

## **Misunderstanding and repair in signed Deafblind conversation**

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This study is concerned with how Deafblind actors negotiate and establish understanding. The empirical focus is a series of dyadic interactions between Deafblind people using tactile Australian Signed Language (Auslan) in Victoria, Australia. Many Deafblind people are born deaf and, due to a genetic condition, lose their vision slowly over the course of many years. As such, they first learn the 'regular' sign language of their community and switch to a modified tactile version (where the Deafblind 'hearer' rests one or both hands on top of those of the 'speaker' to follow their signing) as their sight deteriorates.

Tactile sign languages around the world remain poorly described. A challenge in tactile interaction is that all non-manual features (such as facial expression) are lost and the location on the body where the sign is made can be hard to determine. Previous research on tactile American Sign Language (Collins and Petronio 1998) and tactile Swedish Sign Language (Mesch 2004) has documented how many visually distinctive signs become homophonous in tactile signing, however, the question remains as to whether this homophony is routinely problematic for experienced tactile signers.

In this paper we explore the frequency and nature of misunderstanding and repair in our data corpus. We identify and classify the apparent causes of misunderstanding in our data as well as the strategies participants use to repair the misunderstanding or move the conversation along. A key question is whether the very different mode of delivery used in tactile signing leads to noticeable differences in the types of misunderstandings or repair strategies used compared to those commonly seen in spoken or signed languages.

### **References**

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