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Determiner cuing in Arabic anomaia: the role of syntax in lexical retrieval

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Anomaia is the inability to retrieve words after an injury to the language areas in the brain. It can be caused by a deficit in the mental representation of semantics, syntax or phonology. Previous studies have used semantic and phonological cueing as therapeutic interventions. Recent studies on anomaia in English have shown that there is a positive effect of syntactic cues on word retrieval (Gregory, Herbert, & Varley, 2010; Herbert and Best, 2010, Herbert, Webster and Dyson, 2012). The aim of this study is to examine whether the production of the Arabic definite article /al- 'the' prior to nouns facilitates noun retrieval in Arabic aphasia, with regards to naming speed and accuracy. Three participants with anomaia following stroke named 186 pictures of everyday objects in two conditions; bare noun condition, and determiner + noun condition. Participants' accuracy and reaction time were compared in both conditions. The production of the determiner plus noun in picture naming facilitated spoken naming in all three participants. Nouns produced with the determiner were produced faster and more accurately than their counterparts produced without the determiner. Participants with agrammatism produced morpho-syntactic errors in the bare noun condition (e.g. derivational errors /burtugala/ [singular feminine noun] 'orange' – /burtugali/ [adjective] 'orange [the colour]'), but not in the determiner + noun condition. This suggests that the determiner acts as a filter which ensures that subsequent attempts to name are nouns, resulting in responses that are faster and more accurate. These results have theoretical implications for spoken word production models (Dell et al., 1997; Jackendoff, 2007; Levelt et al., 1999), and further implications in the domains of syntax, language therapy and cognitive neuropsychology of language.