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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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### **Citation**

Sousa da Silva Martins, M. (2026, February 19). *Creating a sign language out of everything and everywhere: an example from the deaf people of Bissau*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4292379>

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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

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|      |               |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------|
|      | Greek         | Greenlandic     |                | Ghanaian      |                | Kuwaiti            |
|      | Maltese       |                 | Malaysian      | Moroccan      |                | Lebanese           |
|      |               |                 | Penang         | Ethiopian     |                |                    |
|      |               |                 | Singapore      | Eritrean      |                |                    |
|      |               | Ecuadorian      | Thai           | Zambian       |                |                    |
|      | Macedonian    | Trinidad & Tob  | Hong Kong      | Libyan        |                |                    |
|      |               | Guatemalan      |                | Zimbabwean    |                |                    |
| 1940 | Bosnian       | Haitian         |                |               |                |                    |
|      |               | Jamaican        |                |               |                |                    |
|      |               | Costa Rican     |                |               |                |                    |
|      |               | Venezuelan      |                |               |                | <b>Israeli</b>     |
| 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-Belgia |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Polish        | American        |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Irish         |                 |                |               |                |                    |
| 1800 | Swedish       |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Danish        |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Russian       |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Ukrainian     |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Catalan       |                 |                |               |                |                    |
| 1790 | Spanish       |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | British       |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Dutch         |                 |                |               |                |                    |
| 1780 | Czech         |                 |                |               |                |                    |
| 1770 | Austrian      |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | German        |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | Swiss         |                 |                |               |                |                    |
| 1760 | French        |                 |                |               |                |                    |
|      | <b>Europe</b> | <b>Americas</b> | <b>Asia</b>    | <b>Africa</b> | <b>Oceania</b> | <b>Middle East</b> |

**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 |
|---|-------|
| <p><b>1a. Overall vitality / endangerment score:</b><br/><i>Unsafe / vulnerable</i></p>   | 4     |
| <p><b>1b. Most prominent threat to sign language:</b><br/><i>Government's indifference.</i></p>   |       |
| <p><b>2. Number of sign language users:</b><br/><i>~1700 deaf people (census 2009)</i></p>  |       |
| <p><b>3. Proportion of signers within the reference community:</b><br/><i>Only less than half, ~800, have access to the meeting places.</i></p>   | 2     |
| <p><b>4. Generational or age-group language use (emerging sign language):</b><br/><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></p>  | 5     |
| <p><b>5. Domains of language use:</b><br/><i>Creole, native languages and Portuguese are used in most social domains and for most functions.</i><br/><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></p> | 4     |
| <p><b>6. New domains, i. e., new media, including broadcast media and the internet:</b><br/><i>The sign language is sometimes used in new domains for entertainment purposes only.</i></p>  | 3     |

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <p><b>7. Materials for language spread and education:</b><br/> <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></p>        | <p>0</p> |
| <p><b>8. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use:</b><br/> <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></p> | <p>0</p> |
| <p><b>9. Use of the target sign language in deaf education:</b><br/> <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></p>  | <p>3</p> |
| <p><b>10. Reference community members' attitudes towards their own sign language:</b><br/> <i>All members that have access to the sign language value it and wish to see it promoted.</i></p>   | <p>5</p> |
| <p><b>11. Type and quality of documentation:</b><br/> <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></p>  | <p>3</p> |
| <p><b>12. Status of language programs:</b><br/> <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></p>   | <p>2</p> |

## 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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