



# The Encounter with a Hot Lamp

How a Child with Congenital Deafblindness Makes Sense of the World He Lives in  
 Ilse van Zadelhoff, 2012

## 1. Research Questions:

- What are the contributions from the embodiment theory with regard to the proces of categorization?
- What are the contributions from dialogical theory with regard to the proces of categorization?
- What are the contributions from mental space theory within the field of cognitive semiotics and cognitive science?
- How can these three different perspectives be applied to identify, analyze and discuss videoexamples of categorization in deafblind children?



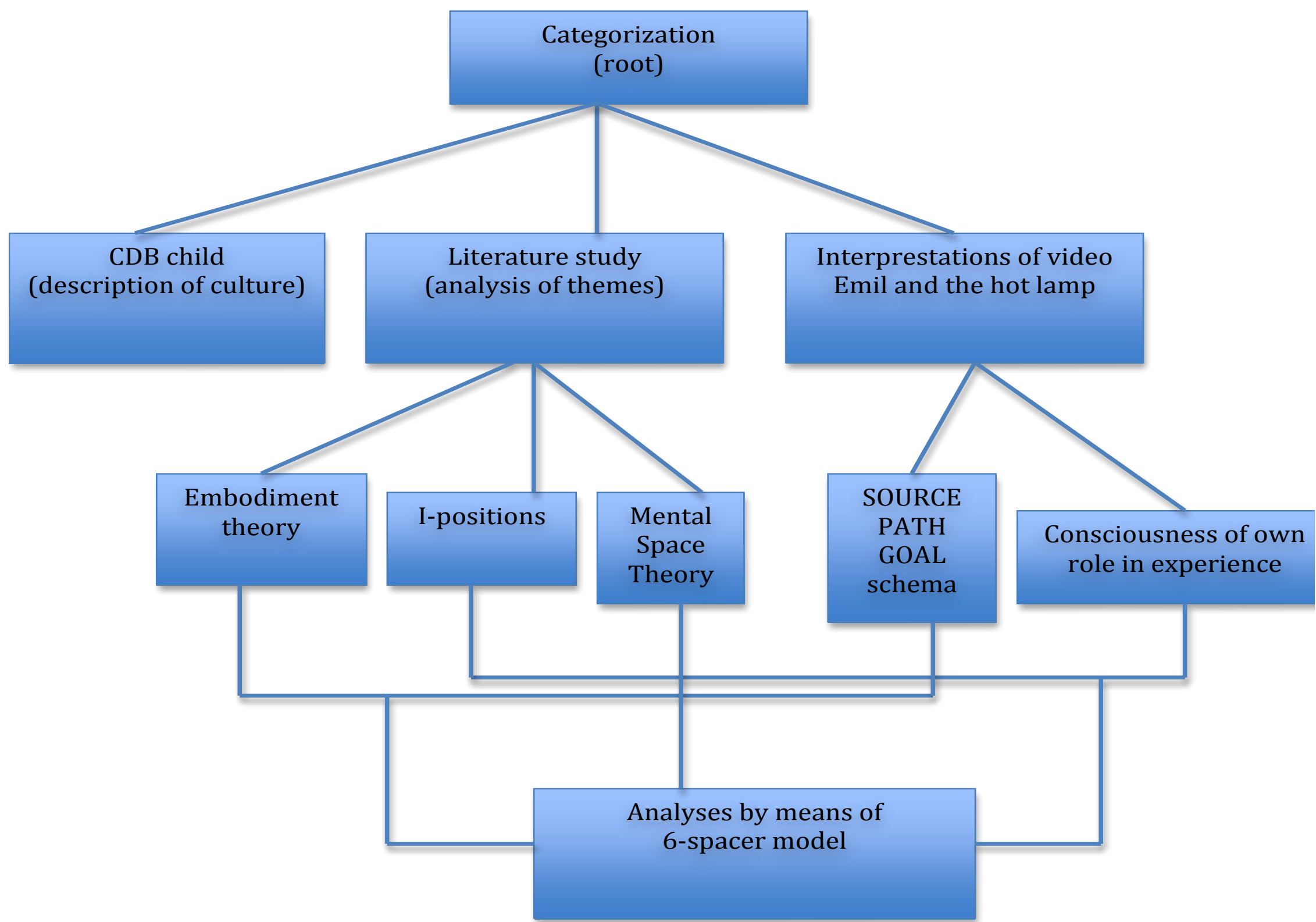
## 2. Background

Meaning making is a process of interacting with the world we live in. We are not independent of the environment that surrounds us; we take in different positions towards ourselves and the context we are in because of changing situations. People with deafblindness need to learn the process of categorization without linguistic categories. This makes the process of categorization for children with CDB more fundamental in contrast to categorization based on linguistic forms.

Consequently, although the process of categorisation is general, the categorizations can be very idiosyncratic in deafblind children whereas they become generalized during the development of typical developing children. Knowledge of the experiences of the child with CDB are therefore essential in understanding their utterances. The aim of this study is to analyse the process of meaning making of a congenitally deafblind child and the way that it forms categories.

## 4. Method

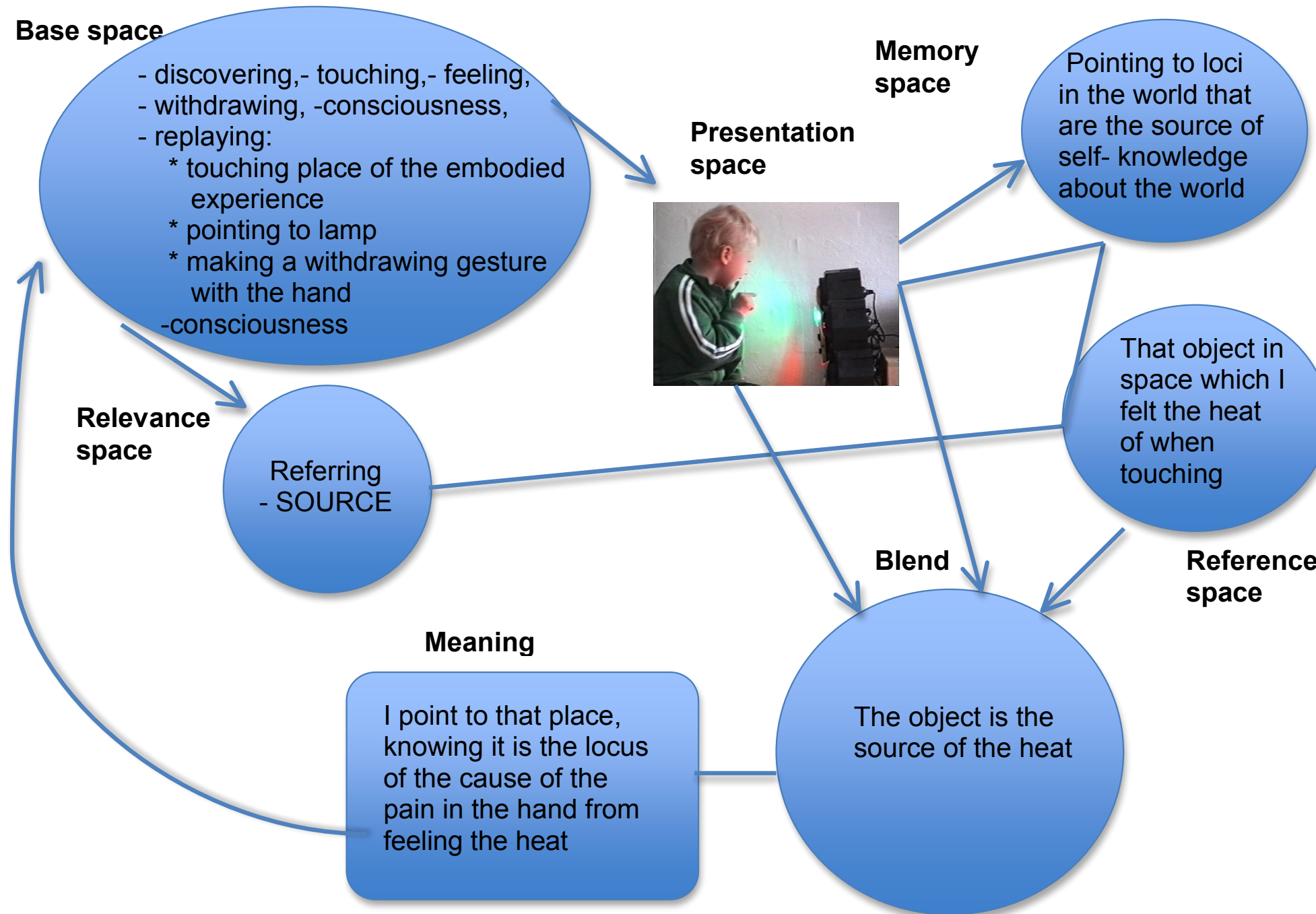
This study is a combined literature study and an exemplary case analysis on how the process of meaning making develops and how categories are formed. One video of 01:04 minutes was used for the observation study. This exemplary case of a 2,5 year old boy was analysed in detail, taking seperate parts of the footage into account. The central topics in this analysis are embodiment (image schemas) and I-positions, which were found by linking the theory to the video (as mentioned above) and by means of axial coding which links the divided parts created by open coding. By means of constructed transcripts, the essential parts of the video were marked and grouped. These categories were analysed separately in different 6-spacers.



Overview of the structure of the study based on the methodological approach of Wolcott (1994)

## 3. Theoretical framework

- **Dialogical Self Theory:** An interactional contextual theory of human sense making. Meaning is seen as “consisting of cognitions (ideas, thoughts), communicative processes and meaningful actions all of which are anchored in both a sociocultural and a physical world” (Linell, 2009). An important aspect of the theory is the concept of I-positions. Because of different perspectives on the stream of thoughts, an individual can look upon sitations from different I-positions.
- **Embodiment Theory:** An embodied view of meaning and meaning-making looks for “the origins and structures of meaning in the organic activities of embodied creatures in interaction with their changing environments” (Johnson, 2007). This means that changes in our bodies contribute to our meaning-making process. All embodied activities are linked to the body and the mind. Products of these activities are Body Emotional Traces and image schemas, which facilitate the recognition of similar situations in the future.
- **Mental Space Theory:** Mental spaces are semiotically distinguishable conceptual contents; each mental space is a cognitive model (Brandt & Brandt, 2005). The theory is based on the idea that we understand the world and each other by integrating different mental spaces in an ongoing process in the here and now (Larsen, 2006).



## 5. Results

- Shifting between I-positions plays an important factor in categorization; it creates consciousness of a certain situation.
- Elements of the Embodiment Theory offer the possibility to reflect upon the situation.
- Conscious reflecting on an emotion is helpful in making sense of an experience
- The combination of the Embodiment Theory, the theory on I-positions and the Mental Space Theory, can be used to trace the meaning of gestures used by congenitally deafblind persons.
- Image schemas can account for the creation of a gesture.

## 6. Conclusion/discussion

In this study, an analysis is made by means of the 6-spacer (Larsen, 2003) to see if a categorization process is taken place in the exemplary sequence. The study takes emotions, feelings and I-positions into account, which gives an analysis that stays very close to the child. A prerequisite of categorizing is becoming conscious of what is being experienced. This is a process of moving from emotions to feelings.

The relevance of this study is to get an in depth analysis on a very small amount of data. This way of doing research offers a detailed way of analysing how the process of meaning making develops in children with CDB. In further research more information could contribute to the analysis of the child. Knowledge of idiosyncratic gestures, the behavioral characteristics and the medical background of the child could benefit the outcome of the study.

**KEYWORDS:** meaning making, consciousness, categories, embodiment, I-positions, 6-spacer model

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