Cohesion in Narratives: Typical Development and Williams syndrome

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Williams syndrome (WS) is a rare neurodevelopmental disorder with an inhomogeneous profile of strengths and weaknesses within the cognitive domain.
As far as I know there are no in depth study of discourse cohesive means in Williams syndrome. Marini et al. (2010) report for WS a general use of cohesive means on the level of mental age matched typically developed children. But Laws and Bishop (2004) found problems in producing coherence in conversation for WS on the basis of a communication checklist (CCC, Bishop, 1998) completed by parents or teachers.

My study aims to provide closer information about discourse cohesive abilities of children and adolescents with WS. A second research question concerns possible connections between Theory of Mind and discourse cohesion. Theory of Mind is expected to improve discourse cohesion because understanding of other perspectives seems to be an important requirement for telling coherent stories.

According to the developmental trajectories approach (e.g. Thomas et al. 2009) the WS group (N = 15) will be compared to a larger group of typically developed individuals (N = 30). The control group covers the chronological age as well as the mental age of the disorder group. Test persons completed the Theory of Mind Scale (Wellman & Liu 2004) and produced narratives of a wordless picture book (Tavano & Biancuzzi 2008). The stories were coded for cohesive means like types of pro-forms, conjunctions and adverbs.

In my talk, at first I provide separate analysis of developmental trajectories in WS and typically developed invididuals. After this, a comparison of both groups will be carried out. In a last step, I investigate potential connections between cohesion and Theory of Mind by correlational analysis for both groups.

The results will be discussed with regard to their relevance for theories of narrative cohesion development, Theory of Mind development and WS research.

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