Exploring metalinguistic profiles in people with aphasia. Some therapeutic implications of the MetAphAs protocol

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A great amount of research has been devoted during the last decade to the assessment of abilities involved in the control, monitorization and strategic use of language by people with aphasia. Research is progressively displacing the focus of interest from language itself to the relationship between language and users of language in different communicative settings. It is now clear that the formal (grammatical) component of verbal behavior manifests itself differently depending on the context of use (Hernández-Sacristán, Rosell-Clari, & MacDonald 2011). As a consequence, a verbal deficit such as agrammatism should also be reevaluated as an across-task variable phenomenon (Sharaoui and Nespoulous, 2012). This perspective embracing language, users of language and contexts of use is defining a new pragmatic-functional paradigm in aphasiology. A particular component of the relationship between language and users of language can be captured under the notion of ‘reflexivity’ (Hockett, 1960), by which we refer to the specific way humans can transform the linguistic tool into an object of reference and perceptual control. In a more general sense, reflexivity in language can be understood as the particular way verbal behavior becomes a factor involved in metacognitive processing and/or executive functioning. The MetAphAs (Metalanguage in Aphasia Assessment) protocol (Hernández-Sacristán, Rosell-Clari, Serra-Alegre and Quiles-Climent, 2012) has been developed with the aim of obtaining an integrated view on the way people with aphasia are enabled to perform metacognitive processes associated with verbal behavior: that is to obtain an integrated view of preserved natural metalinguistic abilities in people with aphasia.

To illustrate this general objective, we will offer in our presentation the ‘metalinguistic profiles’ of five aphasic speakers. Metalinguistic profiles, as established with the MetAphAs protocol, are sensitive to aphasia type and severity for these five aphasic individuals, which confirm previous results from a more extended sample. After comparing profiles, and focusing our attention on the preserved metalinguistic abilities, we will justify the interest in defining these preserved abilities as a baseline for therapeutic intervention, for both practical and theoretical reasons. Natural metalinguistic abilities include, among others, inner speech abilities, paraphrasing abilities, techniques involved in the deferred and the referred use of language, natural translation abilities, general monitoring abilities, control of contextualization cues, displaced uses of language and techniques involved in the control of the intersubjective dimension of verbal behavior and the intersemiotic dimension of communicative practice, as manifested in the relationship between language and gesturing.

References

