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# Repetition of signs according to language background
# in French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB)
# A comparative analysis between Native, Near-Native and Late Signers

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This study aims to compare the repetition of signs in deaf Native (N), Near-Native (NN) and Late (L) signers of French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB). The corpus consists of semi-interactive excerpts (2min/signer, 3,462 signs (glosses) and 950 occurrences of repetitions) of 12 signers aged around 34 (4 N, 4 NN and 4 L) from unprepared speech between two deaf participants (Meurant 2015). The criteria used to classify the signers into the three groups are the parents' status (deaf/hearing), the age of LSFB acquisition and the type of education. The goal of this study is to investigate the commonly held belief that N are more fluent than NN or L. In our view, (dis)fluency results from the combination of many independent markers (so-called "fluencemes": e.g. pauses, truncations, palm-ups) which may contribute either positively or negatively to the fluency of a discourse, depending on their context of occurrence (Götz 2013). Following Tannen (2007), we understand repetition as an "interpersonal involvement strategy" working at different levels (production, comprehension, connection, interaction), and depending on cultural fluency and individual style. We thus consider repetitions as constituting one class of fluencemes, and in this paper we examine the influence of signer profiles on their (1) frequency, (2) form, (3) combination with other fluencemes, and (4) function.

We built an annotation protocol to study the use of repetition from more local instances (at sign level) to broader ones (at discourse level) (Notarrigo et al. 2016), including annotations for forms (RC: contiguous, RN: non-contiguous, RNf: framing), functions within domains (G: grammatical, S: semantic, P: pragmatic), and parts of speech. A number of other fluencemes were also annotated in ELAN (Crible, Grosman, Dumont & Notarrigo 2015). Then, the data was statistically analysed (Student T test, correlation).

Our results suggest that N, NN and L display broadly similar cultural fluency with individual variations. They present the same general patterns in their use of repetition in terms of type of signs affected by the repetition, frequency (ratio of non-repeated/repeated signs) and functions (ratio of G/S/P domains and shared functions within these domains). Nevertheless, there are some specific group characteristics. N are significantly faster than NN and L (Notarrigo and Meurant 2015) without any correlation with repetition. There is a slight tendency for N to produce more repetitions made of several different signs. Some NN and L present a different profile from N for the form of repetition (ratio of RC/RN/RNf). Within the G domain, the ratio of RNf decreases progressively between N, NN and L while the ratio of RC increases. Besides, no correlations were found between the use of repetition and the use of other fluencemes, except for (1) a positive correlation between truncations and RNf and (2) a negative correlation between palm-ups and the ratio of repeated signs. Even if N produce fewer repetitions surrounded by other fluencemes, the three groups produce the same amount of repetitions for word search purpose or to repair an hesitation (maximum frequency: 2/min).

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