

Mimography or Sign Language Trails as Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Bilingual education for the deaf is always necessary. This text discusses sign languages since antiquity, passing through researchers in different times and countries. The recognition of deaf cultural and historical heritage contributes to the formation of deaf identities. Is it possible to say that Berthier and Bébien, French teachers of the 19th century, contributed to sign languages becoming an identity mark? What was the work performed by Huet in Brazil and Le Clerc in the United States? Moreover, why are French, Brazilian, and American sign languages similar? This article aims to disclose the actions that preceded William C. Stokoe in the construction of sign languages such as the work perpetrated by Berthier, who was deaf, and Bébien, first hearing teacher at the Institute of Deaf-Mute in Paris, who was bilingual, giving classes in sign language, at that time called mimicry. Historical research will be the method to achieve this goal. The work of Bébien *Mimographie or Essai d'écriture mimique, propre à régulariser le langage des sourds-muets* (1825) will be analyzed. It was the first attempt to graphically register sign language. Psychologists and philosophers, by the end of 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, analyzed the evolution of the term, from mimicry to polyglossy, and, finally, sign language. Some plates of Bébien's Mimography will be shown and analyzed in this paper, concluding to emphasize that French sign language had a proper grammar, differing from spoken French. Recognizing the efforts of these researchers as forerunners of the fundamentals of sign languages enhances Stokoe's linguistic research.

Keywords: Sign Language, Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien, Mimography, Sign Writing

1. Introduction

The study published by William Stokoe in 1960, recognizing that the linguistic parameters of Sign Language characterize it as a language, is considered a seminal research. In this study, Stokoe [1] argues that sign languages are legitimate linguistic systems with syntax, lexicon, and the ability to generate an infinite number of sentences, just like oral languages.

However, the legacy left by previous researches cannot be denied. Almost two centuries earlier, professors at the National Institute for the Deaf and Mute in Paris¹ (INSMP),

now the National Institute for Deaf Young People in Paris, already taught sign language.

We approach Aguiar and Chaibue [2] to point out studies on sign language in the 18th century. We also highlight the studies carried out in the 19th century by the hearing French professor, Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien (1789-1839), and by the deaf professor Ferdinand Berthier (1803-1886), both professors at INSMP. We emphasize, therefore, that there has been recognition of sign languages in a period long before the 1960s. According to Sacks [3], the deaf professionals of the 19th century believed they had initiated political, cultural, and social advances that continue towards the acquisition of the status of language for sign languages and its recognition at a global level, each country with its own sign language.

Bebien's effort on creating a sketch about written sign language, at that time called mimigraphy, is remarkable.

On recent times, two deaf researchers, Y. Cantin [4] and Bertin [5], brought to our knowledge studies made in the

1 Following the changes in the administrative organization and, in particular, with the forms of government in France, the Deaf Institute in Paris had its name changed many times. On this article, the term National Institute for the Deaf-Mute in Paris will be used, although it does not correspond exactly to the different periods mentioned.

18th and 19th centuries and their contributions to the genealogy of sign languages. Both wrote their doctoral dissertations about that time in French Deaf History.

Cantin [4] highlights the role of French deaf experts in the Belle Époque. He emphasizes the importance of Bébien in subverting the order concerning the adoption of an educational method that would force deaf people to use spoken word. He analyzes how it affected the deaf community, mostly the more educated members.

In 1817, Auguste Bébien already considered that the spoken word could not serve as a basis for the education of deaf-mutes. It could, at best, be a complement. Bertin [5] studied Bébien's biography highlighting how little he was known or even forgotten, since Bébien was an important player in the emergence of a Deaf Culture at the beginning of the 19th century. Bertin [5] also highlights how Bébien, a listening teenager born in Guadeloupe, left in 1802 during a bloody revolution and went to France to study at the INSMP. The director at the time, abbot Sicard, sponsored the young man who, in contact with deaf students, became the first deaf person to master sign language.

The idea that deaf people could communicate differently from others began in antiquity with the Greek philosopher Socrates (470 and 399 B.C.). He stood out for being one of the most important thinkers in the history of Philosophy, being considered the founder of Western Philosophy. At that time, the deaf were treated as incompetent beings, marginalized, and often condemned to death. Because they didn't speak, they were thought to be incapable of reasoning. Socrates then conjectured that deaf people might be able to communicate without mouth movements, just with their hands and body.

By the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Swiss Ferdinand Saussure was looking for an object and a method for his studies on language to obtain scientific recognition. For this, language was the object and structuralism, the method. Thus, Linguistics was born. Saussure conceived language as a simultaneously social, individual, psychic, psychophysiological, and physical phenomenon. Therefore, he believed in the fusion of Language and Speech. Now, it follows that his studies did not consider that certain groups such as the deaf would be unable to carry out the fusion conceived by him. Could it be concluded that the deaf would have no language?

Sign language, from 1960 onwards, broke with the structuralist parameters of Linguistics hence the importance of emphasizing the existence of sign language in France for over two hundred years. So, we ask: did the recognition of sign languages actually happen only after 1960, with William Stokoe? A detailed evaluation of the work *Mimographie or Essai d'écriture mimique, propre à régulariser le langage des sourds-muets*², elaborated by Bébien in 1825, brings the study of a writing of signs. Let's seek a contextualization of

what happened in the 18th and 19th centuries in France in order to understand the immense cultural heritage that began in Paris and reverberated throughout Brazil and the United States.

What are the contributions of French professors Berthier and Bébien to the recognition of sign languages as an identity aspect of deaf people? What is the work performed by Huet in Brazil and why are French, Brazilian, and American sign languages similar?

2. Creation and Dissemination of Sign Languages: France, Brazil, and the United States

In the second half of the 18th century, a religious man, the abbot de l'Épée, learned to communicate without the use of speech with the deaf who lived in the streets of Paris. He did not invent Sign Language; he only systematized this learning in a way he called "Methodic Signs", publishing a book in 1776 entitled *Institution of the Deaf Mute via methodical signs* (*Institution des sourds-muets par la voie des methodical signs*). The Abbot de l'Épée was initially a teacher of two deaf twin sisters, students he inherited from another religious educator, Father Simon Vanin, after his death in 1759.

L'Épée taught in his own residence. However, due to the effectiveness of teaching Methodical Signs, the group of students increased. In need of a larger space, l'Épée publicized his work with public classes, which took place between 1774 and 1778. During this period, a meeting of King Louis XVI's advisers recognized the services provided by l'Épée as being of public utility. Despite his death in 1780, his successors managed to obtain funds so that, in 1791, the National Institute of the Deaf Mute in Paris – INSMP in the Célestins, today Rue de St. Jacques, was inaugurated. At present, the institute is called the Paris Institute of Deaf Young People – INJS. It was the first school for the deaf in the world and has remained at the same address.

It was there where Ferdinand Berthier (1803 – 1886) studied. Deaf, he communicated in sign language. One of his teachers was Auguste Bébien (1789 – 1839), nephew of the director Sicard who succeeded the abbot of l'Épée in the direction of the INSMP, from 1800 to 1822. Bébien had already been working at the INSMP since 1802. He was the first listening teacher to become bilingual, giving classes in sign language [4]. He was looking for a way to spread the language of the deaf; he tried a way to regularize it and use it in the education of his students.

It is possible to confirm that Sign Language is widely spread in Modern History in France, initially with l'Épée, then with Sicard, Bébien, and Berthier, among others. A book written by Sicard, *Théorie des signes or Introduction à l'étude des langues*, in 1808, was much criticized by Bébien because signs, according to the theory set out in the book, had a word-for-word equivalence with French. In the understanding of Berthier, a brilliant student, these signs would mimic French, lacking its own linguistic characteristics.

In United States, sign language began with Thomas

2 In free translation: Mimography or Essay of a mime writing, proper to regularize the language of the deaf-mute.

Gallaudet (1787 – 1851). He lived in Hartford, Connecticut, and had a neighbor whose daughter, Alice, was deaf. He began educating her then. Mason Cogswell, Alice's father, proposed him to travel to England to study methods for teaching deaf students. First, he went to England to learn from the Braidwood's family. However, they imposed the condition to teach him only if Thomas Gallaudet should stay there as their assistant for three years, which he refused.

Nevertheless, there he met Abbot Sicard, who was at that time head of the Institution Nationale des Sourds Muets in Paris. Sicard was accompanied by two staff members, Laurent Clerc, and Jean Massieu, both deaf. Sicard invited T. Gallaudet to follow them to study the French school's method of teaching the deaf using manual communication. Gallaudet was so impressed that, besides learning this manual communication, he invited L. Clerc to follow him to the United States to teach American deaf students.

Both raised private and public funds and succeeded to find a school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Gallaudet's neighbor's daughter was one of the first seven students at this school. Gallaudet served as a principal from 1817 till 1830. Curiously, at that time, some hearing students attended the school. By the time he retired, the school had already 140 students.

Many years later, in 1857, T. Gallaudet's son Edward Gallaudet found a college for the deaf. It was named Columbia Institution and was established in lands donated by Amos Kendall. Edward Gallaudet was the first superintendent of the new school. In 1864, the college had its name changed to Gallaudet College. Only in 1986 it became Gallaudet University, since college education in Gallaudet is offered nowadays in many different majors. It offers education in elementary, middle, and high school level as well.

Therefore, since 1817, students at Gallaudet school and further in college were signing and being educated with manual communication, but it was only in 1960 that a linguist named William Stokoe, a professor at Gallaudet College, proposed that American Sign Language should receive the status of a real language, not just a signed code for English.

The spread of French sign language followed the example of Pélissier and others, whose geographical mobility allowed other countries to know it and to be influenced by it. Also in France, it included semantic standardization, facilitating the circulation of ideas, and a linguistic attachment transmitted by deaf teachers to their deaf students within schools. The international diffusion occurred because a number of deaf French teachers and principals abroad, have been found, like Laurent Clerc in the United States in 1817, Pierre Roger in Mexico in 1823, Edouard Huet in Brazil and Mexico between 1854 and 1865, Frei Young in Quebec in the decade of 1870. Huet took to Brazil a letter that reached the Emperor D. Pedro II through the hands of the Marquis of Abrantes. He got two deaf students aged 10 and 12 and started receiving an annual pension to educate them. This was the beginning of the National Institute of Education for the Deaf – INES, which was born as the first school for the deaf in Brazil, in 1856. Coincidentally, in the same year, Gallaudet College, in the

United States, began its work in higher education.

Although in a furtive way, sign language was already present in the instruction of deaf students at INES since Edouard Huet started his work in Brazil. The strong influence of French sign language on Brazilian sign language is thus understood.

With this brief historical research, the similarity between the three sign languages is justified: French, American and Brazilian.

3. Vigotski and the Recognition of Sign Languages

What is commonly understood as sign language has been historically referred to as “sign language, gesture language, mime, pantomime, natural language of the deaf” [6]³ among other names.

This fact should not be an obstacle to carefully evaluate studies on sign languages, especially those that admitted their importance as a socially constructed tool in order to consolidate and transmit symbolic content. Naming, mime, pantomime or language of gestures have been created according to the trends and knowledge of different times. That's why the original terms are kept here.

During this historical research, a revision was made through the conceptions of two authors about the term mimicry: Benjamin (1933/1987) – arguing about the mimetic faculty of language – and Vigotski (1983/1997) – researching the development and education of the deaf in 1930.

For Benjamin [7], language, as a phenomenon of nature, engenders not always perceptible similarities. He argued that written and oral languages confer a sense of similarity to humans:

Have become a ‘file of similarities, of extra-sensitive correspondences’ (p. 111), without this isolating them from the semiotic dimension. “The gift of being similar, which we have, is nothing more than a weak residue of the violent compulsion, to which man was subject, to become similar and to act according to the law of similarity” [7].

The mimetic faculty would have a history in both a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic sense. Children's play itself would be at the heart of this ability. Although imbued with mimetic behaviors, infants would not limit themselves to imitation. Far from exhausting reflection, Benjamin [7] pointed out that it was necessary to investigate the meaning and history of the mimetic faculty.

In different periods of the history of deaf education in the world [8]⁴ and at INES [6], deaf people were not allowed to enjoy the law of human similarity, as pointed out by Benjamin. Why restrain what was spontaneous? Vigotski saw the damage

3 Thesis defended by the first author, under the guidance of the second.

4 The Internet Archive, a 501(c) (3) non-profit, is building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form. Like a paper library, they provide free access to researchers, historians, scholars, the print disabled, and the general public. Their mission is to provide universal access to all knowledge.

caused by such an interdiction. As one of the founders of Historical-Cultural Psychology, Vigotski initially interpreted the non-oral language of the deaf as an obstacle to their education. In the book *Fundamentals of Defectology* [9], it is possible to follow the change in Vigotski's opinion.

Attentive, he realized that forcing the aural method of communication did not promote the full development of the language of deaf children. Insistent, he indicated that it was necessary to intervene early in kindergarten to create in deaf children the desire for speech. In 1925, he proposed an *Experimental Verification of New Methods of Teaching Language to Deaf-mute Children* [9]. Of the three methods he proposed to test, none advocated mime as the primary means of instruction. However, in one of his theses, he defended that mimicry should be used in the education of the deaf. In 1930, at the Second Russian Conference, together with teams from schools for deaf and mute children, Vigotski presented the conclusions of experimental evidence through the article *On the problem of education and linguistic development of the Deaf-mute Child* [9]. Through Psychology, he recognized sign language. He stressed the need to "admit that the problem of deaf-mute children's linguistic education was related to the nexus between language education and general education" as well as "reviewing the traditional theoretical and practical attitude towards the different types of languages of the deaf-mute child and, in the first place, to mime and written language" [9]. He assured that experimental and clinical studies in the area have shown that "in the current state of deaf pedagogy, polyglossia [mastery of different language systems] constitutes the most fruitful path for the linguistic development and education of the deaf-mute child" [9]⁵. Russian deaf children questioned psychologists, who had to recognize sign language. Linguistics, a scientific field inaugurated by Saussure, would legitimize it thirty years later.

For this reason, together with the artificially inculcated language, it uses more willingly the language of mimicry that is its own and which fulfills in it all the vital functions of the language. Despite all the good intentions of the pedagogues, the struggle of oral language against mimicry, as a general rule, always ends with the victory of mime, not because it is – from a psychological point of view – the true language of the deaf-mute, not because it is easier – as many pedagogues say – but because it constitutes an authentic language in all its richness of functional meaning, while the oral pronunciation of words, artificially inculcated, lacks the living richness and is only a dead copy of the living language [9].

Vigotski found certain dilemmas revealed through practice and reviewed his position, searching for new educational

solutions. In Historical-Social Psychology, acquisition is related to spontaneous apprehension when in contact with sign language users in a social environment that facilitates their acquisition and development. However, Vigotski's work was censored and banned in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from 1934 onwards. It was censored in its concept of internalization, on the grounds that it expressed "individualist tendencies", contrary to socialism.

4. Detailing the Historical Cultural Heritage of the IDM: Professor Ferdinand Berthier

The work of William C. Stokoe Jr. [1] is a valuable contribution and is celebrated by deaf people around the world. Nonetheless, the studies of the deaf professor Ferdinand Berthier, in the period between 1830 and 1880, and of his master, Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien, also need to be valued. In the nineteenth century, these teachers made efforts to prove that deaf mimicry was in fact a language.

Sacks [3] identifies Bébien as one of the early researchers when he clarifies: "that sign language could have an internal structure is not entirely new - it has, so to speak, a singular prehistory of its own" (p. 86-87). The deaf Desloges and Berthier were considered as disseminators of conceptions that characterized sign languages as "linguistic intuitions" [10].

Berthier is known as the founder and President of the Central Society of the Deaf and Mute. His associative practice was developed in the banquets he organized, where the deaf exchanged ideas, spread sign language and supported each other. The first banquet was held on November 30, 1834, in memory of the birth of the abbot Charles-Michel de l'Épée [11]. In this activity, Berthier received support from Eugène de Monglave, a literary personality from the 1820s to 1850s, which contributed to his reputation in the French intellectual milieu [12].

Berthier intended to introduce sign language into society⁶. He was politically supported by listening personalities such as Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Auguste Ledru-Rollin [12]. He intended to reduce the social isolation of the deaf and allow communication with listeners through sign language "other than in writing, since most deaf people [at that time] never attended schools" [12]. The effort offered a double advantage: preserving sign language and reducing the pre-judgment that weighed on the deaf, causing acceptance and recognition of a language worthy of its own name.

Berthier joined the INSMP in 1811, at the age of 8, when the Institute was under the management of Abbot Sicard. At that time, he had contact with two important deaf references: Jean

5 Lacerda [26] discussed the Historical-Cultural approach to education and language of the deaf. She evaluated that they can be understood as precursors of Total Communication as they pointed to the need of using the sign language of the deaf as an instrument for their full linguistic development, as well as linking such studies with "the bilingual approach (the deaf as a "polyglot"), where the mastery of sign language would allow access to the majority language" (p. 58). She emphasizes that, at that time, there were no or unknown studies on sign languages. We argue for the second hypothesis.

6 "[...] we find a number of French deaf teachers and directors abroad: Laurent Clerc in the United States in 1817, Pierre Roger in Mexico in 1823, Edouard Huet in Brazil and Mexico between 1854 and 1865, Frère Young in Quebec in the 1870's"[4].

Massieu (1772-1846) and Laurent Clerc (1785-1869), the same researchers Gallaudet found in London. Gallaudet then took L. Clerc to the United States.

While acknowledging the importance of l'Épée's work, Berthier [8] criticized aspects of the method he developed. He noted that the abbot consulted Latin and Greek etymologies to translate the French words and establish methodical signs. "He wanted to harness the language of gestures to submit it to the habits and phenomena of conventional language, without reflecting that one, grafted onto the other, necessarily becomes nonsense" [8]. Abbot l'Épée's system consisted of framing the sign with the word rather than harmonizing with the idea, followed by Abbot Sicard and all his disciples but Bébien. Therefore, Berthier [8] differentiated the methodical signs of the deaf's own language.

In his 1840 work, Berthier questions both methodical signs and the treatment given to mime. For this reason, he also criticized the publication of the Abbot Sicard, *Théorie des signes or Introduction à l'étude des langues*, from 1808, a dictionary that Bébien – the author's nephew – considered to be "a kind of philosophical novel, more for entertainment of amateurs than for the instruction of masters" [8]. The work tried to facilitate the training of deaf students. However, Berthier [8] asserted that paraphrases were useless as "just one sign is enough to express two complete ideas" (p. 51). He further argues that mimicry "does not resemble any language of the human institution" (p. 52). As a deaf and a teacher of the deaf, he recognized the value of his language.

Mimicry, on the other hand, happier than any conventional language, without bothering to reproduce fleeting expressions with scrupulous fidelity, lends itself with marvelous flexibility to the extreme variety of forms of discourse. Thought is reflected in it as in a mirror, with its finer contours; it materializes in it, so to speak: it allows itself to be surprised and apprehended at first sight, complete, visible, sensitive, palpable, while the richer languages have constantly resorted to borrowings to express particular ideas. Again, they all depend on the imagination, on the care of making up for what is lacking, on embellishing what they symbolize; similar to Aristotle's scale, who, to make each virtue better understood, set it between the two corresponding vices, a scale for which there were gaps because, as said the famous philosopher, it is not my fault that my language has fewer words to express the virtues than the vices. But, admitting with Chateaubriand that "Christianity has traced the difficulty in a sure way, showing us that virtues are virtues only when they return to their source, that is, to God", the result will be no less decisive in favor of the language of gestures [8].

How can one not notice, in the excerpt above, a specialist giving his opinion on the sign language capabilities of the deaf? Berthier [8] predicted that his defense of the system of signs could be contested. He perceived the "indifference of certain teachers in tolerating [it], when it is now generally recognized that the slowness of signs makes the rectitude of ideas, and that this, in turn, exerts the same influence on the other" (p. 54). Under the authority of "an enlightened teacher" (p. 54), the teacher hoped, "this barbarity will disappear" (p. 54). His

wish or prediction was: "Who knows if this beneficial innovation will sooner or later be adopted by other schools in France and abroad? The triumph of logic is inevitable in a more or less near future" (p. 54-55). In addition to the struggle for education as a right, deaf people would understand the importance of community ties, "dedicating themselves with ardor to their rights in the careers of letters, science, arts, industrial professions, for no other reason than to general utility and the glory of the country" (p. 60). Berthier [8] asserts that a good teacher of deaf-mutes knows and practices "the language of action" (p. 61). He harshly criticized oralization; deaf educators should not spread the false conception that abstract ideas would only be reached through speech.

Therefore, although his work has as its central figure the abbot l'Épée, Berthier [8] affirmed sign language and disseminated the contributions of the master Bébien, who built a way to register the visual-gesture language in writing.

5. Sign Language Studies Promoted by Auguste Bébien

Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien started his activities at INSMP in 1802. Let us remember that he was a listener, but he got so close to deaf students that he became bilingual and established a kind of relationship that was rare in those times.

The vertical Listening/Deaf hierarchy, based on audiological criteria, was replaced by a horizontal, egalitarian relationship through the linguistic modality and communication. The boundary is no longer normal/abnormal, but those who speak/those who sign. This awareness of essential identity, which distinguishes "them" – the hearing-speakers – from "us" – the deaf-mutes – is undoubtedly an indirect contribution of Bébien [4].

Bertin [5] assesses the importance of Bébien's work for future generations in favor of sign language. He deconstructs the arguments about the thought/language relationship solely through speech, relativizes the importance of any and all linguistic system and offers an appreciation of what was contemptuously regarded as simple gestures. Bébien is the designer of a bilingual education, a pedagogical orientation that the deaf have not ceased to claim and that are still struggling for it to be put into practice. Bertin [5] emphasizes that the term "bilingual" is naturally anachronistic and that he took the liberty of associating it with the combat of this precursor, as he never failed to defend a linguistic consideration of signs, acknowledging them the functionality of any linguistic system. "Language is not just a means of communication between minds; it is, at the same time, expression and instrument of thought" [13].

Although the term bilingualism is "an expression used, especially since 1991" [14], the concept of bilingual education in the case of the deaf goes back, at least, to Bébien. As highlighted by Berthier [8] and Bertin [14], "he [was] bilingual in the 19th century" (p. 242) and was a precursor of other fields of knowledge, especially linguistics [14].

The language of deaf-mutes should be used "and teachers

On page 14, Bébien [13] describes the characters linked by the hand and shows how to write the different configurations that the hands could have (Plate II; Figure 3). "The hand is the main instrument of mimic language [...] with or even without the junction with the physiognomy" [13]. Bébien already reinforced facial expressions as equally constituents of mimography. On page 16, the author explains the characters that refer to the different parts of the body. On page 17, he shows the physiognomic points. On page 20, Bébien clarifies the combination of elementary signs for mimographic writing.



Figure 3. Plate II from Bébien's book.

Plate 3 [13] shows examples of mimography in which we realize (Figure 4) that the work was not only intended to highlight the importance of sign language from a cultural and pedagogical point of view. If itself had limited yourself to these aspects, it would have been important. However, according to the authors cited here [2, 4, 12, 18], Bébien [13] presents us with an in-depth study of the language. To what extent do your conclusions differ and/or approach the studies that Linguistics would present in the following century? A question that we still need to understand better.

Starting on page 20, Bébien [13] shows how to list the different plates for using mime; to record speech, read and express oneself with the language. For example, on page 23 [13] he explains that F3 in Column B (Figure 4) is the writing of the sign that names God.



Figure 4. Plate 3 of Bébien's book.

Bébien [13] presents documents attached to the book entitled Excerpts from various reports made to the Board of Directors of the deaf and mute in Paris, on the Instruction Manual for the Deaf and Mute (p. 39). The first excerpt reproduces a letter he addresses to the members of the Board of Directors and the Council for Improvement of the Royal Institute of the Deaf and Mute in Paris. In this letter, he points out the obstacles to the instruction of the deaf-mute as it was carried out at the INSMP: "defect of the method, or at least the adoption of a fixed and uniform standard" (p. 30); "absence of a regular system of signs" (p. 30); "lack of means of study for students" (p. 31). He assumes that there was, from the commission, the expectation that he would outline the rules of mimicry, a difficult task to carry out. Yet, it was necessary since it involved systematize mimicry in order to create a system of signs.

Bébien [13] presents another excerpt from the report made to the INSMP Board of Directors by Baron de Gérando⁹, in 1817; therefore, prior to the publication of his book. In the

9 Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1772-1841) was a philosopher, anthropologist, theoretician of mutual education. He also served as Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior, Councilor of State of France and President of the Paris Institute for the Deaf Board of Directors from 1829 to 1841. In this last year there was a major reform of the central administration which established an advisory commission to replace the board of directors. This board, created in 1800, was ubiquitous in the affairs of the Institute, including the educational field, in a context of indifference from the central administration [5].

document, professor Gérando – a reference in education at the time and president of the Council – assessed Bébien's intentions and the need for him to receive support from the INSMP to advance in research and publications on mimic language.

Mr. Bébien had already demonstrated, in an essay on the deaf-mute and on natural language published in 1817, the in-depth study he had made on the theory of languages and the methods employed for the instruction of the deaf-mute. Appointed soon to the duties of repeater (and later, censor of studies at the Paris establishment), he showed the most distinguished talent, and it must be said that the Abbot Sicard had not found any collaborator who had better captured his thoughts and who, by applying his method, had perfected the details. His praise of the abbot of L'Épée achieved deserved success [14].

There was a claim that Bébien studied sign language before 1825, which was recognized by both Berthier and Gérando. Nonetheless, in a period prior to the publication of *Mimographie* [13], in the INSMP there was a series of tensions involving the conceptions of deaf education. Bébien, disgusted, resigned in 1821. He challenged the precarious conditions of student care and administrative problems, even reaching a physical confrontation with Professor Paulmier in that same year [4]. In 1830, after a crisis, the students requested the return of Bébien and carried out a movement that, for the administration, had been instigated by deaf teachers. Cantin and Cantin [12] ensure that the French deaf movements remember this revolt, noting that students reacted to the contempt of teachers, especially those who were convinced that “deaf-mutes could never learn as well as a four-year-old speaking child” (p. 97).

Most certainly, the presentation of the annexes named “excerpts” was a strategy to show that their work and competence were recognized, even by their critics. Thus, it's important to ask: “why did knowledge built in the 19th century – as far as we know from the experiences of deaf and deaf teachers – not deserve the attention of contemporary researchers, or prior to Stokoe?” [6]. Sacks [3] asserted that Bébien “realized that sign language had its own grammar (thus, it did not need the foreign and imported French grammar)” (p. 87). He also stated that the attempt to compile a “Mimography” (p. 87) based on the decomposition of signs was not successful and that “there was no correct identification of the true (‘phonemic’) elements of sign language” (p. 87).

In this same publication, Sacks [3] quoted the anthropologist EB. Tylor [18], a friend of the deaf and fluent in sign language who, in 1870, revealed interesting aspects that he identified in sign language, “and could have started a real linguistic study of this language if this enterprise had not been annihilated, as well as all fair evaluations of sign languages, by the Milan conference of 1880” [3]. In 1998, Kyle and Woll [19] noted that “Tylor was deeply familiar with the grammar of sign language, to the point of making it clear that ‘linguists have only been rediscovering it in the last ten years’” [3].

Aguiar and Chaibue [2] state that the writing of signs proposed by Bébien “has many similarities with the notation system proposed by Stokoe in 1960”. The latter knew of the existence of French notation but did not consider it an antecedent of its own. In 1960, Stokoe considered Bébien sign writing an “ingenious attempt to design a writing system for a natural sign language” [1].

In 1832, Bébien was chosen to head the Rouen Institute for the Deaf and Mute. In 1834, he returned to Guadeloupe.

6. For Not Forgetting a Cultural and Political Heritage of the Deaf

Before Stokoe's important 1960 work, there were already arguments in favor of sign languages and studies carried out by deaf and deaf teachers, but this fact is not widespread. It can be assumed that Bébien's departure from the INSMP and the recommendations of the congresses for the education of the deaf have contributed to oblivion.

About the congresses, the Universal Congress to Improve the Luck of the Blind and Deaf-Mute [20], held in Paris in 1878, accepted, albeit modestly, the need to conserve “the use of natural mime as an aid to teaching, as the first means of communication between teacher and student” [20]. Still, in Milan, 1880, there was a second Congress with an inexpressive presence of deaf people and massive participation of oralization enthusiasts¹⁰. For Sacks [3], the participation of Alexander Graham Bell, famous inventor and producer of communication machines, was decisive. His family was dedicated to teaching utterances and activities to correct speech impediments [21]. Deaf teachers who used sign languages in teaching were barred from participating in the 1880 Congress [3].

In both congresses participated Eugène Pereire – son of Isaac Pereire and grandson of Jacob Pereire – who defended the oralist perspective of the family. They were great industrialists and businessmen of France's second imperial period, whose businesses involved banking, chemical industry, shipping, railways, among others. Entrepreneurs were interested in the debate on deafness because they considered that deaf people had an interesting profile to take on jobs [6].

As W. Benjamin said [22], the trails of the past cannot be ignored. Thus, we value the narratives of Berthier [7] and those of Bébien, carried out in 1825, or about Bébien [5]. Even though History appropriates “the image(s) of the past, we dare to seek them in the expressions of the deaf” [6]. With Benjamin, we refute the policy of forgetting, especially when we are motivated in a “struggle for the transformation of the present” [23].

10 In Rodrigues [27], there are more aspects about the International Congress of 1878 (Paris), the French National Congress of 1879 (Lyon) and the International Congress of 1880 (Milan), presented in the research, to analyse the constitution process of the education of the deaf from a study of the Congress of the Deaf of Paris (1900).

Bébian, Berthier and companions faced an adverse context. Bébian's work was written before the implementation of Itard's medical-pedagogical proposal for all INSMP students, especially from 1829 onwards.

Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1774-1838) – responsible for researching the situation of Victor de Aveyron, the so-called wild boy – is considered the founder of otology. He published views on the intellectual faculties and moral qualities of the deaf. Oralism, as a proposal for training deaf students, has gained new adherents because of its articulated speech experiments, convincing many colleagues about the possibility of curing deafness [24]. Teachers who used sign language and not oralization suffered a reduction in their functions [11]. Bébian's theoretical and practical efforts to spread sign language had limitations in the linguistic aspect, but it must be admitted that it was not politically accepted [3].

With the changes in the educational conception and reception of the deaf in Europe and North America, deaf teachers and deaf sign language users may have believed that these achievements were definitive. However, the “golden age of deaf education” [25] did not last long. In 1850, in the US, about 50% of deaf teachers were deaf; after the Milan Congress of 1880, the proportion dropped to 25% and, in 1960, to 12% [3].

Considering the research and statements of Sacks [3], Quartararo [16], Aguiar and Chaibue [2], Bertin [5], as well as Cantin and Cantin [12], a question remains: why do people still consider that sign languages were only recognized in the 20th century? Why do we not consider what deaf researchers such as Ferdinand Berthier and/or their main teachers and allies, such as Bébian, or even E. B. Tylor [3] have argued? Were these tracks invisible? There seem to be a limit to the emergence of sign language only after Stokoe.

When Bébian [13], Berthier [8] and Vigotski [9] studied mimic language – of gestures, of deaf-mutes, of action, among other names with which it was referenced – the Linguistics field did not yet exist, even though the study of languages pre-existed Saussure.

Perhaps we could consider Stokoe's studies as a response to the appeal of Professor Berthier [8]: “Who knows if this beneficial innovation will not be adopted sooner or later by other schools in France and abroad? The triumph of logic is inevitable in a more or less near future”.

We understand that knowledge production is a collaborative task. Although there are concerns about the chronology of ideas and the indication of milestones, we insist on emphasizing that political, cultural and identity aspects were already present in the research and activism of deaf scholars and their allies, since the 18th century.

7. Conclusion

Several authors confirmed that there is little recognition of the work of Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébian [2, 4, 12, 18, among others] In view of their conclusions, we argue in this paper how important it is to emphasize the recognition that

sign languages received prior to the work of Stokoe [1].

It is possible to conclude that, throughout history, the linguistic rights of the deaf alternate from sign languages to oralism, back to sign languages again. Nowadays, it is understood that most deaf people have sign language as their first language, but advances in biotechnology facilitate the conjunction of signs with speech, which becomes a communicative option.

Let us remember, so that it does not fall into oblivion, the heritage of a struggle that is not contemporary. The studies of Bébian [13], Berthier [8], and others are part of the cultural heritage of the deaf. The new generations can benefit from this remembrance when they notice that, in other times, in contexts that were also difficult and challenging to guarantee the rights of the deaf, it was possible to make many advances. For a long time, researchers ignored sign languages and it was necessary to wait for Stokoe, so that the deaf and their allies would know that among us there were those who duly valued them. Was there no repercussion of Bébian's studies among other deaf and deaf teachers from the 19th and early 20th century? For what reasons? In the period between the studies of Bébian [13] and Stokoe [1] were there other similar studies? If deaf education in countries like the United States is secular, were there no sign language studies or sign writing initiatives before 1960? Stokoe's research is a landmark in contemporary sign language studies, but its important predecessors cannot be ignored.

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