

The variability of word order in the acquisition of Brazilian Sign Language



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

Introduction

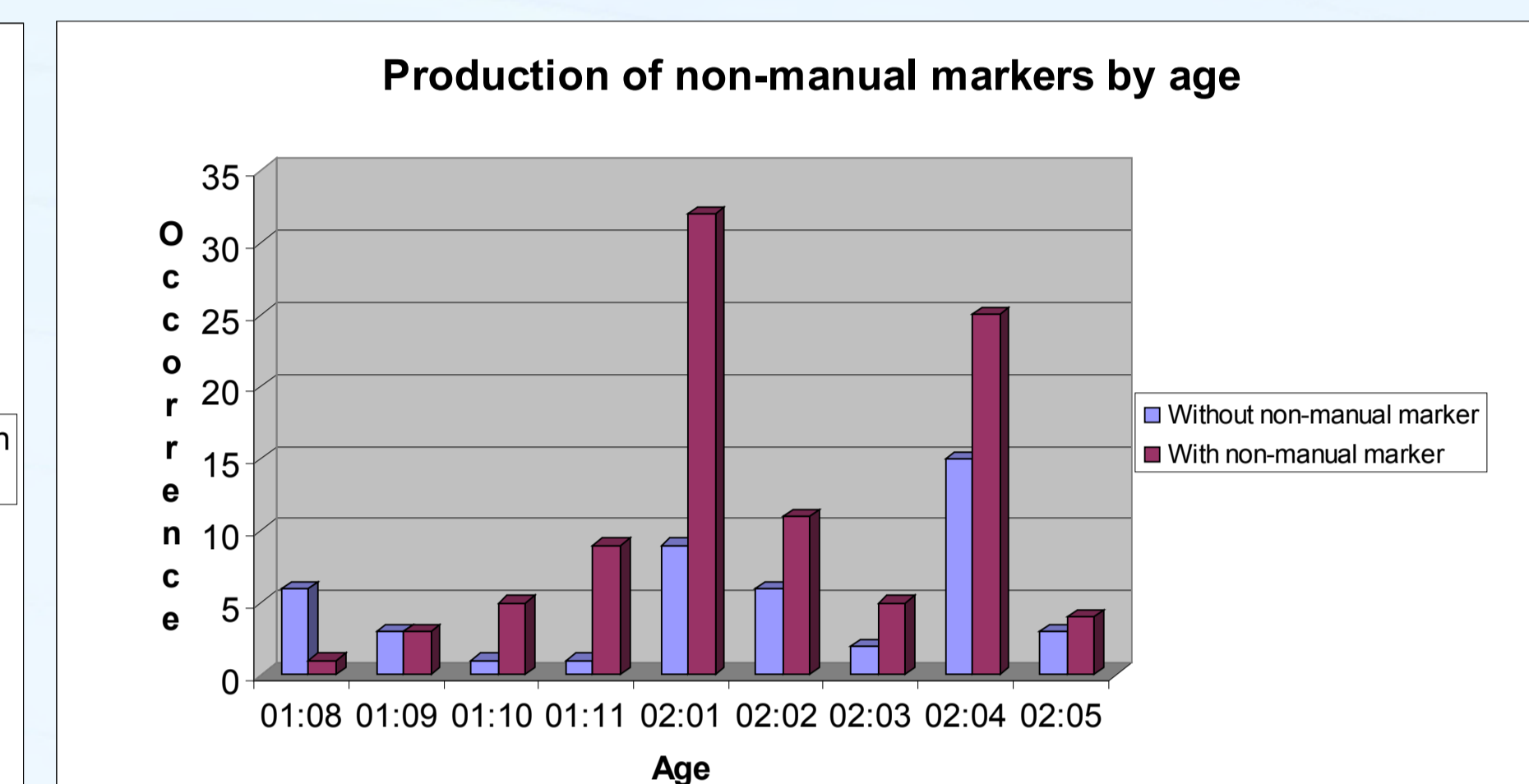
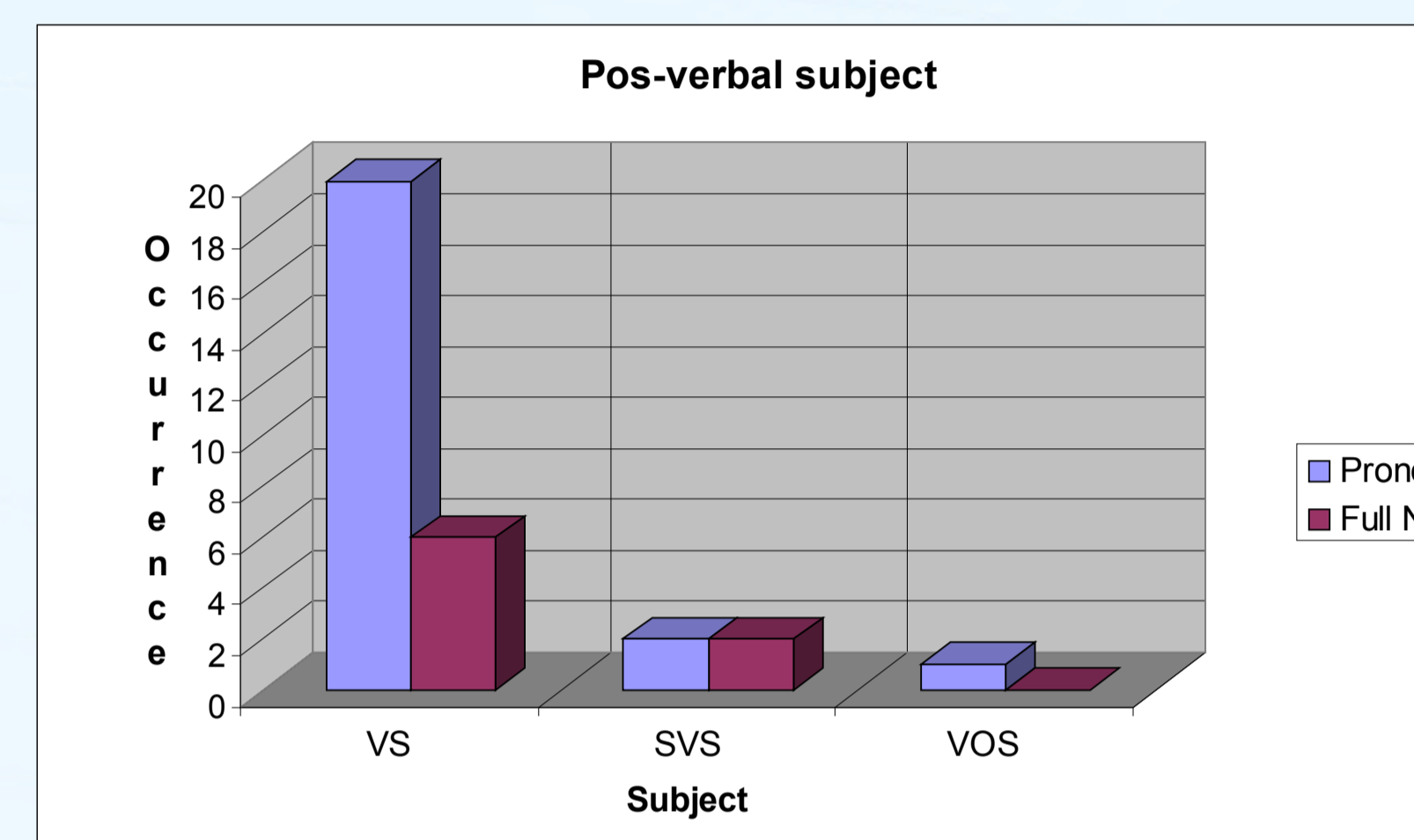
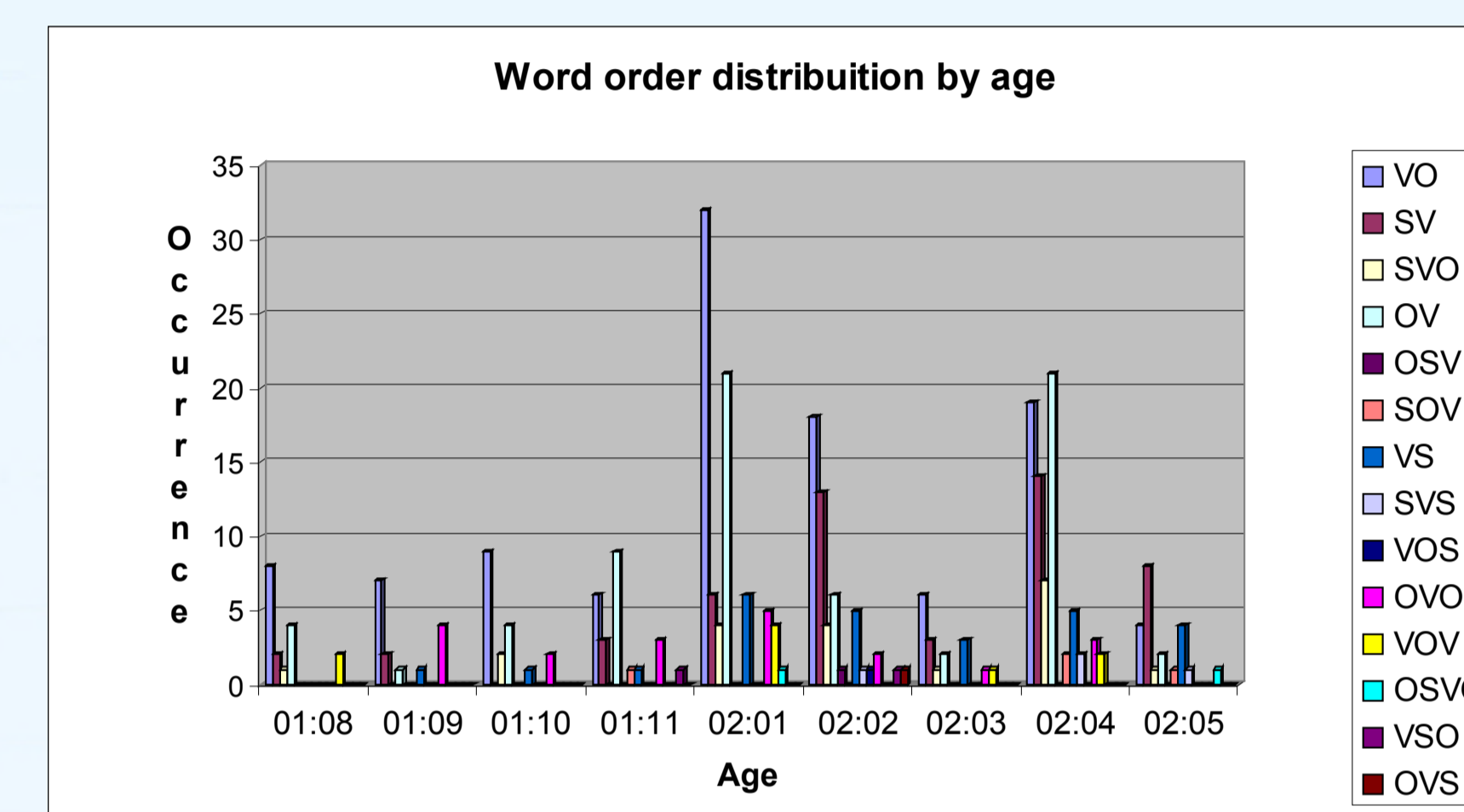
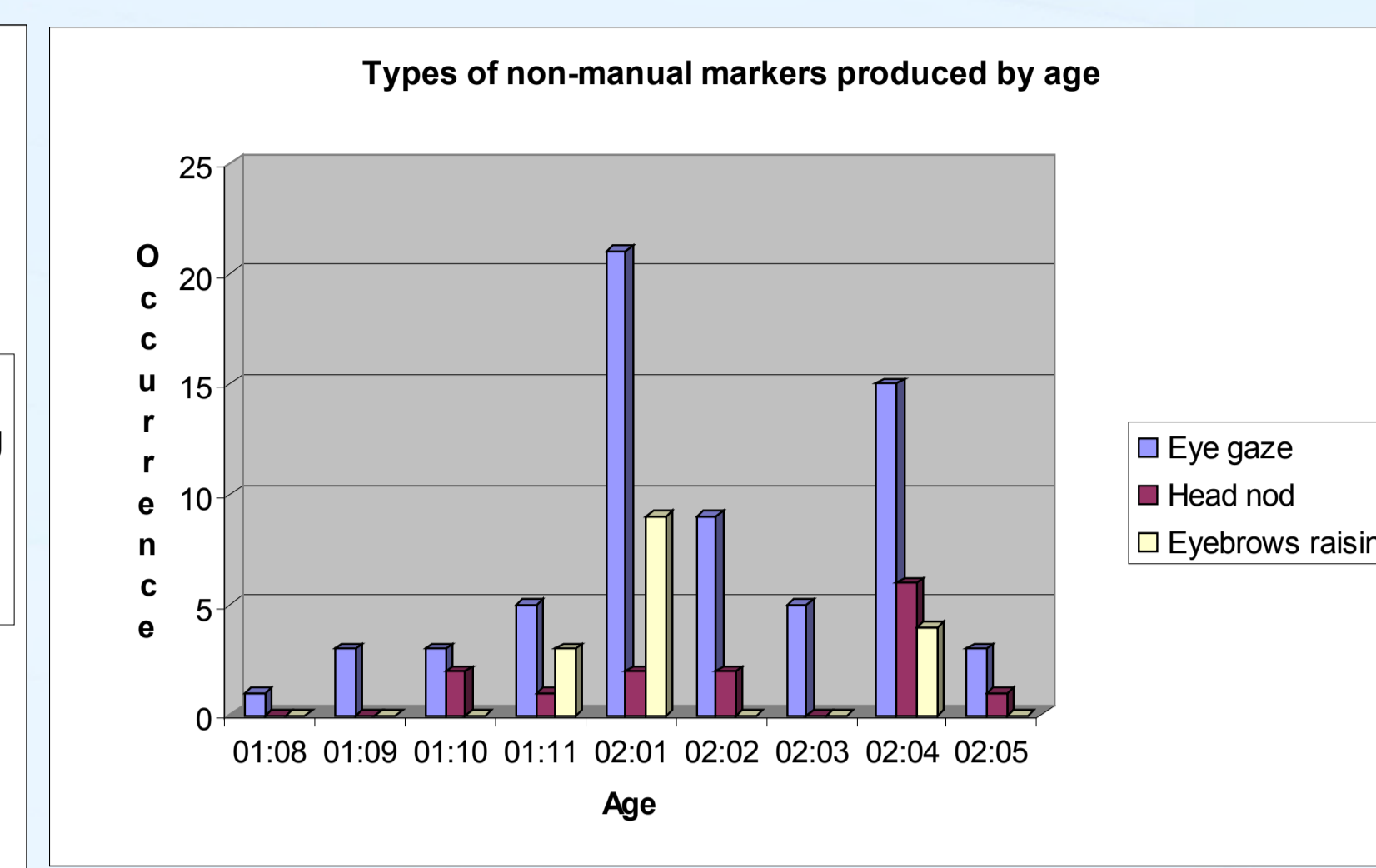
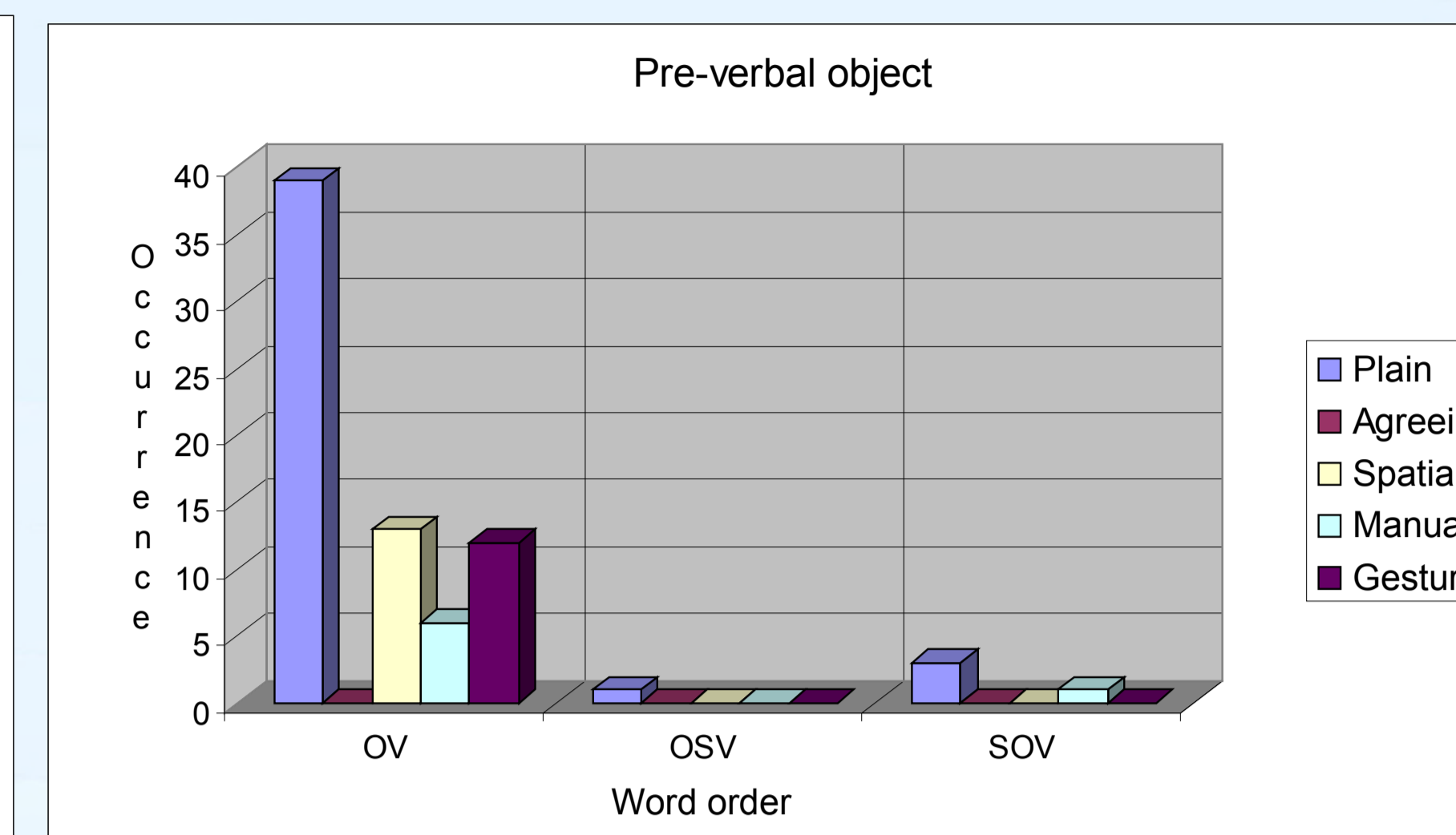
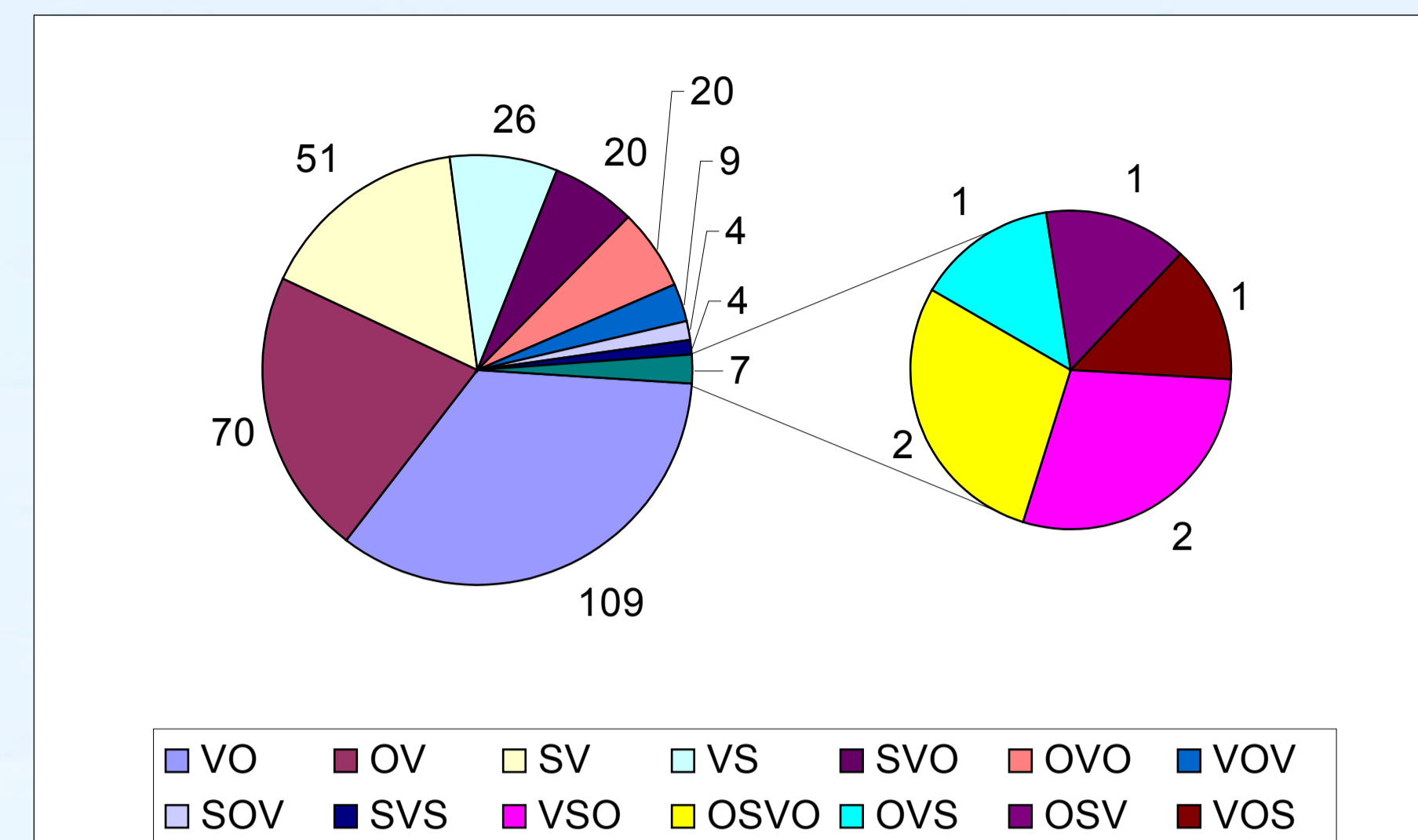
This article aims to show the results of a case study about the variability of word order in the acquisition of Brazilian Sign Language (LSB). It is well known that the most basic word order in this language is SVO (subject-verb-object). However, there are other ways of ordering that are derived from the movement of certain elements licensed in specific linguistic contexts.

Word order	Context
SVO	Basic order
OSV	Agreeing verbs, manual verbs, topic and focus constructions associated with non-manual markers
SOV	Agreeing verbs, manual verbs, topic and focus constructions associated with non-manual markers
VOS	Contrastive focus

Methodology

For this case study we have analyzed data from a deaf child, born from deaf parents, observed by means of a longitudinal study in early stage of language development, including the period from 1:8 to 2:5 years old. The choice for this kind of child was motivated by the fact that he was in contact with the LSB since birth, which means LSB is his first language or his natural language. Thus, the acquisition of sign language occurs spontaneously and it is through it that the child will have his first contacts with the world around him. The recordings were performed initially once a week with one hour duration in average. Some sessions occurred with a greater period, with an interval of fifteen days. The sessions occurred in a familiar environment to the child, such as at home, at school, interacting linguistically with his parents or with the person who made the film (in this case a deaf person fluent in LSB).

Data Analysis



Quantitative Analysis

- Total sessions analysed: 24
- Total verbs produced: 711
- Verbs with null arguments: 380
- Interrogative: 11
- Verbs analysed: 320

Qualitative Analysis

- **Topic constructions:**
 - Base-generated topic;
 - Moved topic;
 - More than a topic per sentence;
 - use of non-manual markers;
 - overt/null subject;
 - Types of verbs produced.
- **Focus constructions:**
 - focus types produced;
 - context production;
 - use of non-manual markers.

Conclusions

The variability found in the child data analysis is not random and is related mainly to two phenomena found in languages: the constructions with topic and focus. These structures appear in the data of this child since the beginning of language acquisition, although there is inconsistency in the use of non manual markers associated with these phenomena. Sometimes, the child produced sentences with the appropriate non manual marker for each construction but in other moments, the child produced sentences with an inappropriate or without a non manual marker for a determinate construction. The deaf child showed evidence of the occurrence of all possible types of topic and focus in LSB (Lillo-Martin & Quadros, 2005). In the child data analysis, it was possible to identify the production of sentences with varied orders, according to the adult language standard. The SOV and OSV orders were observed in contexts of topic constructions, and also with focus of information and focus of emphasis. On the other hand, the order VOS was observed in cases of contrastive focus. These results show that there is a similarity between the data of deaf children with the data of hearing children. It also indicates no effect of modality in language acquisition.

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