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Creating a sign language out of everything and everywhere: an example from the deaf people of Bissau

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APPENDIX 1: Chronology of school-based sign languages

Sign languages of the world that have emerged in schools, in each column by continent – Europe, Americas (North, Central and South), Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the transcontinental region of the Middle East. Chronology is displayed from most recent to oldest, by decades. Dates based mainly on the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2022) and the Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2025) are expressly omitted because they are not always exact. As in Figure 4, the sign languages of Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua and Israel are in bold.

	Europe	Americas	Asia	Africa	Oceania	Middle East
2010				São Tomé & Príncipe		
			Bhutanese		Solomon Islands	
			Laos	Guinea-Bissau		
2000			Tibetan			
				Cape Verde		
			Cambodian	Somali		
				Rwandan	Papua New Guinea	
1990		Honduran		Malian		
		Salvadoran	Maldivian	Mauritania		
				Angolan		
				Gabonese	Samoan	Kurdish
				Burundi		Qatari
				Niger		
1980				Sudanese		
				Lesotho		Afghan
				Congolese (D.R.)		Emirati
		Nicaraguan		Gambian		
		Panamanian		Central African		
				Senegal		
				Chadian		
				Togo		
		Bolivian		Benin		
				Cameroon		
				Côte d'Ivoire		
1970			Georgian	Congolese (Rep.)		Syrian
				Namibian		
				Mauritian		
		Dominican	Armenian	Malawian		Yemeni
			Azerbaijani	Guinean		
			Nepali	Sierra Leone		
			Mongolian	Tanzanian		Jordanian
				Mozambican		Saudi Arabia
				Ugandan		
				Burkina Faso		
	Albanian			Nigerian		
1960		Paraguayan		Liberian		
		Guyanese		Kenyan		
1950						Iraqi

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		Greenlandic		Ghanaian		Kuwaiti
	Greek		Malaysian	Moroccan		Lebanese
	Maltese		Penang	Ethiopian		
			Singapore	Eritrean		
		Ecuadorian	Thai	Zambian		
	Macedonian	Trinidad & Tob	Hong Kong	Libyan		
		Guatemalan		Zimbabwean		
1940	Bosnian	Haitian				
		Jamaican				
		Costa Rican				
		Venezuelan				Israeli
1930		Peruvian	Indonesian			Palestinian
1920		Colombian				Iranian
1910	Romanian	Uruguayan	Sri Lankan	Tunisian		
1900	Slovakian	Puerto Rican	Filipino			
	Turkish	Cuban	Burmese			
	Moldova					
1890	Bulgarian					
	Serbian		Taiwan			
1880	Valencian		Korean			
			Chinese	Algerian		
	Croatian	Argentine	Vietnamese			
1870	Hungarian		Japanese	Egyptian		
1860	Icelandic	Mexican			New Zealand	
	Estonian					
	Latvian			South African	Australian	
1850		Brazilian				
	Finnish	Chilean				
1840	Slovenian					
1830	Lithuanian	Quebec	Indo-Pakistani			
	Italian					
1820	Norwegian					
	Portuguese					
	Flemish					
1810	French-Belgian					
	Polish	American				
	Irish					
1800	Swedish					
	Danish					
	Russian					
	Ukrainian					
	Catalan					
1790	Spanish					
	British					
	Dutch					
1780	Czech					
1770	Austrian					
	German					
	Swiss					
1760	French					
	Europe	Americas	Asia	Africa	Oceania	Middle East

APPENDIX 2: LGG vitality score

LGG vitality score according to the UNESCO survey, adapted for sign languages by Webster and Safar (2019)

SECTION I: Language vitality and endangerment within the reference community

FACTOR	SCORE
1a. Overall vitality / endangerment score: <i>Unsafe / vulnerable</i>	4
1b. Most prominent threat to sign language: <i>Government's indifference.</i>	
2. Number of sign language users: <i>~1700 deaf people (census 2009)</i>	
3. Proportion of signers within the reference community: <i>Only less than half, ~800, have access to the meeting places.</i>	2
4. Generational or age-group language use (emerging sign language): <i>All age groups use the language competently only if they have access to the meeting places and considering that the overall population is very young.</i>	5
5. Domains of language use: <i>Creole, native languages and Portuguese are used in most social domains and for most functions.</i> <i>The use of the target language was used exceptionally on television broadcasts for a few times in the beginning of the pandemic, but it is very present in deaf schools and community gatherings.</i>	4
6. New domains, i. e., new media, including broadcast media and the internet: <i>The sign language is sometimes used in new domains for entertainment purposes only.</i>	3

7. Materials for language spread and education: <i>There are no video materials available to the community, except for a few informal videos made for entertainment purposes. Video materials and technical equipment to show videos to an audience are inexistent, even in deaf schools, where sign language is part of schooling.</i>	0
8. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use: <i>Government and institutions do not recognize sign language. Even if it is supported in the education of deaf students, the need to use it as a means of accessing information in general is not recognized by the government yet.</i>	0
9. Use of the target sign language in deaf education: <i>There are no particular language policies or guidance implemented in deaf schools, but the target sign language is used widely in an ad hoc way, and attitudes 'on the ground' are positive.</i>	3
10. Reference community members' attitudes towards their own sign language: <i>All members that have access to the sign language value it and wish to see it promoted.</i>	5
11. Type and quality of documentation: <i>There are two dictionaries. Video recordings exist in varying quality and with varying degree of annotation. The quality of documentation is thus fair.</i>	3
12. Status of language programs: <i>Sign language is taught to deaf students without a formal curriculum and short training courses in sign language have been promoted on few occasions only to the teachers of the deaf. Since there is not a formal program, its status is still basic.</i>	2

SECTION II: Linguistic diversity

(a) External diversity, i.e., linguistic environment:

13. In everyday life, a typical deaf member of this community *would use sign language and encounter written and spoken Creole and Portuguese and several spoken native languages.*

hearing member of this community *would encounter written and spoken Creole and Portuguese and several spoken native languages.*

14. A typical deaf member of this community is fluent, at least partially, in sign language, written, and eventually spoken, Portuguese and Creole.

hearing member of this community is fluent, at least partially, in Creole, one spoken native language and Portuguese.

15. In the local schools attended by deaf children *spoken Creole is tolerated, but it is used for instruction, together with Portuguese and sign language, these two are also taught as subjects.*

16. In the local media *Portuguese and Creole are represented on TV, print and internet. However, on radio, Creole is the most represented.*

Sign language never appears on television, but it was used exceptionally for a few times in the beginning of the pandemic.

There is no official support and specific resources for the target sign language outside education.

(b) Internal diversity in the language:

17. This language is characterized by moderate internal (dialectal) diversity *between different deaf schools.*

18. A typical member of this reference community is fully or partially fluent in the dialect used by the school group.

19. In number of users *the dialect of Bissau is adopted by the great majority.*

20. In symbolic status and prestige *the dialect of Bissau has higher status/prestige than all other dialects because it is used by the majority.*

21. This sign language is characterized by high stylistic diversity, i.e., a variety of different registers and styles are commonly used in interaction.

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