

1 *Event-Related Potentials of Single Sided Deaf Cochlear Implant Users – Using*  
2 *a Semantic Oddball Paradigm in Noise*

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### 13 Short Title: ODD EVEN ODDBALL TASK IN NOISE

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## Abstract

31     *Objective:* In individuals with single sided deafness (SSD), which is characterised by a  
32     profound hearing loss in one ear and normal hearing in the contralateral ear, binaural input is  
33     no longer present. A cochlear implant (CI) is the only way to restore functional hearing in  
34     the profoundly deaf ear, with previous literature demonstrating improvements in speech in  
35     noise intelligibility with the provision of a CI. However, we currently have a limited  
36     understanding of the neural processes involved (e.g., how the brain integrates the electrical  
37     signal produced by the CI with the acoustic signal produced by the normal hearing ear) and  
38     how the modulation of these processes with CI contributes to improved speech in noise  
39     intelligibility. Using a semantic oddball paradigm presented in the presence of background  
40     noise, this study aims to investigate how the provision of CI impacts speech in noise  
41     perception of SSD CI users.

42     *Method:* High density electroencephalography (EEG) from twelve SSD-CI participants was  
43     recorded whilst they completed a semantic acoustic oddball task. All participants completed  
44     the oddball task in three different free field conditions with the speech and noise coming from  
45     different speakers. The three tasks were 1) with the CI-On in background noise, 2) with the  
46     CI-Off in background noise and 3) with the CI-On without background noise (Control). We  
47     examined task-performance (RT, subjective listening effort, and accuracy) and measured  
48     N2N4 and P3b event-related brain potentials (ERPs) linked to the discrimination and  
49     evaluation of task relevant stimuli. Speech in noise and sound localisation abilities was also  
50     measured.

51     *Results:* Reaction time was significantly different between all tasks with CI-On ( $M(SE) =$   
52     809(39.9) ms) having faster RTs than CI-Off ( $M(SE) = 845(39.9)$  ms) and Control ( $M(SE) =$   
53     785(39.9) ms) being the fastest condition. The Control condition exhibited a significantly

54 shorter N2N4 and P3b area latency when compared to the other two conditions. However,  
55 despite these differences noticed in RTs and area latency, we observed similar results  
56 between all three conditions for N2N4 and P3b difference area.

57 *Conclusion:* The inconsistency between the behavioural and neural results suggest that EEG  
58 may not be a reliable measure of cognitive effort. This rationale is further supported by the  
59 different explanations used in past studies to explain N2N4 and P3b effects. Future studies  
60 should look to alternative measures of auditory processing (e.g., pupillometry) to get a deeper  
61 understanding of the underlying auditory processes that facilitate speech in noise  
62 intelligibility.

63

64

## Introduction

65 Single sided deafness (SSD) is characterised by a profound hearing loss in one ear and  
66 normal hearing in the contralateral ear [Friedmann et al., 2016]. Unlike individuals with a  
67 bilateral hearing loss, SSD individuals can rely on the normal hearing ear (NHE) to  
68 understand speech in quiet, thereby reducing the impact that the hearing loss has on quality of  
69 life [Voola and Távora-Vieira, 2021]. However, in noisy environments, speech intelligibility  
70 of SSD individuals decreases significantly when compared to normal hearing individuals  
71 [Van de Heyning et al., 2008;Williges et al., 2019;Körtje et al., 2022]. Speech intelligibility  
72 in noise is facilitated through the binaural squelch and binaural summation effects, both of  
73 which rely on similar inputs from both ears [Ma et al., 2016]. A cochlear implant (CI) is the  
74 only treatment option that has the potential to restore binaural hearing, thereby providing  
75 access to the advantages of bilateral hearing which in turn can improve speech understanding  
76 of SSD individuals in background noise.

77 A CI has the potential to restore hearing by directly stimulating the auditory nerve in the  
78 impaired ear via electrical signals [Drennan and Rubinstein, 2008]. Sound transmission  
79 through the CI is degraded and does not fully encapsulate all the spectral information that the  
80 NHE provides [Drennan and Rubinstein, 2008]. Despite this limitation, a CI for SSD  
81 individuals can improve speech intelligibility in noise and localisation ability [Távora-Vieira  
82 et al., 2015;2016;Dorbeau et al., 2018;Galvin et al., 2019;Williges et al., 2019;Wedekind et  
83 al., 2020]. These improvements highlight that the brain is capable of understanding both the  
84 acoustic signal from the NHE and the degraded electrical signal from the CI. However, it is  
85 not well understood how the underlying neural process operate to improve speech in noise  
86 intelligibility. One method to understand how the neural process are operating is by using  
87 EEG to examine event related potentials (ERP) evoked by the presentation of acoustic

88 stimuli. Together, these measurements can provide an insight into the cortical processing of  
89 auditory stimuli.

90 Auditory ERPs have been used in the past to measure the neural processing of auditory  
91 information in CI users. ERPs are characterised by a series of deflections with a fixed time-  
92 course. Scalp-distribution and amplitude differences in these deflections provide an insight  
93 into the different stages of auditory processing [Light et al., 2010]. Auditory ERPs can be  
94 elicited by an oddball paradigm, this consists of a frequent (standard) and non-frequent  
95 (target) stimuli whereby participants are instructed to indicate when they hear the target  
96 stimuli. The target stimuli can differ from the standard stimuli in multiple ways such as  
97 differences in physical properties (e.g., frequency, intensity) or semantic qualities (e.g., living  
98 vs. non-living words) [Polich, 1985;Polich et al., 1990]. However, understanding how higher  
99 order processing facilitates speech in noise understanding in SSD CI users has yet to be  
100 investigated.

101 Higher order neural processing that involves discrimination and evaluation of stimuli is  
102 reflected through changes in a fronto-central negativity (N2) and parietal positivity (P3b).  
103 The N2 deflection occurs within a latency range of 200 – 350 ms after stimulus onset and is  
104 enhanced upon the presentation of the target stimuli thereby reflecting the process of  
105 discrimination [Lau et al., 2008]. As task difficulty increases in complexity, a delayed peak  
106 latency is observed which is thought to represent the difficulty in discriminating the stimuli  
107 from stored mental representation [Näätänen and Picton, 1986]. For more complex tasks,  
108 such as those involving the discrimination based on semantic meaning rather than pure tone  
109 differentiation, the N2 peak latency can be delayed to around 400 ms, resulting in the peak to  
110 be labelled as the N4. This delay in peak latency is attributed to the additional time needed  
111 for individuals to fully retrieve the words meaning from their stored mental lexicon.  
112 However, differentiating the N2 from the N4 is challenging with many studies reporting

113 difficulties in distinguishing the two [Deacon et al., 1991;van den Brink et al., 2001;Finke et  
114 al., 2016]. As such, to avoid confusion and to follow in line with previous studies, the second  
115 negativity of the ERP waveform will be referred to as the N2N4.

116 The process of stimulus evaluation and categorising is represented via a parietally distributed  
117 positive deflection occurring at a latency of 300 – 600 ms, referred to as the P3b [Polich,  
118 2007]. The P3b is thought to represent the process of decision making, whereby the  
119 presentation of a stimulus triggers the activation of stimulus-response links [Verleger et al.,  
120 2014]. Stimuli that are more demanding (i.e., differentiating stimuli based on meaning) have  
121 been identified to elicit a smaller P3b amplitude and delayed latency [Polich,  
122 1985;1986;Johnson, 1988;Verleger, 1997;Comerchero and Polich, 1999]. Additionally, past  
123 studies have identified that more involved tasks result in larger reaction time (RT) which  
124 provides support for the decision-making hypothesis.

125 Literature focusing on the higher order processing of CI users in background noise is limited.  
126 Soshi et al (2014) investigated how the P3b is affected by noise in the CI population by  
127 presenting /ga/ and /ba/ syllables. It was identified that only good performing CI users  
128 (speech perception in noise score is greater than 66%) were able to elicit a P3b in noise,  
129 suggesting that the speech perception scores in CI users is positively correlated to their P3b  
130 amplitude [Soshi et al., 2014]. In 2016, Finke et al. (2016) built upon the work of Soshi et al  
131 by instructing subjects to differentiate words as either living or non-living entities in the  
132 presence of background noise when presented in free field. Using a more complex stimuli in  
133 the form of semantic differentiation, rather than just differentiating based on physical  
134 properties provides a firmer representation of how the higher order processes of CI users are  
135 working in everyday life. Compared to the normal hearing control, CI users exhibited delayed  
136 N2N4 and P3b latency, increased RT which may be attributed to the mismatch between the  
137 limited CI input and the stored mental representations [Finke et al., 2016].

138 Given the unique hearing loss of SSD CI recipients (normal hearing in one ear and a  
139 profound hearing loss in the contralateral ear) this provides a unique opportunity to isolate the  
140 impact of the CI by employing a within-subject designed experiment. Finke et al (2016) and  
141 Wedekind et al (2021) both identified that direct stimulation of the CI requires greater  
142 processing effort (as indicated by delayed RTs) when compared to stimulation of the NHE  
143 alone in SSD CI users [Finke et al., 2016; Wedekind et al., 2021]. Whilst these studies do  
144 provide a foundation for understanding CI processing, they do not address how the electrical  
145 signal from the CI and acoustic signal from the NHE is integrated at a cortical level to  
146 provide binaural benefit. As such, in a previous study conducted by our team, we presented  
147 semantic stimuli to SSD CI users with the aim to identify how the higher order neural  
148 processing differs with and without the CI in free field. We found clear evidence that in free  
149 field the brain is processing the input from both ears when the CI is on as indicated by a  
150 significantly enhanced P2 amplitude. However, the behavioural results indicated that the  
151 addition of the CI lead to greater uncertainty (larger RT variability) and delayed RT, which  
152 lead us to believe that the speech in quiet task was not well set up to assess binaural hearing.  
153 This rationale is further supported by the fact that the task used did not evaluate the binaural  
154 squelch effect (an advantage of binaural hearing), thereby the normal hearing ear was able to  
155 evaluate and discriminate the speech in quiet [Voola et al., 2022]. As such, this study was  
156 designed to build up on the findings of Voola et al 2022 by incorporating background noise  
157 into the semantic oddball task, thereby aiming to investigate how the CI impacts speech in  
158 noise perception of SSD CI users. We hypothesize that in the CI-Off condition SSD CI users  
159 will have poorer speech in noise discrimination, which will be reflected by delayed RT and  
160 smaller and delayed N2N4 and P3b effects. SSD CI users will perform better in the CI-On  
161 condition. Using more complex variations of the oddball paradigm (i.e., in noisy

162 environments) may provide a more thorough understanding of the underlying neural

163 processes that facilitate higher order processing in SSD CI user.

164

165 **Materials and Method**

166 *Participants*

167 Twelve SSD CI participants were recruited from the Fiona Stanley Hospital audiology  
168 department. Three participants were also part of previous study of ours Voola et al 2022. All  
169 adult participants (> 18 years) were required to have normal hearing in one ear, which was  
170 defined as having a four-frequency average (250 Hz, 1 kHz, 2 kHz, 4 kHz) hearing loss less  
171 than or equal to 20 dB HL. In the contralateral ear, all SSD CI participants have been using a  
172 MED-EL cochlear implant for at least one year. Participants gave written informed consent  
173 prior to participating in the experiment. Ethics approval was obtained from the South  
174 Metropolitan Health Ethics Committee (reference number: 335). [INSER TABLE 1]

175 *Speech Perception in Noise*

176 The Bamford-Kowal-Bench Adaptive Speech-In-Noise test was used to measure the speech  
177 in noise intelligibility of the SSD CI participants [Bench et al., 1979]. Each participant  
178 underwent the assessment in three different spatial configurations; 1) S0/N0: speech and  
179 noise presented from the front, 2) S<sub>CI</sub>/N<sub>NHE</sub>: speech presented to the CI and noise presented to  
180 the NHE and 3) S<sub>0</sub>/N<sub>NHE</sub>: speech presented from the front and noise to the normal hearing  
181 ear. All configurations were tested twice, with and without the CI, and block orders were  
182 counterbalanced across participants [Távora-Vieira et al., 2015;2016;Wedekind et al.,  
183 2018;Wedekind et al., 2020;Wedekind et al., 2021].

184 *Sound Localisation*

185 Sound localisation was tested using the Auditory Speech Sounds Evaluation Localisation  
186 Test. This test was conducted in a sound proof booth and presents a 4000 Hz narrow band  
187 noise simultaneously through two loudspeakers that were placed at -60 and 60 degrees from  
188 the participant. All stimuli were presented at 60 dB HL at one loud speaker and depnding on

189 the interaural level difference, the other speaker presented at 60, 56, 40 or 30 dB. To create  
190 the illusion of a sound source localized somewhere on the azimuth between the two loud  
191 speakers, the presentation level from both loud speakers differed to create an interaural level  
192 difference of either: -30, -20, -10, -4, 0, +4, +10, +20, +30. The software randomly picks the  
193 ILD to present at. This allowed for 13 localisation points to be established, two true speakers  
194 and 11 sham speakers. Each speaker was placed in a semicircle at 10 degree intervals in front  
195 of the subject, see Figure 1 [Tavora-Vieira et al., 2015].

196 The thirteen loudspeakers were numbered from -6 to 6. The two real loud speakers were  
197 number as -6 and 6 and the 11 sham speakers were numbered from -5 to 5. The participant  
198 was required to report which one of the thirteen speakers the sound was coming from. After  
199 each response made by the participant, their answer was inputted into the computer software  
200 which calculated the median values and root mean square (RMS). A lower RMS indicated  
201 better localisation ability.

202 The total test consisted of 33 items. All narrowband noise presentation locations were  
203 randomly selected by a computer software. Stimuli with intensity differences of -30, -20, -  
204 10, 10, 20, 30 dB were presented three times each and stimuli with intensity differences of -4,  
205 0 and 4 dB were presented five times each. [INSERT FIGURE 1]

206 *Oddball Task*

207 This study used a semantic oddball paradigm consisting of odd and even numbers from one  
208 to nine that was presented in the presence of background noise. Eight talker background noise  
209 wave files were attained from the National Acoustic Laboratories. Speech and noise were  
210 presented in free field from two different speakers, 45 degrees azimuth from the subject –  
211 with the signal (odd and even numbers) always being presented to the CI side. In all  
212 condition participants were instructed to look at a fixation cross presented on a computer

213 monitor 1 metre away from them. This was implemented to reduce eye movement. See  
214 Figure 2 for a schematic diagram of the experimental set up for the three conditions.  
215 [INSERT FIGURE 2]  
216 The odd/even oddball paradigm was presented pseudo-randomly such that a target stimulus  
217 was presented with a probability of 20% (48 presentations) and a standard stimulus was  
218 presented with a probability of 80% (196 presentations). Each stimulus was presented with an  
219 inter stimulus interval of 1500ms. In addition, the task order was counter-balanced across  
220 participants. The task consisted of odd numbers from one to nine (one, three, five, nine) and  
221 even numbers (two, four, six, eight). The number seven was omitted from the odd list as it  
222 contains two syllables. These speech files were recorded with the purpose to be used in a  
223 telephone-based speech-in-noise test called 'Telescreen' [Dillon et al., 2016]. Each recorded  
224 number was modified using the software 'Audacity®' [Audacity, 1999-2016] so that each  
225 number was of an approximate duration of 400ms. Speech babble was presented at 55 dB HL  
226 and the numbers were presented at 60 dB HL – resulting in a signal to noise ratio of +5 dB  
227 HL.

228 *Acquisition and Pre-Processing of Electrophysiological Data*  
229 Electrophysiology data was continuously recorded for the duration of each condition of the  
230 oddball task. The data was acquired using the Micromed™ SD LTM EXPRESS system with  
231 Gilat Medical ERP software (Gilat Medical Research & Equipment Ltd, Karkur, Israel). A  
232 sampling rate of 1024 Hz with an online low pass-filter of 40 Hz was used to digitise the  
233 data. Data was recorded using Ag/AgCl electrode cap (SpesMedica™ Genova, Italy). The  
234 Ag/AgCl electrode cap consisted of 59 electrodes, which were arranged in accordance with  
235 the 10-20 system. An additional four electrodes were used to 1) account for myogenic  
236 artefact arising due to eyeblinks from an electrode placed under the infraorbital region of the

237 right eye, 2) a reference electrode that was placed on the middle of the chin, 4) a ground  
238 electrode placed on the right mastoid. All electrode impedance was kept below 5 kΩ for the  
239 duration of the recording.

240 MATLAB 2020a was used to process the data. A semi-automate procedure was used  
241 consisting of functions from the plug-ins EEGLAB [Delorme and Makeig, 2004], PREP  
242 pipeline [Bigdely-Shamlo et al., 2015], clean\_rawdata() plugin, AMICA [Palmer et al., 2011]  
243 and ICLabel plugin [Pion-Tonachini et al., 2019]. The removeTrend() from the PREP  
244 pipeline plugin was used to linearly detrend the data using a high pass 1Hz fir filter with a  
245 0.02 step size. The cleanLineNoise() from PREP pipeline plugin was used to remove 50Hz  
246 line noise and harmonics up to 500Hz. The pop\_clean\_rawdata() was used to determine noisy  
247 channels. The pop\_interp was used to interpolate noisy channels spherically. EEG data was  
248 then down sampled to 250 Hz. The data was demeaned and a 30Hz low pass filter was  
249 applied using the pop\_eegfiltnew(). Filter order equals 100. The clean\_asr() was used to  
250 correct for artefacts using the artefact subspace reconstruction method. Data was then  
251 epoched from -200 to 1000ms relative to stimulus onset. Independent component analysis of  
252 the data was conducted using AMICA (2000 iterations) on down sampled data to 100Hz  
253 [Palmer et al., 2011]. The number of independent components extracted were adjusted for the  
254 data rank. The data was baseline correct was to the pre-stimulus interval (-200 to 0 ms).  
255 Trials with activity exceeding 100mV were flagged for exclusion for further analysis.  
256 SASICA was used to guide the manual rejection of ICA components that were deemed to be  
257 too noisy (mean = 22 components removed).

258 *Measurement of Event Related Potentials*

259 We measured amplitude of N2N4 and P3b ERP components by calculating the area of  
260 standard-target effects on ‘target-minus-standard’ ERP difference waveforms (Fig. 3). These

261 measurements were conducted at the trial-level by subtracting the individual averaged  
262 standard ERP of each condition from each individual target trial of the corresponding  
263 condition. We measured N2N4 at FCz and P3b at Pz, corresponding to the site where the size  
264 of standard-target N2N4 and P3b effects were most prominent. Given the temporally  
265 distributed nature of each difference ERP, we used broad time windows (300-800 ms for  
266 N2N4 and 500-950 ms for P3b) to capture each component and excluded positive areas for  
267 N2N4 and negative areas for P3b. The same time window were used for all three hearing  
268 conditions. The latency of the N2N4 and P3b were estimated using the 50% area latency  
269 method. [INSER FIGURE 3]

270 *Behavioural Data*

271 We examined task performance by measuring RT and RT variability (standard deviation of  
272 RTs within each condition), and target accuracy. RTs exceeding than 1500 ms were excluded  
273 from further analysis. Target accuracy was calculated as the proportion of target trials that  
274 were responded within the accepted window. Subjective listening effort was also measured  
275 after the completion of each condition. This was measured by using a seven-point scale  
276 where 1 indicated 'No Effort' and 7 indicated 'Extreme Effort'. Participants verbally  
277 indicated which number corresponded to their perceived listening effort [Luts et al.,  
278 2010;Holube et al., 2016].

279 *Statistical Analysis*

280 All statistical analysis were conducted using R statistics and R Studio software [R, 2013]. We  
281 conducted linear mixed model analysis using the 'lme' function from the 'nlme' package  
282 [Pinheiro et al., 2022]. Localisation, speech in noise, RT, subjective listening effort and  
283 Target Accuracy, we included condition (CI-Off, CI-On and Control) as a fixed effect, and  
284 intercepts for participants were modelled as a random effect. For electrophysiological

285 measures (N2N4, P3b) we also included Trial-Type as an additional fixed effect, interaction  
286 with the effect of Ear.

287 Results were analysed using the ‘anova’ function and presented as F-values. Follow-up  
288 pairwise comparison were conducted using the ‘emmeans’ and ‘contrast’ function from the  
289 ‘emmeans’ package [Lenth et al., 2020]. Pairwise results were presented as t-rations (mean  
290 difference estimate divided by standard error) and p-values for multiple comparisons were  
291 corrected using the ‘Holm’ method. The function ‘emmeans’ was also used to plot values and  
292 error bars for figures presented in the results.

293

294

## Results

295 **Localisation and Speech in Noise**

296 For localisation, the linear mixed model analysis revealed a significant effect of CI ( $F(1,49) = 102.79, p < .0001^*$ ), indicating an improvement in sound localisation ability with the CI-on compared to CI-off ( $M(SD) = 23.6(11.1)$  vs.  $50.0(18.0)$  degrees; *Est. Mean Diff. (SE) = 26.4(2.6)* degrees) (Fig. 4A).

300 For Speech in Noise, the linear mixed model analysis revealed significant main effects of CI ( $F(1,45) = 22.74, p < .0001^*$ ) and sound presentation ( $F(2,45) = 90.94, p < .0001^*$ ) but the 301 two-way interaction was not statistically significant ( $F(2,45) = 2.05, p = .141$ ). Pairwise 302 contrasts between CI-on and CI-off for each configuration revealed there was a significant 303 improvement  $S_{CI}N_{NHE}$  (*t-ratio*(45) = 4.40,  $p = .0002^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 3.70 (0.84)*) but 304 not in  $S_0N_0$  (*t-ratio*(45) = 2.08,  $p = .087$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 1.75 (0.84)*) and  $S_0N_{CI}$  305 conditions (*t-ratio*(45) = 1.78,  $p = .087$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 1.50 (0.84)*) (Fig. 4B).

307 [INSERT FIGURE 4]

308 **Reaction Time, Target Accuracy and Subjective Effort**

309 For reaction time, the linear mixed model analysis revealed a significant effect of task 310 condition ( $F(2,1624) = 29.34, p < .0001^*$ ). RTs were shortest in Control condition (no-noise 311 with CI-on,  $M(SD) = 784(143)$  ms) followed by CI-on (807(126) ms) then CI-off with noise 312 (850(161) ms) (Fig. 5A). Differences in RT between task conditions were all statistically 313 significant (Control vs. CI-on: *t-ratio*(1624) = 3.08,  $p = .0021^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 24.4(7.9) ms; Control vs. CI-off: *t-ratio*(1624) = -7.62,  $p < .0001^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 60.6(7.95) ms, CI-on vs. CI-off: *t-ratio*(1624) = 4.54,  $p < .0001^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 36.2(7.97) ms).***

317 Target accuracy (Fig. 5B) exceeded 90% on all task condition with the lowest means for CI-  
318 off and the highest means for Control (Control:  $M(SD) = 96.18(8.42)$  %; CI-on:  $95.14(9.91)$   
319 %; CI-off:  $93.06(12.60)$  %). However, the linear mixed model analysis indicated that  
320 differences in accuracy between task conditions were not statistically significant ( $F(2,22) =$   
321  $2.66, p = .0927$ ).

322 Subjective listening effort (Fig. 5C) measured after the completion of each condition revealed  
323 that participants perceived the CI-Off condition required the greatest listening effort,  
324 followed by CI-On and then Control condition (Control:  $M(SD) = 1.08(1.38)$ , CI-on =  
325  $2.08(1.62)$ , CI-off =  $3.42(1.08)$ ). The linear mixed model analysis revealed a statistically  
326 significant effect of task condition ( $F(2,22) = 22.93, p < .0001^*$ ). Follow-up pairwise  
327 comparisons showed that differences in subjective effort ratings between all task conditions  
328 were statistically significant (Control vs. CI-on:  $t\text{-ratio}(22) = 2.89, p = .0221^*$ , *Est. mean diff.*  
329 ( $SE$ ) =  $1(0.25)$ ; Control vs. CI-off:  $t\text{-ratio}(22) = 6.75, p < .0001^*$ , *Est. mean diff.* ( $SE$ ) =  
330  $2.33(0.25)$ ;  $t\text{-ratio}(22) = 3.86, p = .0024^*$ , *Est. mean diff.* ( $SE$ ) =  $1.33(0.35)$ ). [INSERT  
331 FIGURE 5]

### 332 **N2N4 area amplitude and 50% area latency**

333 N2N4 area amplitude was calculated using difference waveforms using a frontocentral  
334 electrode (Fig. 6). The linear mixed model analysis showed that there was no statistically  
335 significant difference in area amplitude between task condition ( $F(2,1614) = 1.24, p = .289$ ).  
336 However, there was a significant main effect of task condition for latency ( $F(2,1624) = 5.4, p$   
337 =  $.0045^*$ ). As depicted in Figure 4, mean latency was shortest for Control ( $M(SD) = 520(33)$   
338 ms), followed by CI-On ( $535(26)$  ms) and CI-Off ( $552(42)$  ms). Follow-up pairwise  
339 comparisons revealed that differences in area latency between Control and CI-off were  
340 statistically significant ( $t\text{-ratio}(1624) = 3.28, p = .0032^*$ , *Est. mean diff.* ( $SE$ ) =  $32.8(10)$  ms),

341 but not for Control vs. CI-On ( $t\text{-ratio}(1624) = 1.36, p = .175$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) =*  
342 13.5(9.94) ms) and CI-On vs. CI-Off ( $t\text{-ratio}(1624) = 1.93, p = .1079$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) =*  
343 19.3(10.03) ms). [INSER FIGURE 6]

344 **P3b area amplitude and 50% area latency**

345 Difference wave forms (target minus standard) was used to calculate the P3b area using a  
346 parietal electrode (Fig. 7). Linear mixed model analysis revealed a significant main effect of  
347 task condition ( $F(2,1612) = 4.34, p = .0132^*$ ). Follow-up pairwise comparisons showed that  
348 P3b area amplitude was significantly greater for Control compared to CI-on ( $t\text{-ratio}(1612) =$   
349 2.43,  $p = .0305^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 21.30 (8.77)  $\mu$ V\*ms*) and CI-off ( $t\text{-ratio}(1612) =$   
350 2.65,  $p = .0242^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 23.39(8.82)  $\mu$ V\*ms*), but not between CI-on vs. CI-  
351 off ( $t\text{-ratio}(1612) = 0.24, p = .8127$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 2.09(8.84)  $\mu$ V\*ms*).

352 Looking at P3b 50% area latency, the main effect of task condition was approaching  
353 statistical significance ( $F(2,1612) = 2.90, p = .056$ ). Follow-up pairwise comparisons,  
354 revealed P3b area latency was significantly shorter for Control compared to CI-On ( $t\text{-}$   
355  $ratio(1612) = 2.41, p = .048^*$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 25.5 (10.6) ms*) but differences between  
356 Control vs. CI-off ( $t\text{-ratio}(1612) = 1.15, p = .249$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 12.3 (10.6) ms*), and  
357 CI-on vs. CI-off ( $t\text{-ratio}(1612) = 1.24, p = .249$ , *Est. mean diff. (SE) = 13.2(10.7) ms*) were  
358 not statistically significant. [INSERT FIGURE 7]

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## Discussion

366 In the present study, we examined the neural processing of words presented during  
367 background noise in SSD CI users. In particular, we focused on understanding how the CI  
368 impacts the ability to discriminate odd/even numbers by comparing ERP results obtained  
369 with and without the CI, and assessed the effect of noise by contrasting the results with a no-  
370 noise (Control) condition. We also characterised functional hearing ability, by measuring  
371 sound localisation and speech in noise intelligibility with and without the CI. In the  
372 functional hearing task, we identified a significant improvement in both test when the CI was  
373 switched on. In the semantic oddball task, the best performance was observed during the no-  
374 noise condition, but under noisy conditions, participants performed better during CI-On  
375 compared CI-Off, as indicated by faster RT, higher target accuracy and a lower subjective  
376 listening effort rating. For ERPs, we observed an effect of condition on N2N4 latency  
377 (Control < CI-On < CI-Off), and P3b amplitude (Control > CI-On/Off) and latency (Control  
378 < CI-On/Off).

379

380 *Functional Hearing: Speech In Noise and Sound Localisation*

381 Functional improvement with CI was observed during the speech in noise test. The  
382 improvement was most prominent when the speech signal was directed at the CI-side  
383 ( $S_{CI}N_{NHE}$ ). Smaller CI-related improvements were also observed in  $S_0N_0$  and  $S_0N_{CI}$   
384 configurations, however these did not reach the threshold for statistical significance ( $p =$   
385 0.87). These smaller effects highlight the dominance of the NHE in  $S_0N_0$  [Van de Heyning et  
386 al., 2008;Arndt et al., 2011;Dorbeau et al., 2018] and that the CI is not detrimental to speech  
387 intelligibility when noise is coming from the CI side [Wedekind et al., 2021]. Likewise, a  
388 statistically significant improvement in sound localisation was seen with the CI on, consistent  
389 with previous studies [Vermeire and Van de Heyning, 2009;Firszt et al., 2012;Távora-Vieira

390 et al., 2015; Wedekind et al., 2021]. Collectively, the results demonstrate that the CI is  
391 capable of restoring binaural hearing in SSD patients.

392

393 *Semantic Oddball Task: Task Performance*

394 In line with the functional hearing results, RTs to target stimuli in the Oddball task were  
395 faster during CI-On compared to CI-Off, indicating that the addition signal from the CI  
396 significantly facilitated the ability to process and identify target words. RTs to the Control  
397 condition (no-noise with CI) was significantly shorter than both CI-On and CI-Off. This  
398 performance increase was also accompanied by participant reports that less effort was  
399 required to perform the task with CI-On compared to CI-Off, demonstrating that the use of CI  
400 had a noticeable benefit on perceived task difficulty. Similarly, subjective effort ratings to the  
401 control condition was significantly lower than CI-On and CI-Off. Although reactions were  
402 slowest and the task perceived most effortful during CI-Off, participants were highly accurate  
403 across all conditions (< 90%). While the main effect of condition was not statistically  
404 significant, inspection of mean values indicated that CI-Off was lowest (93%), followed by  
405 CI-On (95.1%) and Control (96.2%), which is in line with the RT and subjective effort  
406 ratings.

407

408 Collectively, these behavioural results demonstrated that (1) the use of background noise had  
409 a significant impact on objective performance as well as subjective perceptions of task  
410 difficulty – but participants were able to successfully complete the task despite the noise –  
411 and (2) that use of background noise allowed us to show a measurable improvement in  
412 bilateral hearing (CI-On) compared to hearing with the NHE alone (CI-Off).

413

414 *Semantic Oddball Task: Neural Responses*

415 With respect to neural processing, we identified that with the CI-Off, N2N4 latency was  
416 significantly delayed compared to the Control condition. The delay in N2N4 during the more  
417 difficult (CI-Off) condition is consistent with previous within-group observations, such as  
418 Almeqbel and McMahon (2015) who examined neural responses to speech-tokens in  
419 background noise using a passive task with young children. They reported delayed N2N4  
420 latencies in with lower (-10 dB) compared to higher SNR conditions (+20 dB). Our results  
421 are also consistent with Finke et al. (2016) who reported delayed N2N4 latencies in CI users  
422 compared to a normal hearing control group. One interpretation for the delay is that it reflects  
423 the increased effort in accessing lexical information during adverse listening conditions  
424 (Finke et al. 2016). Alternatively, the delay could also reflect increased effort needed to  
425 resolve lower-level uncertainty in the sound signal whereby previous studies have attributed  
426 this uncertainty to the CI (Cope et al. 2017; Obleser et al. 2007), but in our study we attribute  
427 this uncertainty to the background noise. Although our task required word discrimination and  
428 our N2N4 results could be interpreted in the context of retrieving word meanings from the  
429 mental lexicon, we cannot rule out the possibility that our results may be driven by more  
430 general lower-level uncertainties. Nevertheless, our N2N4 findings suggest that the higher-  
431 order cognitive processes involved in evaluating the simple words requires more time under  
432 noisy conditions, without the CI.

433

434 With respect to P3b area latency we observed that the Control condition had a significantly  
435 shorter latencies when compared with the CI-On. However, the difference between CI-Off  
436 and CI-On/Control were not statistically significant. With respect to amplitude, a similar  
437 pattern was observed, where P3b amplitudes were more positive during control compared to  
438 CI-On, but no differences was observed between CI-On and CI-Off.

439

440 Focusing on P3b area latency we observed that the no noise Control condition had a  
441 significantly shorter latency when compared with noise conditions (CI-On and CI-Off)  
442 [Polich, 2007]. Additionally we identified significantly shorter RT and lower perceived  
443 subjective listening effort results for the Control condition. Taken together the P3b area  
444 latency and behavioural results indicate that in the absence of noise, SSD CI users are able to  
445 discriminate and evaluate auditory stimuli quicker relative to in environments with noise.  
446 Despite the lack of statistically significant differences in P3b area between CI conditions, we  
447 did identify that the P3b area was largest in the control condition which was identified to be  
448 the easiest conditions indicated by smallest RT and subjective listening scores. The larger  
449 P3b area for the Control condition suggest that in the absence of noise, evaluation of auditory  
450 stimuli is easier when compared to situations in noisy environments [Polich, 2007].

451  
452 The P3b area and latency findings are surprising given that functional assessments indicated  
453 that with the CI, SSD CI users record improvements in speech in noise intelligibility with the  
454 CI. We would have expected this improvement in functional assessment, along with the  
455 behavioural results (RT and subjective listening effort), to result in larger P3b areas and  
456 earlier latency being recorded for CI-On when compared with CI-Off, but we did not observe  
457 this between CI-On and CI-Off. This finding alludes to the possibility that EEG may not be  
458 sensitive enough to detect within subject differences. The clear differences observed in the  
459 behavioural data and the lack of differences in the EEG data suggest that there are limitations  
460 with using EEG as a measure of cognitive processing.

461  
462 *Reliability of ERPs as measures of cognitive processing.*  
463 The lack of consistency in the explanation of N2N4/P3b responses in the present and  
464 previous studies highlights that using N2N4/P3b to measure cognitive effort may be more

465 complex and subjected to large amounts of variability. Finke et al identified that the N2N4  
466 amplitude recorded from directly stimulating the CI was larger than when recording directly  
467 from the NHE and attributed this increase in N2N4 during direct connect of CI to lexical  
468 processing. This larger N2N4 reflected greater effort to match the sound with the mental  
469 lexicon, showing support for the conflict monitoring hypothesis [Finke et al., 2016].  
470 Conversely, in previous work conducted by our lab, we identified that a smaller N2N4 was  
471 recorded from directly stimulating the CI in comparison to the NHE [Wedekind et al.,  
472 2021;Voola et al., 2022]. Wedekind et al (2021) used an auditory oddball paradigm  
473 consisting of pure tones (1kHz and 2kHz) identifying that compared to the NHE, the CI  
474 showed a smaller N2 but the P3b was similar between the NHE and CI. However, given the  
475 simplicity of the pure tone oddball task, the paper highlighted the possibility that stimulus  
476 differences were mainly discriminated by early discrimination process reflected by the N2  
477 and deeper evaluation of stimulus was not needed [Wedekind et al., 2021].  
478

479 To build on the findings of Wedekind et al. (2021), our lab conducted a follow-up study  
480 whereby SSD CI users had to discriminate between odd and even numbers, comparing both  
481 the NHE vs CI (both via direct stimulation) and also in free field, with and without the CI.  
482 We identified that N2N4 and P3b were both similar between the NHE and CI, even though the  
483 behavioural data indicated that evaluation of auditory stimuli from the CI was significantly  
484 slower in RT when compared to the NHE. For free field, we observed similar N2N4, P3b and  
485 RT results between CI-On and CI-Off, which suggested that the NHE was dominating the  
486 response. This rationale was developed due to the stimuli used in the study not containing any  
487 binaural cues. As such the current study was implemented noise using an auditory oddball  
488 tasks.  
489

490 With the ambition to create a task that is more complex, the current and past study's [Finke et  
491 al., 2017] have added noise to the auditory oddball task with the aim that increasing task  
492 complexity will reveal more about the higher order process of SSD CI users. Finke et al.  
493 compared CI users with normal hearing controls, evaluating their higher order processing of  
494 speech using german two syllable words in noise. Overall the current study and Finke et al.  
495 identified that in the no noise condition, SSD CI participants performed better behaviouraly  
496 (shorter RTs) than compared to the tasks that had noise. However, the N2N4 and P3b results  
497 were from both studies showed mixed results. This is evident in the P3b area findings in  
498 Finke et al (2017) who identified that in the most complex task (modualted noise) P3b area  
499 was larger when compared to the no noise condition. Conversley, in the current study we  
500 observed that the most complex condition (CI-Off) elicited the smallest P3b area, attributing  
501 this effect to stimuli being more difficult to distinguish. These inconsistencies in EEG data  
502 between studies highlights the large variability with using N2N4 and P3b to measure  
503 cognitive ability. Additionally, implementing noise into an auditory oddball task may not be  
504 the answer to be able to gain a deeper understanding of cognitive ability of SSD CI users.  
505 This is highlighted by the fact that early ERPs (N1-P2) which are thought to have  
506 downstream effects on later ERPs (N2N4 & P3b), cannot be identified in the waveforms  
507 generated from noisy conditions, but can be seen in the no-noise condition (Fig. 3). The  
508 absence of clear early ERPs highlight that the adding more noise to the auditory oddball  
509 paradigm will only result in the waveforms generated being harder to interpret and being able  
510 to compare with past research from no-noise studies. To overcome these issues with N2N4  
511 and P3b measurements, future studies should look to employ alternative measures such as  
512 pupillometry which has been shown in past literature to be a good measure of cognitive effort  
513 [Piquado et al., 2010;López-Ornat et al., 2018].

514

515

## Conclusion

516 In the present study, we identified significant differences in RT, subjective listening effort,  
517 both indicating that the Control condition was both objectively and subjectively the easiest  
518 condition. Despite significant differences in RT, the neural responses (N2N4 and P3b) did not  
519 follow the same trend for all three conditions. The lack of consistency between the  
520 behavioural and neural responses highlights the variability in using N2N4 and P3b to  
521 measure cognitive effort. This was emphasized by previous studies employing different  
522 explanation for N2N4 and P3b effects. This highlights the need for caution to be taken when  
523 designing auditory oddball tasks with CI patients in future studies. By using other forms of  
524 measures for cognitive ability (such as pupillometry) in speech in noise task with SSD CI  
525 users, this knowledge could potentially guide implantation candidacy guidelines and  
526 management rehabilitation protocols.

527

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530 **Statement Ethics**

531 Ethics approval was obtained from the South Metropolitan Health Ethics Committee  
532 (reference number: 335). Participants have given their written informed consent to participate  
533 in this study.

534

535 **Conflict of Interest Statement**

536 The authors report no competing interests.

537

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543

544 **Author Contributions**

545 **Marcus Voola:** Drafting, design, data collection, interpretation, final approval. **Andre**  
546 **Wedekind:** Drafting, design, interpretation. **An Nguyen:** Drafting, design, analysis,  
547 interpretation. **Welber Marinovic:** Drafting, final approval, interpretation. **Gunesh Rajan:**  
548 Interpretation, drafting, final approval. **Dayse Tavora-Vieira:** Interpretation, drafting, final  
549 approval, design

550

551 **Data Availability Statement**

552 Data can be made available upon request sent to the corresponding author.

553

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696 **Legends**

697 **Table 1:** Demographic information of participants age, gender, duration of deafness, cause of  
698 deafness (ISSNHL = Idiopathic Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss, MD = Meniere's  
699 Disease), side of implant, pure tone average (PTA), inserted electrode type and experience  
700 with the CI.

701 **Figure 1.** Set up of the localisation test. Participant was seated facing speaker number 0. The  
702 black speakers 6 and -6 are the two true speakers and the grey speakers (-5 to 5) are the sham  
703 speakers. Each speaker is positioned 10 degrees apart

704 **Figure 2.** Schematic diagram illustrating the set up of the three experimental conditions. **(a)**  
705 depicts CI-Off, **(b)** depicts CI-On and **(c)** depicts Control.

706 **Figure 3.** Grand mean ERP waveforms for each stimulus (Standard, Target) and presentation  
707 conditions (CI-On, CI-Off, Control). Panel **(a)**, **(b)**, **(c)** depict grand mean waveforms  
708 recorded from frontocentral electrode FC1 and panel **(d)**, **(e)**, **(f)** depict grand mean  
709 waveforms recorded from parietally distributed electrode Pz.

710 **Figure 4.** **(a)** depicts group means with within subject standard error bars for speech in noise  
711 intelligibility using the Bamford-Kowol-Bench Speech-In-Noise Test. Test was conducted in  
712 three spatial configurations, with and without the CI; S0N0 – speech and noise from front,  
713 Sci/Nhe – speech from CI side, noise from NHE side and S0/Nci – speech from front, noise  
714 from CI side. **(b)** Sound localisation test results with and without the CI. A lower RMS  
715 indicates better sound localisation ability.

716 **Figure 5.** Grand mean estimates with error bars depicting the standard error of the mean. **(a)**  
717 depicts the reaction time, **(b)** depicts the target accuracy and **(c)** depicts the subjective  
718 listening effort.

719 **Figure 6.** ERPs measured from a frontocentral electrode (FCz). **(a)** depicts the difference  
720 waveform (target minus standard) for all three testing conditions. The grey highlighted region  
721 indicates the time window used to measure the N2N4 (300 to 800 ms). **(b) & (c)** mean area  
722 and latency reflecting the N2N4 measured in all three conditions, respectively.

723 **Figure 7.** ERPs measured from a posterior electrode (Pz). **(a)** depicts the difference  
724 waveform (target minus standard) for all three testing conditions. The grey highlighted region  
725 indicates the time window used to measure the P3b (500 to 950 ms). **(b) & (c)** mean area and  
726 latency reflecting the P3b measured in all three conditions, respectively.

727













