

Referential Use of Space: Early Exposure Makes a Difference



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Previous L1 studies

- Relatively late/protracted development of referential space

(Bellugi et al., 1988; Meier 2002; Hänel 2005; van den Bogaerde 2000)

- Uninflected verb forms > Agree with present referents > Agree with non-present referents
(Baker, van den Bogaerde, & Woll, 2008)

Previous M2 studies

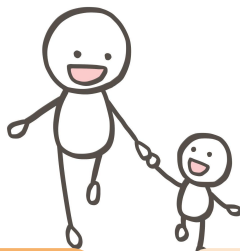
- Beginner signers often omit spatial agreement on verbs that allow it

(Boers-Visker & Pfau 2020)

- Yet they can use space in other cases (e.g. pointing, locating classifiers or nouns in space)

(Ferrara & Nilsson 2017; Janke & Marshall 2017)

Methods



15 hearing parents M2L2 ASL learners

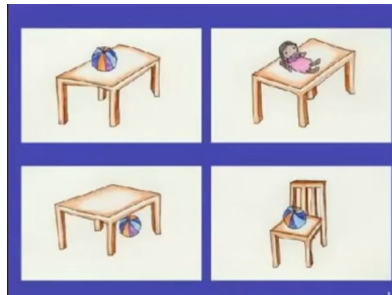
9 DHH children ages 4-5

ASL-Expressive Skills Test
(Enns et al. 2019)

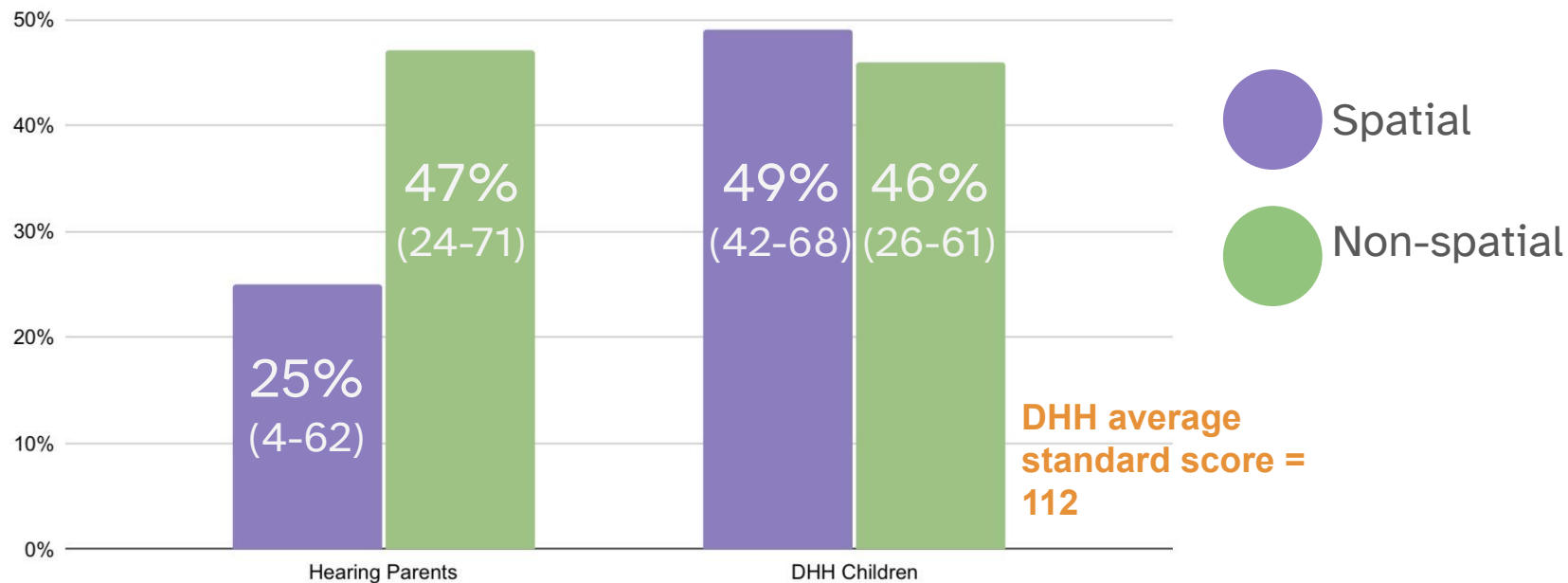
ASL-Receptive Skills Test
(Enns et al. 2013)



Scoring ASL grammar	
Spatial Verb	0 / 13
Directional Verbs	0 / 3
Agreement Verbs	0 / 6
Aspect	0 / 3
Manner	0 / 4
Additional comments	0 / 1
Total for ASL grammar	0 / 30
Total for Role Shift	
	0 / 6
Scoring narrative skills	
Questions	0 / 6
Narrative content/structure	0 / 18
Total for narrative skill	0 / 24
Final total	0 / 60



Results: Accuracy on Spatial vs. Non-Spatial Items



Discussion & Conclusion

Hearing parents display a gap on spatial vs. non-spatial items (reflecting previously observed M2L2 struggles in this area).

The DHH children do not display this gap; they may surpass their parents in accuracy for grammatical elements involving space.

Children's average standard ASL-RST score was exceptionally high (112), indicative of a solid start on ASL acquisition!



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For more information:
<https://slla.lab.uconn.edu/family-asl/>

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