

# Prosodic organization in sign language: a study on intensifiers and modal adverbs in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras)

**Rosana Passos\***

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Faculdade de Letras, Brazil

## Abstract

This paper aims at contributing to the description of grammatical organization of sign languages with emphasis on Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). According to Wilbur and Martínez (2002) the study of prosody in American Sign Language (ASL) offers information about the accent, rhythmic structure and intonation together with the syntax of a natural sign language. The authors sought to explain that the intonation of sign languages is in the kinematics of the movements and in their variables used for signing (movement, duration, speed, acceleration) which encode prosodic features in sign languages. Aiming to present the specificities of the interaction between grammatical and prosodic aspects, this study seeks to quantify and qualify the production of signs that characterize the prosody of Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). We will evaluate signs' movements according to their movement, duration, speed and acceleration. We will follow Felipe's guidelines on intensifiers and modal adverbs in Libras.

The participants analysed reflect the result of four groups of subjects, three of which are users of Libras, i.e., deaf signers (acquired Libras as L1), deaf bilingual (learned Libras as L2), bilingual hearing subjects (hearing people, Portuguese speakers, who learned Libras as their L2) and a control group of hearing subjects who had never been in contact with Libras. The hypothesis investigated in this study are: a) the longer the exposure to the

sign language as L1, the more accurate the subject is in the production of signs and gestures; b) prosodic markers of deaf signers and deaf bilinguals are produced with greater accuracy on target and expressiveness than of the bilingual hearing subjects. The results indicate that there is a difference between the groups and that these differences are related to the age of acquisition and the use of Libras. Also, whether the subjects are native speakers or not affects the quantity and quality of the productions of prosodic markers. Therefore, it is important to intensify the studies on Libras acquisition as L1, whether the child has hearing or deaf parents, to understand how the evolution of this language happens in contrast to what is already known in the acquisition of spoken languages.

## References

1. Felipe, T. A.; Monteiro, M. S. *Libras em contexto: curso básico*, livro do professor. 7 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WallPrint, 2008.
2. Wilbur, R. B; Martínez, A. M. Physical correlates of prosodic structure in american sign language. *Proceedings of the Chicago linguistics society (CLS)*, 2002. Disponível em <<http://www.ece.osu.edu/~aleix/CLS02.pdf>> Acesso em: 15/04/2009.

---

\* rosana.passos@gmail.com