

THEONYMY IN BRAZILIAN SIGN LANGUAGE: THE SIGNS OF ORISHAS

TEONÍMIA EM LÍNGUA BRASILEIRA DE SINAIS: OS SINAIS DOS ORIXÁS

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Abstract: Name-giving and organizing the world through concepts and categories are human acts underlying lexicon production in any language. The lexicon of a language includes proper nouns, which particularize people, places, or things. Onomastics is the field of Linguistics devoted to studying proper names. This article focuses on the proper names of Orishas in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). It analyzes 10 signs that name Orishas in Libras as to their formal and semantic-motivational aspects and taps into the iconicity underlying the relationships between these signs and their referents that might have influenced their creation. This qualitative, applied study is based on descriptive and documentary methods and draws theoretically on Castro (2001), Sousa (2019; 2022a; 2022b; 2023), and Vidigal and Teixeira (2014). Findings indicate that 7 out of the 10 signs are classified as morphologically simple, while the remaining are compound and constituted by Libras-only formants, i.e., without borrowing from the Portuguese language. Iconicity was found in all signs except for NANAN-BURUKU in the semantic-motivational analysis. Findings point to a strong relationship between the naming of Orishas in Libras and the visual experience of the deaf, especially through the iconic relationship between the signs and their referents.

Keywords: Brazilian Sign Language; Onomastics; Theonymy; Candomblé.

Resumo: O ato de nomear e organizar o mundo por meio de conceitos e categorias é uma característica humana que proporciona a geração do léxico de uma língua. No universo lexical de uma língua estão os nomes próprios, que particularizam as pessoas, os lugares ou as coisas com um nome. A área da Linguística que se dedica ao estudo dos nomes próprios é a Onomástica. Neste artigo, interessam-nos os nomes próprios atribuídos aos Orixás do Candomblé na Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras). Nosso objetivo é

analisar dez sinais que nomeiam os Orixás do Candomblé em Libras quanto aos aspectos formais e semântico-motivacionais e verificar fatores de iconicidade que mostrem as relações entre o sinal e os referentes que possam ter influenciado a sua criação. Para fundamentar nosso estudo – de natureza aplicada, abordagem qualitativa e de procedimento descritivo e documental – tomamos por base os estudos de Castro (2001), Sousa (2019; 2022a; 2022b; 2023) e Vidigal e Teixeira (2014). Os resultados apontam que, quanto à classificação morfológica, dos dez sinais analisados, sete são do tipo simples e três do tipo composto, constituídos somente por formantes da Libras, sem empréstimo da língua oral. Quanto ao aspecto semântico-motivacional, a iconicidade é perceptível em todos os sinais, exceto no sinal NANÃ. Os dados evidenciam a forte relação das nomeações dos Orixás do Candomblé em Libras com a experiência visual dos surdos, especialmente por meio da relação icônica dos sinais com seus referentes.

Palavras-chave: Libras; Onomástica; Teonímia; Candomblé.

Introduction

The act of name-giving is part of the human experience and an important part of social interaction. It occurs in all cultures and in all languages, whether oral-auditory or visual-spatial. By giving names to people, places, and things, humankind owns these entities while also becoming part of them. As a result, the names of things reflect the world-views and cultures of their name-givers.

This study focuses on how the Orishas¹ in Candomblé (an African diasporic religion that is widespread in Brazil) are named in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) – a language officially recognized through Act No. 10436, as of 2002, and used by the Brazilian deaf community, especially by those who live in urban centers. As every language reflects its culture and every culture is projected into the lexicon of a language, this study also analyses how visual aspects are reflected in the names of Orishas in Libras.

The lexicon in Libras reflects not only the specific characteristics of this sign language, but also traces of the visual experiences of deaf people, their culture and their identity (Sousa, 2022a). It also reflects influences of the linguistic contact of deaf people with the Portuguese language – which is present in society, in schools, in religious spaces, etc. (Sousa, 2022a).

Particularly, this article analyzes 10 signs in Libras that name Orishas in Candomblé. The analyses focus on both formal aspects and semantic-motivational aspects of the lex-

¹ Orishas are Yoruba Deities.

ical items. It particularly aims to tap into iconicity factors evincing the relationships between these signs and their referents that might have influenced their creation.

To this end, it first discusses the 1) act of name-giving and. 2) Onomastics and its relationship with culture in general and African diasporic religions in particular. Subsequently, it describes the study design and reports on the analysis of the following signs: ÈṢÙ (EXU)², OYA (IANSÃ), YEMOJA (IEMANJÁ), NANAN-BURUKU (NANÃ), ÒGÚN (OGUM), OḂALÚWÁIYÉ (OMOLU), ÒRÌSÀNLÁ (OXALÁ), ÒṢÓṢÌ (OXÓSSI), OṢUN (OXUM), and ṢÀNGÓ (XANGÔ).

The act of name-giving

The act of naming things is inherent to human interaction. It is a process whereby the lexicon of a language is built. The investigation of the lexicon of a people's language – whether an oral language or a visual-gestural language – also requires a study of the cultural and ideological identity of its speakers, as lexicon and culture are inseparable (BIDERMAN, 1998).

The act of name-giving does not occur in the same way everywhere:

As expected, different peoples and cultures have established different practices and customs with regard to name-giving, whether to animate entities (such as people and animals) or to inanimate entities (such as places and institutions). Thus, onomastic studies – i.e., studies of proper names – must also include an anthropological component.³ (LOURENÇO; CUNHA, 2022, p. 117)

Conceptualizing or giving meaning to things are ways of organizing the world; as such, giving names to people, objects, feelings, places, real or fictional beings etc. means making them exist and become part of the world we live (BIDERMAN, 1998). Therefore, the lexicon of a language reflects the cultural aspects of a linguistic community as a result of shared experiences among its speakers.

The lexicon of a language can be seen as an extensive repertoire of words, i.e., a set of lexical items available to its speakers, who use them to meet their interaction needs (ANTUNES, 2012). As a matter of fact, it is the lexicon of a people that informs us about their culture, beliefs, and customs as part of a social and linguistic group.

² Convention: Name in Yoruba (name in Brazilian Portuguese).

³ Original in Portuguese: “Como não poderia deixar de ser, diferentes povos e culturas estabeleceram práticas e costumes diversos no que diz respeito à atribuição de nomes próprios, seja a entidades animadas (como pessoas e animais), seja a entidades inanimadas (como lugares e instituições). Por esse motivo, os estudos onomásticos – isto é, os estudos que se dedicam aos nomes próprios – devem possuir, também, um componente antropológico.”

Culture entails the set of experiences lived and shared by a given human group. Worldviews are culturally formed and established in communicational contacts and throughout history in different contexts, including the religious (spiritual) context.

Thus, human experiences are named and categorized through the lexicon (BIDERMAN, 1998; 2002). In the lexicon, proper names have always had a meaning that goes beyond the sign itself (the lexical unit); it can even bear a magical dimension in several cultures.

Onomastics

Onomastics is the field of Linguistics devoted to studying proper names (AMARAL; SEIDE, 2020). A proper name individualizes and singles out its referent (SOUSA, 2022a). It can be given not only to individuals and places, but also to different beings and things in the world, such as works of art, means of transport, animals, commercial centers, festive events, supernatural beings, or anything else that is meant to be singled out.

This process also occurs in sign languages whenever deaf people give names to people, places, soccer teams, pets etc. by ascribing to them a sign that identifies them in the deaf community (SOUSA, 2022b). In giving a proper name, the name-giver resorts to knowledge from different domains, including Linguistics, History, Geography, Biology, Theology, Sociology, and Anthropology.

Sousa and Dargel (2017, p. 6) explain that

Onomastics, a field within Linguistics, draws on other areas of knowledge according to the orientation of the study carried out. This convergence of areas makes the science dedicated to the analysis of proper names fundamentally interdisciplinary, despite being in principle part of Linguistics. It analyzes the name, a language element (or onomastic item) that is subject to several conditions beyond those aspects related to language itself.⁴

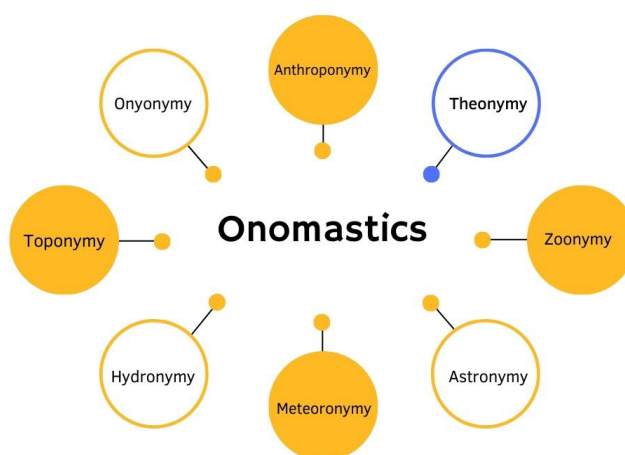
Although the best-known sub-areas of Onomastics are Anthroponymy (study of people's proper names) and Toponymy (study of place names), there are other sub-areas of equal importance within Onomastics:

⁴ Original: "A Onomástica, área do saber inserida na Linguística, dependendo do viés do estudo realizado, recebe subsídios de outros ramos. Essa convergência de áreas faz com que a ciência dedicada à análise dos nomes próprios seja fundamentalmente interdisciplinar, apesar de ser, em princípio, parte da Linguística porque se parte da análise do nome, elemento da língua (ou item onomástico) para os outros condicionantes que o envolvem além dos aspectos relacionados à linguagem."

As one can see, we have several classes of “proper names”. The philologists have agreed to refer to the section of Glottology that address them (origin, reason for use, form, evolution, etc.) as “Onomatology”, which, should be broken down into three secondary disciplines according to those classes: 1) study of place names, or “Toponymy”, which also includes liquid elements (rivers, lakes, etc.) and other products of nature, such as trees and rocks that frequently give names to places (“Toponymy” is, therefore, geographic Onomatology); 2) study of the name of people, or “Anthroponymy”, an expression [...] first proposed and used in 1887, in *Revista Lusitana*, I, 45; and 3) study of various other proper names, such as stars, winds, animals, supernatural beings, ships, things: “Panteonym” (from the Greek *pantoĩos*, which means “of all kinds”, “varied”). In the study of the names of supernatural beings, nothing prevents us from giving the name Theonymy to the study of the names of gods.⁵ (LEITE DE VASCONCELOS, 1928, p. 57)

Focusing on Libras, Sousa (2022a) described each sub-area of Onomastics and provided examples of signs used by the Brazilian deaf community to single out the name-given referents. Figure 1 shows the sub-areas of Onomastics.

Figure 1 – Onomastics and its sub-areas



Source: Adapted from Sousa (2022a, p. 14).

⁵ Original: “Temos como se vê, muitas espécies de “nomes próprios”. A secção da Glotologia que trata d’eles (origem, razão de emprego, forma, evolução, etc.), convieram os filólogos em a designar por “Onomatologia”, que, de acordo com aquelas espécies, deverá decompor-se em três disciplinas secundárias: 1) Estudo de nomes locais, ou “Toponímia”, na qual se inclui igualmente o elemento líquido (rios, lagos, etc.), e outros produtos da natureza, como árvores, penedos que dão freqüentemente nomes a sítios (a “Toponímia” é pois Onomatologia geográfica). 2) Estudo dos nomes de pessoas, ou “Antroponímia”, expressão que [se propôs] pela primeira [...] e [se] empregou em 1887, na “Revista Lusitana”, I, 45. 3) Estudo de vários outros nomes próprios, isto é, de astros, ventos, animais, seres sobrenaturais, navios, cousas: “Panteonímia” (de pantóios, que quer dizer “de toda a espécie”, “variado”). No estudo dos nomes de seres sobrenaturais nada nos impede de chamar “Teonímia” (Theonymia) ao dos nomes de deuses.”

Astronymy studies the names given to heavenly bodies (planets, stars, comets, etc.); Metereonymy, the names of natural phenomena (hurricanes, typhoons, tsunamis, etc.); Ononymy, the names of commercial and financial establishments and goods (stores, banks, brands, etc.); Zoonymy, the names of animals (pets, for example); and Theonymy – the focus in this study – the names of gods and spiritual entities in various religions.

Because sign languages are mostly used by people who understand the world visually, its sign/name-giving processes usually consider visual peculiarities. This is, for instance, the case of the physical, social, or behavioral aspects of an individual, or the physical characteristics of the environment or some of the cultural characteristics related to a geographic space. In general, this results in an iconic relationship between the name-sign and its referent, as shown by Sousa (2019; 2022b; 2023) and Sousa and Quadros (2021).

Onomastics and culture

Defining what culture is entails considering several variables, as it encompasses several features. The universal notion of culture is: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (CANEDO, 2008, p. 4).

Onomastics is undoubtedly linked to culture (SOUSA; DARGEL, 2017). Sign language speakers express their culture through the lexicon while also projecting their visual perceptions of the world and their referents in the creation of onomastic signs, as “language is, above all, a cultural and social product, and it must be understood as such”⁶ (SOUSA; DARGEL, 2017, p. 26).

Giving a name to a person is something present in all cultures, and having a name is essential for the process of socialization between individuals (SUPALLA, 1992). There may be a different system for forming and using proper names in each culture (SUPALLA, 1992). In sign languages, naming things is particularly motivated by the visual input and the relationships cognitively established between the referent and the signs ascribed by the deaf.

Biderman (1998, p. 81-82) points out that “the name is not arbitrary, as there is a bond between the name and the thing or object that it designates, i.e., we cannot separate the word from the referent that it names.”⁷ The following applies to the Yoruba culture:

⁶ Original: “a língua é, sobretudo, um produto cultural e social, e assim deve ser entendida”.

⁷ Original: “o nome não é arbitrário, pois existe um vínculo de essência entre o nome e a coisa ou objeto que ele designa, ou seja, não podemos separar a palavra do referente que ela nomeia”.

giving name to a newborn is a ritual, a festivity celebrated in the community by relatives, friends, neighbors, acquaintances. The name-giving ceremony is a symbolic initiation of the baby into society and life. Through this ceremony, the newborn is introduced into the value system of the Yoruba society. The name given to the newborns clearly evinces that they are seen as a reflection of the social order, as the events, values, and beliefs of the family or the community provide the rules for creating the baby's name. The name for the Yoruba is identified with the essence of the individual.⁸ (BIDERMAN, 1998, p. 113-114)

Menezes (2021), W. Souza (2022) and T. Souza (2023) showed the influence of extralinguistic aspects – physical aspects, behavioral aspects, and a strong influence of oral languages – in the conceptual formation of a person's name-sign used in the deaf community. Carmo (2021) identified other motivations in the creation of name-signs of places: their physical characteristics or their relationships with anthropologic and cultural aspects. Similarly, Miranda (2020) and Chaibue (2022) pointed to the influence of extralinguistic factors and the occurrence of Portuguese language loans in the formation of onomastic signs in Libras.

Sousa (2023) found that the lexical items used by deaf people from the cities of Rio Branco (state of Acre) and Campinas (state of São Paulo) for giving proper names to their pets were influenced by their physical characteristics (anatomical factors), their behavior and temperament (ethological factors), as well as externalities, such as accessories and metaphors (extrinsic factors). The study highlights the influence of the visual experience of the deaf in the naming of their pets.

As a study within Theonymy, this article focuses on the name-signs that designate Orishas in the Candomblé religion. The study set out to describe the formal aspects of name-signs and analyze the relationships between their structure and the named referents. However, before describing the methodology and reporting the analyses, the next section discusses African diasporic religions in Brazil.

⁸ Original: Na cultura iorubá, a nomeação de uma criança recém-nascida é um ritual, uma festividade celebrada em comunidade por parentes, amigos, vizinhos, conhecidos. A cerimônia de nomeação constitui uma iniciação simbólica do bebê na sociedade e na vida. Através dessa cerimônia, a criança é introduzida no sistema de valores da sociedade yoruba. O nome que é atribuído à criança evidência claramente que ela é vista como um reflexo da ordem social, pois são os eventos, valores, e crenças da sua família ou comunidade que fornecem as regras para a criação do nome do bebê. Ora, o nome para o yoruba se identifica com a essência da pessoa.

African diasporic religions

For over three centuries, thousands of Africans were brought to Brazil for slave labor in sugar mills, cocoa plantations, and coffee crops (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014). Despite being native to the same continent, those individuals spoke several languages and did not share the same customs, nor did they worship the same gods.

The resulting miscegenation spawned a new culture in the slave quarters (SOUSA, 2007), one which also included a religion known for its joy, its colors, its dances, and its magic. This religion has gained several names – for instance, it is known as *Xangô* in the states of Alagoas and Pernambuco, *Tambor de Minas* in the state of Maranhão, *Batuque* in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and *Candomblé* in the state of Bahia.

Each Afro-Brazilian religion is “a type of social and religious organization based on common patterns of the African traditions, on a system of beliefs, way of worship, and language”⁹ (CASTRO, 2001, p. 80). The customs of these religions are associated with the nations that has predominantly influenced the religious language of Candomblé. The main African peoples that have influenced the Afro-Brazilian vocabulary are the nations Ewe-Fon, Bantu, and Yoruba.

The religious language of Candomblé (also named *língua-de-santo*, i.e., language-of-saint in literal translation) is a circumscribed system, i.e., limited to an African-based lexical system related to the religious context where the rituals take place (CASTRO, 2001). It has undergone modifications in its very origin due to the influence of the Brazilian Portuguese language:

This repertoire, called *língua-de-santo* (language-of-saint, in literal translation) in the state of Bahia, comprises the lexical systems of ancient African languages used in Brazil and is part of a language that contains a sacred component, but one which is not overtly supernatural in nature. [...] As a result, one sings to *Vodun* in Ewe-Fon, to the *Orishas* in Yoruba, to the *Nkishi* in Bantu.¹⁰ (CASTRO, 2001, p. 82)

The religious discourse of Candomblé is a fundamental part of the initiation process, as knowledge about this religion is passed on orally following an initiatory and participatory process (CASTRO, 2001). In the initiation process, the *iaô* (Ìyàwó) – generic name given to novices, regardless of gender – are “isolated” from the world for three to

⁹ Original: “um tipo de organização sócio-religiosa baseada em padrões comuns de tradição africanas, em um sistema de crenças, modo de adoração e língua”.

¹⁰ Original: “Esse repertório, chamado língua-de-santo na Bahia, compreende sistemas lexicais de antigos falares africanos no Brasil, vindo a constituir uma língua de aspecto sagrado, mas não declaradamente de natureza sobrenatural. [...] Desta maneira, canta-se para *vodum* em jeje-mina, para o *Orixá* em nagô-queto, para o *inquire* em congo-angola.”

seven weeks, alone or in groups, forbidden to speak to anyone and even to each other without the permission of their priest (*pai-de-santo* – father-of-saint in literal translation) or priestess (*mãe-de-santo* – mother-of-saint in literal translation). They undergo numerous rituals, such as baths and head shaving, and acquire an extensive, complex code of symbols and gestures, which are associated with a specific linguistic repertoire of the religion used in the sacred ceremonies of each *terreiro* (the place for religious encounters) (CASTRO, 2001).

To deal with the linguistic components in the *terreiros*, it is necessary, above all, to characterize these spaces as a place of speech, one which has different characteristics compared to other linguistic environments (OLIVEIRA, 2019). The speech of the *ialOrisha* (priestess) or the *babalOrisha* (priest) is considered to have *axe* (*àşę*) – a divine force that sustains the *terreiros*. It is through the speech that priests and priestesses become mediators between the human beings and the divine. From the very beginning, followers can perceive the power of speech, even if they are yet to go through the initiation process.

Upon the initiation process, Candomblé followers, now known as *filhos-de-santo* (children-of-saint, in literal translation) gather to celebrate and get in touch with the entities through a ritual governed by the sound of drums. In this ritual, they receive the entities, enter a state of trance, and dance according to the characteristics of each Orisha.

It is believed that the Orisha own the body of the children-of-saint and are “on land” at this moment of dance. Each Orisha has their own greetings and characteristics, such as the colors of their garment, their way of dancing, their gestures and their accessories:

Each gesture performed by a child-of-saint, each piece of clothing, each necklace, each corner says something about a particular Orisha. For Candomblé followers, each mortal has a deity that protects them and transfers some personality characteristics to them. It is “one Orisha per head”, as they say in the *terreiros* (only a few people have more than one).¹¹ (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014, p. 12)

The Orishas are believed to influence the personalities of the children-of-saint. For instance, the children of Şàngó, the god of fire, are considered restless people; the children of Òrìşànlá, the creator of the mankind, are usually calm.

Another Afro-Brazilian religion is Umbanda, which emerged in the state of Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s. It is, however, much more Brazilian than African, as it combines elements of Spiritism and Catholicism. In the *tendas*, the sacred place for Umbanda reli-

¹¹ Original: “Cada gesto realizado pelo filho-de-santo, cada peça de roupa, cada colar, cada canto diz algo sobre um determinado Orixá. Para os adeptos do Candomblé, cada mortal possui uma divindade que lhe protege e que lhe transfere algumas características de personalidade. É “um Orixá por cabeça”, como se costuma dizer nos terreiros (raras pessoas têm mais de um).”

gious meetings, the mediums receive spirits that can be from Indians, caboclos (a person of mixed Indigenous Brazilian and European ancestry) and pretos-velhos (archetype of African elders).

As an act of resistance in this article, it should be noted that Afro-Brazilian religions have long faced religious intolerance. African diasporic religions have been daily attacked by pastors and church members who, without the slightest respect, often refer pejoratively to Candomblé followers as *macumbeiros* (dark witches or sorcerers), refer to the Orishas as demons, and even utter exorcist words referring to the entities, which, according to them, would be evil spirits. This prejudiced discourse that refers to Candomblé as something evil and labels the Orishas as demons and their followers as *macumbeiros* is the racist, ignorant reflection of those who do not know the history of their own country, those who do not know how to live with nor respect the difference.

As deaf people have a totally visual perspective of the world, it is worth reflecting on how deaf people understand these religions and the information about what each religious entity represents and how this knowledge is reflected in the creation of signs for Orishas. However, the present study is limited to the linguistic fact and aims to analyze Orisha signs in Libras, in their formal and semantic-motivational aspects.

Methodology

The present descriptive, applied research seeks to contribute to a reflection that opens ways to new scientific studies. Descriptive research is interested in describing the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon (GIL, 2008). Meanwhile, the fundamental feature of applied research is its interest in the application, use and practical consequences of knowledge as a contribution to expanding scientific knowledge, especially by suggesting new research questions (GIL, 2008).

More specifically, this research aims to analyze 10 theonymic signs that name Orishas in Candomblé, with a view to describing their phonological structure, classify them based on morphological types, and describe their iconic features, if any. The signs were selected from a YouTube channel entitled “Axé Libras”, which provides different videos with signs related to Candomblé and to Afro-Brazilian and African cultures. The YouTube channel is managed by the teacher Wermerson Silva, who also manages the Instagram account @axelibras.

The video chosen for data collection contains 24 signs of Orishas. The selection of signs for study was based on Sousa’s (2007) description of lexical items in oral languages. The following signs were analyzed: ÈŞÙ, OYÁ, YEMOJA, NANAN-BURUKU, ÒGÚN, ÒBALÚWÁIYÉ, ÒRÌSÀNLÁ, ÒŞÓÒSÌ, OŞUN, and ŞÀNGÓ.

As the video is available on a private account, the selected signs were recorded and stored in theonymic lexicographical forms. The videos can be accessed using the QR Code shown in the figures in the analysis that follows.

Data analysis

The present data analysis follows a threefold structure.

Firstly, it provides the analysis of each sign in a subsection, starting with information about the Orisha, especially regarding their characteristics. Each description is accompanied by a representative image of the named referent.

Secondly, it describes each sign as to its phonological formation, its morphological type, and the possible motivations for its creation. The sign handshapes are presented according to their corresponding number in the appendix.

The morphological classification considers four types of formation (SOUSA, 2022b), namely:

- *simple*: the sign has a single formant¹² in Libras,
- *simple hybrid*: the sign presents a formant in Libras but also incorporates a morphological element influenced by the Portuguese or Yoruba,
- *compound*: the sign has more than one formant (in Libras),
- *hybrid compound*: the sign has more than one formant, but at least one of them incorporates morphological elements influenced by the Portuguese or Yoruba.

The formal descriptions are accompanied by a figure containing a signing image, the sign in SignWriting, and a QR-Code with the video corresponding to the Orisha sign.

Thirdly, this section analyzes the semantic-motivational characteristics reflected in the lexical items: the possible characteristics of the Orishas that might have influenced the name-giver in the sign creation. This entailed an analysis of iconicity, i.e., “the direct relationship between the form of a word and its meaning”¹³ (TRASK, 2004, p. 141). Iconicity “can motivate the formation of various signs”, especially at the phonological level and in the lexicon production in Libras (QUADROS, 2019, p. 115-116).

Iconicity can be considered as a part of a language system that reflects a relationship between a linguistic form and its meaning (PERNISS, 2007). The basis for an iconic sign is the “image” of the referent that it represents.

Bearing this in mind, the analysis presents some characteristics of the Orishas to understand the relationship between the signs and their referents, and it also involves cultural aspects to analyze whether there is an iconic reference or not in the data.

¹² The formant is a free form of a word (CÂMARA Jr., 1970).

¹³ Original: “a relação direta entre a forma de uma palavra e seu significado”.

ÈŞÛ sign

Èşù is the messenger Orisha between the mortals and the gods. He has a strong personality and is highly respected by Candomblé followers. He is considered the Orisha of communication and the guardian of villages, cities, and residences. It is believed that one cannot make an offering to another entity without first pleasing him (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

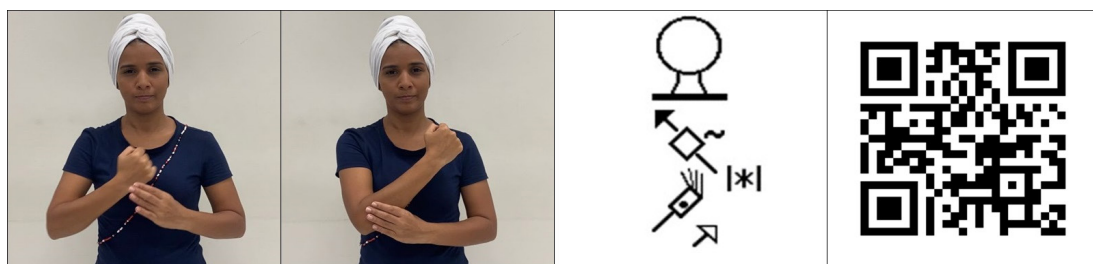
Figure 2 – Representation of the Orisha Èşù



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 6).

His symbols are the trident, the iron spear, and the *Ogó* – a wooden staff or cane with a phallic structure containing a great power. In some rituals, he is called *Bongbogirá* (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 3 – ÈŞÛ sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The Èşù sign is performed in neutral space, with the active hand in handshape #2 and the passive hand in #51b. The sign follows a straight-line movement that goes diagonally upwards. The active hand, representing the *Ogó* (artifact used by Èşù), passes

through the passive hand, and the sign materializes with the passive hand holding the forearm of the active hand (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The ÈŞÙ sign is classified as morphologically simple because it is formed by a single formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). Iconicity, which most often implies semantic motivation, can be perceived through the representation of holding or wielding the *Ogó*, which is one of the Orisha's symbols.

QYA sign

Qya is the Orisha of storms, winds, and sensuality. She symbolizes fighting, fearless people. She is also known as the mother of lightning and thunder. Seduction and will-power are considered her greatest weapons (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

Figure 4 – Representation of the Orisha Qya



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 8).

Her symbols are the cutlass, which is a kind of small sword, a buffalo horn at waist height, and a thunderbolt and a fan with feathers in her hands (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 5 – QYA sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The OYA sign is produced in a neutral space in front of the body (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004). Initially, with the palms of the hands facing each other, both hands are in handshape #2 and the wrists touch each other twice in a straight-line movement. Then, the hands take on different shapes in a circular movement: handshape #32 for the active hand, and handshape #64 for the passive hand.

The sign can be classified as morphologically compound, as it consists of two natural language formants (SOUSA, 2019). The semantic motivation of the sign is in what the Orisha symbolizes, as she is the queen of winds and storms. This shows in the handshapes that have the same form used for the signs WIND and STORM, and points to an iconic relationship between the sign and its referent through cultural aspects associated with OYA.

YEMOJA sign

Yemoja is a discreet Orisha related to motherhood. She is considered the mother of sea waters, absolute ruler of homes, and protector of the family. She gives meaning to our family and, thus, makes us understand the feeling of love, of union between those who live under the same roof (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

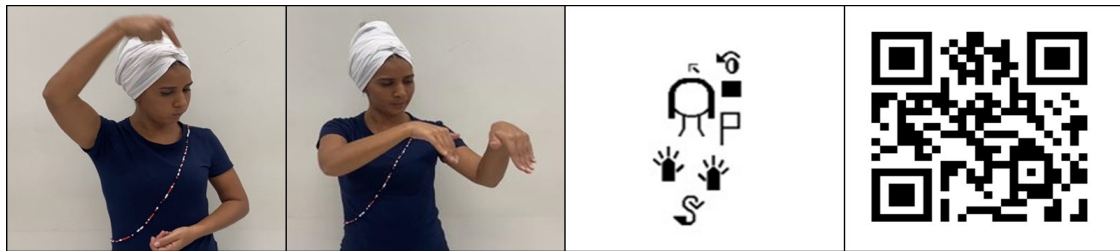
Figure 6 – Representation of the Orisha Yemoja



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 7).

Her symbols are the *adê* (a crown) accompanied by fringes of beads and a silver *abebé* (a circular fan with a cutout in the center in the shape of a mermaid). She also receives the names: Inaê and Queen of the Sea. She is associated with Our Lady of the Conception (CASTRO, 2001)

Figure 7 – YEMOJA sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The sign is produced as follows: the dominant hand takes on different forms from the beginning of the sign, as shown in the video. Initially, the active hand is closed in handshape #3 and makes a semicircular movement next to the face, passing over the head. Then, it assumes handshape #9, producing a straight-line movement downwards, with the palm of the hand turned to the face. Finally, both hands assume handshape #62 in neutral space with a sinuous movement (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The YEMOJA sign can be classified as compound, as it has more than one formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). The semantic motivation of the sign may be related to iconicity both in the physical aspects of the representations of Yemoja (accessories and symbols) and in the cultural characteristics associated with the Orisha.

In physical terms, Yemoja wears a crown with fringes, which explains the hand that passes in front of the face. In cultural terms, she is the queen of the waters, which can be related to the handshapes and movements at the end of the YEMOJA sign. This makes reference to water and establishes an iconic relationship between the referent and the sign.

NANAN-BURUKU sign

Nanan-Buruku is the Orisha of clay, goddess of mud and still water. She was one of the first deities to appear in the world. In Candomblé legends, she is the oldest among the water goddesses, thus gaining the status of “grandmother” in the hierarchy of deities (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

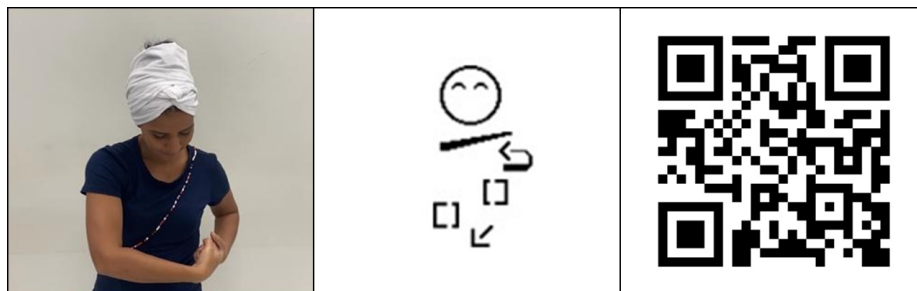
Figure 8 – Representation of the Orisha Nanan-Buruku



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 7).

Nanan-Buruku's symbols are the *adê* (a crown), the *dilogó* (a scepter with a handle decorated with whelks), and the *ebile* (a kind of broom made from the veins of palm leaves) (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 9 – NANAN-BURUKU sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The NANAN-BURUKU sign is produced as follows: the hands take on handshape #2, and with closed fists, the back of both hands, specifically the fingers, are joined. Then, a straight-line movement to the right is performed in a neutral space, with the hands together; the arms are taken backwards while the body leans forward (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The NANAN-BURUKU sign is morphologically simple type, as it contains one

single formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). There seems to be no semantic motivation for the sign, nor any iconic relationship between the sign and its referent.

ÒGÚN sign

Ògún is the Orisha of war. His characteristics are leadership and determination, but also impulsiveness and violence, due to the legends told about him. Ògún is considered one of the oldest entities, the eldest son of Oduduwa (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

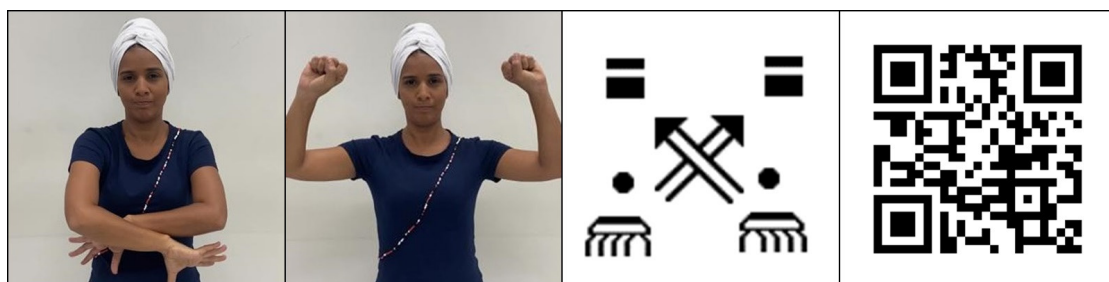
Figure 10 – Representation of the Orisha Ògún



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 9).

Ògún's symbols are the *guaia* (a kind of rattle), the *mariô* (an artifact made with shredded oil palm fringes), and the sword-of-Ògún, also known as *gumbaça* (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 11 – ÒGÚN sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The ÒGÚN sign is performed in a neutral space, i.e., in front of the body. The hands are initially crossed and with the palms facing forward and assuming handshape #64. Then, they are uncrossed taking on handshape #2 (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign can be considered morphologically simple (SOUSA, 2019), as it is formed by a single formant in the native language. It semantically refers to Ògún's insignias – as he is considered a great warrior, the iconicity present in this sign might be related to the act of wielding swords.

ỌBALÚWÁIYÉ sign

Ọbalúwáiyé is the Orisha of the Earth, of life and death, of healing and illness. He is considered a young, strong Orisha, but manifests himself in some rituals as an old man who can barely walk. He is also called Omolu (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

Figure 12 – Representation of the Orisha Ọbalúwáiyé



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 7).

His symbols are the straw clothes, called “straws from the coast” and by the *xaxará* (a small scepter), which serves to show him as “King of the Earth” and lord of the portal between the world of the living and the world of the dead (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 13 – ỌBALÚWÁIYÉ sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The ỌBALÚWÁIYÉ sign is produced with both hands in handshape #1, and its starting point is on the forehead. Then, with palms of the hand backwards, both hands assume handshape #64 through a straight downward movement in neutral space. The eyes and the head also move and follow the hands, which are initially facing forward and end up downwards (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign can be considered morphologically simple, as it consists of a single formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). Its semantic motivation is very clear if one knows a little about this Orisha, who is known for his clothes that cover his entire body, including his face, as shown in Figure 12. Therefore, the semantic motivation can be associated with the Orisha's "physical" aspects, as it is possible to perceive the iconicity between the image that represents the referent and the sign in Libras.

ÒRÌSÀNLÁ sign

Òrìsànlá is the Orisha of peace, serenity, and wisdom. He is considered the supreme deity of creation and the creator of all Orishas (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

Figure 14 – Representation of the Orisha Òrìsànlá



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 6).

The color that represents Òrìsànlá is white. His symbols are a white dove, which symbolizes peace, and a silver staff, named *paxorô* (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 15 – ÒRÌSÀNĹ sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The ÒRÌSÀNĹ sign is made in neutral space, with the palms of the hands facing the body. Initially, both hands take on handshape #63, and the thumbs touch each other as shown in Figure 15. Then, with a straight movement downwards, the hands assume handshape #2 and touch each other, one on top of the other. The head also makes a straight-line movement downwards (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign is considered morphologically compound because it consists of two formants in the sign language (SOUSA, 2019). Its semantic motivation seems to be twofold and iconicity-bounded: at first, the hands assume a shape that makes us create a pictorial mental image of a bird, which in this context represents the white dove; then, the hands take on a shape as if they were holding the *paxorô*. Meanwhile, the head is moved downwards, as if bowing to something.

ÒŞÓÒŞÌ sign

Òşóòşì is the Orisha of hunting. He is considered the king of the forests. His characteristics are joy and the pursuit of plenty. He is also known for holding a single arrow and never missing his target (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

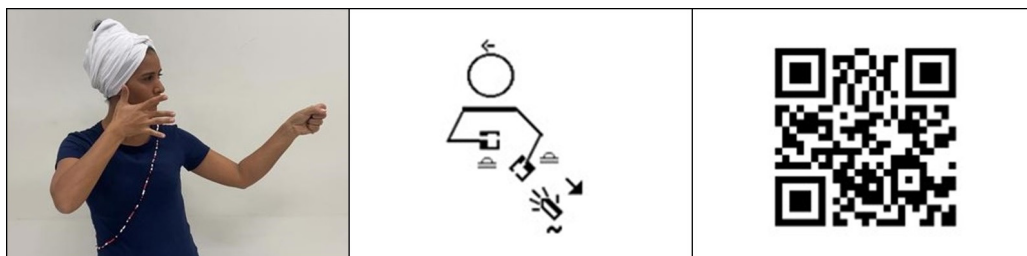
Figure 16 – Representation of the Orisha Ọ̀ṣọ̀ọ̀ṣì



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 9).

The colors that represent Ọ̀ṣọ̀ọ̀ṣì are green and blue. His symbols are the bow and arrow, known by the African people (Yoruba) as *damatá* and *ofá* (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 17 – Ọ̀ṢỌ̀Ọ̀ṢÌ sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The Ọ̀ṢỌ̀Ọ̀ṢÌ sign is produced as follows: with the arm at chest level and the palm of the hand facing forward, the passive hand assumes handshape #2, while the dominant hand also takes on handshape #2 and makes a circular movement at the face height. Then, the active hand releases the fingers progressively until it assumes handshape #64 as shown Figure 17 (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign is classified as morphologically simple, as it consists of only a single for-
mant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). Iconicity is present as a semantic motiva-
tion and is related to a characteristic of the Orisha: the bow and arrow.

ỌᡚUN sign

Ọᡚun is the Orisha of rivers, waterfalls, and all fresh water. Considered the Orisha of splendor, her main characteristics are beauty, vanity, sensuality, and determination (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

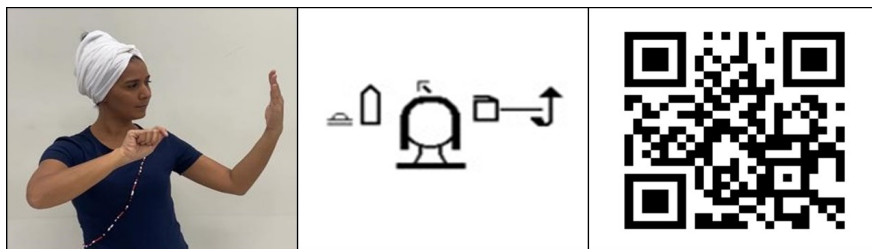
Figure 18 – Representation of the Orisha Ọᡚun



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 8).

Ọᡚun is represented by the colors golden yellow and gold. Her symbols are the *abebé* (a circular fan that has a cutout in the shape of a mermaid in the center, like Yemoja's, except for the fact that it is made of brass) and the *idé* (a bronze or metal bracelet) (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 19 – ỌᡚUN sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The OṢUN sign is produced with different handshapes. With the arm at chest level and the palm of the hand towards the signer (more precisely, towards the face), the passive hand is in handshape #62 while the dominant hand is in handshape #4 and makes circular movements next to the face (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign is considered morphologically simple because it has a single formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). Its semantic motivation seems to be related to a specific characteristic of the Orisha: the comb and the mirror. As mentioned previously, Oṣun is vain, and these artifacts are part of her symbols. Thus, there is iconicity between the referent and the sign.

ṢÀNGÓ sign

Ṣàngó is considered the Orisha of lightning and thunder, life, protection, justice, and fire. He is complemented by Oya: he is the lightning, while she is the storm. His main characteristics are beauty, virility, passion, and a strong sense of justice (VIDIGAL; TEIXEIRA, 2014).

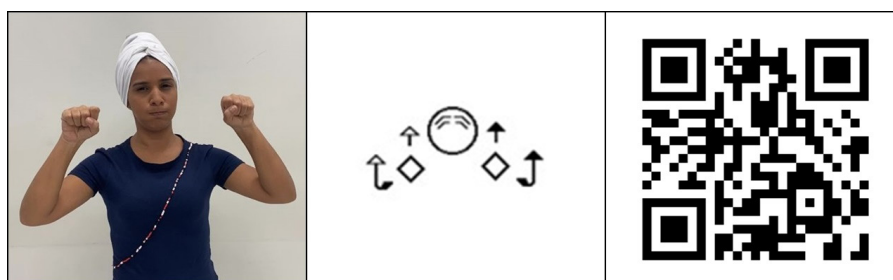
Figure 20 – Representation of the Orisha Ṣàngó



Source: Vidigal and Teixeira (2014, p. 8).

His symbols are the *oxê* (a carved ax with two faces, i.e., two edges) and the *xerê* (a metal or gourd rattle with small grains inside) (CASTRO, 2001).

Figure 21 – ŞÀNGÓ sign and its equivalent in SignWriting



Source: the authors.

The ŞÀNGÓ sign is performed in neutral space. With both hands in handshape #2, the sign follows a straight movement upwards and facial expressions such as frowning (QUADROS; KARNOPP, 2004).

The sign can be considered morphologically simple, as it is formed by a single formant in the native language (SOUSA, 2019). Its semantic motivation points to a relationship of iconicity between the sign and its referent based on particular characteristics of Şàngó when manifested in the sons-of-saint: the way of dancing. Another characteristic that can be represented through facial expressions is his seriousness, as he is considered a virile entity with a strong sense of justice.

Final remarks

This research aimed to study the signs of the Candomblé Orishas in Libras. Considering that the lexicon of a language is an inexhaustible resource and is constantly evolving, with some lexical items appearing and others falling into disuse, it is appropriate also to consider the lexicon of sign languages, specifically Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).

As mentioned before, we can have access to the culture of a people through the lexicon (ANTUNES, 2012). However, analyzing a lexicon entails consideration of several factors such as culture, history and especially how this lexicon has been formed. Recent studies dealing with both the lexicon in Libras and the lexicon used by people-of-saint have contributed significantly to this research.

Within Onomastics as the area of Linguistics dedicated to the study of proper names in general, Anthroponymy and Toponymy have been the most known sub-areas, but Panteonymy also stands out. Panteonymy studies the proper names of the stars,

winds, animals, and particularly the gods and entities, which are specifically named through Theonymy.

Onomastic studies of Libras have shown an interdisciplinary relationship between the study of proper names and other areas of knowledge such as Biology, Geography, and Religion. In fact, understanding the act of name-giving, which is an innate characteristic of human beings, in both oral and sign languages requires understanding the motivations that lead a linguistic community to ascribe a name to a person, a place, an animal, a star, or a religious entity.

Findings indicate that 7 out of the 10 signs are classified as morphologically simple, while the remaining are compound and constituted by Libras-only formants, i.e., without borrowing from the Portuguese language. Iconicity was found in all signs except for NANAN-BURUKU in the semantic-motivational analysis. Findings point to a strong relationship between the naming of Orishas in Libras and the visual experience of deaf people, especially through the iconic relationship between the signs and their referents.

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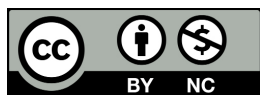
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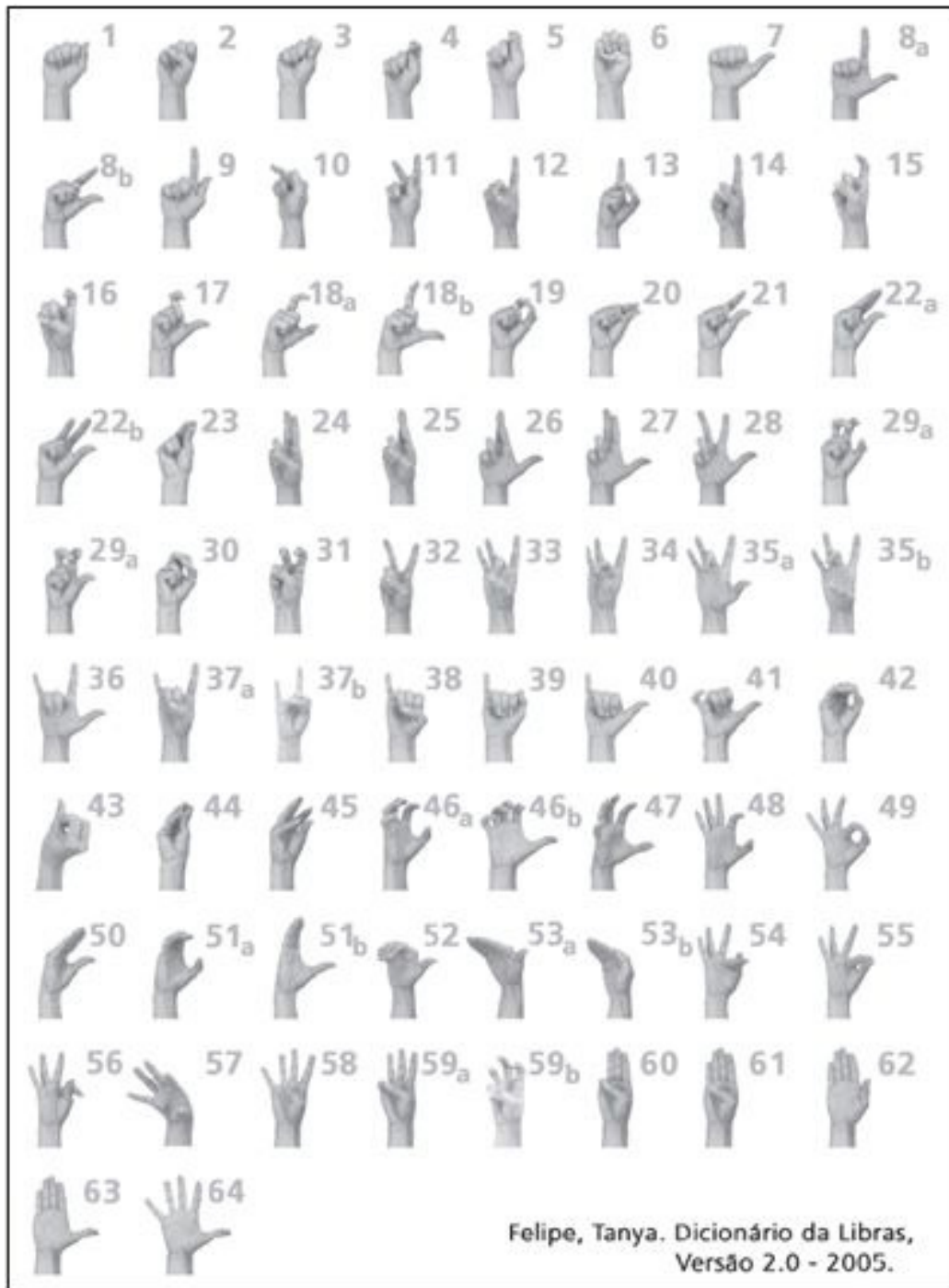
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ATTACHMENT

The sign handshapes



Source: Felipe and Monteiro (2007, p. 21).