

ABSTR ACT

Unlike the oral languages, specially the Indo-European ones which express the temporal distinction in terms of verbal inflection, LIBRAS (the Brazilian Sign Language) is usually cited as example of a system in which there is not inflection for this category, which is denoted through the use of time adverbs. This work aimed at evaluating this question based on a semantic and pragmatic description of the data. Such description points to an analysis in which not only the adverbs are part of the temporal reference, but also many other factors such as the aspect of the sentences, the different discourse situations, the conversational implicatures arising from such situations, as well as the rules of inferences and, also, the possibility of interpretation of “quantization” of nominal phrases. Thus, the theoretical support taken from pragmatics came mainly from the works of Roberts (1995) and Levinson (2000), and as regards semantics, it came more specifically from the area of aspect, in particular the researches of Godoy (1992), Lin (2002) and Verkuyl (1993).

This analysis demonstrated that the temporal/aspectual reference, in LIBRAS, is expressed in a dynamic way through the linguistic structure. Thus, the time may be denoted by specific temporal operators, by the semantic inflection given by the *aktionsart* of the verbs and by generalized conversational implicatures. Concerning the aspect, it is expressed through the inflectional organization of the linguistic system plus the interpretation of the syntactic and semantic composition of the utterances, in interaction with pragmatical principles. With regard to temporality, it is possible to synthesize the organization of the system as follows: the future time frame is analysed as a stereotyped structure, with the use of a specific temporal operator; the past time frame is observed by the occurrence of both the operator and the lexical value of the verbs; the present time frame is given by default, due to the lack of past and future marks.

KEY-WORDS: LIBRAS, time, aspect, Semantics, Pragmatics.