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The iconicity-arbitrariness asymmetry: A gradient of perceived iconicity in Uruguayan Sign Language for nonsigners

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Abstract

The present study extends the interest in iconicity, a fundamental property of language, to the understudied Uruguayan Sign Language (LSU). We investigated iconicity judgments of LSU lexical items for 127 Uruguayan Spanish naïve nonsigners, testing predictions derived from a theoretical continuum of iconicity, classified with the assistance of IA tools – an approach supervised by experts. The large size of the sample compensated for the absence of a power calculation, as it yields robust estimates and allows for subgroup explorations if needed. Results revealed a graded pattern of transparency: feature-based and pantomimic iconicity elicited the highest rates of iconic judgments, followed by emblematic iconicity, with diagrammatic mappings showing markedly low transparency. These findings confirm that iconicity is a potent but selective predictor of perceived iconicity across language modalities, with its effectiveness contingent on the specific semiotic strategy and the perceptual accessibility of the form-meaning link to the uninitiated observer.