

## **The acquisition of spatial expressions by blind children**

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Even if spatial representations are built upon all senses, vision seems to play an important role in the perception of our environment (Millar 1994). Nevertheless, it has been shown that blind people have a spatial representation just as detailed as sighted people, even if they use other information and it contains different features. From the earliest age, blind children learn to compensate for their lacking vision by taking advantage of their auditive and tactile senses. They are merely delayed with respect to their spatial experiences due to their restricted exploration behavior (Wheeler et al. 1997).

The language acquisition process of blind children seems to differ only in minor aspects from that of sighted children, especially if caregivers are sensitized for their children's particular verbal input (more descriptions and explanations) which often has to be complemented by touch (Perez-Pereira 2014, Perez-Pereira & Conti-Ramsden 1999). However, the question arises how blind children acquire spatial expressions and if they are used in the correct context.

In this longitudinal case-study one blind and one sighted child were observed in a semi-structured caregiver-child interaction from 1;8 to 2;9 years of age in order to analyze a) the beginning of spatial language, b) the quantity of their spatial expressions and finally c) the error-rate. The data are complemented by a small-scale cross-sectional study (3 blind vs. 3 sighted children) at the age of 2;9.

The results show a great interindividual variability within both groups: Blindness doesn't have a major impact on the beginning and quantity of spatial language. The widespread assumption that blind children show a delayed acquisition of spatial expressions should therefore be rejected. Regarding the error-rate, there is no significant difference between both groups.

Our findings will be discussed with respect to the impact of the children's input and the role of language (complemented by other modalities) in early caregiver-child interactions with blind as compared to sighted children.