer to Brazil, of the application of the principle of territoriality. The 2009 Constitution declares the country a plurinational state and makes 36 languages official along with Castilian: Aymara, Araona, Baure, Bésiro, Caninana, Cavineño, Cayubaba, Chácobo, Chimane, Ese ejja, Guaraní, Guarasu'we, Guarayu, Itonama, Leco, Machajuyai-kallawaya, Machinei, Mojeño-Trinitario, , Mojeño-Ignaciano, Moré, Mositén, Movima, Pacawara, Puquina, Quechua, Sirionó, Tacana, Tapiete, Toromona, Uru-Chipaya, Weenhayek, Yaminawa, Yuki, Yuracaré and Zumuco (Bolivia CPE Plurinacional, 2009, p. 15). It is also established in the Constitution that all public servants must be proficient in two of the country's official languages. (Lagares, 2018, p. 75).

In this sense, Bolivia's national language policy favors a multilingual environment. Despite this determination of the Bolivian Constitution, Bolivian Sign Language is not considered an official language in the country. However, Bolivia's national language policy favors significant linguistic and cultural diversity for several languages. This plurinational language policy can be a good example of how several languages can assume official linguistic status within a national State.

In this sense, access to education, as well as knowledge, is possible in the language of the speaker due to the status of official language attributed to these languages. Another example is India, which has the Three Languages Act. This Act determines that every Indian citizen must know Hindi, English and a third regional language. As can be seen, the State intervenes incisively in Indian language policies, encouraging multilingualism in the country.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that an official language may need a written form. In this sense, a sign language that comes to have the status of an official language will emphasize the need to adopt a writing system for the dissemination of information in this language. The dissemination of Libras in video recording is not the only possible alternative for this language. Sign writing is an alternative that makes it possible to disseminate knowledge, especially in contexts where access to the internet and technological resources for video recording may be limited. In this sense, both the officialization of Libras and a sign writing system favor the dissemination of the language, as well as access to knowledge and various public services for the deaf community, are necessary.

Another important example is Finland, where there are two official languages used throughout the national territory. According to Lagares (2018), in Finland,

Firstly, the official languages of the country [Finland] are Finnish (or Suomi) and Swedish. All citizens can use these two languages in their relations with the public administration and request official documentation in both. The State also undertakes, according to its 1999 constitution, to meet the cultural and social needs of the population equally in both Swedish and Finnish. Thus, unlike what we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the national anthem of Finland has official versions in both languages. And all citizens, regardless of their first language, must complete their studies with a good command of the other official language (2018, p. 73)

As can be seen, the use of two official languages in Finland is a significant example of how two or more languages can be made official and used by the State so that people have access to information, knowledge, and education in the languages in which citizens feel comfortable, both spoken and written. With this example, one can think of a bilingual or plurilingual national language policy. Thus, it is possible for sign language to be made official and have a sign writing system that is also used in the written form of sign language.

A unique case of a multilingual language policy in both spoken and sign language is New Zealand. The New Zealand Sign Language Act of 2006 makes this language official alongside English and Maori in this Oceanian country. Figure 1 shows the first part of the New Zealand Sign Language Act which “declares New Zealand Sign Language an official language of New Zealand” (New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006:

Figure 10 – First Part of the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006.

Part 1 Preliminary provisions

3 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to promote and maintain the use of New Zealand Sign Language by—

- (a) declaring New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand; and
- (b) providing for the use of New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings; and
- (c) empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand Sign Language; and
- (d) stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of New Zealand Sign Language.

4 Interpretation

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

Deaf community means—

- (a) the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf and who use New Zealand Sign Language as their first or preferred language; and
- (b) people who are deaf and who identify with the group of people referred to in paragraph (a)

government department means a government department named in Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Ombudsmen Act 1975

interpretation, in relation to New Zealand Sign Language, means—

- (a) the expression in New Zealand Sign Language of words spoken in English or Maori or both; and
- (b) the oral expression in English or Maori or both of messages expressed in New Zealand Sign Language

Fonte: <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2006/0018/latest/whole.html>

Although this law does not mention any information about sign writing, it is a significant step towards officializing the sign language of the New Zealand deaf community. However, it should be considered that a language has integrated skills, that is, seeing, signing, reading, and writing. Policies of this nature tend to be more inclusive, although they can still be improved in relation to sign writing.

McKee and Manning (2015) discuss this law that officializes New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). NZSL was officialized in 2006, through a specific law approved by the New Zealand Parliament. The authors highlight that ‘NZSL has been institutionally recognized in the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006; in judicial, educational and health system policies; and through the provision of state-funded interpreting services.’ (MCKEE; MANNING, 2015, p. 474). Despite this specific law, the authors criticize that there were no mechanisms and resources to implement the law’s purposes.

In general, sign languages are recognized through laws and decrees that give them status and appreciation in a certain country. According to the authors, unlike other sign languages, NZSL received its recognition in a peculiar way:

At the time of the NZSL Act 2006, granting official language status was an unusual measure to apply to a sign language. Such recognition and instrumental linguistic rights for deaf people are more often codified in policies and regulations relating to administrative domains such as education, justice and health care and are typically codified in terms of accessibility provisions.’ (McKee; Manning, 2015, p. 475).

The officialization of a sign language is positive, in that it can achieve status, appreciation and greater visibility. However, the fact that legislation does not provide plans and goals for its proper implementation makes it impossible for the deaf community to have its linguistic rights guaranteed. McKee and Manning (2015) argue that a ‘top-down’ language policy does not always meet the needs of the deaf community. The creation of a law that makes a language official can be positive because, according to the authors, it gives value and recognition to the deaf community. According to them, ‘Officializing a minority language sends a political message of recognition of the identity and social position of that group, and can allow members of a linguistic minority to participate in official administrative domains through their own language.’ (2015, p. 475). The scenario described above can enhance access to public goods and services in a broad way for a minority community, as is the case with the deaf community. However, there is a need for proper implementation of this language policy so that the deaf community can exercise its citizenship fully. Thus, McKee and Manning (2015) emphasize that the law that officializes NZSL has three basic principles:

The first (§ 6) confers official language status, recognizing NZSL as the first or preferred language of members of the deaf community and that it exists exclusively in New Zealand. Secondly (§ 7), it guarantees the right to use NZSL in court with the provision of competent interpreters when NZSL is the first or preferred language of a person (including jurors). Thirdly (§ 9), it establishes principles that guide government departments in making their services accessible to NZSL users “so far as is reasonably practicable”. (2015, p. 477)

As can be seen, the Act provides for the status of an official language, guarantees access to interpretation in a legal context, as well as establishes the right to access public services. Even though the Act provides for access to services in sign language, these will be possible “so far as is reasonably practicable”. This proposition present in the Act may impede access to services and rights of the deaf community, which further limits the scope of the Act. The Act does not provide for possibilities of access to knowledge, education, health, among others, in sign language. Likewise, the law does not specifically mention learning, dissemination, and access to knowledge through a sign writing system.

McKee and Manning (2015) criticize the absence of deaf education in the law. According to the authors, ‘educational language rights are universally considered a central objective of sign language recognition, but the NZSL Act is silent on education’ (2015, p. 477-478). In other words, access to education and knowledge are not guaranteed under a law that makes a sign language official. What is observed in the law, according to the authors, is the favoring of special education: ‘In short, the law’s silence on the educational rights of Deaf children has left this to the policy and practice of special education. In New Zealand, special education favors the placement of children in mainstream schools’ (2015, p. 478-479). Thus, the law does not guarantee access to bilingual education for deaf people in their first language, nor does it explicitly specify the possibilities for the use and dissemination of sign writing.

According to McKee and Manning (2015), in 2013 and 2014, there was a public consultation on the NZSL law. It made a series of recommendations, mainly regarding the education of deaf people. There was an increase in resources for NZSL. However, education is still inclusive, with the hiring of sign language interpreters. There are projects aimed at teaching NZSL to families with deaf children, in addition to tutors in inclusive schools who work as a support for the learning of deaf children. As can be seen, there is no language policy aimed at the full development of bilingual education for deaf people. (McKee; Manning, 2015). According to the authors,

Language planning and policy actions, including the legal recognition of NZSL as an official language, have not yet resulted in the expected gains in the instrumental rights of deaf New Zealanders to communication and information in the wider society. Nor have top-down

policy initiatives adequately addressed the need to plan for the acquisition and maintenance of NZSL, especially through the education system. (2015, p. 492).

The officialization of NZSL occurred in a ‘top-down’ movement, but the deaf movement and the deaf community are not involved in this process. Therefore, it is necessary that the officialization of a sign language embodies a language policy and implementation that allows the deaf community to have their linguistic rights in full.

Final Remarks

As we have seen, the language policy for the official languages provides that writing should be developed in the language. In the case of sign languages, as in New Zealand, the written form of signs must also be guaranteed by means of specific legislation, ensuring that communication by deaf people is carried out fully in sign language and in the written form of sign writing.

In the case of Libras, there is still a restriction that Law 10.436/2002 imposes on the written form of Libras. That is, Article 4 determines that ‘Brazilian Sign Language - Libras may not replace the written form of the Portuguese language.’ (Brazil, 2002). Again, this situation of Libras and Portuguese is what Lagares (2018) calls *unequal bilingualism*. Thus, the purpose of this research is to discuss and propose that a single written form of sign writing be used as the written form of communication for Libras. This proposal, however, does not exclude or eliminate the written form of Portuguese, as the deaf community can learn it more effectively together with written sign writing.

However, in contexts of teaching and acquiring two distinct languages – Libras and Portuguese – sign writing favors the development of these languages, as previously pointed out by Stumpf (2005). Therefore, the sign writing system that can be used in the written form of Libras is SignWriting. This system is widespread in several Brazilian states, mainly due to the creation of the Letras: Libras EAD course in 2006 and 2008, which was opened in 15 teaching centers throughout Brazil. With the emergence of this course, the SignWriting system was disseminated throughout Brazil, as previously pointed out in the research by Leão (2019a). Thus, this research presents a proposal for the officialization and standardization of the SignWriting sign writing system for the registration and dissemination of Libras in its written form.

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