

## METALINGUISTIC SKILLS AND LANGUAGE USE IN THE PROPOSITIONS OF FOUR BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULA

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a description of the general aspects of four Libras curricula developed by the municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and the state of São Paulo - Rio Grande, Canoas, Guarulhos and São Paulo, in Brazil. The propositions for Libras are presented in these documents and an analysis is made of how they approach metalinguistic skills and language use. The analyzed documents reflect a direction pointed out by deaf studies and by current linguistic studies regarding the deepening of the objectives of teaching sign languages as a first language. The relationship between the objectives of learning and development aiming at use and metalanguage revealed a preponderance of those focusing on metalinguistic skills in two of the documents. The peculiarities of these four documents make them different, though in line with the Brazilian Common National Curricular Base when carrying out their propositions according to their local realities without leaving aside the guidelines of the federal document and the state of the art in the area.

**Keywords:** Metalanguage. Curriculum. Sign Language.

## HABILIDADES METALINGÜÍSTICAS E USO DE LÍNGUA NAS PROPOSIÇÕES DE QUATRO CURRÍCULOS DE LÍNGUA BRASILEIRA DE SINAIS

**Resumo:** Este trabalho apresenta uma descrição de aspectos gerais de quatro currículos de Libras elaborados por municípios do estado do Rio Grande do Sul e do estado de São Paulo: Rio Grande, Canoas, Guarulhos e São Paulo. São apresentadas as proposições para a Libras nestes documentos e feita uma análise de como elas abordam as habilidades metalingüísticas e o uso da língua. Os documentos analisados refletem uma direção apontada pelos estudos surdos e pelos estudos linguísticos atuais com relação ao aprofundamento dos objetivos de ensino de línguas de sinais como primeira língua. A relação entre objetivos de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento voltados ao uso e à metalingüagem revelou preponderância daqueles voltados às habilidades metalingüísticas em dois dos documentos. As peculiaridades desses quatro documentos os tornam diferentes, mas em consonância com a BNCC ao realizarem suas proposições de acordo com suas realidades locais sem deixar de lado as orientações do documento federal e o estado da arte na área.

**Palavras-chave:** Metalingüagem. Currículo. Língua de Sinais.

## HABILIDADES METALINGÜÍSTICAS Y USO DEL LENGUAJE EN LAS PROPUESTAS DE CUATRO CURRÍCULOS DE LENGUA DE SEÑAS BRASILEÑA

**Resumen:** Este artículo presenta una descripción de los aspectos generales de cuatro currículos Libras desarrollados por municipios del estado de Rio Grande do Sul y del estado de São Paulo - Rio Grande, Canoas, Guarulhos y São Paulo, en Brasil. En estos documentos se presentan las proposiciones para Libras y se analiza cómo abordan las habilidades metalingüísticas y el uso del lenguaje. Los documentos analizados reflejan una dirección señalada por los estudios sordos y por los estudios lingüísticos actuales en cuanto a la profundización de los objetivos de la enseñanza de las lenguas de señas como primera

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lengua. La relación entre los objetivos de aprendizaje y desarrollo dirigidos al uso y el metalenguaje reveló una preponderancia de los dirigidos a las habilidades metalingüísticas en dos de los documentos. Las peculiaridades de estos cuatro documentos los hacen diferentes, pero en línea con la Base Curricular Nacional Común Brasileña al realizar sus propuestas de acuerdo con sus realidades locales sin dejar de lado las directrices del documento federal y el estado del arte en el área.

**Palavras-clave:** Metalenguaje. Curriculum. Lengua de Señas.

## Introduction

Metalinguistic skills are composed of explicit knowledge about the language and intentional control of cognitive skills (CORREA, 2004). For Bialystok (1986), metalinguistic awareness results from the action of analyzing linguistic knowledge in structured categories and from the control of attentional procedures. This analysis aims at selecting and processing specific linguistic information that occurs from instantiations of more general cognitive skills that are involved in the forms of analysis applied to knowledge in a variety of domains. It is a metacognitive resource referred to by several authors as essential for the literacy process (TUNMER, 1990; REGO, 1995; GOMBERT, 2003).

The teaching of Portuguese in schools, which presupposes its early acquisition and encompasses the literacy of hearing children, presents its learning and development objectives in various proposals and curricular references with its linguistic analysis as a focus under different approaches. Souza (2019) analyzes the propositions of the Common National Curriculum Base (in Portuguese, Base Nacional Comum Curricular – BNCC) (BRASIL, 2017) and identifies the prioritization of metalanguage in its objectives. Indeed, teaching and learning to read and write mobilizes metacognitive skills that, regardless of the method chosen to achieve this objective, will evoke analysis and reflection on the acquired first language (DINIZ, 2008). This logic reflects an elementary process of the relationship between the natural language, as a cognitive processing independent of the written tradition and the writing itself. For there to be a reflection on language, language necessarily needs to be processed by the individual who carries out such reflections.

With the completion of the literacy process, there is a continuity of linguistic analysis practices in school and outside it. The exclusive and repetitive focus on a linguistic analysis approach is often driven by prescriptive practices, a fact criticized by some authors (SILVA et al., 2010). In this work, however, we do not refer to the mobilization of metalinguistic skills in

a prescriptive approach, but in the cognitive one, for the development of knowledge and reflection on the language, including dialogic practices in the teaching and learning process. Hearing children and young people can, thus, deepen their knowledge of the language, its print, uses and enjoyment, through, until the end of high school and beyond, the reflective study of their first language, formalized in school practices.

The premises of bilingual education for the deaf advocate that sign language should be the first language and the language of accessing knowledge for deaf children. In Brazil, the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) has been gradually more in use and respected in school environments. Hence, similar to the Portuguese language school curricula, the use of Libras should appear as an axis (or a subject of study) and bring together specific learning and development objectives. It should, however, carry a greater responsibility when compared to the oral language curriculum (as a first language), since the education of the deaf child demands special attention to the language acquisition process. Let us keep in mind that the Brazilian deaf community comprises a group of deaf children, whose majority comes from hearing families. This again means a great chance for the deaf child to reach Elementary Education without having the opportunity to acquire a language, thus demanding from the curriculum to think of Libras use and communication (in this same language) as the central focus of its objectives.

While hearing children arrive at school already with an advanced (oral) language acquisition, having experienced different language stimuli in interactions with their families, many deaf children arrive at school without an acquired language. As a result, they will be acquainted with the sign language and communicate with their peers, and hence, begin the acquisition process. These deaf children deal, mainly in regular schools, with a large number of stimuli (that could be valid, I emphasize) about the written modality of the oral language, a language to which they do not have full access and through natural acquisition possibilities. While hearing children begin to make hypotheses about reading and writing the Portuguese language by observing the print stimuli, hearing the language from their peers, and mobilizing metacognitive and metalinguistic skills, deaf children continue to try to communicate.

This leads us to the need to reflect on the concept of literacy for the deaf child. Literacy is traditionally seen as a process of building a written representation of the language through the acquisition of a set of necessary skills for the practice of reading and writing (SOARES,

2004; MORAIS; ALBUQUERQUE, 2007). This concept is appropriate when discussing a language that has a writing system and whose acquisition has already been completed in the child. On the other hand, there is little discussion about the concept of literacy for non-written languages or for communities that start their schooling process without an acquired language or they are in the acquisition process.

In addition to the already mentioned peculiarities in the sign language acquisition process, the deaf community deals with the fact that Libras does not have a consolidated and widely used written record. Although there are sign writing systems, such as the SignWriting (SUTTON, 1974 [2022]) and the Sign Language Writing System (BARROS, 2006), there is no unanimous adherence by the deaf community to their use. In research and studies on Libras, researchers in the field often represent graphically the sign samples or glossed examples under analysis. This latter resource uses the writing of the oral language as a basis - in Brazil, the Portuguese language as a basis - or figures (photos or drawings) or videos links. Sign writing systems are used on a smaller scale and accessed by a restricted number of users, unfortunately.

We consider literacy for the deaf, then, the process of building explicit knowledge about sign language that allows the use, analytical thinking and control over its production and understanding through the acquisition/learning of a set of skills necessary for the practice of reading and understanding signed texts, using printed or video records. It is a process that predicts the use of metacognitive skills, including metalinguistic ones, mobilizing reflection on sign language, allowing a deeper understanding of it, its recording possibilities, uses and materialization observed in the cultural and artistic manifestations of the deaf community.

Just as learning to read and write the register of an oral language demands constant mobilization of metalinguistic skills, the school endeavor in the teaching of Libras must mobilize metalinguistic and metacognitive analysis of the sign language, beyond its linguistic use and communicative function, which is generally recommended in Libras courses, even as a first language.

This paper presents a description of the general aspects of four Libras curricula that are based on the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), prepared by the municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and the state of São Paulo: Rio Grande, Canoas, Guarulhos and São Paulo. We will

present their propositions for Libras and analyze how they approach metalinguistic skills (the objectives related to language structure) and language use.

#### **Four Libras curricula: Rio Grande, Canoas, Guarulhos and São Paulo**

In the city of Rio Grande, state of Rio Grande do Sul, the document “Curriculum of Brazilian Sign Language: curricular component as a first language” (MERTZANI et al., 2020), the *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* from now on, was proposed by the Municipality of Rio Grande and published by the Editora da FURG in a partnership between the city hall of this city and the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG). The document is authored by Maria Mertzani, Cristiane Lima Terra and Maria Auxiliadora Terra Duarte, responsible for the elaboration of the results of the project “INST 15 - Curriculum of LIBRAS as a first language”, of the Institute of Education of FURG, Rio Grande/RS, under the coordination of Maria Mertzani.

The *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* presents an introductory text divided into parts that cover topics such as the legal prerogatives for bilingual education in Brazil, the biopsychosocial conditions of the deaf, a discussion about the need for bilingual education, a presentation by the Municipal School Professora Carmen Regina Teixeira Baldino, Libras as a school module, the acquisition of Sign Language in the school years, a presentation of the curriculum and its implementation, considerations about teaching in the classroom, and assessment. This organization provided a conceptual and historical discussion of the proposed curriculum and the most relevant topics for understanding the curriculum learning objectives.

The authors present the curriculum as a document that intends to accompany the interdisciplinarity of the curricular components, organizing the learning objectives in two main axes: language functioning and language use and production. These axes present the learning objectives for Early Childhood Education and the initial and final years of Elementary Education.

The two proposed axes of the curriculum are composed of groups of learning objectives. The *Language Function* axis is composed of the Language Structure, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Sign Concepts, Phonological Awareness and Morphological Awareness. The *Language Use* axis is composed of Discourse and Presentation, and Literature and Informative

texts. The document names the groups that meet the learning objectives as parameters of the axes, distinguishing between the parameters of Libras, referred to as the components of the phonetic-phonological level of Libras.

The *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* also discusses issues related to the Libras assessment by the teacher, bringing theoretical subsidies and proposals for forms of evaluation that help the teacher in their pedagogical decisions. The document partially presents an instrument called “Knowledge Level Checklist”, based on an instrument applied in the Greek Sign Language. In this instrument, among other receptive and sign language production skills, metalinguistic skills in the sign language acquisition/learning process are assessed.

Learning objectives are distributed on axes and their parameters. The structure axes are Language Function and Language Use. For the Early Childhood Education, 55 learning objectives were proposed, 35 of them are on the Language Function axis and 20 on the Language Use axis. Table 1 below presents the number of the proposed learning objectives for Early Childhood Education.

Table 1. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Rio Grande for Early Childhood Education

Axes	Axis Parameters	Learning Objectives	Sub totals
Language Functioning	Language Structure	8	35
	Vocabulary acquisition and use	8	
	Sign Concepts	6	
	Phonological Awareness	6	
	Morphological Awareness	7	
Language Use	Discourse and Presentation	12	20
	Literature and Informative texts	8	

Source: Prepared by the author.

The *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* presents propositions for the nine years of Elementary Education. With the same axes presented in Early Childhood Education, the document presents 486 learning objectives divided between the initial and final years of Elementary Education. Tables 2 and 3 present the numbers of the learning objectives for each year of Elementary Education and the distribution of these numbers in the axes and parameters. From the total number of the learning objectives for the initial years of Elementary Education, 159 are in the Language Function axis and 117 in the Language Use. For the final years of Elementary Education, 99 are in the Language Function axis and 117 in the Language Use.

Table 2. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the *Libras Curriculum - Rio Grande* for Elementary School - Initial Years

Axes	Axis Parameters	Learning Objectives					
		1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year	Sub totals
Language Functioning	Language Structure	10	9	22	25	17	159
	Vocabulary acquisition and use	8	14	6	11	13	
	Signs Concepts	3	0	0	0	0	
	Phonologic Awareness	8	0	0	0	0	
	Morphologic Awareness	8	2	1	1	1	
Language Use	Discourse and Presenting	8	10	17	16	15	117
	Literature and informative texts	5	8	10	12	16	

Source: Prepared by the author.

In the city of Canoas in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the document “Referencial Curricular de Canoas” (Canoas, 2018) was published by the City Hall in 2019 and presents the Brazilian Sign Language as a curricular component in Elementary Education. We will refer to this curriculum component as *Libras Curriculum – Canoas*. The document aims to guide the set of essential learning for students of the municipal education system of Canoas and was prepared with the participation of a network of teachers and in accordance with the guidelines of the BNCC.

For the Early Childhood Education, although the document uses the term “different languages” when presenting children’s learning rights, it does not mention Libras or refer to deaf children. The fields of experience are focused on the oral language and the learning and development objectives do not refer to Libras or make specific propositions for the deaf child.

Table 3. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Rio Grande for Elementary School - Final Years

Axes	Axis Parameters	Learning Objectives				Sub totals
		6th Year	7th Year	8th Year	9th Year	
Language Functioning	Language Structure	3	3	3	2	99
	Vocabulary acquisition and use	10	10	10	6	
	Signs Concepts	0	0	0	0	
	Phonologic Awareness	0	0	0	0	
	Morphologic Awareness	13	13	13	13	
Language Use	Discourse and Presenting	12	13	20	16	111
	Literature and informative texts	11	11	12	16	

Source: Prepared by the author.



Moreover, the document does not present any theoretical references on the education of the deaf, on sign language or on the teaching of Libras, and the inclusion of Libras as a curricular component in Elementary Education. The document mentions that the proposition of Libras as a curricular component is due to the Municipal School of Bilingual Elementary Education for the Deaf Vitória, in the municipality itself, and that it would serve other schools that would adopt Libras as a component of their curricula.

Table 4. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Canoes for Elementary School

Thematic Units	Learning Objectives	Skills			
		1st to 4th Year	5th Year	6th to 9th Year	Sub Totals
Culture	Deaf Culture	3	0	6	20
	Deaf Community Contexts	2	0	6	
	Ethics and Citizenship	0	0	3	
Expression and Communication	Literature and Deaf Literature	3	6	3	25
	Deaf Everyday life	5	4	4	
Linguistics	Grammar	6	6	0	29
	Linguistic Analysis	0	0	5	
	Semiotics	3	4	5	
Literacy	Literacy out of context	3	4	0	16
	Text production practice	0	2	2	
	Alphabetic writing and signin	0	1	0	
	Signed texts comprehension	0	1	0	
	Translation and Interpretation Practices	0	0	3	

Source: Prepared by the author.

The *Libras Curriculum – Canoas* aims at making Libras the first language of the deaf student, and at knowing and appropriating the particularities of the deaf culture, presenting propositions of learning objectives in three tables, covering the 1st to the 4th year, the 5th year, and the 6th to the 9th year. Within the propositions for the Libras curricular component, there are skills relating to teaching Portuguese as a second language.

The skills are distributed in four Thematic Units: Culture, Expression and Communication, Linguistics and Literacy. Each of these thematic units is divided into Objects of Knowledge, presenting the Deaf Culture, Deaf Community Contexts and Ethics and Citizenship in the thematic unit Culture; Literature and Deaf Literature and Literature in Deaf Everyday Life in the thematic unit Expression and Communication; Grammar, Linguistic Analysis and Semiotics in the thematic unit Linguistics and Literacy; and Literacy out of Contexts, Practice of Textual Production, Alphabetic Writing and Signing, Signed Texts Comprehension and Translation and Interpretation Practices in the thematic unit Literacy.

Table 4 shows the distribution of the number of the proposed learning objectives (skills). Of the 90 skills proposed as learning objectives, 20 were assigned to the thematic unit Culture, 25 to Expression and Communication, 29 to Linguistics, and 16 to Literacy.

For the city of Guarulhos, state of São Paulo, the Municipal Education Department published the “Curricular Proposal – Necessary Knowledge Frameworks (from the Portuguese Quadros de Saberes Necessários - QSN)” (GUARULHOS, 2019). The document is presented in three separate editions: one for Early Childhood Education, one for Elementary Education and one for Youth and Adult Education. Libras is discussed in all three documents. From now on, we will refer to this document as *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos*.

For Early Childhood Education, its learning objectives establish five fields of experience: Myself, Others and We; Body, Gestures and Movements; Traces, Expressions, Colors and Shapes; Vision, Imagination, Thinking, Communication and Signing in Libras; Spaces, Times, Quantities, Relations and Transformations. The organization of knowledge and learning for Libras is not proposed separately, but in the same document for all children, making a distinction, in the frameworks of knowledge and learning, between those common to hearing and deaf children and those specific to deaf children, delimiting what is specific to the deaf child.

Table 5. Number of learning objectives (knowledge) in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Guarulhos for Early Childhood Education

Experiences Fields	Saberes
Myself, Others and We	5
Body, gestures and movements	11
Traces, expressions, colors and shapes	12
Vision, imagination, thinking, communication and signing in Libras	27
Spaces, times, quantities, relations and transformations	8
Sub Total	63

Source: Prepared by the author.

The fields of experiences regarding Libras are presented as specific propositions for hearing and deaf children, proposing respect and appreciation of the linguistic and cultural difference of the deaf and hearing person. The *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos* presents a short theoretical introduction on education and deaf children and their linguistic needs. Table 5, and the other tables in this section, present specific propositions for deaf children only. For Early Childhood Education, 63 propositions of knowledge (learning objectives) for deaf children are presented, distributed in the five fields of experiences.

Table 6. Number of learning objectives (knowledge) in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Guarulhos for Elementary School (initial years)

Thematic Units	Learning Objectives				
	1st and 2nd Years	2nd and 3rd Years	3rd and 4th Years	4th and 5th Years	Sub Total
Emission and reception	31	31	31	31	124
Linguistic analysis	27	27	27	27	108
Deaf culture	17	17	17	17	68
Total	300				

Source: Prepared by the author.

For Elementary Education, the *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos*, proposes Libras as an axis, called “Educating the Deaf in their Communication and Expression Process”. The

document proposes knowledge for teaching Portuguese as a Second Language and presents a section on the deaf student in his/her communication and expression process, with a theoretical introduction on deaf education and sign language and on Portuguese as a second language. Proposals are made for the initial years, covered by the municipality.

Table 6 shows the distribution of knowledge proposed for the initial years of Elementary Education. Of the 300 proposed learning objectives, 124 were assigned to the thematic unit Emission and Reception, 108 to Linguistic Analysis and 68 to Deaf Culture.

For Youth and Adult Education, the Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos presents propositions for Libras in a single axis, called Emission and Reception, dividing the 194 learning objectives into cycles I and II, as they are displayed in table 7.

Table 7. Number of learning objectives (knowledge) in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - Guarulhos for Youth and Adult Education

Thematic Unis	Learning Objectives	
	Cycle I	Cycle II
Reading and Writting	0	0
Emission and reception	100	94

Source: Prepared by the author.

In the city of São Paulo, capital of the state of São Paulo, the Curriculum of the City proposed by the Municipal Department of Education (SÃO PAULO, 2019), presents its propositions in publications specific to Early Childhood Education (one document), for each curricular component of Elementary Education (nine documents), for each curricular component of Youth and Adult Education (nine documents), for Special Education (two documents, one for Libras and one for the Portuguese Language for the Deaf, (as second language) in addition to the didactic guidance documents (14 documents). The Curriculum of the City – Brazilian Sign Language, henceforth *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo*, covers the Early Childhood Education for deaf children and their Elementary Education. The document is divided in three parts. Part 1 presents the general project of the Curriculum of the City in an initial general technical part; Part 2 presents the Bilingual Curriculum of the City project, with

a theoretical exposition on deaf education and sign language; and Part 3, with the Libras curriculum itself, presenting the objectives of learning and development.

For Early Childhood Education, the Libras Curriculum – São Paulo is organized in a single axis called “Precursor Bases of Sign Language Acquisition”, with objectives of learning and development distributed in three objects of knowledge: Visuality, Linguistic-motor skills organization, and Comprehension and Interaction. In Elementary Education, the axes are Use of sign language, Deaf identity, Linguistic analysis practice and Deaf literature. The *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo* presents 554 learning and development objectives distributed in Early Childhood Education and in the three cycles of Elementary Education.

Table 8 shows the distribution of the 36 proposed learning objectives and their distribution among the knowledge objects. Ten learning objectives are proposed for Visuality and Linguistic-Motor Skills Organization, and 16 for Comprehension and Interaction.

Table 8. Number of learning and development objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - São Paulo for Early Childhood Education

Structure Axes	Knowledge Objects	Learning and Development Objectives
Precursor Bases of Sign Language Acquisition	Visuality	10
	Linguistic-motor skills organization	10
	Comprehension and Interaction	16
Sub total		36

Source: Prepared by the author.

Elementary Education presents propositions for the nine school years, divided in three cycles. In these, the axes that structure the learning and development objectives are Sign Language Use, Deaf Identity, Linguistic Analysis and Deaf Literature. The following tables present the distribution of learning and development objectives in each cycle: Literacy Cycle (3 years), Interdisciplinary Cycle (3 years) and Authorial Cycle (3 years).

In the Literacy Cycle, the 192 learning and development objectives are distributed in the structure axes, 58 of which are designated for the Use of Sign Language axis, 47 for Deaf Identity, 50 for Linguistic Analysis and 37 for Deaf Literature, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - São Paulo for Elementary School - Literacy Cycle

Structure Axes	Knowledge Objects	Learning and Development Objectives	Sub total
Sign Language Use	Basis of Exploration of Visuality	13	58
	Comprehension and Production	26	
	Communication and Interaction	19	
Deaf Identity	Deaf Culture	32	47
	Intercultural	7	
	Deaf Community History	8	
Linguistics Analysis	Phonetic-phonological aspects	12	50
	Semantics	9	
	Libras Syntax	14	
	Discursive Coherence	15	
Deaf Literature	Aesthetic Appreciation	25	37
	Literary Artistic Production	12	
Cycle Sub total		192	

Source: Prepared by the author.

In the Interdisciplinary Cycle, the 194 learning and development objectives are distributed in the structure axes, 78 of which are designated for the Use of Sign Language axis, 34 for Deaf Identity, 52 for Linguistic Analysis and 30 for Deaf Literature, as shown in Table 10.

In the Authorial Cycle, the 132 learning and development objectives are distributed in the structuring axes, 43 of which are designated for the Use of Sign Language axis, 36 for Deaf Identity, 33 for Linguistic Analysis and 20 for Deaf Literature, according to Table 11.

Table 10. Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - São Paulo for Elementary School - Interdisciplinary Cycle

Structure Axes	Objetos de Conhecimento	Learning and Development Objectives	Sub total
Sign Language Use	Signed Comprehension and Production	47	78
	Interaction/Conversation	10	
	Formal and Informal Use of Language	11	
	World knowledge	10	
Deaf Identity	History of the Deaf in Brazil	10	34
	Deaf Culture	14	
	Accessibility in Communication	10	
Linguistics Analysis	Phonetic-Phonological Aspects	14	52
	Morphological Aspects	17	
	Libras syntax	12	
	Libras Semantics	9	
Deaf Literature	Aesthetic Appreciation	9	30
	Literary Artistic Production	21	
Subtotal of the cycle		194	

Source: Prepared by the author.

The Curriculum of the City, in its proposal for the Portuguese Language in the Youth and Adult Education (SÃO PAULO, 2019), mentions Libras in four of its learning and development objectives. The focus of these objectives, however, is not on Libras itself, but on the appreciation and knowledge by the hearing student of the different forms of communication.

Table 11: Number of learning objectives in the propositions of the Libras Curriculum - São Paulo for Elementary School - Authorial Cycle

Structure Axes	Objetos de Conhecimento	Learning and Development Objectives	Sub total
Sign Language Use	Interaction/Conversation	28	43
	Formal and Informal Use of Language	7	
	World knowledge	8	
Identidade Surda Deaf Identity	Policies for the Deaf Community	7	36
	Deaf Communities in the World	6	
	Deaf Culture	15	
	Accessibility in Communication	8	
Linguistics Analysis	Libras syntax	13	33
	Libras Semantics	9	
	Pragmatics	5	
	Text Structure	6	
Deaf Literature	Aesthetic Appreciation	9	20
	Literary Artistic Production	11	
Sub Subtotal of the cycle		132	

Source: Prepared by the author.

### Metalinguistic skills and use of sign language in curricula

The four curricula do not present a homogeneous nomenclature when referring to the mobilization of metalinguistic skills and the use of language. The work of teaching linguistic analysis, at its various linguistic levels, consists of an activity of explicitly mobilizing linguistic knowledge (DINIZ, 2008), and thus, mobilizing metalinguistic skills (BIALYSTOK, 1986) in the learning process. Therefore, we will analyze the proposed learning objectives in the curricula observing their reference to metalinguistic skills (metalanguage). In particular, when they suggest the mobilization of explicit knowledge of the language and its structure, at any



level of linguistic analysis - perception, attention, control and analysis on phonetic-phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, discursive or pragmatic aspects - based on visual records (print or video) or on the analysis of other signers' production (their communicative partners) or of their own production; and those related to the use of sign language, when producing and understanding sign language, spontaneous or not, for interaction or enjoyment, for developing language use skills or for other purposes, other than the study of its structure, like acquiring general or specific non-linguistic knowledge.

Table 12: Quantitative synthesis of the propositions presented by the four curricula

		Child education	Elementary School	Youth and Adult Education
Rio Grande	Metalanguage	35 (63,6%)	258 (53,1%)	0
	Use	20 (36,4%)	228 (46,9%)	0
Canoas	Metalanguage	0	29 (38,7%)	0
	Use	0	46 (61,3%)	0
Guarulhos	Metalanguage	10 (15,9%)	108 (36,0%)	34 (17,0%)
	Use	53 (84,1%)	192 (64,0%)	166 (83,0%)
São Paulo	Metalanguage	20 (55,6%)	349 (69,2%)	0
	Use	16 (44,4%)	156 (30,8%)	0

Source: Prepared by the author.

Comparing the four documents under analysis, Table 12 presents a quantitative synthesis of the proposed propositions by the four curricula, separating them into metalanguage and use.

The *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* focuses its propositions on the learning objectives relating to metalinguistic skills, with 63.6% of the total propositions for Early Childhood Education and 53.1% for Elementary Education. The document makes explicit the intention and importance of these skills in the Language Function axis throughout Elementary Education. In this axis, there is the specification of its parameters: Language Structure, Sign Concepts and

Phonological and Morphological Awareness, which resume the skills already described in the literature as important for the literacy process, according to Carlisle (2000), Plaza and Cohen (2003) and Correa (2004).

The application of these metalinguistic skills in the literacy process of the deaf person - by observing the literacy concept proposed in this work - seems to be based on the practice of a linguistic analysis that has been already explored in the Portuguese language curricula for hearing children.

Its Phonological Awareness axis presents propositions such as demonstrating understanding of the signs and their parameters (phonemes); recognizing that signs are separated by parameters and identifying their phonological parameters in Libras, thus referring to an awareness of the elements that act in sign formation and of language segmentation. Although it is common in Portuguese language curricula similar knowledge to be proposed in Elementary Education, the exploration of phonological awareness is carried out before the beginning of the literacy process. This makes the mobilization of this metalinguistic skill useful for deepening the knowledge of sign language and for learning Portuguese as a second language. Objectives relating to second language are not mentioned.

The document makes its propositions based on a series of linguistic studies on sign language acquisition (MERTZANI et al., 2020, p. 16), incorporating works that discuss the acquisition of verb agreement, classifiers and negation, among other linguistic structures. This choice corroborates the concept brought by the document exploring linguistic analysis and metalinguistic skills. Learning and development objectives are then arranged in a partially explicit order of increasing complexity, adding skills that increase over the school years and omit them in a given year when already covered in the previous year.

In the *Curriculum of Libras – Rio Grande*, the mobilization of metalinguistic skills is mentioned as a strategy to promote knowledge of the structure of the language and the linguistic competence of signers who are proficient in understanding different types of texts on different subjects. It is an explicit objective directed at the literacy process, intending to take the deaf child to a place where he/she acts as a good reader of signed texts.

The *Libras Curriculum – Canoas*, in a different way, focuses its propositions on the use of sign language. Learning objectives relating to metalinguistic skills add up to 38.7% of the

total of propositions, against 61.3% for the use of sign language, only in Elementary Education. Expression and Communication are presented, concerning use and Linguistics, with a clear mobilization of metalinguistic skills in the latter, in addition to two other axes that explore more objectives in relation to deaf culture and second language teaching.

As objects of knowledge regarding metalanguage, the document proposes Grammar, Semiotics and Linguistic Analysis, with a focus on the identification and production of phonetic-phonological items in Libras, as in “Knowing the basic hand configurations and being able to make associations with signs already known”; and syntactic, as in “Associating sentences with the verb tenses in which they are found, as well as using verb tenses in their productions, using adverbs of tense”.

Similarly, the *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos* also focuses on the use of sign language, at all educational levels it addresses. The document is presented jointly, in a general curriculum and is divided in three publications as already mentioned. In these documents, there is a division between the axes “educating hearing people” and “educating the deaf” in Early Childhood Education. For children in this age group, the propositions are quite comprehensive in terms of language use for interaction and instruction. Objectives such as “Communicate your ideas and feelings through Libras to different people and groups. Argue and raise hypotheses through signs and expressions”; and “Participate in an active, creative and critical way in the elaboration of agreements, through routine and other school activities, making use of Libras” are examples of exploring and using the language for interaction and instruction.

The proposed fields of experience, which encompass the knowledge that must be explored, do not mention objectives aiming at metalinguistic skills. However, some knowledge addresses these skills, such as the objective “Perceiving body expressions, facial expressions, gestures and sensations of the body itself, taking into account that these expressions will contribute to the construction of their communication through sign language”, in which there is clear reference to the precursor bases for the acquisition of language structures.

In Elementary Education, the organization of knowledge takes place gradually, and there is an increase in knowledge focusing on metalanguage. From a quantitative point of view, there is almost the double knowledge dedicated to this skill. The use of language is explored in the

form of knowledge concerning communication and interaction, with an inclination to explore narratives.

Metalanguage has a predominant focus on phonetic-phonological aspects, as in the objective “Exploring the point of articulation in playing and games” and “Recognizing the importance of hand orientation in the construction of signs”; lexical, as in “Identifying synonyms and antonyms”, exploring the meaning they express, with challenges and repertoire relevant to each cycle”; and syntactics, as in “Order in your sentences participant-verb or verb-object”, “Understanding the use of topicalization in sentence construction” and “Expanding the vocabulary repertoire and linguistic structure from everyday news”. In Youth and Adult Education, the objectives of Libras are related to the teaching of Portuguese as a second language.

The *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo* also directs its attention mainly to learning and development objectives that explore metalinguistic skills. In its specific introduction to the area, the document presents in its principles the approach of reflection on the language beyond its use, emphasizing its importance in the school development of deaf children, and in the process of learning Portuguese as a second language.

This organization divides the document in structure axes that approach formal aspects of the language and of its use since Early Childhood Education. For the first years, the learning and development objectives are organized in knowledge objects such as visuality, linguistic-motor skills organization, and comprehension and interaction, showing the intention to encourage the use of language in objects concerning understanding and interaction, and the metalanguage in the linguistic-motor skills organization object. We emphasize the conception of language and its acquisition prerequisites found in the visual objects and in the (spatial) motor approach to language production.

A similar structure echoes in the Elementary Education axes: Use of Sign Language and Deaf Literature as axes of approaching Linguistic Use and Analysis, with a clear mobilization of metalanguage. The knowledge objects that construct the axes have a specification that organize them in groups. For the use of sign language, the knowledge objects and the learning and development objectives are presented in increasing order of complexity, both in use and in metalanguage.

For the Literacy Cycle - the first three years of Elementary Education - for the use of sign language axis, the document presents the following objects of knowledge: bases for exploring visuality, comprehension and production, and communication and interaction, with a special emphasis for the object aesthetic appreciation and artistic-literary production, component of the deaf literature axis. For metalanguage, the objects for this cycle are phonetic-phonological aspects, semantic fields, Libras syntax and discursive coherence. In the following three years - the Interdisciplinary Cycle - the use of the language is addressed in more depth, with the exploration of objects concerning the understanding of signed production and the formal and informal use of Libras, focusing on the possibilities of language variation based on the usage situation. The learning and development objectives in this knowledge object mobilize metalinguistic skills. Examples of these objectives are: “to analyze videos with the production of deaf people with different signing variants” and “to use the incorporation of character in an appropriate way to the linguistic register and the signing situation”. In the linguistic analysis axis, the Interdisciplinary Cycle counts with the entry of the morphological analysis of Libras and with the deepening of the analysis at the phonetic-phonological and syntactic levels.

In the last three years of Elementary Education - the Authorial Cycle - the increase in the complexity of learning and development objectives occurs in the same knowledge objects present in the previous cycle, with the entry of pragmatic objects and text structure in the linguistic analysis axis.

Metalanguage in São Paulo's curricula also points to the written record of sign language. The resource is discussed in the *Libras Curriculum - São Paulo* as an instrument for registering Libras in the moments of linguistic analysis and study, mainly for avoiding the use of glosses that have the Portuguese language as their registration basis. In the *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos*, an example of this mention is the knowledge “Perform readings of signs and short sentences in sign language writing” and in the *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo*, the learning and development objective “Providing moments to start representation of Libras through the writing of signs in playing, games and writing activities (with the teacher as a scribe), which enable the knowledge and use of this resource”.

## Final Considerations

After the publication of the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) and the resolution of the National Education Council (BRASIL, 2017), the BNCC is established as a reference for the education systems to build or review their local curricula. The four documents under study were the first to be published based on the BNCC in the order: *Libras Curriculum – Canoas* (2018), *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo* (2019), *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos* (2019) and *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* (2020).

The BNCC does not mention sign language in its learning and development objectives. At the time of writing this work, a reference document has not yet been published by a federal management agency. The work “Referentials for teaching the Brazilian Sign Language as a first language: from Early Childhood Education to Higher Education”, organized by Stumpf and Linhares (2021), was prepared by a group of deaf and hearing researchers as a comprehensive proposal for national representation, however, independent.

The four documents reflect a direction pointed out by deaf studies and current linguistic studies towards deepening the objectives of sign language teaching as a first language, and unfolding the already consolidated tradition of sign language teaching as a second language, mostly for hearing learners. The analysis demonstrated that two documents, among the four, explicitly show a preponderance of those learning and development objectives aiming at metalanguage. The process of teaching and learning a second language in a school environment has, as one of its basic characteristics, the mobilization of metalinguistic skills, as well as the process of teaching and learning the written modality of a language, a recurrent activity in the curricular component of the language spoken by the child.

However, the teaching of Libras as a first language - until then without official curricula and references in Brazil - appeared in schools and educational institutions as a course that mostly advocated the communication of the deaf child. Although Albres and Saruta (2012) had proposed a Libras curriculum program for the deaf, this was suggested prior to the BNCC and therefore does not follow its directions, which were not established at the time.

The *Libras Curriculum – Rio Grande* and the *Libras Curriculum – São Paulo* devote most of their propositions to aspects of mobilizing the children’s metalinguistic skills, while the *Libras Curriculum – Canoas* and the *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos* present an approach

with learning and development objectives predominantly focusing on the use of sign language. The *Libras Curriculum – Guarulhos* is the only one among the four that presents propositions for Youth and Adult Education, with 83% of the learning and development objectives dedicated to the use of sign language for this school phase. The *Libras Curriculum – Canoas* is the only one among the four that does not present proposals for the Early Childhood Education but makes explicit the possibility of other school units using it. In the four documents, the organization of the propositions is made with a clear increase in knowledge complexity in expressions like “gradually expanding complexity” or “explore-understand-do”.

The peculiarities of these four documents make them different, although, in line with the BNCC, they carry out their propositions according to their local realities, without leaving aside the guidelines of the federal document and the state of the art in the area.

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