NeuroImage 46 (2009) 500–504

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

NeuroImage

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ynimg

A mirror reflection of a hand modulates stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity

Wataru Tominaga [a], Jun Matsubayashi [a], Yoichiro Deguchi [a], Chihiro Minami [a], Takahiro Kinai [a], Megumi Nakamura [a], Takashi Nagamine [b,1], Masao Matsuhashi [b], Tatsuya Mima [b], Hidenao Fukuyama [b], Akira Mitani [a,*]

[a] Laboratory of Neurorehabilitation, Department of Human Health Sciences, Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University, 53 Kawaracho, Syogoin, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8507, Japan
[b] Human Brain Research Center, Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8507, Japan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 4 December 2008
Revised 7 February 2009
Accepted 16 February 2009
Available online 26 February 2009

ABSTRACT

Mirror therapy is one of the promising rehabilitation therapeutic interventions but the neural basis of the therapeutic effect remains unknown. It has been reported that the 20-Hz rhythmic activity is induced in the primary motor cortex after median nerve stimulation and the amount of the induced activity is decreased when the primary motor cortex is activated. In the present study, to elucidate the neural mechanisms underlying mirror therapy, we investigated whether the mirror reflection of a hand holding a pencil modulates the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity. Neuromagnetic brain activities were recorded from 11 healthy right-handed subjects while they were viewing their hand holding a pencil or its mirror reflection. The right median nerve was stimulated and the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity over the left rolandic cortex dominantly innervating right-hand movements was quantified. The stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity was strongly suppressed when subjects viewed the right hand holding a pencil or the mirror reflection of the left hand looking like the right hand holding a pencil, compared with when subjects viewed the left hand holding a pencil or the mirror reflection of the right hand looking like the left hand holding a pencil. These results suggest that the human left primary motor cortex is strongly activated when the subjects view not only the right hand holding a pencil but also the mirror reflection of the left hand looking like the right hand holding a pencil. This may be one of the neural mechanisms responsible for the therapeutic effect of mirror therapy.

Introduction

The neuroscience-based rehabilitation is a potent method to improve therapeutic outcome (Woldag and Hummelsheim, 2002; Sharma et al., 2006). Mirror therapy was first introduced to treat “phantom limb” pain (Ramachandran and Rogers-Ramachandran, 1996), in which amputees could feel to move the phantom limb while watching a mirror reflection of the intact hand movement and experienced pain relief after the treatment. The mirror therapy was also applied to rehabilitation of hemiparesis after stroke (Altschuler et al., 1999; Sathian et al., 2000; Stevens and Stoykov, 2003; Yavuzer et al., 2008), in which patients performed movements of the unimpaired limb while watching its mirror reflection superimposed on the position of the impaired limb and showed a significant recovery of the paretic arm movement. These reports indicate that mirror therapy is one of the promising rehabilitation therapeutic interventions; however, the neural basis of the therapeutic effect remains unknown.

Magnetoencephalographic (MEG) studies have demonstrated that the 20-Hz rhythmic activity is induced in the primary motor cortex after median nerve (MN) stimulation and modulated by various types of movements including actual movement, motor imagery and action observation. It has been shown that the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity is abolished when subjects execute actual hand movements (Salmelin and Hari, 1994), significantly suppressed when subjects imagine themselves performing the movements (Schnitzler et al., 1997) and also when subjects observe another person performing the similar hand movements (Hari et al., 1998). These authors have reported that the suppression of the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity indicates the activation of the primary motor cortex (Salmelin and Hari, 1994; Schnitzler et al., 1997; Hari et al., 1998): The strong activation of the primary motor cortex induces the strong suppression of the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity. Several studies have used it as an indicator of the functional state of the motor cortex (Järveläinen et al., 2004; Ichikawa et al., 2007).

In the present study, to make a beginning for elucidating the neural mechanisms underlying mirror therapy, we examined whether the mirror reflection of a hand modulates the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity. Because about 90% of humans are right-handed and left-hemisphere dominant for manual skills (Volkmann et al., 1998), we

* Corresponding author. Fax: +81 75 751 3913.
E-mail address: amitani@hs.med.kyoto-u.ac.jp (A. Mitani).
[1] Present address: Department of System Neuroscience, School of Medicine, Sapporo Medical University, S1W17, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 060-8556, Japan.

1053-8119/$ – see front matter
doi:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2009.02.021

focused the 20-Hz activity induced in the left hemisphere after right MN stimulation.

Materials and methods

Subjects

The experiments were carried out on 11 healthy right-handed subjects (six females, five males; age range, 19-31, mean = 25). The study was performed in conformity with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Kyoto University Graduate School and Faculty of Medicine. All subjects gave informed written consent prior to participation.

Experimental paradigm

The subject was seated comfortably in a magnetically shielded room, with both hands placed in the mirror box in front of the subject (Fig. 1). The mirror box was constructed by attaching a 25 cm by 30 cm mirror inside at an angle of 15–20° lateral to the sagittal plane. The position of the mirror box and the angle of the mirror were carefully adjusted so that the left or right hand looks like the right or left hand, respectively. The right MN was stimulated over the wrist to produce the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity. The stimuli were 0.3 ms constant-current pulses once every 1.5 s with stimulus intensities below the motor threshold to avoid a twitch of the thumb holding a pencil (2.4–4.7 mA, mean = 3.5 mA, 80% of the motor threshold in each subject).

The experiment consisted of a Rest condition and four experimental conditions (Fig. 2):

Rest: The subject rested relaxed without holding anything and looked at a point in the front wall (about 3 m away from the subject).

Right hand: The subject viewed the right hand holding a pencil through a transparent plastic (25 cm × 30 cm).

Reflected-Right hand: The subject viewed the right hand holding a pencil reflected in a mirror as the left hand holding a pencil.

Left hand: The subject viewed the left hand holding a pencil through a transparent plastic.

Reflected-Left hand: The subject viewed the left hand holding a pencil reflected in a mirror as the right hand holding a pencil.

In the experimental conditions, the subject held a pencil very softly not to produce any distinct muscle activity by holding a pencil because the muscle activity that is different from that during Rest condition would modulate the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity in the primary motor cortex (Schnitzler et al., 1997).

Cortical magnetic signals during Rest condition were first recorded to identify a sensor pair showing the strongest reactivity in each subject. Then, cortical magnetic signals were recorded during the four experimental conditions. The order of the four experimental conditions was balanced across subjects. Each condition lasted about 3 min with short intervening pauses and was performed three times.

Recording

Cortical magnetic signals were recorded with a 306-channel whole-head neuromagnetometer (Vectorview; Elekta Neuromag, Finland), which contains 204 planar gradiometers and 102 magnetometers. In this study, the data recorded from 204 planar gradiometers were used for analyses because they provide an optimal signal-to-noise ratio for superficial cortical current sources such as the pericentral mu-rhythm generators (Simões et al., 2004). The recording passband was 0.03–330 Hz and the signals were digitized at 1003 Hz and stored for off-line analysis.

Surface electromyograms (EMGs) were recorded to check the relaxation of subject's hand muscles. Pairs of cup electrodes were placed over the extensor digitorum and flexor digitorum superficialis muscles of both hands. Interelectrode distance was approximately 3 cm. The EMGs were continuously monitored during MEG measurement, and the subject was announced to relax the hands when any different muscle activity from that during Rest condition was observed on the EMGs. Vertical electrooculogram and the markers indicating the delivery of the stimuli were also recorded.

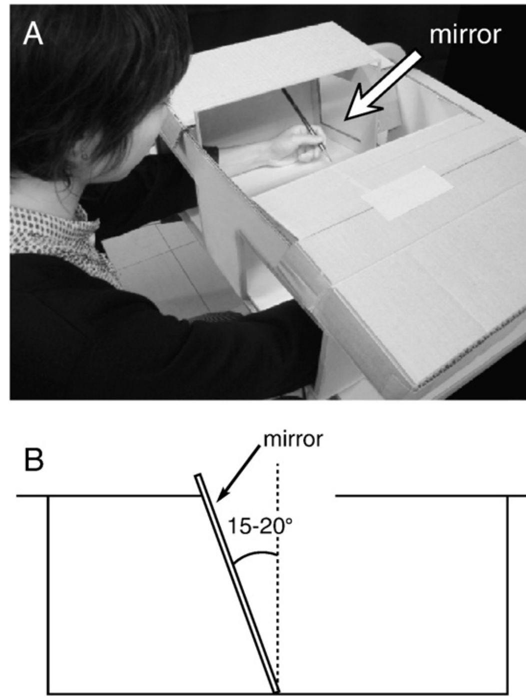

Fig. 1. The mirror box. (A) The subject placed both hands in the box and viewed one hand holding a pencil through an opening in the top of the box. The unnecessary visual input of hands was prevented by covering them with sliding boards on the top of the box. In this figure, the subject views the mirror reflection of her right hand looking like her left hand holding a pencil. When the subject views her left hand directly, a transparent plastic is placed instead of the mirror. (B) A cross-section showing the interior of the mirror box.

Data analysis

The data analysis was in the same principle as described in our previous study (Ichikawa et al., 2007). MEG epochs from 0.1 s before the onset of stimulus to 1.4 s after the onset of stimulus were collected. Each epoch was inspected visually, and all epochs coinciding with significant EMGs, blinks or eye movements were excluded from the data analysis. The temporal spectral evolution (TSE) method (Salmelin and Hari, 1994; Nagamine et al., 1996) was employed to calculate the average levels of 20-Hz activity as a function of time with respect to MN stimuli. The continuous MEG signals were bandpass-filtered through 18–23 Hz, and then rectified and averaged with respect to the onset of stimulus and smoothed with a 15-Hz low-pass filter. Then the values of root-mean-square of the TSE signals from the gradiometer pair measuring two orthogonal derivatives of the magnetic field at the location were calculated to express the 20-Hz activity levels as TSE curves. Because the MEG signals from planar gradiometers are strongest when the sensors are located just above cortical current sources, the data from the sensor pair showing the strongest TSE response were used to evaluate the stimulus-induced 20-Hz activity levels (Salenius et al., 1997; Schnitzler et al., 1997; Tamura et al., 2005; Ichikawa et al., 2007). The values of root-mean-square of the TSE levels from the two orthogonal gradiometers denoted as pair were also used to express the mean TSE levels in a time window from 0.2 to 0.7 s after stimulation and the mean values were compared among the conditions with a two-way repeated measures ANOVA using "holding"