

# THE LINGUISTIC STATUTE OF BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND THE STIGMA OVERCOMING IN THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF<sup>1</sup>

## *O ESTATUTO LINGUÍSTICO DA LÍNGUA BRASILEIRA DE SINAIS E A SUPERAÇÃO DO ESTIGMA NA EDUCAÇÃO DE SURDOS*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyzes the linguistic statute given to Brazilian Sign Language and the constraints

imposed on it due to the overlapping of values derived from social and academic representations referring to the *word*. The assumption here is that it was just partially successful the determination of the Brazilian Sign Language linguistic statute, once, even already recognized as a natural linguistic system, there is still a reading of its structure and its operation based on assumptions pertaining to the word domain. In consequence of this, the tendency to the reinforcement of social stigma associated to the deaf persists, especially in the context of school education, through what will be defined as a *spectacle of overcoming*. It is a theoretical approach leading to a deep reflection about the real situation of the Brazilian Sign Language in the development of school education of the deaf individual, based on four intercomplementary points of view from the fields of Philosophy, Linguistics and Social Psychology. With this analysis, as a conclusion, the focus is on the issue of school education of the deaf and the role that the development of a full linguistic statute for the Brazilian Sign Language can play in the education of the deaf.

**KEYWORDS:** Brazilian Sign Language – LIBRAS. Stigma. Education of the deaf.

**RESUMO:** Este estudo tem por objetivo analisar o estatuto linguístico da Língua Brasileira de Sinais (LIBRAS) e as restrições que lhe têm sido impostas em virtude da sobreposição de valores oriundos de representações sociais e acadêmicas referentes à *palavra*. Defende-se aqui que apenas parcialmente se obteve êxito na determinação do estatuto linguístico da LIBRAS, pois, em que pese seu reconhecimento como língua natural, ainda persiste uma leitura de sua estrutura e de seu funcionamento baseada em pressupostos pertencentes ao domínio da palavra. Em consequência disso, tende-se a reforçar o estigma social do sujeito surdo, particularmente no contexto da educação escolar, por meio do que se caracterizará como espetáculo da superação. Trata-se de uma abordagem teórica que busca refletir sobre a real situação da LIBRAS no desenvolvimento da educação escolar do indivíduo surdo, a partir de quatro pontos de vista que se intercomplementam, nos campos da filosofia, da linguística e da psicologia social. Com essa análise, a título de conclusão, focaliza-se a questão da educação escolar do surdo e o papel que nela pode exercer o desenvolvimento de um estatuto linguístico pleno para a LIBRAS.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** LIBRAS – Língua Brasileira de Sinais. Estigma. Educação de surdos.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze the linguistic statute of the Brazilian Sign Language (known as LIBRAS) and the restrictions imposed on it due to the overlapping values derived from social and academic representations of the *word*. Used here as an allegory of spoken languages, word plays a central role in the composition of Man's identity, from the sacred bond with God, in the field of religions, to modern reason in the field of academic-scientific culture. It is argued, here, that there was only partial success in determining the linguistic statute of LIBRAS, because, despite its recognition as a natural language, a reading of its structure and functioning based on assumptions pertaining to the word domain still persists. As a result,

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the tendency is to reinforce the social stigma of the deaf, particularly in the context of school education, through what will be characterized as a spectacle of overcoming.

With strictly didactic purposes, the arguments on which this study is based are divided into four parts. In the first, shortly thereafter, the role of the word in the identity construction of Man as a species is characterized, focusing it on the body of the sacred discourse of the Judeo-Christian religion. The choice for this religion was given due to the fact that it is the one with the greatest influence, both in the development of the academic-scientific culture that still predominates around the world today, and the consequent influence on the conformation of the school institution and its formative values.

The analysis of the “word” or “verb” in the field of the sacred offers explanation for a strong tendency to treat language as a phenomenon independent of the subject and its intentionality. This tendency has repercussions in the academic culture, which is analyzed in a second moment throughout the text, called *From the word to gesture and the expression systems*, in which the origin of a representational level of the word, here called *language*, is presented, and in which various modes of organization operate. From this level of representation, we understand the Saussurean notions of *language faculty* and *expression systems*. Despite Saussure’s contribution to the recognition of gestural expression systems as legitimate and natural, the absence of an organization similar to the nature of human reason still weighs on nonverbal systems. This is the question addressed later in the study, called *The body, the structure, and the expression system*, which analyzes the nature of hypotheses formulated in the field of linguistics to explain the organic linkage of verbal expression systems with the body. At the center of these hypotheses is the notion of *structure*, which seeks to describe the units and modes of speech organization. Having as assumptions values and principles strongly inspired by hypotheses about the internal organization of verbal systems, as well as their relation with a presumed way of thinking, notions such as *structure* objectively compete for any system of expression that is not subject to the description it ends up occupying a place of discredit.

It is argued, then, that all this word-related culture imposes itself on LIBRAS, denying full linguistic statute and contributing to the reinforcement of deafness stigma. In the fourth and last part of the text, the condition of deafness stigma is analyzed from the point of view of word deprivation, as well as the problem of the attempt to absorb the word culture as an attempt to overcome it. With this analysis, as a conclusion, the focus is on the issue of deaf school education and the role that the development of a full language statute for LIBRAS can play in it.

## 2 THE WORD, THE SACRED AND THE MAN

From a strictly physiological point of view, speech is nothing more than a vocalization derived from the projection of air over the vocal folds through the airways. Among the vocalized sounds that are produced in the same way, some stand out for their intentionality, becoming more than vocalizations, utterances. In the linguistic domain, utterances are defined as the product of statements, which can be understood as the context of communication in which utterances are employed. The utterance, also called discourse, is what properly defines the intentionality<sup>3</sup> of the

<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with *intentionality* in terms of the phenomenology of E. Husserl (e.g. Husserl, 1994), in which it is related to the consciousness that the subject holds of his/her representations of the world from that of the world presented to him/her,

uttered words. According to Dubois et al. (1994, p. 181), the utterance is characterized by three properties: (i) the possibility of the speaking subject modulating the utterance, either assuming for him/herself the truth of what is expressed (for example, “I affirm here that the defendant committed a crime and his/her conviction is necessary”), either by subjunctively modifying it (for example, “it may be possible that the defendant has committed a crime and his/her conviction may become necessary”); (ii) the level of transparency or opacity with which information is made known through the utterance; (iii) the level of tension that occurs in the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, which not only interferes with the utterance process itself, but also regulates the type of utterance to be employed from different types of records and formality rules; (iv) the simulation, in which the diverse resources with which the speaker manipulates the interlocutor’s relationship with information, involving metaphors, ironies, omissions of points of view, etc., are considered. Although so many other properties of utterance can be listed, the four presented above allow us to illustrate the nature of the decisions made by the speaker and, from them, to define what is properly understood as intentionality in the field of linguistics: a series of decisions that ensure the statute of language code for the speech.

The association of speech with intentionality is relatively recent in the field of language sciences and is not universal yet. Often, the study of the linguistic code has already disregarded intentionality, being the atomic description of its structural form enough, on the grounds that, thus, greater scientific potential would be obtained. This is what is presented by Bloomfield (1926, p. 45-47):

The method of postulates (that is, assumptions or axioms) and definitions is fully adequate to mathematics; as for other sciences, the more complex their subject-matter, the less amenable are they to this method, since, under it, every descriptive or historical fact becomes the subject of a new postulate. Nevertheless, the postulational method can further the study of language, because it forces us to state explicitly whatever we assume, to define our terms, and to decide what things may exist independently and what things are interdependent.

[...].

Also, the postulational method saves discussion, because it limits our statements to a defined terminology; in particular, it cuts us off from psychological dispute. Discussion of the fundamentals of our science seems to consist one half of obvious truisms, and one half of metaphysics; this is characteristic of matters which form no real part of a subject: they should properly be disposed of by merely naming certain concepts as belonging to the domain of other sciences.

[...].

1. *Definition.* An act of speech is an utterance.

2. *Assumption 1.* Within certain communities successive utterances are alike or partly alike.

[...].

3. *Def.* Any such community is a speech-community.

4. *Def.* The totality of utterances that can be made in a speech- community is the language of that speech-community.

[...].

6. *Def.* The vocal features common to same or partly same utterances are forms; the corresponding stimulus-reaction features are meanings. Thus a form is a recurrent vocal feature which has meaning, and a *meaning* is a recurrent stimulus-reaction feature which corresponds to a form.

7. *Assumption 2.* Every utterance is made up wholly of forms.

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breaking, thus, with the innate motivational rationalism that preceded him/her in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and with the currents of academic positivism that were contemporary to him/her.

In Bloomfield's (1926) excerpt, the emptiness of the figure of the speaker is observed, while the social component of the language is emptied, in favor of an approach that takes it as an autonomous entity, with life and functioning regulated by laws of a certain structural logic inherent in it. Even the meaning of structures derives from behavioral reactions, so that in this kind of linguistic study the speaking subject has no control over the language and, consequently, over the utterance process, which is explained from the conditioning in stimulus and response beams.

Although studies with this theoretical profile have a very specific bias, many others, even among the most recent ones, have some commonality, always associated with the idea that language can be listed as an autonomous entity, whose structure and functioning exist without relationships with other symbolic domains of Man. Even in theoretical currents strongly associated with Physiology, as is the case of post-transformationalist Generativism, today strongly linked to research in the field of Neurosciences, language is not analyzed in its relations with other domains of the mind, but rather in its possible relations with neurophysiological devices specialized in linguistic operations.

The motivation of these studies – which is, herein, of our interest - comes from a culture that derived a social concept of language, somewhat dissociated from the figure of Man. Thousands of years before the Greek philosophers introduced into Western culture any reflection on the nature of the facts of language in the universe of human representations, it already inhabited the imaginary of all known civilizations, not exactly in the place of Man, but of transcendence, more precisely in the interlacing that is established between Man and the sacred. All known forms of religion depart from the word and ascribe transcendental properties to it.

In the Catholic Bible, for example, there are 1,239 instances of the term [*palavra*] (word), which corresponds to 22% of the number of times God is quoted (5,421 instances) and 37 more than Jesus is quoted (1,202 instances). In addition, adding up the occurrences of terms associated with verbal activities, such as [*louvar*], [*adorar*], [*aclamar*], [*evocar*], [*dizer*] e [*falar*] (praise, worship, acclaim, evoke, say, speak, respectively), results in a total of approximately 5,300. In all, the Bible presents about 6,539 instances of terms associated only with the word and its uses. Although no other contexts have been researched, it is presumably the same in all sacred terms.

Notwithstanding significant variations between religions, the word is a common datum to all. The word evokes God, heals, foretells, explains, comforts, in short, it is the very beginning, the middle and the end. In the Bible, in Old and New Testament terms, the word has atomic and essential character, as follows:

*Ecclesiastical* (O.T.)

3. Wisdom hath been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting!
4. The *word* of God most high is the fountain of wisdom; and her ways are everlasting commandments.
5. To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed? Or who hath known her wise counsels?
6. Unto whom hath the knowledge of wisdom been made manifest? And who hath understood her great experience?
7. There is one wise and greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon his throne;
8. He created her, and saw her, he numbered her, and poured her out upon all his works;

9. She is with all flesh according to his gift, and he hath given her to them that love him.<sup>4</sup>

*Gospel According to John* (N.T.)

In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

[*The word*] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the *Word* was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.<sup>5</sup>

From the previous excerpts, the following aspects are attributed to the word: firstly, the power that emanates from its nature to be confused with that of God (“... and the word was God...”); from this perspective the word is above all the power and power of the creator God; then, in both texts, the word is prior to time, prior to everything except God, so that it is not instituted, but it is instituting of everything and everyone, including, of course, Man; however, “And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us...”, resulting in a third aspect to consider, namely that the word, even dwelling among us, is a force from the outside, with an existence that transcends us. This is the true origin of a conception of language that takes it as an entity whose life and functioning lie beyond the man in which it merely dwells.

Only from this conception one can understand what really motivates linguistics to treat language as a fact itself, isolated from the speaking subject who uses it. Moreover, it explains how to support the hypothesis that a sound - a mere vocalization - can become a structural feature of a certain language, as Bloomfield (1926) puts it. However, speech vocalizations analyzed outside the context of intentionality are not distinguished from other forms of vocalization that are as complex as those of speech, as Oliveira Filho (1968) points out in the following excerpt:

Certo, então, de que linguagem passou de fato biológico a fato social já entre os primatas inferiores e de que a linguagem do macaco japonês (*macaca fuscata*) não teria a grande importância que lhe estão atribuindo se não fosse realmente um instrumento de comunicação de certa eficiência, J. Itani dá uma atenção especial a essa função da linguagem entre os macacos de seu país, donde o empenho em procura, a cada passo, a relação real entre os diferentes tipos de vocalizações e os comportamentos diversos quer na comunicações entre um macaco e o resto do bando, quer, especialmente, nas comunicações entre um e outro (“diálogo”)<sup>6</sup>. (Oliveira Filho, 1968, p. 229).

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on June 20, 2019 from <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Ecclesiasticus-Chapter-1/>

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved on June 20, 2019 from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=KJV>

<sup>6</sup> Translation: Certain, then, that the language actually went from a biological to a social fact already among the lower primates, and that the language of the Japanese ape (*macaca fuscata*) would not have the great importance they are attributing to it if it were not really a communication tool of a certain efficiency, J. Itani pays special attention to this function of language among the monkeys of his country, from which the effort to seek, at every step, the real relationship between the different types of vocalizations and the different behaviors both in communication between a monkey and the rest of the pack, and especially in communication between them (“dialogue”). (Oliveira Filho, 1968, p. 229).

The language statute that, *a priori*, linguists give to human vocalizations employed under specific social conditions rests only on their earlier belief in an autonomous entity with a strong power status assured by its presumed divine provenance.

Still in this same perspective, another relevant aspect is found in this work, which refers to the relation of the word with the wisdom of God, or rather, the word as the wisdom of God itself. This relationship dealt with in the book of Ecclesiastics is taken up in the Bible even in the books of Numbers and Wisdom, all belonging to the Old Testament. Wisdom, which is the word of God, “He has sprinkled it in all His works upon all flesh”, thereby leaving it to Man, “to those who loved it”. Wisdom is therefore to praise God with the very word that is God, becoming that way a child of God. The word becomes the key to Man’s relationship with his transcendence in God and at the same time becomes his consciousness. This explains why there are so many occurrences of the term [*word*] and the terms associated with verbal activities in the body of the Bible.

### 3 FROM WORD TO GESTURE AND EXPRESSION SYSTEMS

Notwithstanding its cultural basis in the field of the sacred, the word also permeates the academic culture, mainly due to the relationship that, since religion, has been established between the word and the intelligence. Some historical milestones of scientific culture provide us with data to understand the central place of the word in the gradual process of characterization of man outside the religious discourse in the West. In the ontological text of the Discourse on Method (Descartes, 1637), reason and word appear as properties essentially responsible for the distinction between Man and other animals.

You won’t find that at all strange if you know how many kinds of automata or moving machines the skill of man can construct with the use of very few parts, in comparison with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other parts that are in the body of any animal, and if this knowledge leads you to regard an animal body as a machine. Having been made by the hands of God, it is incomparably better organized - and capable of movements that are much more wonderful - than any that can be devised by man, but still it is just a machine. I worked especially hard to show that if any such machines had the organs and outward shape of a monkey or of some other animal that doesn’t have reason, we couldn’t tell that they didn’t possess entirely the same nature as these animals; whereas if any such machines bore a resemblance to our bodies and imitated as many of our actions as was practically possible, we would still have two very sure signs that they were nevertheless not real men. (1) The first is that they could never use words or other constructed signs, as we do to declare our thoughts to others. (Descartes, 2007, p. 22).

Descartes advances significantly in the introduction of some intentionality as property of the word, already listed as an instrument of thinking manifestation. With this, it should be noted, it is already possible to treat word and reason as distinct things. More than that, the word does not, by itself, have the property of expressing thinking, because it depends on certain “*arrangements*” applied by Men. It is these so-called arrangements that we can associate here with the constituent features of intentionality, which properly characterize a human being acting on reason. According to Descartes, therefore, words do not become languages because they are words, but rather because they are employed according to certain arrangements that give us the ability to express a thought. As a result, Descartes opens up, revolutionarily in

his historical moment, so that other resources of the so-called *human machine* are equally recognized as languages, as he states:

These two factors also tell us how men differ from beasts [= ‘non-human animals’]. For it’s a remarkable fact no men (including even madmen) are so dull-witted or stupid that they can’t arrange different words together so as to form an utterance that makes their thoughts understood; whereas no other animal, however perfect and well-endowed it may be, can do anything like that. It’s not because they lack organs of speech; for we see that magpies and parrots can utter words as we do yet can’t speak as we do - i.e. utter words while showing that they are thinking what they are saying. Whereas men who are born deaf and dumb, and thus at least as lacking in speech-organs as the beasts are, usually invent their own signs to make themselves understood by those whom they live with, who have the opportunity to learn their language. This doesn’t show merely that the beasts have less reason than men; it shows that they don’t have reason at all. (Descartes, 2007, p. 22-33).

The presence of a sign language among the deaf is surprising in Descartes’s speech, given the *maxim cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”) which, among the Enlightenment philosophers, marks a break between modern thinking and the materiality of the body. This presence of a corporeal language, however, is sustained by the fact that the nature of the object considered by Descartes is not the act or matter of expression, but rather the *language*, the intentional arrangement that connects thought with the given data. It is therefore a mental phenomenon that one would be considering as a language.

It is at this level of representation of a language that the translation of thinking operates where the best explanation for the concept of *category* present in Kant’s philosophy is provided, notably in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (first published in 1781), published about a century after *The discourse on method*. Although not confused with thinking, language, as the level of representation of concepts, is the repository of categories *a priori* to the thinking, namely:

Subtle considerations about this table of categories could be made, which could perhaps have considerable consequences with regard to the scientific form of all cognitions of reason. For that this table is uncommonly useful, indeed indispensable in the theoretical part of philosophy for completely outlining the plan for the whole of a science insofar as it rests on a priori concepts, and dividing it mathematically in accordance with determinate principles, is already self-evident from the fact that this table completely contains all the elementary concepts of the understanding, indeed even the form of a system of them in the human understanding, consequently that it gives instruction about all the moments, indeed even of their order, of a planned speculative science [...]. (Kant, 1998, p. 214-215).

It is understood with Kant and Descartes that thinking develops from peculiar instruments of reason, their categories, associated with conceptual arrangements that develop at the level of language, not of word or signs. The relationship between the properties of thinking and world experience, which, according to Kant, is indispensable, does not alter the fact that there is an *a priori* thinking and language, which govern both the expression systems and the possible arrangements of their functioning. Therefore, in spite of the most significant differences between the various types of expression systems, whether formed by words or signs,

their *a priori* nature is always the same. The issue that remains to be questioned here is the fact that, as language is thus considered, all its properties would reside exclusively within the mind, more specifically that of thinking, and it is therefore impossible to analyze the impact of differences between expression systems in the profile of the subjects who employ them.

At the advent of the first specific studies of the still recent, at that time, science of linguistics, the works of Ferdinand Saussure were published in a posthumous work, which arrived in a single book called *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916). Saussure's work makes an important contribution to addressing the problem raised in the previous paragraph by presenting a so-called *language faculty*. It defines a trait of the human species that enables it to develop and operate expression systems of the most varied order, from verbal, such as natural languages and written alphabetic languages, to nonverbal languages, equally divided between natural ones, such as LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language), and the artificial ones. In Saussure (1916), both the language faculty and the derived systems of expression are appreciated exclusively from the point of view of their proper linguistic conformation, both in terms of structural form and the dynamics of their functional organization. In terms of the representation of thinking, Saussure's theory refers only to what, according to him, interferes with the structure of the systems and the selection of words that make up the units of meaning. In this case, it is the *associative relations*, based on which the ideas that can be articulated within the so-called phrases (basic units of meaning within a given structure) are defined. For example, in the universe of a world shared by most people, an associative relationship between  $_n$ [residence] and  $_v$ [to live] is valid, while another between  $_n$ [guitar] and  $_v$ [to have lunch] would be invalid.

Saussure's contribution adds to Descartes's in the sense that it assures to all expression systems the same status, all equally tied to the phylogeny of the human being. A language faculty assigns to expression systems a biological materiality, resolving this way the issue of their origin, previously linked to the sacred. But further, Saussure recognizes that derivative systems are not sufficient, however are sustained in social practices, and thus should be the subject of a larger science than linguistics, the semiotics.

Semiotics is responsible for the study of the processes of signification, of intentionalities, therefore, for the meaning given to the signs of a system of expression. In listing such a broader area, Saussure recognizes that every expression system synthesizes, at the same time, one component derived from the thinking processes (within the categories discussed in Kant (2016) and another derived from psychosocial, subjective, and historical experience). It is in this way that it can be determined that no system of expression, even if derived from a universal faculty, constitutes itself on the fringes of a culture that pervades it, becoming part of its form and organization.

Nevertheless, however, the proposition of a language faculty is not yet sufficient to definitively link expression systems to the body, as discussed in the next section.

#### 4 THE BODY, STRUCTURE AND EXPRESSION SYSTEMS

Gestural expression systems, such as LIBRAS, benefit from the notion of a language faculty that gives it the same language status, in the sense presented here, associated with spoken languages. This alone, however, is not fully satisfactory, considering that the statute

of language confers a generic status whose validity depends on the nature of the so-called arrangements that enable the expression of thinking. In this issue, the problem lies in the integration of deaf subjects who are proficient users of LIBRAS in contexts strongly marked by academic-scientific intellectual models, such as the school. Such a problem can be defined either by the difference between the already established status of LIBRAS as a fully constituted language as a system of natural expression and effectively intentionally employed, or by its status as a rational expression system capable of providing the proficient user with the same potential as the speaker, to think, that is, to identify the operating logical-formal categories, to conceptualize, to fix causal chains in time, etc.

The relationship between thinking and the units of verbal systems, as well as their forms of organization, is enshrined in both sacred extracts and academic-scientific culture. It is suggested that there is an ontological relationship between them that, as we have seen here, is usually associated with the power of God. However, such a relationship with thinking has not been consecrated in association with other expression systems than speech, except those derived from scientific culture itself, of a specific character, such as writing, mathematics, artificial languages of computing etc. LIBRAS, as well as other analogous expression systems, is greatly damaged in the context of such a relationship with thinking, because its structures and forms of organization are not subject to the order of structures that have been consecrated in academic culture.

The emergence of linguistic science is usually associated with the presentation of the first applications of the notion of *structure* in the phrasal description process. Structure is, in fact, an allegory from the field of Medical Sciences, in which the concept of *system* has been developed as a bundle of structures that operate in solidarity to fulfill a certain organic function. Hence the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, etc. systems were defined. Transferred to the field of language sciences - notably linguistics - the notion of system was applied to the characterization of languages as one of these organic functions of Man, promoted and governed by the faculty of language. However, in Medicine, the structures and modes of their organization in physiological systems are studied and described from clinical evidence, whereas in linguistics the different systems - that is, the different languages - are explained based on hypotheses that start from categories and units absolutely devoid of matter, of a symbolic and historical nature. Thus, for example, the differences in meaning in the verb  $\sqrt{[arrasar]}$ <sup>7</sup> used in sentences 1 to 3 ...

1. *A cantora arrasou.*
2. *A cantora arrasou a bailarina que errou o passo.*
3. *A cantora arrasou o show.*

... are not explained from some systemic notion or arrangement of words, but from pure cultural idiosyncrasy. In Portuguese,  $\sqrt{[arrasar]}$  (rock, humiliate, ruin) can be employed with the meanings of “succeeding”, “scolding bluntly” or “leading to failure”. Moreover, the linguistic description of natural languages inherits several assumptions about their categorical units,

<sup>7</sup> Note of translation: In this case, the verb “arrasar”, in Portuguese, has three meanings: rock, humiliate, ruin – 1. The singer *rocked*. / 2. The singer *scolded* the dancer for missing the step. / 3. The singer *ruined* the show.

influenced by a particular way of “wanting to see” the parts of the sentence. Thus, for example, it was chosen, here, to consider articles and other determinants as grammatical entities isolated from the nouns they determine in the sentence, with which they always form structures (for example: {[a]→[cantora]})<sup>8</sup>. However, why do we postulate this dissociation and not a bond, as, for example, in a single word [acantora]? If the justification for not doing so is the fact that the article can easily be switched with some other determinant ({[essa][cantora]}) (*this/ singer - female*), then why not postulate two separate terms within the noun itself ({[cantor] [a]}) - (in Portuguese singer (male and female) -, since the gender ending may be switched with other morphemes (e.g., [-es])<sup>9</sup>? The justification is neither semantic, since definite articles are grammatical terms without semantic value, whereas the endings of gender and number have a very transparent meaning.

Boundaries between words in a sentence, or even boundaries between functional units of sentences, as subjects or verbal complements, are not facts of the language itself, but of the interpretation made of it. This explains why children in the process of literacy present writing with truncated or juxtaposed words at some stage of learning: “*meuoto*”, meaning “*minha moto*”; “*aranja*”, meaning “*a laranja*”.<sup>10</sup>

All idiosyncrasy in the process of grammatical description is, however, disregarded in linguistic discourse and literate culture, so it has become normal to believe that language is, in fact, presented as a mere descriptive hypothesis. And by virtue of cultural traditions - whether in the sacred or in the academic-scientific realm - it has been assumed that this supposed normality stems from the direct relationship between thinking and language. This set of presuppositions and their presumed normality gave legitimacy to the notion of structure in linguistic culture, giving it a biological statute. Structure, therefore, is considered part of human physiology.

From this perspective, any language sustained by expression systems that are not subject to descriptions based on the conception of structure is subject to a different status than the one of verbal languages. Distinct and, from the point of view of school culture, inferior, since it would be a language alienated from the structure of thinking. This is the case of LIBRAS, whose language status contrasts with its status in school culture.

It should be remembered that, as Saussure had already told us, every language is established in a culture that legitimizes it as a form and mode of organization. Therefore, the case of LIBRAS refers us to a situation of clear cultural discrimination that affects it, rather than its definition as a language, its status as a system of expression linked to the psychosocial, subjective and historical experience of Deaf culture.

## 5 THE WORD AND THE STIGMA IN THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF

The situation of LIBRAS in the context that has been dealt with in this study relates to the issue of the process of school inclusion of the deaf, which has, on the one hand, support in a consistent legal regiment, but, on the other hand, still goes through difficulty regarding

<sup>8</sup> Note of translation: In Portuguese, the female word for “*the singer*”.

<sup>9</sup> Note of translation: The plural form of the noun “*cantor*” (male) is “*cantores*”.

<sup>10</sup> Note of translation: These words may be translated as “*myoto*”, meaning “*my motorcycle*”; “*range*”, meaning “*the orange*”.

integration of the deaf student in teaching-learning process. The nature of contemporary processes of social inclusion, including school inclusion, deserves a reflection because:

A atmosfera de inclusão que se instalou nessas últimas décadas e que exige a todo o momento um tratamento igualitário aos supostamente “diferentes” de diversas ordens seria um refinamento da produção dos diferentes. Novas palavras, novas práticas? Ou antigas práticas (re)atualizadas? Incluir para observar, encaixar, colocar num ponto estratégico de observação dos desvios? Estaríamos, na escola inclusiva, preparados para lidar com ambiguidades, ambivalências, indefinições, “diferenças”, sem, contudo, estigmatizar, delimitar espaços, estabelecer fronteiras fixadas de forma concreta ou imaginária?<sup>11</sup>. (Schilling & Miyashiro, 2008, p. 247).

One way or another, stigma is not surpassed by inclusion. In Goffman’s (1981) terms, stigma is the undesirable trait that distinguishes one who is not allowed to include him/herself. This is not just an “*other*” individual, since my other is a possible one; it is the “*nonindividual*”, which will not become another of me. First and foremost, therefore, stigma is the *veto* of someone becoming an “*other*” in society; it is the impediment and justification for social banishment. In Brazil, public education is populated by the most diverse stigmas, always related to states of learning failure, alleged behavioral disorders, outbreaks of indiscipline and insubordination, so that the condition of the school individual is an eternal “*student becoming*”, according to Castro (2015), from an ethnographic study. According to the author:

Os conceitos de pertencimento e resiliência em relação aos processos de escolarização servem como cenário para a compreensão sobre o tornar-se aluno. Entende-se que é através do pertencimento que os alunos podem legitimar suas identidades em seus diferentes contextos de convivência, sobretudo, na escola. Pertencer significa partilhar características, vivências e experiências com outros membros das comunidades de pertencimento, desenvolvendo sentimento de pertença. (§) [...]. Do mesmo modo, pode-se observar como ocorre o pertencimento nas comunidades escolares, nas quais, os alunos vão idiosincronicamente identificando as práticas de sala de aula que os conduzirão à condição, por exemplo, de bons e maus alunos pelo desempenho escolar. Ocorre que esse desempenho é atribuído não somente pelas vivências do aluno em sala de aula e na realização das atividades pedagógicas, mas também por uma série de características, muitas vezes subjetivas. Isso porque é o próprio aluno que acentua e revela o que é importante para pertencer à escola e à sala de aula. A partir desse conceito de pertencimento e suas características aplicadas ao aluno e à escola como um todo, pode ser facilitado o entendimento do processo de pertencimento, do que significa tornar-se aluno e de como se dá a pertença dos mesmos nesses contextos<sup>12</sup>. (Castro, 2015, p. 39-42).

<sup>11</sup> Translation: The atmosphere of inclusion that has been settled in recent decades and which demands at all times an equal treatment of the supposedly “different” of various types would be a refinement of the production of the different. New words, new practices? Or old (re)updated practices? Include to observe, fit, place at a strategic point of observation of deviations? Are we, in the inclusive school, prepared to deal with ambiguities, ambivalences, indefinitions, “differences”, without, however, stigmatizing, delimiting spaces, establishing fixed boundaries in a concrete or imaginary way?. (Schilling & Miyashiro, 2008, p. 247).

<sup>12</sup> Translation: The concepts of belonging and resilience in relation to schooling processes serve as a scenario for understanding about becoming a student. It is understood that it is through belonging that students can legitimize their identities in their different contexts of coexistence, especially at school. Belonging means sharing characteristics and experiences with other members of the communities of belonging, developing a sense of belonging. (§) [...]. Similarly, one can observe how belonging occurs in school communities, in which students idiosyncratically identify classroom practices that will lead them to the condition, for example, of good and bad students by school performance. It turns out that this performance is attributed not only by the student’s experiences in the classroom and in the performance of pedagogical activities, but also by a series of characteristics, often subjective. This is because it is the student him/herself who emphasizes and reveals what is important to belong to school and the classroom. From this concept of belonging and its characteristics applied to the student and the school as a whole, the understanding of the belonging process can be facilitated, as well as the meaning of becoming a student and how their belonging in these contexts. (Castro, 2015, p. 39-42).

Stigma is one of the factors that act impeditively in the development of the process of belonging, which, in daily school life, manifests itself through “a series of often subjective characteristics” (Castro, 2015, p. 42). In most studies in special education, stigma is given as a material trait, centered on the figure of disability, which is given to the subject as something that he/she “carries”, “flaunts”, which is well identified in the questionable expression “*disability bearer*” (a wheelchair bound friend once said: “I don’t take my paralysis on the wheelchair; the chair takes me”). This focus on disability is perhaps what justifies in education a tendency to seek to absorb it in the ordinary practices of everyday school, aiming to overcome it, to compensate; in summary, all sorts of things that justify the subject’s belonging despite the stigma.

An interesting view of this type of situation is described by Moura (2015), in the text entitled “Corrigindo o estigma através do espetáculo: o caso da equipe de futebol de anões” (*Correcting stigma through the spectacle: the case of a soccer team of dwarfs*). It is about a soccer team made up of dwarf players; they could be blind, paraplegic, it does not matter; what stands out in the paper is the thesis that sport allows the overcoming of stigma or, better said, its “*correction*”. The so-called spectacle corrects: one must become the subject of the spectacle that common sense recognizes as a spectacle. In that game, the spectacle is not the game itself, but the overcoming.

In the case of the deaf, the stigma lies less in the deprivation of the sense than in the deprivation of the word, because as previously seen, the word permeates human identity itself, whether in the domain of the sacred or of reason. In this case, the spectacle of overcoming lies in forced oralization, in a word that imposes itself upon it in the hope of allowing to have God within, or some rationality that is perceived as human. Spectacles are not, however, instruments that lead to the overcoming of stigma, because as soon as the scenario is undone, only the individual remains, naked, and the stigma. The word is strongly related to states of social exclusion, constituting a trait with characteristics of stigma not associated with disabilities of any order. Linguistic prejudice is a matter of concern in different areas of knowledge and treated as stigma in works such as the one by Araujo, Correa and Wolters (2016), in the area of administration, to whom:

Uma possível explicação para esse dado é o fato de, muitas vezes, as pessoas com sotaques de grupos dominantes serem percebidas como tendo status e poder, enquanto são percebidas como baixos níveis de sucesso socioeconômico as pessoas que possuem perfis de grupos menos dominantes [...]. De acordo com essa premissa, pode-se observar que nos quesitos como competência e inteligência, atributos desejados em cargos de elevado status social, os indivíduos possuidores de sotaques de grupos dominantes tendem a receber avaliações mais positivas do os de grupos não dominantes [...]. No entanto, no tocante aos quesitos bondade, cordialidade e solidariedade – características mais requisitadas em cargos de baixo status, indivíduos com sotaques que remetem a grupos não dominantes tendem a ser avaliados de forma mais positiva<sup>13</sup>. (Araujo, Correa, & Wolters, 2016, p. 3).

Prejudice and stigmatization in the field of linguistics are not restricted to spoken languages, because although accents are stigmatized, prejudice rests on other factors, such

<sup>13</sup> Translation: One possible explanation for this fact is that people with dominant group accents are often perceived as having status and power, while people with less dominant group profiles are perceived with low levels of socioeconomic success [...]. According to this premise, it can be observed that in terms of competence and intelligence, desired attributes in positions of high social status, individuals with accents of dominant groups tend to receive more positive ratings than those of non-dominant groups [...]. However, in terms of kindness, cordiality and solidarity - characteristics most requested in low status positions, individuals with accents that refer to non-dominant groups tend to be evaluated more positively. (Araujo, Correa, & Wolters, 2016, p. 3).

as power, social identity, and so on. The presence of LIBRAS in Brazilian education has a revolutionary character, because it enables the deaf to become students through their own mother tongue, a fact that contributes very positively to the development of their identity, whether school or social. However, LIBRAS' entry into the school and academic culture takes place in the form of the spectacle, by attempting to absorb it by common sense and by employing it as part of the means to overcome disability. Instead of having the development of the deaf student at the center of the schooling process, the school grants the student access to LIBRAS in order to make him/her a student, "correcting" his/her disability.

This is what was said here earlier, as to recognizing LIBRAS as a language, but disregarding its modes of organization, in favor of the theories and descriptive models already established in the description of the mode of organization of the spoken language. However, deaf users of LIBRAS organize utterances and, consequently, their representation of the world, in a unique way in relation to users of spoken languages. This peculiar form of organization to LIBRAS is directly related to the deaf culture, the primary identity of the deaf. By denying it, in favor of a non-existent analogy with the structure and functioning of speech, is denied a full linguistic, autonomous and legitimate status to LIBRAS. At the same time, the deaf subject is denied full status as an intellectual subject, as a student, as a person.

Overcoming the word stigma among the deaf necessarily requires the study of the organizational properties of the LIBRAS system, thus listed as a language with its own linguistic statute. It is not a question of seeking grounds for overcoming a disability, as there is no disability in any supposed absence of words among the deaf. Nor is it about trying to fit LIBRAS in theories about supposed mental structures that link it to some culturally consecrated model of thinking. Rather, it is about seeking to describe it as a unique organizational system, entirely consistent with the deaf culture and the social and intellectual identity of those who hold it as their mother tongue.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The school culture brings values that are imposed on its policies and processes of inclusion, as well as in the case addressed in this paper, with an impact on the education of the deaf. Among these, the values added to the spoken word and languages compete very strongly in the delineation of the figure of the school subject, contributing to the conformation of the parameters of normality, both in terms of identity before the human species, as well as intellectuality. As seen here, even regarding its attachment to Man, the word fluctuates between the sacred and an immaterial mental representation, which is explained by concepts such as *structure*, not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although LIBRAS has already been given the status of natural language, this and all other nonverbal expression systems have been described based on the same parameters derived from the values applied to the word, thereby depriving them of full linguistic statute.

As a result, the deaf in inclusive education is still subject to what has been called the *spectacle of overcoming*. In this case, in the face of a social stigma that reveals itself in the absence of the spoken word, the spectacle lies in the attempt to absorb LIBRAS, as well as the deaf culture underlying it, to the organizational parameters of speech. The void still to be filled in

defining LIBRAS' linguistic statute weighs on the social inclusion of the deaf, especially in their schooling. For this reason, it is one of the most relevant objects to be included in the study and research agenda in the area of the education of the deaf.

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