

How Did a Blind Child Begin Understanding Her “Blind Self”? : A Longitudinal Analysis Of Conversation between Her and Adults

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Abstract : This study explores the process in which a Japanese child with congenital blindness deepens understanding of the condition of being “unable to see” and develops the idea of “blind self,” despite having no direct experience of vision. The rehabilitation activities of a child with a congenital visual impairment that were video-recorded from 1 to 6 years old were analyzed qualitatively. The duration of the video was about 80 hours. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the episodes in which the child used the words related to the act of “looking” were extracted. Detailed transcripts were constructed referencing the notations of conversation analysis. Characteristics of interactions in those episodes were identified and compared longitudinally. Results showed that the child used the expression “look” under certain interaction patterns and her body expressions and interaction with adults developed in conjunction with the development of language use. Four stages were identified. At the age of 1, interactions involving “look” began to occur. The child said “Look” in the sequence: the child’s “Look,” an adult’s “I’m looking,” certain performances by the child, and the adult’s words of praise. At the age of 3, the child began to behave in accordance with the spatial attributes of the act of “looking,” such as turning her face to the adult’s voice before saying, “Look.” She also began to use the expression “Keep looking,” which seemed to reflect her understanding of the temporality of the act of “looking.” At the age of 4, the use of “Look” or “Keep looking” became three times more frequent. She also started to refer to the act of looking in the future, such as “Come and look at my puppy someday.” At the age of 5, she moved her hands toward the adults when she was holding something she wanted to show them. She seemed to understand that people could see the object more clearly when it was in close proximity. About that time, she began to say “I cannot see” to her mother, which suggested a heightened understanding of her own blindness. The findings indicate that as she grew up, the child came to utilize nonverbal behavior before and after the order “Look” to make the progress of the interaction with adults even more certain. As a result, actions that reflect the characteristics of the sighted person’s visual experience were incorporated into the interaction chain. The purpose of “Look,” with which she intended to attract the adult’s attention at first, changed and became something that requests a confirmation she was unable to make herself. It is considered that such a change in the use of the word as well as interaction with sighted adults reflected her heightened self-awareness as someone who could not do what sighted people could do easily. A blind child can gradually deepen their understanding of their own characteristics of blindness among sighted people around them. The child can also develop “blind self” by learning how to interact with others even without direct visual experiences.

Keywords : blindness, child development, conversation analysis, self-concept

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