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The acquisition of verbal morphology in cochlear-implanted and specific language impaired children

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The cochlear implant (CI) gives severely hearing impaired to profoundly deaf children access to auditory speech input and consequently stimulates their oral language development. However, speech perception with a CI is still not optimal. Therefore, these children develop oral language based on reduced auditory speech input.

This dissertation aims at enhancing our knowledge of whether a CI provides sufficient access to auditory speech input to acquire verbal morphology. It takes a new perspective regarding the research on morphology acquisition in CI children. The outcomes of the children under investigation are not only compared to those of their normal hearing peers, but also to those of their specific language impaired (SLI) peers. The latter group is known to be particularly delayed in their acquisition of verbal morphology.

One of the major findings of this dissertation is that CI children outperform their SLI peers in the production of verbal morphology. Remarkably, they are even able to catch up with their normal hearing peers. Nevertheless, their spontaneous speech samples contain more verb inflection errors as compared to similar samples from normal hearing peers. In this respect CI children compare to their SLI peers.

The results of the CI children are further analyzed as a function of their age at implantation and hearing age. Additional emphasis is given to the role of perceptual salience in the acquisition of morphology.

This dissertation is of interest to scholars who are working in the field of clinical linguistics, (atypical) language acquisition, verbal morphology, as well as for language pathologists.

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