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Cross-Language Generalization in an Arabic-English Bilingual Person with Aphasia

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Introduction

Bilingualism is becoming the rule, rather than the exception. Combined with a growing number of strokes this leads to an increasing number of bilingual adults with aphasia. Despite this, therapy for bilingual aphasics has only recently become the focus of clinical aphasiology research (Ansaldo, Saidi, & Ruiz, 2010). However, as clinicians are more often facing bilingual clients and there is limited time for assessment and treatment, the issue of generalisation of treatment effects across languages becomes ever more important (Kiran & Roberts, 2010). Some case studies on bilingual speakers with aphasia have been published, but there still is a great need for more studies, on various language combinations.

The aim of this single case study was to examine cross-language generalization of language treatment in a bilingual speaker with severe aphasia.

Case Study

The participant in the present study is a 64-year old male, suffering from severe expressive and impressive aphasia following a left hemisphere stroke. The participant is bilingual, with Arabic as his first language (L1) and English as his second language (L2). Language measurements were conducted pre- and post-treatment in both languages with *The Bilingual Aphasia Test* (BAT, Paradis, 1987). Test results showed a slightly better performance in L1 pre-treatment. In addition, an assessment of 120 verbs from *Newcastle University Aphasia Therapy Resources* (Webster, Morris, Withworth, & Howard, 2009) was conducted pre- and post-treatment. Language therapy was given in the participant's L2 one hour twice a week for ten weeks. Treatment focused on the production of selected verbs. The verbs were divided into two groups; treatment focused on semantic and phonologically tasks respectively.

Results

The participant showed improvement in his production of the selected verbs in treated language (L2), with greater improvement in the phonological treated verbs (an increase from 20 to 65 % correct). There was no significant improvement in the untreated verbs. In L1, he had close to ceiling effect pre-treatment and this was maintained post-treatment. He showed significant improvement in his results on the BAT in untreated language (L1), and some better results in treated language (L2).

Conclusion

The results indicate a cross-language generalization from the participant's second language to his first language.

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The results are discussed in relation to theory on bilingual word recognition and the relevance for clinical practice.

References

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