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A New Conversation-based Therapy for Agrammatism: Initial Findings from an Ongoing Intervention Study

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The Issue

Conversation Analysis (CA) has shown that utterances produced by agrammatic speakers in everyday conversation differ significantly from utterances elicited by assessment and therapy tasks (Beeke, Wilkinson & Maxim, 2007). This may explain why carryover of skills targeted in therapy into spontaneous speech has proved hard to detect (Marshall, 2002). This poster reports on an ongoing Stroke Association-funded study to evaluate a new therapy for agrammatism that focuses directly on grammar in conversation (Beeke, Maxim, Best & Cooper, in press).

Method

Ten dyads where one person has agrammatic aphasia are being studied in three phases of eight weeks each: assessment, therapy and post-therapy assessment. A battery of impairment, activity/participation tests and interviews are administered and each dyad video-records a weekly 20 minute conversation. Therapy is based on the SPPARC conversation training programme (Lock, Wilkinson & Bryan 2001), adapted to target the conversational effects of agrammatism, and teach the person with aphasia turn construction strategies.

Results

This poster reports preliminary findings for Simon (large left MCA infarct May 2006) and Cath (pseudonyms), husband and wife in their late 30s. Test results and a qualitative analysis of conversation samples will illustrate the effects of therapy on decontextualised grammar and the construction of a conversational turn.

Early qualitative analysis of Simon's pre-therapy conversations revealed: (i) incomplete turns (lines 2, 6); (ii) turns with unclear conversational function (6, 10); (iii) frequent long pauses where it was unclear if he intended to continue (2, 6, 8, 10):

(Bedroom renovations)

01   Cath   our bedroom

02   Simon   →   (1.6) yes (2.1)

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03   Cath   w- we wanted=

04   Simon   =the bed

05   Cath   our bed yeah?

06   Simon   →   (1.5) the (2.0) ermm (3.0) inside >°and out°< (2.7)

07   Cath   what, so the headboard's underneath the window?

08   Simon   →   (8.5)

09   Cath   want the headboard underneath the window?

10   Simon   →   (1.7) (dunno?) (12.0)

Discussion

In aqualitative analysis of post-therapy samples, turns appear longer and more complete (thoughstill severely agrammatic), Simon uses strategies for turn building targeted in therapy, and appears better able to initiate new topics. We are in the process of investigating the quantitative significance of these preliminary qualitative impressions of change.

References

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