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Talk (Abstract)

**The Acquisition of Finite Verb Morphology
in Hearing Impaired Children**

Eva Wimmer¹, Martina Penke², Johannes Hennies³, Monika Rothweiler¹, Markus Hess³

¹*University of Bremen, Germany*

²*University of Cologne, Germany*

³*University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany*

Research question

For children with a sensorineural hearing impairment (HI) inflectional affixes are particularly difficult to perceive (despite hearing aids) because they are often realized by coronal consonants (e.g. in German *-s* or *-t* for finiteness inflections). We investigated whether the acquisition of verb morphology is affected in German children with a moderate HI – a population whose grammatical development is not well investigated to date.

Method

A group of 10 German 3-to 4-year old HI toddlers with a moderate bilateral hearing loss (40-92dB) and 10 age-matched hearing peers were asked to describe the action in 30 short video scenes to elicit utterances in 2nd and 3rd person singular and 3rd person plural contexts (i.e. verbal suffixes *-s(t)*, *-t* and *-n*, *n* = 10 each). All target verb forms were controlled for phonological complexity.

Results

The data indicate that 29% of the affixes *-s(t)* and *-t* were not realized correctly in obligatory contexts by the HI group in contrast to the control subjects (no errors). Whenever the affixes *-st* and *-t* are used, they are applied correctly (97%). These results and findings of a picture-naming and a phoneme discrimination test suggest that the children's tendency to avoid the agreement markers *-st* and *-t* in obligatory contexts is due to specific difficulties in perceiving these coronal consonants.

Conclusion

Our findings indicate that the production of inflectional morphology is selectively affected even in children with moderate HI. However, this seems to be caused by a problem in perceiving and processing the relevant phonemes used as inflectional affixes rather than by a morpho-syntactic deficit.