Sign Language And Interpreter Aptitude: A Longitudinal Study
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Outline of the Problem:
Most interpreters are late learners of BSL (18+ L2M2)
Many arrive in undergraduate programmes needing language tuition
Language learning and interpreter aptitude are often conflated
We need to identify how to effectively use resources

Scope of the current study:
4 year study
Catches snapshots of learning
Gives us information about before and after training
Identifies linguistic and cognitive skills required for L2M2 learning and interpreting
Enables the development of a screening test battery

Participants:
Cohort 1 - interpreters in a vocational training setting
Cohort 2 - undergraduates
Cohort 3 - expert interpreters (graduates, having achieved full professional status, ≤10 years experience)
Within normal range for Digit Span and Matrix Reasoning

Language tests:
L1 English reading accuracy (Vernon-Warden)
L2 Non-Sign repetition task (phonological and phonological WM)

Study 1: Cohort 1 Phonological sensitivity
Errors handshape > movement > location (p < 0.001)
handshape: substitution (p < 0.001)
internal movement: deletion = addition
markedness does not affect errors
correlation between phonological complexity and deletion (F(1,126) = 27.319, p = .000)

Summary: Concur with other evidence (Orfanidou et al, Mann et al) showing this is an artifact of modality not language

Further data and analysis:
Patterns - Visual acuity
Connections - Set shifting
PASAT - Auditory information processing speed and flexibility
Flanker - Distractibility
BIS - Risk taking

Study 2: Cohort 2 Language Aptitude
Positive correlations between:
MLAT1 and AbB* (p = 0.020, r = 0.832)
MLAT1 and IntA† (p = 0.025, r = 0.812)
MLAT total and AbB* (p = 0.048, r = 0.734)
MLAT total and IntA† (p = 0.020, r = 0.831)

Summary: MLAT appears to predict semester two (*Ab initio B) and semester 3 (†Intermediate A) BSL exam results

Further language tests:
Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT)
I Number learning (WM)
II Phonetic script (phonetic coding)
III Spelling clues (phonetic coding)
IV Words in sentences (grammatical sensitivity)
V Paired associates (rote learning)

What next?
Cohort 2 continue testing and comparing scores with exam results
understanding learning trajectory of BSL
differentiating between language learning and interpreting learning

Cohorts 2&3 comparing scores of interpreters in training with expert interpreters

Summary: Understand the difference between prerequisites and professionally developed skills

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