

感觉通道与经验剥夺对阅读神经基础的影响 ——来自盲文触觉阅读的证据*

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摘要 感知觉经验缺失和阅读等文化技能的习得, 都会引发脑的可塑性改变。研究盲人阅读触觉盲文的神经基础为理解这一机制提供了独特视角。本文综述了近年的神经影像学证据, 聚焦三个核心问题: 1) 早期视觉皮层是否存在阅读特异性表征; 2) 腹侧枕颞皮层“视觉词形区”是否保留跨通道词形加工功能; 3) 顶叶是否存在“触觉词形区”。结果发现, 早期视觉皮层和腹侧枕颞皮层的功能仍存在争议, 而顶叶在触觉词形加工中可能发挥重要作用。未来研究应进一步揭示盲人“视觉”皮层在盲文阅读中表征的具体信息, 并检验“触觉词形区”的存在。同时, 还需要探讨盲文阅读水平的神经基础。这将深化我们对脑可塑性机制的理解, 并为盲文阅读教育提供理论依据。

关键词 盲文阅读, 盲人, 脑可塑性, 视觉词形区

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1 引言

人类大脑具有可塑性, 当大脑面临某种感知觉经验缺失时, 会产生功能的可塑性变化。先天盲人的“视觉”皮层在加工非视觉任务, 如触觉和听觉任务时会激活(Amedi et al., 2010; Collignon et al., 2011), 还会参与比如语言加工、盲文阅读、工作记忆等许多高级认知功能的加工(Bedny et al., 2011; Deen et al., 2015; Kanjlia et al., 2016, 2021; Raz et al., 2005)。另一方面, 文化技能的学习也会带来大脑皮层功能的变化, 比如阅读的习得改变了大脑的腹侧枕颞皮层(ventral occipitotemporal cortex, vOTC), 在梭状回的中部形成了一个专门用于加工文字的“视觉词形区(visual word form area, VWFA)”(Dehaene & Cohen, 2011)。这种由经验或者经验缺失带来的可塑性变化的规律和机制是什么? 一直以来都是认知神经科学领域的重要议题。

本文将综述盲人触觉盲文阅读的神经基础研究, 并以此为窗口探讨经验和经验缺失带来的脑可塑性变化的机制。盲文(Braille)是一种为视障人士发明的、依靠触觉感知的文字。一般而言, 盲文由凸起的点阵组成, 基本单元是由 6 个点组成的 2 列 3 行点阵, 称之为“方”。盲人读者通过手指滑动触摸点阵来进行阅读。拼音文字盲文是基于字母设计的, 而中文盲文是基于汉语拼音设计的, 将声母、韵母和声调分别转换成盲文点阵。

对于视觉阅读, 视觉文字信息进入大脑的起点是初级视觉皮层, 视觉阅读会激活早期视觉皮层、腹侧枕颞皮层、颞顶联合区和额颞语言网络(图 1A), 并且在不同的语言间保持着较高的跨文化一致性(Bolger et al., 2005; Rueckl et al., 2015)。阅读是一个复杂的过程, 既包括与语言加工重合的过程, 如对语音、语义的加工等, 也包括阅读独有的过程, 即对文字符号的识别。腹侧枕颞皮层(ventral occipitotemporal cortex, vOTC)梭状回中部的“视觉词形区”(visual word form area, VWFA)在视觉文字符号识别中起着关键作用(Cohen et al., 2000; Dehaene et al., 2010; Dehaene & Cohen, 2011; Schlaggar & McCandliss, 2007)。

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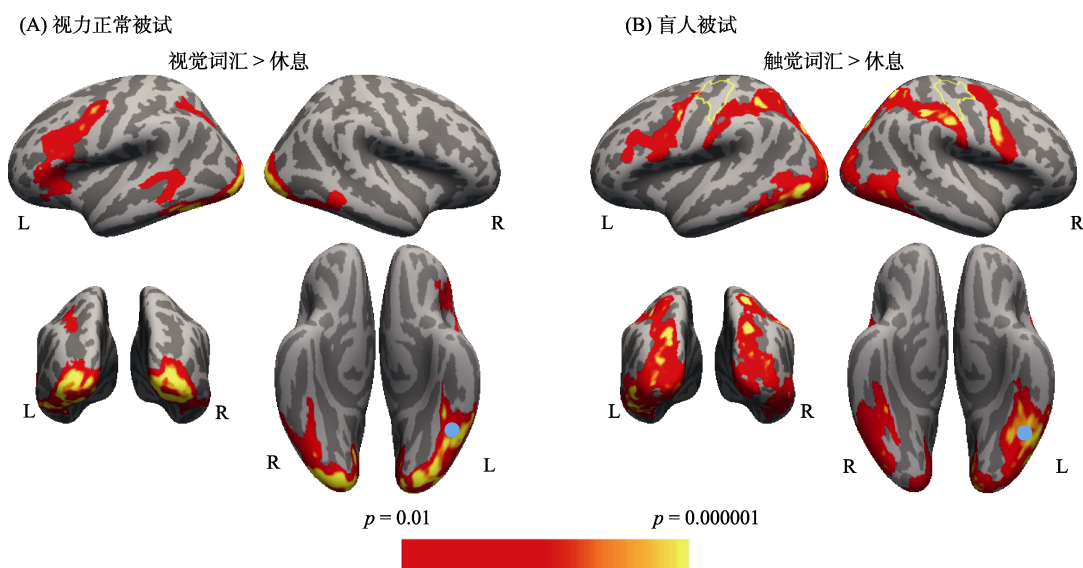


图1 视力正常被试(A)和盲人(B)在视觉/触觉阅读任务中的全脑激活图。蓝色圆点标记了以往文献中报告视觉词形区(VWFA)的位置(MNI coordinate: $-46, -53, -20$) (McCandliss et al., 2003)。黄色轮廓标记了手部初级感觉运动区(S1/M1)的位置。改编自 Tian 等人(2023)。彩图见电子版。

对于触觉盲文阅读,进入大脑皮层的起点是初级躯体感觉运动皮层。相比于视觉阅读,盲人阅读盲文时激活了一个更广泛的神经回路,包括躯体感觉运动皮层、顶叶后部和背侧枕叶、早期视觉皮层、腹侧视觉皮层,以及额颞语言网络(图1B) (Beck et al., 2023; Burton et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 1997; Sadato et al., 1998; Tian et al., 2023)。相比视觉阅读,触觉盲文阅读不仅改变了信息进入大脑的感觉通道起点,还发生在视觉经验长期缺失的背景下。这种双重因素为探究感觉通道与经验剥夺在高级认知功能重组中的作用机制提供了独特的模型体系。然而,现有研究虽已描绘了盲文阅读涉及的广泛皮层区域,但对这些区域在盲文阅读中的具体作用、彼此关系及其背后的可塑性机制仍缺乏系统性的解析。本综述以机制问题为主线,整合盲文阅读神经基础研究的证据,旨在揭示不同感觉通道和视觉经验剥夺如何共同塑造与阅读相关的皮层功能区,并以此检验任务特异-感觉通道独立(task-specific sensory-independent)理论和认知多能性假说(Cognitively Pluripotent Hypothesis)在该领域的适用性。

围绕这一目标,本文将聚焦以下三个核心科学问题:(1)早期视觉皮层在失明个体触觉盲文阅

读中的功能特异性,即它是仅参与一般触觉加工或高级语言加工,还是存在阅读特异的表征?(2)腹侧枕颞皮层的“视觉词形区”在失明个体中是否保留词形加工功能,即是否存在跨通道的词形加工机制?(3)顶叶是否存在与视觉词形区功能等效的“触觉词形区”。

2 早期视觉皮层在触觉盲文阅读中的功能特异性

对于盲人,盲文虽然通过触觉通道阅读,但仍然会激活早期视觉皮层,包括初级视觉皮层(Burton et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 1999; Sadato et al., 1996, 1998; Tian et al., 2023)。经颅磁刺激(Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, TMS)和脑损伤的研究表明,早期视觉皮层在触觉盲文阅读中有关键作用。刺激背侧枕极部位,视力正常被试会报告看到幻光,而早期盲人则报告了指尖的触觉感受,同时会造成盲文字母阅读的错误率上升(Ptito et al., 2008)。与刺激躯体感觉运动区相比,刺激枕叶会造成更多的阅读错误和启动重复效应减少(Cohen et al., 1997; Kupers et al., 2007)。脑损伤的研究发现,当枕叶因中风受到损伤时,病人无法再阅读触觉盲文(Hamilton et al., 2000)。然而,这些研究仅说明了早期视觉皮层参与了盲文阅读,

却不能明确指出早期视觉皮层在盲文阅读中具体有什么作用,或者说表征了什么信息。

一些研究者认为盲人枕叶不太可能仅承担了低级的触觉感觉功能(Cohen et al., 1997; Sadato et al., 1996, 1998; Tian et al., 2023)。当被试分别用左手和右手阅读时,与初级躯体感觉运动皮层不同,枕叶的激活偏侧化与阅读手无关,这表明早期视觉皮层与初级躯体感觉运动皮层的功能特征不同(Sadato et al., 1998; Tian et al., 2023)。早期视觉皮层在盲文阅读和触觉形状辨别任务中激活,而在非辨别的触觉感觉任务,即手指划过同质点表面的任务中则不激活(Sadato et al., 1996)。因此可以推断枕叶在盲文阅读中至少承担了高级触觉辨别的功能。枕叶的激活是否是特异于盲文阅读,目前研究还没有形成一致的结论。一些研究发现使用 TMS 刺激枕叶不仅会造成盲文阅读的错误率上升,还会造成触觉浮雕形式的罗马字母辨别的错误率上升(Cohen et al., 1997)。盲人早期视觉皮层在非文字触觉辨别任务中的激活大于简单的手部运动任务,并且对任务难度敏感(Amedi et al., 2010; Voss et al., 2016)。这些研究表明早期视觉皮层可能不是盲文阅读特异的,也负责非文字的一般触觉刺激的辨别功能。然而当早期视觉皮层因中风受到损伤时,病人盲文阅读能力受到了损伤,但其他触觉能力如识别物体或者硬币等却保持完好(Hamilton et al., 2000),这表明枕叶可能存在盲文阅读特异的区域。

此外一些研究发现早期视觉皮层,包括初级视觉皮层参与了听觉言语信息的加工,并且与额叶语言区的静息态功能连接增强(Abboud & Cohen, 2019; Bedny et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2015)。当使用独立成分分析(Independent component analysis, ICA)识别静息状态下的语言网络时,先天盲人的语言网络包括了外侧枕叶皮层(Watkins et al., 2012),并且盲人在盲文阅读时早期视觉皮层激活的偏侧化程度与语言网络的偏侧化更为相关(Tian et al., 2023)。以上结果提示了先天盲人的“视觉”皮层可能被整合到了语言加工网络中。大脑皮层的认知多能性假说(Cognitively Pluripotent Hypothesis)认为,盲人的视觉皮层由于失去了自下而上的视觉信息输入,在发育过程中来自额顶网络自上而下的远程连接将会主导盲人枕叶的功能发展,使其承担与视力正常被试的视觉皮层不

同的认知计算功能(Bedny, 2017)。因此,另一种可能性是早期视觉皮层在盲文阅读中激活是因为参与了高级言语信息的加工,而非触觉形状的感知加工。在以往触觉形状知觉的研究中,也有研究采用了命名任务,这混淆了语言信息的加工和触觉形状加工(Amedi et al., 2010)。总之,早期视觉皮层在触觉盲文阅读中既可能参与触觉知觉加工,也可能参与高级言语信息的加工,然而现有证据尚不能确定其是否存在阅读特异性的表征。

3 腹侧枕颞皮层的“视觉词形区”: 跨通道词形加工与语言加工争议

对于视觉阅读,一个关键区域是腹侧枕颞皮层梭状回中部的视觉词形区(VWFA) (Dehaene & Cohen, 2011)。以往 fMRI 的研究揭示了 VWFA 的许多功能特性,比如对低水平的视觉特征,如词的大小、在视网膜上的位置和字母的大小写不敏感,对被动呈现的听觉词汇不敏感,并且对被试熟悉的文字激活大于没有学习过的其他语言(Baker et al., 2007; Dehaene et al., 2002, 2004)。VWFA 对视觉文字的词形信息和亚词汇正字法结构敏感,比如字母身份(identity)、字母顺序,以及短字母串的词形状态等(Dehaene et al., 2004, 2005; Glezer et al., 2009, 2015),但不加工高级的言语信息,如语义、句法信息等(Baek et al., 2015; Fischer-Baum et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017)。在不同的书写系统中,无论是拼音文字,还是象形/字符文字(logographic writing system, 如中文)或者基于音节的书写系统(syllabic writing system, 如日语的平假名、片假名),都会激活 VWFA (Bolger et al., 2005; Feng et al., 2020; Krafnick et al., 2016; Nakamura et al., 2012; Rueckl et al., 2015)。神经元再利用理论认为,阅读等文化工具之所以可以形成专门的脑机制,是因为这些文化工具“再利用”了原本用于其他功能的脑区,并且会受到原本大脑解剖和连接结构的限制(Dehaene & Cohen, 2007, 2011)。从皮层固有的功能特点来讲, VWFA 所在的区域拥有多种适合加工视觉文字的特点,比如偏好高分辨率的、来自中央凹输入的视觉信息,以及对物体形状或者说物体组成部份的邻接关系更敏感,即形状假说(The shape hypothesis) (Hasson et al., 2002; Malach et al., 2002; Szwed et al., 2009, 2011)。连接偏好假说(The biased

connectivity hypothesis)认为, VWFA 占据了一个既和早期视觉皮层有连接,也和额颞语言区有连接的有利区域 (Bouhali et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2017; Yeatman et al., 2013)。这些条件形成了一个对文字加工的有利的“神经生态龕(Neuronal niche)”,为形成专门用于识别视觉文字的脑区提供了支持(Dehaene & Cohen, 2007; Hannagan et al., 2015, 2021)。

视觉文字的词形信息并不是仅在 VWFA 加工,而是存在一个从后向前的视觉词形信息层级加工梯度,文字的视觉词形信息从初级视觉皮层进入大脑,沿着腹侧视觉通路向前传送(Vinckier et al., 2007; Zhan et al., 2023)。最近的研究认为可能存在两个 VWFA 亚区(Lerma-Usabiaga et al., 2018; Weiner et al., 2017; White et al., 2019)。后部的亚区(posterior VWFA, pVWFA)更靠近初级视觉皮层,对较小的加工单元如线条特征等敏感,对由字母组成的刺激激活大于非字母刺激;更靠前的亚区(anterior VWFA, aVWFA)对更大的,或者更接近真词的加工单元敏感,对符合正字法规则的字母串激活大于不符合正字法规则的字母串(Dehaene et al., 2005; Lerma-Usabiaga et al., 2018; Vinckier et al., 2007)。VWFA 两个亚区的功能和结构连接特征也不同。结构连接的研究发现, pVWFA 可能通过垂直枕束连接至顶内沟,而 aVWFA 可能通过弓形束连接至角回和额下回等额颞语言网络(Kubota et al., 2023; Lerma-Usabiaga et al., 2018)。静息态功能连接的结果发现, pVWFA 与早期视觉皮层和背侧枕叶、顶叶有更多的连接,而 aVWFA 与额颞语言网络存在更多的连接(Yablonski et al., 2024)。

许多研究发现,先天盲人在阅读触觉盲文时同样会激活“VWFA”的位置(Beck et al., 2023; Buchel, 1998; Dzięgiel-Fivet et al., 2021; Rączy et al., 2019; Reich et al., 2011)。Reich 等人的研究发现,盲文词相比较于无意义的盲点符号,在 vOTC 激活的峰值点与经典的 VWFA 非常接近。有研究还发现 VWFA 仅在触觉阅读中存在与视觉文字类似的正字法重复抑制(orthographic repetition-suppression)效应(Glezer et al., 2009),对听觉词汇没有表现出重复抑制效应,表明盲人的“VWFA”只对触觉盲文的亚词汇结构敏感,而不加工口语词汇(Rączy et al., 2019)。任务特异-

感觉通道独立(task-specific sensory-independent)理论认为,在失去了来自下丘脑自下而上的视觉输入后,盲人的枕叶皮层会转为承担其他感知觉通道信息的加工,但保持其基本的认知计算功能不变(Heimler et al., 2015)。盲人的“VWFA”与额颞语言网络也同样有更多的连接,且盲人和视力正常的被试在该区域静息态功能连接模式也高度相似(Abboud & Cohen, 2019; Wang et al., 2015)。形状假说认为, VWFA 对于物体形状和物体组成部份的邻接关系的加工是独立于感觉通道的,因此视觉文字、触觉盲文甚至声音景观(soundscapes)都能够激活 VWFA,但口语词只会选择性地激活位于颞叶的听觉词形区(Auditory word form area, AWFA),不会激活 VWFA (Dębska et al., 2023; Hannagan et al., 2015)。

然而,也有研究发现盲人的“VWFA”表现出与视力正常被试不一样的功能特征。与早期视觉皮层类似,有研究发现先天盲人“VWFA”会加工听觉呈现的句子,并且对句法难度敏感,这与形状假说的预期不符;而视力正常被试的 VWFA 则不会加工句法信息(Kim et al., 2017)。在视觉文字阅读中,对于多数书写系统,口语-阅读会聚(speech-reading convergence)的神经网络集中在外侧裂周的语言脑区,如额下回、颞中回和角回(Rueckl et al., 2015);但盲人的“VWFA”也表现出口语-阅读会聚效应,视力正常的被试的 VWFA 则无该效应(Beck et al., 2023; Dzięgiel-Fivet et al., 2021)。一项研究发现,盲人的 vOTC 在层级性加工方面也与视力正常的群体不同,先天盲人的整个 vOTC,一直延伸到初级视觉皮层都不存在对词形信息的层级性加工梯度,而整体都表现出对真词的激活大于辅音字符串和触觉形状等控制刺激(Tian et al., 2023)。该研究还发现 vOTC 对真词的加工是双侧化的,而不是像视觉阅读那样有明显的左侧化(Dzięgiel-Fivet et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2023),这可能与先天盲人的语言网络相比于视力正常被试左侧化程度降低有关(Lane et al., 2017)。这些研究都表明,与早期视觉皮层类似,同样存在另一种可能性是盲人的“VWFA”加工了高级言语信息而不是触觉词形信息。以往大多数研究都采用了盲文词对比低层级触觉刺激,如无意义的盲文点阵这样的实验设计(Debowska et al., 2016; Dzięgiel-Fivet et al., 2021; Reich et al., 2011),

无法区分“VWFA”加工的是触觉词形信息, 还是盲文词的高级言语信息比如语音, 语义等。Raczy等人(2019)的研究虽然采用了重复抑制效应范式, 通过对比触觉词形的重复效应和听觉语言的重复效应, 试图证明“VWFA”仅加工触觉词形信息而不加工听觉言语信息。然而在他们的研究中, 触觉任务是检测某个字母是否出现, 涉及文字的加工, 而听觉任务是判断刺激是由男性还是女性的声音呈现, 不涉及文字加工。触觉任务和听觉任务的不对等, 导致二者不能直接对比, 无法排除盲人“VWFA”加工了言语信息的可能性。

综上所述, 关于盲人腹侧枕颞皮层(包括VWFA)的功能存在两种主要观点: 任务特异-感觉通道独立理论认为, 该区域在视觉剥夺后仍保留词形加工的能力, 仅仅从视觉转为触觉的跨通道加工; 而认知多能性假说则认为, 该区域在失明后不再执行词形分析, 而是被重新分配去承担更高层级的语言处理。若后者成立, 则意味着触觉词形加工可能由其他脑区来完成(图2)。顶叶在这一背景下值得特别关注: 它在触觉空间信息处理和运动控制中发挥重要作用。那么, 顶叶是否可能包含与“视觉词形区”等效的“触觉词形区

(tactile word form area, TWFA)”呢?

4 顶叶的“触觉词形区”

以往许多研究都发现盲人盲文阅读额外激活了顶叶和背侧枕叶的多个区域(Burton et al., 2002, 2012; Dziegiel-Fivet et al., 2021; Sadato et al., 1998)。盲文阅读起始于顶叶和额叶的手部感觉运动区, 顶叶后部在触觉形状识别中起到了重要作用(Bauer et al., 2015; Hegner et al., 2010)。顶叶后部与躯体感觉皮层有密集的连接, 也和额叶的语言区以及工作记忆相关脑区存在连接(Burks et al., 2017; Duhamel et al., 1998; Kaas, 2012; Lewis & Van Essen, 2000; Ruschel et al., 2014)。依据“神经生态龕”的逻辑, 顶叶后部因其对触觉形状识别的敏感性, 并与语言相关区域保持连接的有利条件, 具备了类似VWFA的词形加工基础, 因而在此可能形成一个“触觉词形区”(Tian et al., 2023)。虽然在先天盲人的vOTC没有发现类似视觉文字的层级性加工梯度, 但在顶叶和背侧枕叶可能存在着一个触觉文字的层级性加工梯度, 即顶叶前部接近初级躯体感觉运动皮层的区域对触觉形状的激活大于文字刺激, 而顶叶后部和背侧枕叶对

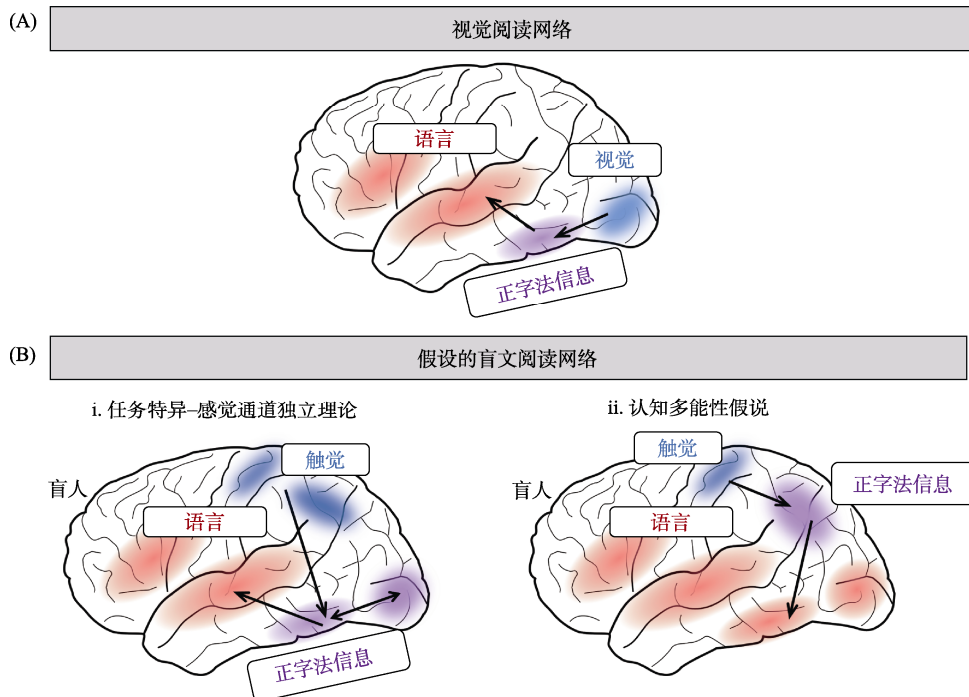


图2 (A) 视觉阅读网络; (B) 假设的盲文阅读网络。

真词激活更高(Tian et al., 2023)。另一项研究探索了英文盲文的词长效应,英文盲文的特殊之处在于存在高频字母组合的缩写,例如将“ing”缩写为一个盲文单元“:”,“er”缩写为“::”等等。该研究发现顶叶存在一个区域对英文单词原本的词长敏感,而不是盲文缩写后的实际长度,这表明该区域表征了盲文的亚词汇结构,而不是低层级的感知觉信息(Liu et al., 2023)。

最近一项研究让被试分别用左手和右手阅读盲文字母,用多体素和机器学习的分析方法,试图分离盲文字母阅读中阅读手依赖的感觉加工与阅读手独立的知觉加工。该研究发现,初级和次级躯体感觉皮层、顶内沟前部和后部对阅读手敏感,而早期视觉皮层和 VWFA 对阅读手不敏感。研究者认为对阅读手敏感表明其加工了盲文字母的感觉信息;而对阅读手不敏感表明其进行了更高层级的知觉加工,类似高级视觉皮层对视网膜位置不敏感;外侧枕叶则处于两者之间,可能承担了感觉到知觉的过渡功能(Haupt et al., 2024)。Haupt 等人的研究和 Tian 等人(2023)、Liu 等人(2023)的研究存在矛盾,认为顶叶仅承担了对盲文触觉信息低层级的感觉加工。然而前者采用了单个字母作为实验材料,单个字母并不包含高级语言信息,仅依靠早期视觉皮层和 VWFA 在加工字母时对阅读手不敏感这个结果,不能排除该区域加工语言信息这个可能性。此外,在自然情境的阅读中,盲人通常是用两只手共同阅读,一只手作为惯用主阅读手,而另一只手通常用于追踪位置或者预读等。如果考虑到左右手在阅读中承担不同功能的情况,对阅读手敏感是否还能够作为加工低级感觉信息的证据,目前还不清楚。

综合现有证据,顶叶在触觉盲文阅读中不仅参与低级的触觉感觉加工,还可能在更高层级的正字法信息处理中发挥作用。一方面,部分研究发现顶叶后部对盲文亚词汇结构敏感,并呈现出从感知到词形加工的层级性梯度,提示其具备形成“触觉词形区”的条件;另一方面,也有研究认为顶叶主要承担低层级的感觉加工,高级词形分析仍由腹侧枕叶皮层主导。这些分歧反映出目前对顶叶在盲文阅读网络中定位与功能的认识仍不一致,因此,顶叶是否存在与视觉阅读功能等效的“触觉词形区”,是亟需澄清的重要问题。

5 总结与展望

盲人在阅读触觉盲文时,激活了包括视觉皮层在内的广泛区域,也包括视觉阅读的重要区域“VWFA”。然而,最近的研究表明先天盲人的“VWFA”加工了高级言语信息,可能并不加工触觉词形信息。与此相对应,有研究者提出在顶叶后部可能存在一个专门处理触觉词形的脑区,即“触觉词形区”。综上所述,虽然目前的研究已经大致勾勒出盲人盲文阅读的神经回路,然而仍存在许多关键问题尚未解决。

首先,盲人触觉盲文阅读激活了广泛的“视觉”区域,包括早期视觉皮层、外侧枕叶和背侧枕叶的区域。然而,这些视觉皮层在盲文阅读中表征了什么信息目前还不清楚。有一项研究以及我们未发表的数据都表明,盲人枕叶的不同区域参与到不同的高级认知任务中,包括言语加工、数学加工、长时记忆和执行控制等(Abboud & Cohen, 2019)。阅读是一个复杂的过程,包括阅读独有的过程,即对文字符号的识别,也包括与语言加工重合的过程,如对语音、语义的加工等,还包括长时记忆、注意和执行控制等高级的认知过程。目前需要阐明的是,在盲文阅读中激活的枕叶区域是否存在阅读特异的区域,还是参与了与阅读相关如语言加工或者执行控制等高级认知过程?如果存在阅读特异的区域,那么其表征了什么信息?

其次,目前仍不清楚“VWFA”在盲文阅读中是否依然承担了触觉词形加工。在视觉文字的研究中,VWFA 对阅读的特异性得到了多重证据的支持,包括启动范式、多变量分析和纵向的追踪研究等等(Baeck et al., 2015; Dehaene-Lambertz et al., 2018; Fischer-Baum et al., 2017; Glezer et al., 2009; Rothlein & Rapp, 2014)。而目前盲文阅读中的 VWFA 参与触觉词形加工的证据主要来自单变量分析,以及将刺激与低层级控制条件对比所得到的结果,并不能排除 VWFA 加工的是高级言语信息的可能。虽然 Rączy 等人(2019)的研究采用了启动范式,表明 VWAF 对仅对触觉盲文存在重复抑制效应,对听觉言语条件不存在重复抑制效应,然而任务的不匹配导致两种条件无法直接比较。

第三,一个未来值得探索的研究方向是:顶叶在触觉盲文阅读中究竟是负责低级的触觉感觉

加工, 还是存在一个专门的“触觉词形区”。结合盲文阅读顶叶的研究和视觉阅读的研究, 我们认为盲文阅读可能和视觉阅读类似, 存在两个甚至可能有多个词形加工亚区。与视觉阅读相比, 触觉阅读的层级性加工梯度存在显著差异。这源于其信息入口是初级感觉皮层, 因此从低级触觉信息到高级正字法及言语信息的处理, 可能并非局限于腹侧枕颞皮层(vOTC), 而是一条从顶叶开始, 并延伸至 vOTC、LOC 与早期视觉皮层的广泛通路。区分从顶叶到枕叶的不同区域在阅读中分别表征了什么信息可能是解决该问题的关键。

最后, 与盲文阅读水平有关的神经基础是什么, 这个问题还鲜有人研究。目前对于盲文阅读水平神经基础的研究较多是在视力正常的人群中进行的。学习了触觉盲文的视力正常被试的布洛卡区、早期躯体感觉皮层、枕中回、枕下回和腹侧视觉皮层在阅读任务中的激活强度与阅读速度有关, VWFA 和初级躯体感觉皮层的静息态功能连接强度也与阅读速度有显著相关(Matuszewski et al., 2021; Siuda-Krzywicka et al., 2016)。然而, 视力正常人群和盲人的盲文阅读的神经基础可能不同。一是视力正常人群和盲人的盲文阅读速度差异巨大。在视力正常成人的两篇研究中, 虽然进行了 8 至 9 个月的触觉盲文阅读训练, 然而视力正常成人的阅读速度仅仅为从几乎完全不能阅读(0~1 词/分钟)到最高 17 个词每分钟, 平均达到 18.41 个字母每分钟(Matuszewski et al., 2021; Siuda-Krzywicka et al., 2016)。而在早期盲人群体中, 熟练的阅读者可以达到平均 399 个字母每分钟(Oshima et al., 2014)。二是视力正常人群和盲人的视觉皮层功能特征不同, 并且视力正常的成人已经建立了成熟的视觉阅读网络。这些差异都有可能导致阅读的神经基础不同。目前仅有少量研究探索了盲人盲文阅读速度的神经基础。一篇研究发现晚期盲人左侧外侧枕叶和额下回的静息态功能连接强度和阅读速度有显著相关(Wang et al., 2024), 但该研究并未考虑被试是否学习过视觉文字这一因素。另一项研究(Beck et al., 2023)探究了先天盲人字母-声音整合脑区的激活与其阅读技能的相关性, 但未发现显著关联。一些早期小样本的研究($n < 10$)探查了先天/早期盲人和晚期盲人盲文阅读神经基础的差异, 并没有得到一致的结论。一些研究发现

与先天盲人类似, 晚期盲人阅读盲文时也激活腹侧视觉皮层和早期视觉皮层, 只是激活范围较小(Buchel, 1998; Burton et al., 2002)。但也有研究发现晚期盲人不激活枕叶区域特别是初级视觉皮层, 并且使用 TMS 刺激枕叶不影响晚期盲人的盲文阅读表现(Cohen et al., 1999)。一项对低视力人群的研究探查了盲文学习的起始年龄和静息态功能连接的关系, 发现相比于未学习过盲文的低视力者, 学习过盲文的低视力者的 VWFA 和中央后回的静息态功能连接显著增强。VWFA 和枕下回的连接减弱, 并且与盲文学习的起始年龄相关(Zhou et al., 2020)。在拼音文字的研究中, 晚期盲人的阅读速度显著慢于先天盲人(Oshima et al., 2014), 但原因尚未明晰。也有研究表明视觉皮层的功能重组也存在关键期(Bedny et al., 2010; Kanjlia et al., 2019; Röder et al., 2021)。探明盲文阅读水平的影响因素和神经基础, 能够为盲文阅读教育提供理论依据。

在未来的研究中, 首先需要在任务设计与加工层级分析方面取得突破。现有证据多基于单变量分析和与低级控制刺激的对比, 尚不足以确定早期视觉皮层或 VWFA 在盲文阅读中的特异性功能。后续研究可通过重复抑制范式、启动范式及多变量模式分析等方法, 区分低级触觉加工、词形加工与高级言语加工的神经表征; 同时, 实验设计应充分考虑触觉阅读的特殊性, 如双手分工与阅读手效应, 以避免任务条件不对等造成的解释偏差。

其次, 在神经机制探查与连接组研究方面, 有必要进一步明确顶叶、VWFA 与额颞语言网络之间的关系。如果顶叶确实存在“触觉词形区”, 其应当在功能连接和结构连接上表现出与视觉阅读网络类似的偏好。未来可结合多模态成像技术(如 fMRI、DTI、MEG 等)描绘从顶叶到枕叶的层级性加工路径, 阐明盲文阅读中不同脑区的信息流向与交互机制, 从而为“任务特异”与“认知多能”理论的争论提供更直接的证据。

最后, 发展性与个体差异研究同样是关键方向。纵向追踪研究可以在盲文学习前后观察脑功能与连接的变化, 从因果关系层面验证特定脑区在阅读习得中的作用; 跨群体比较则可探讨先天盲人、早期失明与晚期失明在阅读网络重组上的异同, 并分析视觉经验起始时间、盲文学习年龄

及视觉文字学习经历等因素对阅读神经基础的影响。此外, 还应关注不同阅读水平个体的神经差异, 为盲文教育和康复干预提供理论依据。

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The influence of sensory modalities and experience deprivation on the neural basis of reading: Evidence from tactile Braille reading

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Abstract: Both the deprivation of sensory experience and the acquisition of cultural skills such as reading can induce plastic changes in the brain. Studying the neural basis of Braille reading in blind individuals offers a unique perspective for understanding these mechanisms. In this review, we summarize recent neuroimaging evidence with a focus on three central questions: (1) whether the early visual cortex contains reading-specific representations; (2) whether the visual word form area within the ventral occipito-temporal cortex retains cross-modal orthographic processing functions; and (3) whether the parietal cortex contains a tactile word form area. Current findings suggest that the roles of the early visual cortex and the ventral occipito-temporal cortex remain controversial, whereas the parietal cortex may play a critical role in tactile orthographic processing. Future research should further clarify the specific information represented in the “visual” cortex of blind individuals during Braille reading and test the existence of a tactile word form area. It is also important to explore the neural basis underlying individual differences in Braille reading proficiency. Together, these efforts will advance our understanding of brain plasticity and provide theoretical foundations for Braille reading education.

Keywords: Braille reading, blindness, neuroplasticity, visual word form area