

## 2-3. Pragmatic and social-cognitive skills in the Czech Deaf

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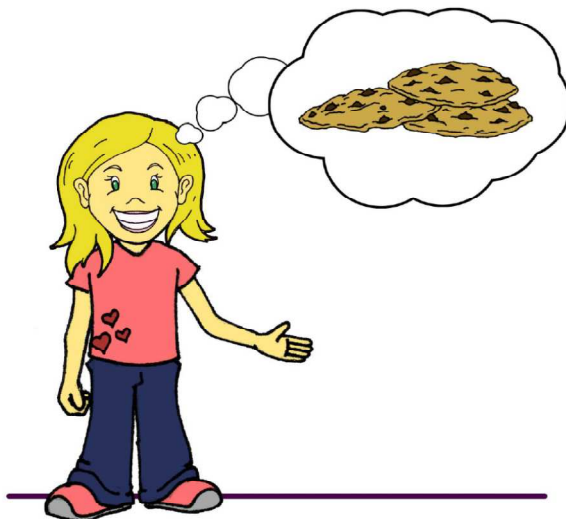
Despite much progress in the empirical research on deaf children's development, claims about deafness as a handicap are still pervasive in the medical discourse of the present-day Czech society. Deaf have been declared to reach lower cognitive milestones compared to their hearing peers, as documented by the statistics for the literacy and ratios of deaf and hearing within their respective populations. Hearing impediment has thus been a blame for the failure of reaching cognitive potentials of these individuals (e.g., Komínek, 2009), along with some of the mainstream societal standards.

In a review of over 20 studies, Peterson (2009) demonstrates that only a paucity of even 11-year-old severely deaf children with hearing parents passed standard tasks assessing their social cognition, usually mastered by typically developing 5-year-olds. Moreover, such delays in pre-lingual hearing-challenged individuals occur in both children with cochlear implants or in those communicating with their caregivers in sign language. These marked delays come in a sharp contrast with little or no delay documented in deaf children of signing parents. This may be due to the richness of their conversational input during their early ontogeny (Harris 2005, 2006).

### Method

Our study has been testing Czech deaf and hearing children's respective skills in theory of mind. To this date, 10 deaf children and 23 hearing children were tested on the adapted battery of ToM skills (Hutchins & Prelock, 2010) (see Figure 1 for a sample of a ToM task and Figure 2 for the respective test questions).

Figure 1: A sample task.



**B**

Toto je Hanka.  
Hanka chce jíst sušenky.

This is Hanka. Hanka wants to eat some cookies.

Figure 2: Test questions



B

B. CQ1: Co chce Hanka?

→ □ pomocná Q: Chce dort, sušenky, lízátko, nebo čokoládu?

→ špatně: → C, s. 7

What does Hanka want?

B: CQ1—Control question 1: Does she want some cake, cookies, lollypop, or chocolate? If the response is wrong, continue to task C, page 7.

### Results

Preliminary results seem to confirm our hypothesis in that Deaf CzSL users are as competent as their hearing peers in their performance on the ToM battery of tasks, in a contrast to the Deaf users of spoken Czech.

### Discussion

As a first endeavor of this kind in the Czech Deaf community, our aim has been to document that deaf individuals can, indeed, reach the full potential as can their hearing peers, provided they have the tools to communicate with and represent through a complex independent language in whatever modality.

### References

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