

ESR 12. Multimodal Communication Among Deaf and Hearing Interactants in the Presence of Sensory and Communication Asymmetries

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In a social-constructivist approach, we investigate how individuals with different experiences and resources of language and communication draw on multimodal communication strategies in order to accommodate sensory and communicative needs. We focus on episodes of joint attention in early parent-child interactions in the time prior to cochlear implantation when access to auditory input and/or sign language is often not yet available to children with severe to profound hearing loss. Moving away from predominantly language-driven approaches of the past, the current project picks up on the multimodal nature of communication and, in a more holistic approach, goes beyond the bimodal distinction of spoken and/or sign language(s) when looking at early interactions. The aim of the project is (1) to reveal the potential of multimodal communication strategies in making communication accessible to children who are deaf or hard of hearing while facilitating interactions with their hearing family members and peers; and (2) to understand how multimodal communication strategies are influenced by individual affordances, context and the interactional situation. Video-recorded data of unstructured play sessions between parents and children (9-18 months of age) with severe to profound hearing loss will be collected prior to cochlear implantation in collaboration with the Yorkshire Auditory Implant Service (YAIS) at the Bradford Royal Infirmary, NHS (UK). Detailed multimodal analysis with ELAN, an annotation tool for audio and video recordings, will be used to identify and understand how multimodal communication strategies are involved in initiating and sustaining episodes of joint attention while offering a more systematic approach to multimodal analysis of early interactions. The application of findings, emphasizing individual resources rather than deficits, will be relevant to early intervention with families and will provide parents with informed guidance on how to make communication more accessible to their child, especially within the critical period of the first year/s of life that form the building blocks for later (language) development.