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Investigating Handedness Effects on Perception in British Sign Language (BSL)

The main articulators in sign languages are the hands - one being used predominantly over the other, depending on handedness. This raises issues such as the extent of integration of body specificity in language use. Our study used a picture-sign matching task to explore the effects of handedness on perception in BSL. Participants were presented with a picture of an object, followed by a clip of a sign and asked to decide as quickly as possible whether the sign matched the picture. Two left-handed and two right-handed signers were used, and signs were divided into four categories where handedness plays different roles in sign production. We expect handedness-congruent signers to be understood faster and more accurately and for 'symmetrical' signs to be perceived faster than those where one hand is dominant. However, since right-handers are the majority in the signing population, can the left-handed minority understand them just as easily?