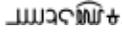# SEL – writing system for Sign Language

Adriana Stella Cardoso Lessa-de-Oliveira*

Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB)

Abstract

We present the results of a research project that aimed to create a writing system for sign languages. This is a project developed at the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), in Brazil, financed by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico - CNPq (Process: 483450/2009-0) and the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia - FAPESB (Term of Agreement: PPP 0080/2010). The methodology involved intense investigation of the articulatory constitution of the sign, because we wanted to create a non-logographic and linear writing system. Our research led us to the discovery that the sign is composed of a kind of unity we call MLMov. This unit is composed of three types of macro-segments (Hand, Location and Movement) formed by interwoven distinctive features – the parameters. The characters of writing SEL represent these three macro-segments. Thus, the sign CHICKEN in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is written in SEL as: ⨽ШЈϽႱ. As you can see, we represent the macro-segment HAND with the character ⨽Ш (✋ - spread hand) and the character Ͻ (superior axis with palm facing inwards); represent the macro-segment LOCATION (point of the body involved in the articulation of the sign) with the character Ϛ (face); and represent the macro-segment MOVEMENT with the character ⋒ (to close four fingers gradually) and character ⬇ (hand movement straight down in the frontal plan) (cf. Lessa-de-Oliveira, 2012). An experiment conducted with a group of five deaf people and one listener demonstrated that the SEL is a writing system compatible with the criterion of automation of processing in reading and writing and it is of easy acquisition. We also verified that, as with the oral languages, the written form of sign languages will present its own structure. Finally, we conclude that the adoption of a writing system for sign languages can bring benefits to the practical life of the deaf people and also could contribute to a higher degree of grammaticalization of the spoken modality of this language.

References

1. Lessa-de-oliveira, Adriana S. C. 2012. Libras escrita: o desafio de representar uma língua tridimensional por um sistema de escrita linear. *ReVEL*, v. 10(19).

* adriana.lessa@gmail.com