

The “Tip of the Fingers” phenomenon in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras): a study about lexical retrieval in deaf people



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Introduction

The tip of the fingers (TOF) phenomenon mirrors the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon in oral languages (Brown and McNeill, 1966). This phenomenon occurs when there is momentary forgetfulness of known words and the feeling that this word is about to be recovered. It offers clues about language processing as the suggestion of independent process stages in lexical retrieval. Few studies have been carried out on this phenomenon in sign languages (Thompson et al., 2005).

Aims:

- To analyze and discuss the lexical retrieval in deaf signers using Brazilian Sign Language (Libras);
- To verify whether the “tip of the fingers” (TOF) phenomenon occurs in Libras;
- To describe the phonological aspects in the phenomenon occurrence.

Methods

- Participants: 34 deaf signers (over 18 years old).
- Phenomenon elicitation: picture naming of lexical-signs.
- Proper names:

44 famous faces

25 cities or countries

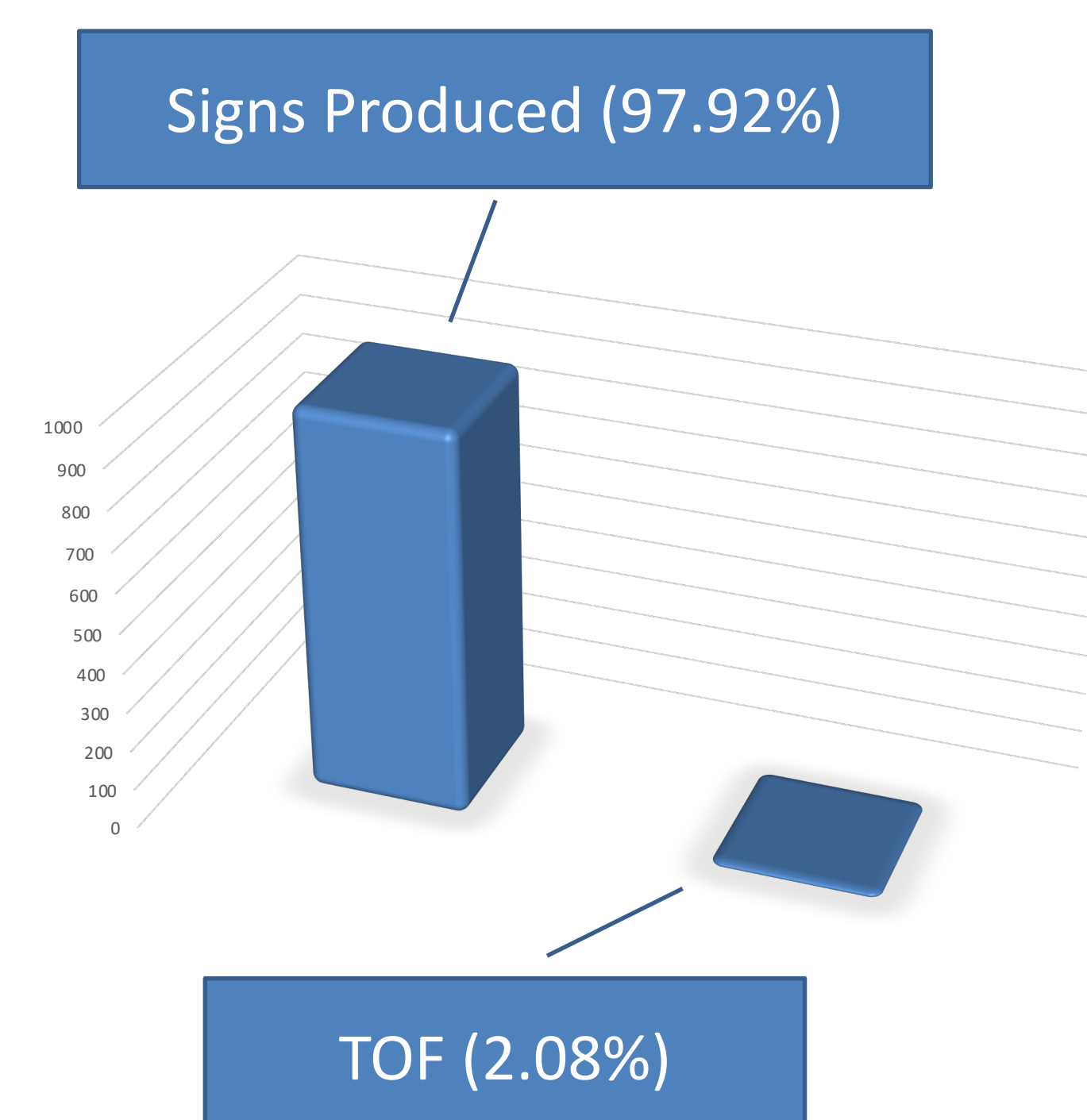


- Participant knows the sign.
- Participant doesn't know the sign or doesn't recognize the picture.
- TOF

Picture

Response

Results



Phonological parameters	Recovered during TOF (%)
Number of Hands	90%
Space	85%
Location	70%
Handshape	65%
Orientation	50%
Movement	35%

Example of TOF occurrence:

The sign ISTAMBUL in Libras



How it was recovered during TOF



Conclusion

The TOF phenomenon was observed in Libras strengthening the approach of independent process stages of lexical retrieval in sign language. The results corroborate the conclusion of Thompson et al. (2005) that movement is the least recovered parameter at the time of TOF. This fact may indicate that the parameters localization, handshape and orientation (more retrieved while in TOF state) constitute the onset of the syllabic structure of the sign.

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