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Alternating Verbs in Multilingual Speakers with Aphasia and Multilingual Late Learners of English

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Introduction

Transitivity is one aspect of verb semantics and syntax which differs in Hindi and English. While a range of single verbs in Hindi undergo morphological derivation to form the intransitive and transitive form of the same verb to express causation, in English only a few of the equivalent Hindi verbs have the same form (lexical causatives). Other constructions in English corresponding to the equivalent Hindi causative verbs have to be expressed either by using periphrastic causatives in addition to the lexical verb or by using two related verbs with unrelated forms (suppletion).

This study uses a biased language selection condition to assess production and judgement of causative verbs in late learners of English (LLE) and multilingual speakers with aphasia with the aim of identifying if the verb deficit post aphasia is influenced by the morpho-syntactic properties of the verbs in the individual languages. Our prediction is that given the linguistic differences across the two languages, multilingual speakers with aphasia will show a difference in their performance across languages and across tasks irrespective of their prior language abilities.

Method

Four LLE (mean age = 59.5 years, mean years of exposure to English = 33 years) and four multilingual speakers with aphasia (mean age = 67.5 years, mean years of exposure to English = 50.5 years) were tested on three production and one judgement task in Hindi and English. Line drawings were used to elicit twenty four single verbs, and the same verbs in the causative and non causative form in sentences. The verbs were divided into three groups of 8 based on the way the Hindi causatives are syntactically expressed in English. The verb production in sentences involved a priming task, where the alternate form of the verb was primed and 2 practice items for each verb group provided the target syntactic frame. Sixty sentences (30 grammatical, 30 ungrammatical) were used for the picture judgement task.

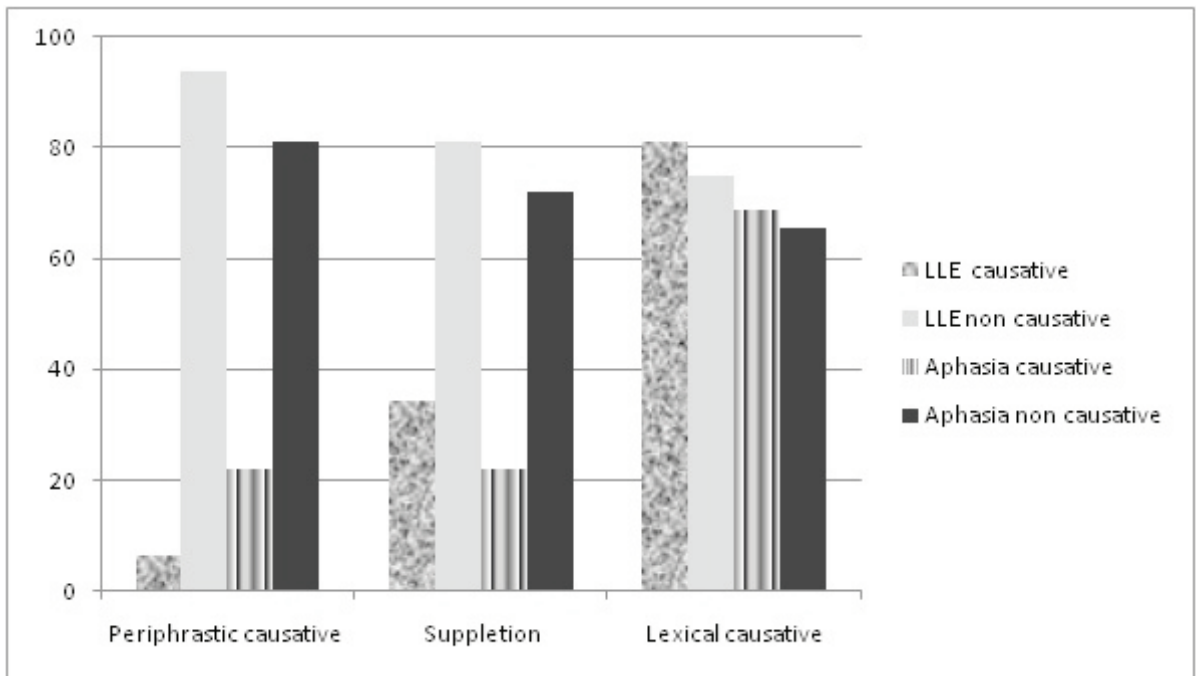
Results

Both the groups performed better in Hindi than English. Both groups showed poor performance in English for the causative condition involving periphrastic causatives and suppletives compared to the non causative condition but showed the reverse for the lexical causatives (Figure 1). Unlike the performance of the participants with aphasia, LLE group's production errors mirrored their judgement errors. Production errors made by the LLE included generalising lexical causativization, using semantically intransitive verbs as syntactically transitive and morphological over-generalizations. Aphasic production errors were predominantly omissions and noun verbalizations although they showed a few of the above error patterns.

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Figure 1: Production of English verbs in sentences in causative and non causative conditions



Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the syntax of the causative verbs and the meaning attached to these verbs in individual languages influence verb production in Hindi- English bi/multilingual speakers and that there is a need to consider these factors when assessing aphasia in multi-lingual speakers.