

SIGN LANGUAGE AS THE LANGUAGE OF A CODA GENERATION: FAMILY APRENDICEMENT AND LITERACY

A LÍNGUA DE SINAIS COMO LÍNGUA DE UMA GERAÇÃO CODA:
APRENDIMENTOS E LITERACIA FAMILIAR

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ABSTRACT

The discussion about literacy in sign languages and especially about family literacy for hearing children of deaf parents (Children of deaf adults - CODA) is still in its infancy. In the few existing sign language curricula, attention is paid to sign languages as the first and/or second language of deaf children, while there is little discussion of CODA sign language and its bimodal bilingual abilities. This discussion raises questions about the possibilities of including sign languages in the school curriculum for these hearing children, besides deaf children. To this end, this paper presents four narratives of CODA who share their sign language as a heritage language, discussing sign language literacy and family literacy. We also discuss coming into the world through the ancestral language of deaf parents, and how each family is a unique generation, being perpetuated by other families, and each told story makes the language alive and present in other families. This paper focuses on sign language aprendicement practices of hearing children with their deaf parents.

Keywords: Coda. Sign Languages. Sign language literacy. Family Literacy.

RESUMO

A discussão sobre alfabetização em línguas de sinais bem como a literacia familiar para crianças ouvintes filhas de pais surdos (CODA - Children of Deaf Adults), que é uma área de estudo ainda incipiente. Nos poucos currículos de língua de sinais existentes, é dada atenção às línguas de sinais como primeira e/ou segunda língua das crianças surdas, enquanto há pouca discussão sobre a língua de sinais de CODA e suas habilidades bilíngues bimodais. Tal discussão nos traz indagações sobre as possibilidades de que as línguas de sinais estejam no currículo da escola para estas crianças ouvintes para além das crianças surdas. Para esse fim, este artigo apresenta quatro narrativas das infâncias de CODA que compartilham a sua língua de sinais como língua de herança, discutindo sobre alfabetização em língua de sinais e literacia familiar. Discutimos também a vinda ao mundo pela língua ancestral de seus pais surdos e de como cada família é uma geração única, sendo perpetuada por outras famílias e cada história contada, faz a língua viva e presente em outras famílias. O artigo enfoca as práticas de aprendimentos das línguas de sinais por crianças ouvintes filhas de pais surdos.

Palavras-Chave: Coda. Línguas de Sinais. Alfabetização em línguas de sinais. Literacia familiar.

INTRODUCTION

The discussion on sign language literacy for hearing children of deaf parents (Children of deaf adults - Coda) is still in its infancy. To present, in existing sign language curricula (see Mertzani, Barbosa, Fernandes, 2022) the focus is on the study of sign language as a first language (L1) for deaf children and as a second language (L2) for hearing students. In this latter case, there is no special mention of the bilingual hearing child in a deaf family, who is growing up with a maternal sign language (and therefore L1). This paper attempts to discuss this aspect, raising questions about the possibilities of including sign languages in the school curriculum for Codas, besides deaf children.

In general, the traditional concept of literacy is related to learning the written language, although recent studies question this traditional definition (see Mertzani, 2022; Gibson, Byrne; and De Monte in this volume), discussing literacy in sign languages, which are the languages of deaf communities. In particular, this article discusses the early literacy of Codas and, hence, aspects of family literacy practices. According to the National Literacy Plan¹ (Plano Nacional de Alfabetização) (2019, p. 23), family literacy practices are easily incorporated into the family's daily life. These include conversations with the child, storytelling, contact with picture books, language modelling, the development of receptive and expressive vocabulary in everyday situations and in play, and games with letters and words.

Even with all the laws and decrees in favour of sign languages in Brazil, such as Law 10.246/2002 and Decree 5.626/2005, little or no attention is paid to sign language literacy for Codas children. Furthermore, although current literature discusses the narrative practices of deaf parents with deaf children (Berke, 2013), this article presents such practices with their hearing children.

Following a qualitative method, the study presents four narratives by four Codas (the author of this article is one of them), who are currently professionals in the field of Libras and deaf education. From these narratives as memories of Codas' childhood life, especially in relation to family literacy practices, the study discusses aspects of the various forms of this literacy in sign languages at home (of the target families) and in Libras. In these narratives, sign languages are seen as heritage languages (Quadros, 2017) and childhood memories as *apprenticements* (Manoel de Barros, 2010).

CHILDHOOD CODA AND HERITAGE LANGUAGE

Ninety per cent of children born to deaf parents are hearing (Preston, 1994), learning the language and culture of their parents, although there is a generational break since the children of these hearing subjects will not inherit sign language. Although Codas do not openly share their parents' functional condition, they potentially inherit a different sensibility and cultural legacy than any other hearing child (Preston, 1994). The pattern of socialisation is even different from that of their own deaf parents, many of whom were brought up in hearing families. The deaf parents of hearing children were brought up on the peripheries of a world that has its own language and often within an exclusively deaf community. "As children and as adults, they stand on the edge of this remarkable world, which is only superficially accessible to those who can hear" (Preston, 1994, p. 13).

Following Masschelein and Simon (2014) on childhood as power, the *becoming-Coda* is the vacuum between the child and the Coda where the *becoming* takes place. This vacuum can be understood as potentiality or potency and ex-position. Potency here unfolds in three ways:

¹ At the time of writing this paper, the plan was still in use.

Firstly the power, the power of movement, that is, the movement out of oneself or the will [...] to set out, to go and see and to speak for oneself. [...] Secondly, the power of the word, i.e. the power of translation, or intelligence - because intelligence must be understood as the power of translation. [...] And thirdly, the power of thought, or reminiscence: 'to remind a thinking subject of its destiny' [...] the power of self-remembering, or 'to remember oneself by becoming foreign to oneself. [...] This triple power unfolds in an ex-position. [...] The ex-position refers to the emergence of children as beings of words. (Masschelein; Simons, 2014, p. 34 e 35)

childhood-Codas are marked by languages because they are beings of words based on the triple power and capacity for exposure. But what does it mean to be beings of words? “[...] a human word has been addressed to them, to which they want to respond [...] as men, as one responds to someone who speaks to you, [...] under the sign of equality” (Masschelein; Simons, 2014 p. 35). As beings of word in a bilingual reality, the Coda child is characterised by the need to respond in at least two languages: spoken and signed. They respond in the visuospatial language of their deaf parents and also, at the same time as they receive a word, they respond in spoken language. A Coda’s childhood can be understood as a continuous process of development, where language, as an event, moulds their subjectivities. It is in this space of transition and linguistic coexistence that a *becoming-coda* is forged.

The becoming, considered as a driving force, distances itself from an immutable and identifiable existence. This is because the concept of becoming does not refer to what we already are, but rather to what we are turning into. Becoming can be compared to a spear that is thrown towards a distant point in the hope that someone will find it and throw it again.

Thus the Coda, when it organises him-/herself together with his/her peers, the *becoming-Coda* takes shape. It does not delimit a fixed destiny. Instead, it points to the fact that the destiny of all things is a constant transformation. The *becoming-Coda* is a crack, a border between two worlds and languages. “To become is never to imitate, nor to do as, nor to conform to a model, be it one of justice or truth. There is no end from which one starts, nor one to which one arrives or must arrive” (Deleuze; Parnet, 1998, p. 10).

Still according to the authors:

Affections are becoming: sometimes they weaken us, when they diminish our power to act and break down our relationships (sadness), and sometimes they make us stronger, when they increase our power and make us enter a wider or higher individual (joy). (Deleuze; Parnet, 1998, p. 73, 74)

The *becoming-Coda* realises that he inhabits two worlds and in the transit between them, while being exposed to the oral language, he is also linked to his parents by sign language as a heritage language. According to Quadros (2017), heritage language is a language that is used by the family in a context where there is a predominant language spoken by society in other spaces.

In the specific case of Brazil, the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is a heritage that clashes with Portuguese, impacting the bilingual development in different ways. Some hearing children of deaf parents are fluent in Libras and in Portuguese. (Quadros, 2017, p. 4)

Heritage languages are languages that, in a socio-cultural context, are different from those used in the community at large. The word HERITAGE is directly proportional to the idea of tradition, of inheriting something, of heritage, and is related to family tradition.

[...] this heritage may be being passed on by a community in which the family is inserted. Thus, heritage language is directly related [...] to the uses of a language by people from a specific social group within a larger social group. (Quadros, 2017, p.7)

Considering that Libras is passed down from generation to generation of deaf people in the community (not necessarily within a family nucleus) and that it is a language used by Brazilian communities in large urban centres in a country that uses another language as official, the Portuguese language, conveyed in the media, official documents, public bodies and education, this sign language does constitute a heritage language. (Quadros, 2017, p. 33)

Etymologically, the word “inheritance” has its roots in the Latin *haerentia*, which in turn derives from “*heres*”, which designates “heir” or “one who receives property”. It is used to define the legacy or inheritance that an individual can leave to their descendants. It is not only limited to material goods, but also encompasses cultural and social elements passed down from one generation to the next.

In addition, social heritage, also known as popular or cultural heritage, encompasses the typical characteristics of a social, cultural or class group that are passed on to their descendants. This includes traditions, histories, languages, ideas, cuisine and other factors that endure over time. Social heritage plays a crucial role in shaping the behaviour, morals and ethics of each society, defining the legacy or heritage that an individual can leave to their descendants.

APPRENDICEMENT AND FAMILY LITERACY

Three people helped me compose these memories. I want to tell you about them. One, the child; two, the birds; three, the walkers. The child gave me the seed of the word. The birds gave me detachment from the things of the earth. And the walkers, foreknowledge of God’s nature. [...] The birds, the wanderers and the child in me are my collaborators in these invented memories and the donors of their sources. (Manoel de Barros, 2010, p. 147)

In relation to family literacy, this study sought to answer the question: what goes into the construction of Cogas memories and experiences in sign language *apprendicement*? In this study, the deaf family is thought of as a space-time, where and when deaf people meet; a place for the *apprendicement* of languages and cultures, especially in the production of a linguistic community (as deaf communities are).

The concept of *apprendicement* is different from learning. According to Manoel de Barros (2010), such a word is something of the order of what is seen, in the small, in the detail. With *apprendicement* we can also add detachment, disambition, and long-suffering as synonyms. Learning, on the other hand, has acquisition as a fundamental part of its synonymy. Learning, on the other hand, is synonymous with acquisition as a fundamental part. That’s why we do not believe that there is an intention to acquire language in the power of deaf encounters in the family, where it is all driven organically, physically, interactionally, and relationally.

Apprendicement

The philosopher Kierkegaard taught me that culture is the path that man takes to know himself. Socrates travelled his path of culture and at the end he said he only knew that he knew nothing. He did not have scientific certainties. But he had learnt some minor things from nature. He had learnt that the leaves on trees are meant to teach us how to fall without fuss. [...] He had studied too much in books. But he learnt best by seeing, hearing, holding, tasting and smelling. At times, he even had the accent of his origins. He marvelled at how a single cricket, just one little cricket, could dismantle the silence of a night! I used to live with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle - those people. They spoke in class: Whoever gets closer to their origins renews themselves. (Barros, 2010, p. 129)

The *apprendicement* takes place by hearing, seeing, picking up, tasting and smelling. In the same way, sign languages in deaf homes and families are learnt freely, in other words, without even knowing where they're going like wanderers...

In order to turn to memories, we Codas can, together with the poet, reach out to the characters who are capable of pulling our memories from within us: the child that we are and who gives us the seed of the word, the birds that give us learnings in our *apprendicement* and the walkers who are free and wander aimlessly because it is in the walk that the adventure lies. Apparently, what belongs to the old is in the construction of a memory to which we must resort in order to narrate experiences, since Codas' childhoods are filled with stories and memories of how they resort to the language of their deaf parents so that they can live in both worlds that surround them.

Under this concept of *apprendicement* the family literacy is examined in the narratives of this study. The concept of family literacy follows on from the concept of literacy because it is built up in family relationships through everyday reading practices at home. These family language experiences increase the relationship with language and, thus, develop more competent communicative skills. While literacy is directly linked to the development of reading and writing skills, family literacy comes from another place. Initially, Taylor (1983, cited in Mata and Pacheco, 2009) used this term to describe the diverse literacy practices that took place at home and in the community; that is, the ways in which people learn and use literacy in their lives at home and in the community.

METHODOLOGY

To bring the Codas memories to life, we methodologically used narratives based on Walter Benjamin (1994) in his classic "The Narrator: Considerations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov²." So we turn to *Mnemosyne*, the goddess of reminiscence, so that a narrator can emerge within us. And for this, experience is evoked when reminiscence emerges from the network woven by the stories that run through the narrator as well as the stories of other narrators who are also involved. The experience is personified in the narrator because "[...] each of them lives a Sherazade, who imagines a new story in each passage of her storytelling" (Benjamin, 1994, p. 211).

² Even though he was little known outside Russia, Leskov (1831-1895) dedicated part of his work to recording narratives by the Russian people of all classes, religions, and ways of speaking, behaving and living.

For Benjamin, defining a narrator necessarily requires a certain distance, a certain gaze, in which features appear like a human face. The observer, for Benjamin, must be at a favourable angle, at an appropriate distance. “An almost daily experience imposes on us the requirement of this distance and this angle of observation” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 197). Benjamin goes on to say that people who know how to narrate properly are becoming increasingly rare, as the narration experience and art are on the verge of extinction.

When someone is asked to tell a story in a group, embarrassment generalises. It is as if we have been deprived of a faculty that seemed secure and inalienable to us: the faculty to exchange experiences. (Benjamin, 1994, p. 198)

When sharing their stories, the narrator is not interested in passing on the pure experience itself as information or a report. The narrated experience immerses itself in the narrator’s life and then draws it out of him. Experience here, according to Larrosa (2004), is about what passes us by, what happens to us, and what touches us. Not what happens (Larrosa, 2004). “This is how the narrator’s mark is imprinted on the narrative, like the potter’s hand on the clay of a vase” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 205). And “[...] whoever listens to a story, is in the company of the narrator, even those who read and share that company” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 213). By sharing stories, reading each other’s stories, we can exchange experiences in the most denotative sense of the word, record stories, merge them with our experiences, creating, in this way, a network of conversations.

Another characteristic of narratives is the practical sense that permeates them, because they carry within them something that they want to show. For Benjamin, narratives come about through the meeting of experiences, the gathering of stories, for “the narrator brings from the experience what he tells; his own experience or that of others. And he incorporates the things narrated into the experience of his listeners” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 91).

In short, for Benjamin (1994), narratives happen when experiences meet, when stories come together. “To narrate life is to reinvent it. It is to produce new meanings, to re-actualise in a new context; the marks inscribed on our body, in our history” (Pérez, 2003, p. 112). Thus, by narrating their chosen experiences in learning and using their parents’ language, the Codas’ stories received here become objects of knowledge for others and for themselves, since, by narrating, they reinvent, add, put their emotions into it and thus, recreate their stories and perspectives.

A narrator makes use of their memories, which are fragments, scraps, pieces of experiences chosen to remember (Pérez, 2003). At the end of the day, telling their stories, narrating their issues, makes these narrators authors not only of themselves, but of everyone who is part of the collective. To place oneself, is to place the other, and thus, be part of the historical fabric that is constructed in the tangle of narratives.

The Codas’ stories intertwine in such a way that it is confusing when the story of one begins and the story of another ends. Understanding that each family begins and ends its own generation, the stories almost repeat themselves and even with some particularities, the families only change addresses. And so, with the weaving of the narratives, a Coda community comes into existence in the weave of the stories told, each one experienced in their own subjectivity, making the common unique, making the equal singular in each life.

The Codas of the four narratives

The stories that intersect here begin with mine, as I have a doctorate (2012) and a master's degree (2007) in Education from the Postgraduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (PPGE-UFES), where I wrote my dissertation and thesis on deaf issues. In my master's dissertation I discuss deaf narratives about school, and in my thesis, about the training of hearing teachers of the deaf. I have a degree in Pedagogy from the Federal University of Espírito Santo, where I am currently Associate Professor I in the Letras Libras course, Professor and Master's and PhD supervisor in the Postgraduate course in Education (PPGE/UFES) on Special Education and Inclusive Practices, and in the Postgraduate Program in Linguistics (PPGEL) on Applied Linguistics. I am also the coordinator of the Libras and Deaf Education Research Group (GIPLES/CNPq-UFES). My parents are born deaf and I have three uncles who are also deaf. Deafness in my family is genetic on my father's side, and myself I am unilaterally deaf. We have the so-called Waardenburg syndrome, which means that my parents and uncles are bilaterally deaf and I, my brother, and my cousins are unilaterally deaf.

The second story is by Sônia Marta de Oliveira, who has a degree in Pedagogy (2001) from PUC Minas. She has a Master's degree (2015) and a PhD (2020) in Education from the Postgraduate Program in Education at PUC Minas, where she studied deaf discussions. She is a teacher in the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Network and a translator and interpreter of Brazilian Sign Language and Portuguese, with experience in translating technical scientific texts, audiovisuals, and in community and conference interpreting. Sonia's parents were born deaf and had different relationships with deaf language and culture. While Sonia's mother lived in a space where her condition was not understood (she was the only deaf in the family at first, as she later gained other deaf family members), Sonia's father had other deaf family members, such as her paternal uncle and second cousins.

The third story is by Keli Simões Xavier Silva, who has a doctorate (2020) and a Master's degree (2012) from the Postgraduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Espírito Santo. She has also a degree in Pedagogy (2005) from the same university. She is a professor in the Department of Education and Human Sciences (DECH) at the Federal University of Espírito Santo. She is a member of the Interinstitutional Research Group on Libras and Deaf Education (GIPLES) and the Human Development and Educational Practices in School and Non-School Spaces research group. She has experience in the field of Education, with an emphasis on Inclusive Education, Special Education and Deaf Education. She has worked mainly on the following subjects: Inclusion, Bilingual Education for the Deaf and Libras Interpreters. Keli's father became deaf due to meningitis when he was months old and is the only one in his family. Her mother was born deaf and has a brother who is also deaf. Although the uncle says he lost his hearing as a child, other uncles say that the deafness in Mum's family comes from the fact that the grandparents are cousins. It is worth noting that Keli's mum has always been involved in association struggles and was therefore the first female president of the deaf association in Vitória (state of Espírito Santo).

Finally, the fourth story is by Adriana Gomes Bandeira, who is a PhD candidate and holds a Master's degree in Linguistic Studies from the Postgraduate Program in Linguistics (PPGEL) at the Federal University of Espírito Santo. She has a BA in Languages - Libras from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, and she is currently a Libras/Portuguese translator at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (2014). Her parents were born deaf and both studied at INES where they met. In addition to her father who was deaf from birth, Adriana had two deaf aunts who were her father's sisters. Her father was born in Espírito Santo and studied at INES as a boarder, while her mother, who was from Pernambuco, lived in Rio and also studied in Laranjeiras.

THE NARRATIVES

Narrative 1: I love watching you interpreting... you have an ancient Libras

The fact that I am the daughter of deaf people has given me many stories. I was the little girl in the deaf group. I was the hearing girl who knew signs. I was the one who could interpret as well, since knowing sign language and being a hearing person, meant being a “hearing - almost - deaf person”, who could be deaf or hearing! Going to parties at the oralist school (which she attended from the age of 2 or 3) was the perfect opportunity for public demonstrations of the intelligence of this “hearing - almost - deaf” child: “Look, so little and how well she knows to sign!” This was the talk of a deaf father who was proud of his little almost-deaf, but also hearing child who mastered Libras in public demonstrations of signed speeches. What was it like to be deaf? It was normal to be deaf. And what was it like to be hearing? I did not realise the difference between these two worlds and even between these two languages.

Going to training meetings of a deaf association was the fun of the moment. Playing, running, watching debates and speeches. Free, without hearing people. The only hearing people were me, my brother, my cousins, and the children of the other deaf people who were there. We ran around all the time, while the deaf people discussed their future, their past, and their present. I remember when I was four years old, my father would sit with me and explain the world to me in his language with an open map of the world and a globe. He spent hours teaching me the signs of the countries of the world and the existence of a world. America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania... I knew them all. According to dad, to know the world is to be intelligent.

Maths... I learnt maths from my father. The teacher insisted on explaining the multiplication operation, but it was incomprehensible to me. My father saw my anguish and, my semi-literate father, took some oranges and showed me the logic of multiplication in signs and with the oranges. I deciphered a world of new mathematical *appendicement!*

I remember very well one day, watching my mum chatting to her friends, she made the sex sign (on her cheek) and I suddenly asked: “What is that sign?” My mum, blushing, quickly disagreed and said she would tell me later and gave me a good telling off for following adult women’s conversations.... I kind of knew but pretended not to, because I realised it wasn’t my place (not yet).

I used to write diaries and in one of them I wrote: “I am 9 years old, I am a very troubled girl (full of problems). My parents are deaf and I am very adult for my age”. That’s how I saw myself in my *appendicement* at home.

Figure 1: Me signing at the age of three.



Source: Author’s archive.

As we related visually, exchanging glances and letting go of things, I developed sign language very naturally. This apprenticeship also took place through simultaneous and spontaneous interpretations in different spaces; in the political arena, and especially in the medical and educational contexts, weddings, religious events, etc. New signs were introduced and we were transformed, thinking of other signs and possibilities so that our parents would understand everything that was going on in the best possible way. Thus, we considered our translation/interpretation to be in the language of our parents and many Codas took this practice into their lives, even professionally, without ever forgetting their own family's Libras. I remembered a lot about how I learnt when I saw my father teaching my son who is hearing the signs, trying to pass on his culture to him as well. Teaching my son the signs of the countries, the football teams, and telling him, as he did with me, that Flamengo was the best team. So many people still say to me: "I love watching you interpreting, you have an "old Libras", without jargon, without terminology... but simple, familiar." And so, our reading of the world cuts across our translation and interpreting and, particularly, our relationship with the world. A sign language/Libras that has not passed through the language of the school, that has not been formalised, and that still retains a status of primal intimacy, in which the gaze between the deaf parent and the hearing child allowed a language of the lap, in the sense of a language not from the school bench, but from the cosiness of the family, from the warmth of everyday life with its infinite grooves.

Narrative 2: Discursive observation...how do I understand what my deaf parents say?

According to the poet Manoel de Barros, there are three people who help us compose memories: the child, the bird, and the wanderer. At the Paris Congress in 1900, during the opening of the event, one of the moments when both the congressmen from the Hearing Section and those from the Deaf Section were together, he gave a speech in signs, in defence of the preservation of signs in deaf education:

We ask only one thing: that our natural language, sign language, not be sacrificed for articulate language:

I am a bird,
Look at my wings,
Do not clip them!

Let's get to work! Let's discuss freely in our soul and conscience!

(Gaillard, 1900, p. 14)

This image, more than a metaphor, is perhaps an invitation to enter this context in which, in front of those hands that move like bird wings, we Codas experience the "not-knowing" as a desire to know, a willingness to know. The Codas easily recall situations in which they understood the discourse and, when they did not know a word, they would ask for the meaning directly. Parents or other deaf people explained it to them in signing, and the Codas understood completely.

Sign languages, as a reality that takes place in the air, that moves in a space in continuous movement, are the full manifestation of a liveliness. A constant flight erupts through the hands, making the agility of thought a bet on the depth of life. And, if we want to play like Manoel de Barros, those winged hands through which we Codas were introduced to the world, are the hands that also gave birth to people, who, for the most part, at one point or another in their lives, made sign languages a constitutive part of themselves, in a profound becoming; from the home language to the language of the church, to the language of the deaf association, to the language of the school, to language as a possibility of being.

But how do I understand what is said in sign languages? How do I understand what my deaf parents say? How does the sign language apprenticeship differ from learning an oral language? Perhaps it's worth remembering that language is experienced rather than taught. And every movement accompanied by those eyes eager to learn became an opportunity to ascend to another place. And, even if abruptly, by taking the little hands to give them the right shape, there was a mum or dad exercising a teaching role. Teachers, often without academic training, but capable of a pedagogy in which a desire for freedom prevailed. And other wings were born in other hands in those nests that we can, in Bachelardian language, call every house. And, still with Bachelard, we remember that the bird that helps us memorise makes us return to the nest from time to time: "If one returns to the old house as one returns to the nest, it is because the memories are of dreams, it is because the house of the past has become a great image, the great image of lost intimacies" (Bachelard, 2000, p. 262).

And I, who am Keli, with my hands in the air to produce some memories, turned to my mum to reminisce about these apprenticeships. My mother told me that my house was always full, and my parents used to house deaf people from another state who would stay at my house for months.

She recalled that I used to watch them talk very attentively... the kind of child who watches adults talk. And when there was a different sign, I would immediately call my mum and ask her in signing what the unknown word meant, and she herself would explain it to me in signing. And often, when I interrupted conversations to find out what the words meant, my mother would draw my attention because she was talking. But then I would come back and insist on an explanation.

At a very young age, I could not do the number five because I could not bend my little fingers, and my parents would understand even when I did something like the number two due to my still-forming motor skills. The strangeness came from my relatives who, when they saw me saying five in my own way, they did not understand and thought I was doing it wrong, that I was saying the number two even though my parents understood exactly what I was saying. I also remember that at home, my brother and I always made the bean sign, with one hand "biting" the tip of the index finger of the other hand. It was not until we were adults that my brother realised, when he saw in a handout for a sign language course - he was interpreting for the deaf instructor - that the sign was on the little finger. We laughed a lot. My brother and I used to joke about comparing our deaf family to hearing families where the parents say "problema" (the correct word is "problema") and the children grow up saying it like that, only to discover that it is wrong at school. In our case, we found out that the bean sign was "wrong" by looking at the Libras course workbook. This was very common.... And so our wings were not clipped and we could be who we were and speak how we spoke.

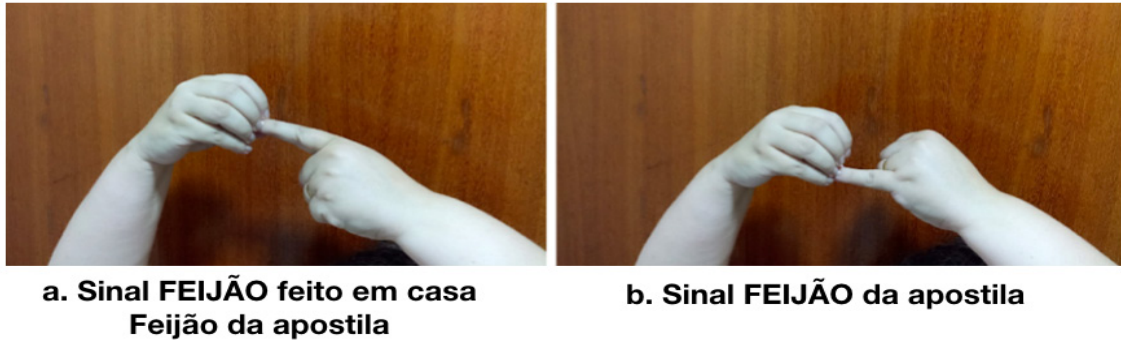
Figure 2: The Libras signs TWO (dois) and FIVE (cinco)



a. Sinal DOIS

b. Sinal CINCO

Source: Author's archive.

Figure 3: The sign BEAN (feijão)

Source: Author's archive.

Obs.: (a) in English, the sign BEAN used at home; (b) the sign BEAN in the book.

Narrative 3: My hands... I loved looking at them!

The hand
Technique has a bad reputation; it can seem devoid of soul.
But this is not how it is seen by people who acquire
a high degree of skill in their hands.
Of all the members of the human body, the hand is
the greatest variety of movements
that can be controlled as we wish.
"The hand is the window to the mind."
(Richard Sennett, 2013)

I am Sonia and I know very well that this phrase makes a lot of sense to me: "The hand is the window to the mind." After all, as I admired my hands, somehow I realised that with them I could see the world. My mother went to a school in the rural area of Uberaba and did not develop her reading and writing skills. Mum could write her name, my father's name, my uncles' names and our (children's) names. And dad had access to an education that understood his linguistic difference. I think that is why dad was very concerned about his children's reading and writing. We had several books of children's fables at home. I remember the story of the three little pigs very much. Mum would read the pictures and tell the story... There were so many strong, striking facial expressions... My brothers and I loved watching her expressing the big bad wolf... We always asked: "Do it again! Do it again!" I believe that this experience contributed greatly to our learning of sign language.

Another memory I have is that, when I was around 7 years old, one day dad came home and I was "playing" with my hands...I really liked looking at my hands and making shapes...that day dad asked me what the "sign" I was making meant. I told him I did not know. That's when my father said: "You're making the sign for INES, a very important school for the deaf. This school is in Rio de Janeiro." I looked at my hands and thought it was amazing! Then my father asked me if I wanted to learn more signs. I said, "Yes!!" My father gave me the book "Language of the Hands." Dear me! How many signs! It was like I was starting to read signs! The feeling of discovery, of the new, was extremely pleasurable!

Living with sign language from an early age was very natural! I did not see any difference between my parents signing and my paternal grandparents and/or other hearing relatives speaking orally. I believe that in my head it worked like this: some people sign, others speak... Today I still think like that

(laughs), but I know that deaf people, and often we daughters and daughters of deaf people, face the ethnocentric gaze of the hearing. The difference, whatever it may be, is still uncomfortable for those who do not experience it. I celebrate my diversity, I celebrate the linguistic and cultural heritage I carry with me. And I end by paraphrasing Sennett (2013): “The hands are the windows that not only access the mind, but mainly the soul.”

Narrative 4: I, Adriana, said one thing, my parents understood another, and everything was fine! A letter (almost) to myself to my other sister³ Coda.

We also want to revisit an image of the three characters proposed by Manoel de Barros. The poet speaks of wanderers and their foreknowledge of the nature of God. We will not go that far, but we want to look for a deaf nomadism that has also been experienced in Coda's life since ancient times. Every home is always a place for people to pass through, for visitors to visit, for people to move around. However, a home for deaf people tends to be a space where a language meets. Sign language itself can be a wandering language, which, due to the fact that it does not have a headquarters, a specific territory, it can be felt in all territories, but particularly rejoices in a house of the deaf. It was also in this flow of deaf people travelling that many Coda's found themselves in houses that were a space-time of continuous novelty. The deaf men and women who passed through... from those who worked as shopkeepers or wandered around on fraternal visits, to those who came for meetings with a clear associative purpose. The other who arrives is the one who also brings with them the world that I have not yet mastered, that I do not yet possess, and into which one can be introduced by the hands of the other. In becoming-Coda's, there are also constant experiences of wandering, and the condition of Coda makes a simple visit to certain places in an event.

In the 19th century, one of the ways of naming sign languages was to refer to them as a language of action. Possibly, when you see a house of the deaf and are a constituent part of it, as a Coda, you experience this action that can never be translated as mere action. The language of action indicates that it is not simply a matter of repetition or maintaining a pattern. More open to the other wanderer, the language of action - also a wanderer - is that language that moves, making the interlocutors feel that they are always in the process of becoming children. How many deaf people have walked in the life of a Coda? How many wanderings have made a child of the deaf a Coda? Here, as Manoel de Barros, the poet who listened to the colour of birds, said, memories are also invented because “everything that is not an invention is false.” So here's my letter, almost to myself, reflecting on the Coda experience.

Serra/ES, 18th October 2023.

Dear Professor Lucyenne, how are you? I hope this letter finds you and your family well! I decided to send you this letter after you asked me to tell you briefly about my experience as the hearing daughter of deaf parents, or as some researchers call CODA, the acronym for children of deaf adults. This experience that we share, since you are also CODA, brings us together, constitutes us and makes us contemporaries in the same space-time that we live/are CODA. And these stories that I am telling you through this letter have to do with our way of learning Libras in and through sign language. First of all, my father, who was born deaf, and my mother, who became deaf at a very young age, were the ones in my house. I was born to this couple and grew up without siblings, although my parents had pre-

³ When I asked Adriana to tell her story, she chose to write a letter addressed to me because we have a lot of history together.

viously raised a goddaughter for a while and my cousins were always around them. I grew up learning both Libras and Portuguese, since mother spoke well, but she also signed perfectly well. So, I had the opportunity to grow up in a house where two languages existed.

It is interesting to think about Libras, the language we call Brazilian Sign Language. Back home, in the 1980s and 1990s, we signed without being fully aware of which sign language we were using. It was sign language that my parents learnt when they had the opportunity to study at INES, the National Institute for the Education of the Deaf, in Rio de Janeiro, in the Laranjeiras neighbourhood. It was also there that they met. It was there that they experienced friendships, romances, fights and intrigues. It was there, living and socialising with other users of this same language, that they were formed, constituted and then were able to pass on this language to me. I use the verb to pass on rather than to teach because the way I learnt was very organic, very much from routine, from everyday life, from love, from affection, there was no primer for that. Although I remember, as a child, being enchanted by some printed materials such as the manual alphabet, for example, but it was through observation, through daily contact, that I had the opportunity to learn this sign language, which from the 1990s onwards came to be called Libras, and then with Law 10.436 in 2002, gained national recognition.

I have some memories that are very striking in my learning, if that is possible, of using a sign to say “Why” that was different from the grammatically correct sign, and my parents let me do it like that and talked to me in accordance with my adapted way of signing. When I was once observing a conversation between my parents and my godparents, who are also deaf, they signed the grammatically correct “Why” sign. And I was curious to know that sign, because until then I did not know it. When they explained to me that that sign meant “Why”, I immediately corrected them with conviction, saying that the right sign for “Why” was the one I was making. But far from what I expected, they updated me on the situation and said, “No, my child, that’s the sign we use at home. But if you talk to any other deaf person, they won’t understand that sign. You’ll have to use this one.” That was my first shock of reality.

Figure 4: The sign WHY



a. Sinal PORQUE em casa

b. Sinal PORQUE da Libras

Source: Author’s archive.

Obs.: (a) The sign WHY at home; (b) the sign WHY in Libras.

I learnt in practice one of the linguistic concepts of the (i)mutability of language. I could not create new signs if they were not agreed upon by the whole community. So that was one of my defining moments in this “learning” of Libras (which you have called apprendicement, and I agree very much). Another moment, in my pre-adolescence, was when I was faced with a situation where I had to interpret in a religious context for some of my parents’ friends who had come from another state. At that time, at the end of the 1990s, at least in my town and in the religion we attended, there were no meetings interpreted into Libras. My mother used to go, but as she was able to move between deaf and hearing people, she was able to follow the meetings with some adaptations. When we had this visit, there were no adaptations for them. It was either in Libras or not at all. And in their town, they were already used to the meetings being all signed. And there I found myself in a place where I knew how to sign in Libras but I did not know how to do it in a religious context, with specific signs, with deaf people who were already familiar with the subject. So, I could not mess around. But I tried to be the best interpreter I could be at that moment. I think it was hard for everyone, but in the end, I received a lot of praise from my family, friends, and church members who were very impressed with my dedication.

That is when my training as a Libras interpreter came into play, even though I’m still a CODA, the daughter of deaf people. In my childhood and youth, I never imagined that I would be a Libras-Portuguese interpreter. As I did not see this profession around me, I never considered the possibility.

But from the 2000s onwards, with the movement for legal recognition of Libras, of the professionals provided for later in the Decree 5626 of 2005, it was possible to start to glimpse this career, and at that time I was young. I went on to study for a bachelor’s degree in Letras-Libras, and you were one of my tutors. I passed the entrance exam for TILSP at the Federal University of Espírito Santo, and soon I will complete ten years at the institution. In the meantime, I did a Master’s degree in Linguistic Studies and I am currently a PhD candidate in the same program. So Libras, the language I learnt at home with my parents, helped me to become who I am today, not just a professional, but a citizen, a woman, a mother.

Another recent moment, which also reminded me of my parents, was when I interpreted at a Master’s degree exam for another CODA, like us, and her elderly parents came to watch. I felt like I was interpreting for my parents and I thought: “Now I’m going to sign in a way that can somehow include them” because I was in a formal environment, I had achieved a good linguistic level of the language, I was no longer that pressured pre-teen interpreter who did not know what to do. There I found myself thinking “I want to sign in a way that even my parents would understand” and so I tried to do it. I do not know if I managed to achieve that result, but I tried my best again! I say goodbye in the belief that this will be a farewell and that we can have other opportunities to exchange and experience these memories and experiences.

Fraternal hugs! Adriana.

RESULTS

Family literacy events

From the stories told, there was intentional learning and “reading” of sign language in the family environment in the narrators’ early years, similar to what happens early on in learning to read and write Portuguese (see Mata and Pacheco, 2009). For example, there were cases in which the narrators as children observed signs that they did not understand their meanings as they did not have prior knowledge of them (for example, Sônia’s case with the INES sign; the author’s case with the sex sign) and

the deaf parents had to explain them explicitly. Although sign language materials/books were scarce in the past, these narratives show that deaf parents used sign language dictionaries to teach their hearing children new signs (as in Sônia's case).

In the absence of specific books in sign language, the deaf parents used picture books (such as the story of the three little pigs in Sonia's case) and signed the stories using the content of their images. According to Sônia's story, her mother "read" the images in these picture books. These literacy practices are no different from those of hearing parents with hearing children and deaf parents with deaf children. Not only was the feeling of discovery extremely pleasurable, but reading in signs only shows the feeling that the hands are in fact the window to the mind (SENNETT, 2013). This literacy practice is shared, helping Cudas to develop and improve their vocabulary skills. According to Borges and Azoni (2021):

Learning vocabulary from an early age benefits from shared reading. Three-year-olds exposed to shared reading of a picture book are able to associate unfamiliar words with images, because even with a few presentations of the same reading, they can learn to discriminate the unfamiliar word-figure relationship from the others and even name figures of objects previously uncommon to their vocabulary. (Borges; Azoni, 2021, p. 2)

Hearing children's sign language apprendicement often occurred naturally, through their interactions with their parents and deaf peers. It was common practice for parents and deaf friends to talk to each other, while their hearing children followed along to understand what was being signed. Even when they did not understand, the children did not hesitate to immediately ask questions, a process which gradually expanded their vocabulary. In addition, the need to spontaneously interpret and translate what was asked of them also enriched their Coda repertoire.

In addition to these vocabulary expansion practices, when parents allow and understand what is meant at home, even if it is a sign that does not refer to the term itself, they do not let us use what we say at home with other deaf people outside the home. This practice characterises the difference in the use of these languages.

In addition, the narratives show that deaf parents are aware of the use of implicit and/or explicit and corrective feedback, according to the age of their children, teaching the correct articulation of signs. For example, although Keli does not mention the signing age of the "five" sign, it seems that she was still at the stage of motor development and sign language acquisition, and therefore the hand shape of the "five" sign was difficult to form correctly. In keeping with her age, her parents allowed this sign to be signed as the "two" sign, which confused the other signers. In Adriana's case, although the home use of the "why" sign was different, her parents explained the use of the standardised Libras "why" sign (in the place of the home sign). The relationship between home sign languages and the one (Libras) developed at school or in institutional spaces is in the order of life, feeling and sensation. Furthermore, the linguistic and cultural relationship between hearing children and deaf parents happens naturally with stories, conversations, and readings in Libras.

Curiously, in this apprendicement, in the family environment, the narratives present cases in which the Cudas children seem to play with phonological aspects of their sign language (for example, in the cases of Keli and Sônia). The shapes of the hands take on other imaginative forms (for example, a mouth with teeth to eat the beans) and the parents take the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary and signs (for example, the INES sign). As they matured with age, so did their understanding of the use of sign language and Libras in the various communicative and pragmatic instances, with the con-

sultation of their parents. This understanding and knowledge of literacy in sign language is self-taught (as the narrators say), it is apprenticeship since there was no formal teaching. When it comes to sign languages, together with Manoel de Barros, we understand that apprenticeship is in the order of practice and looking experience, thus it makes more sense than learning that is based on another rational. We have separated these concepts so as to make clear what we are defending in this paper.

Other literacy and apprenticeship spaces

In addition to the family environment, the narratives show other spaces (for example, the church) where literacy in sign language took place. In these spaces, the narrators at a young age were perceived by the deaf community as transmitters of their parents' sign language. This is because, when communicating in the language of their ancestors (parents, uncles, grandparents, godparents, deaf nannies, etc.), Codas often do not use standardised technical terms when interpreting discourses. It is common for comments to be made, both positive and negative, such as: "Your Libras is old" or even "Wow, I love watching your interpreting because you have old Libras".

Home sign languages enable people to read the world through their hands and, although there are other ways of looking at this practice, we will stick to family practice. Furthermore, as sign language is a heritage language for the Codas, its development is only possible through family literacy practices. It is in the family environment that hearing and deaf children experience literacy learning in any language, spoken or signed. Most Codas, children of deaf parents who are signers, enter school with sign language as their mother tongue and through it they perceive, feel, and think about the world. From the beginning of their lives, they experience practices such as reading stories together and learning vocabulary to understand both sign language and spoken language. Oral language permeates and both languages form in these children different ways of being in the world from other children who do not share this ancestral language. In fact, Codas live in deaf homes and are in contact with other deaf people, in addition to their deaf parents, which also affects the child's literacy development in sign language.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Talking about hearing children of deaf parents, in other words, Codas, is certainly not common, let alone simple. The aim of this text, using narratives as a methodology, is to listen to the sign language apprenticeship practices of hearing children with their deaf parents. In this way, we analyse how Coda's childhood as power and experience can be seen as a rich moment for the apprenticeship of sign language as an inheritance, and for increasing his/her repertoire, based on the notion of family literacy.

Even though Libras is a heritage language, it must be developed and perfected in family literacy practices before school literacy practices. It can be seen from the narratives that deaf parents actively participate in the apprenticeship of the heritage language, even before literacy in Libras takes place, especially when the Codas are in a position to translate or mainly interpret spontaneously for their parents and other deaf members of the deaf community in which the families participate.

Currently, although limited, there is some school practice in Brasil, in which deaf and Coda children co-exist (Mertzani, Barbosa, Fernandes, 2022; see also Zilio and Witches in this volume). Such practice, and the need for sign language literacy (as demonstrated in this study), suggests the importance of Libras school curricula to consider and include Codas in their educational planning.

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