

Sign Language and the Bilingual Mind

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Studies of naturally occurring signed languages used in Deaf communities have greatly enriched our understanding of the human capacity for language. Recent studies have begun to examine bilingualism in the context of deaf and hearing users of signed languages. These studies are important because they hold the potential to assess the role of language modality in shaping the bilingual mind. In this talk we review some emerging findings from this new literature and critically evaluate recent claims related to language transfer and executive function in ASL-English bilinguals. We argue that several important factors inherent in multi-modal bilingualism have not been adequately addressed and the desire to fit these new findings within existing models that have been developed for spoken language bilingualism may be premature.