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Letters

Computer skills: Choosing sides

I propose another test to challenge the "wrongheaded" assumption regarding the division of duties and capabilities between brain hemispheres ("Left brain reigns over sign language," SN:8/2/86,p.7). Why not consider computer programming skills in much the same way that sign language was studied?

Computer programming languages have components of a syntactical and/or grammatical nature not unlike spoken and written "human" language. However, the symbols and references contained in programs can only be interpreted in a mathematical context. I have often read that mathematics is another of the right hemisphere's domains of expertise, related as it is to spatial relations, geometry and the like. In cases of separation of brain hemispheres, I wonder what test results would indi-

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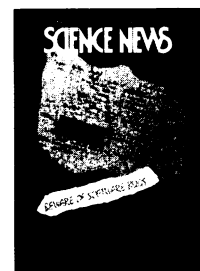
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Cover: The first computer "bug," discovered in 1945 and preserved in Navy records, may have been this moth, which jammed a relay in the Navy's electromechanical Mark II computer. Since then, "debugging" has become an unavoidable part of using computers and computer programs. Finding errors in complex computer programs is particularly difficult. This raises questions about how to prevent catastrophic failures in software that controls such critical functions as banking transactions, space shuttle launches and nuclear missile firings. (Photo courtesy of Naval Surface Weapons Center)



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cate for a subject's ability to read/write/interpret computer programs (given that the subject was "fluent" in the use of a programming language before the separation). Logically, there should be consistency between such results and those reported for sign language.

Andy Watson
Engineer/programmer
Englewood, Colo.

No scientific desert here

Every time I read an article about the Continuous Electron Beam Accelerator Facility (CEBAF), planned for construction in Newport

News, Va., it pains me to read that "no university is located nearby" ("Single-File Electrons," SN:8/9/86,p.90). My graduate school alma mater, Old Dominion University, one of Virginia's finest state universities, is only 30 minutes away by car.

While I was completing a master's degree in physics at Old Dominion in Norfolk, I conducted part of my thesis research at the CEBAF site itself, which used to be the Space Radiations Effects Laboratory (SREL) run by NASA (NASA's Langley Research Center is practically next door). SREL's linear electron accelerator had an energy range of 3 to 10 MeV. Southeastern Virginia is certainly not the scientific desert that certain "Ivy Leaguers" will have us believe.

Marcia F. Bartusiak
Norfolk, Va.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1986

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