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Influence of predicate sense on sign order: Intensional and extensional verbs.

(collaborative work by Rachel Sutton-Spence, Ronice Quadros de Mueller, and Donna Jo Napoli)

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Abstract:

We present evidence for the influence of semantics on the order of subject, object, and verb in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) sentences. While some have argued for a prevailing pattern of SVO in Libras, we find a strong tendency for this order in sentences that do not presuppose the existence of the verb's object, but not in sentences that do, which, instead, favor SOV. These findings are coherent with those of a recent study on gesture. We argue that the variable influence of the relevant predicates is particularly salient in sign languages, due to the iconic nature of the visual modality.