The Writing of Grammatical Non-Manual Expressions in Sentences in LIBRAS Using the SignWriting System

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This research investigates the written form of non-manual expressions (ENM) in sign language, drawing on research by Ferreira-Brito (1995), Quadros and Karnopp (2004), Stumpf (2005) and Quadros, Pizzio and Rezende (2008). It discusses the visual-spatial nature of sign language, describing its parameters as a way to consider ENM. It then focusses explicitly on the system of SignWriting, more specifically the symbols for ENM. The method of data collection was to apply two written tests with students on the Brazilian Sign Language Studies course at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. In the first test, students were asked to connect columns in phrases that did not contain ENM symbols in the SignWriting system. In the second test, the symbols were present. Thus, it was possible to verify differences in understanding because of the existence or not of ENM in the system. The analysis and discussion considers the results from the tests, in which students were asked to connect the column showing

which sentence category the written signs belonged to. These included affirmative, negative, interrogative Y/N (S/N), interrogative WH (QU), interrogative expressing doubt and suspicion, interrogative WH (QU) appearing in subordinate sentences without non-manuals, conditionals, constructions with topics or focus, and sentences expressed by the direction of gaze. A total of 45 questions with ENM and another 45 in the second test without ENM showed the number of errors and correct answers in both tests, demonstrating the need for the use of ENM symbols in SignWriting system. Generally, students made more errors in tests without ENM, whereas, there were more correct answers with ENM, indicating that the use of grammatical expressions symbols in writing is required. There may be other variables that have influenced this result, but nevertheless, we can infer that the data indicate the need for ENM usage in writing sign language.