Subjective Communication Difficulties in Very Mild Aphasia

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Background

- Experienced clinicians recognize that people can have subjective complaints about persisting aphasia, yet score within normal limits on aphasia batteries.
- The validity of these complaints is partially supported by case reports and evidence that discourse analyses reveal impairment in complex language constructions.
- There is a risk that needs are dismissed for people with mild aphasia and that treatment is either not offered or is poorly aligned with clients’ needs.
- Purpose: Characterize the experience of living with mild aphasia within a holistic framework for aphasia outcomes

Method

Subject Age Etiology Months post Onset WAB-R A-Q
1 48 CVA 25 94.7
2 58 CVA 29 95.2
3 58 CVA 115 96.1
4 64 CVA 25 98.9
5 31 CVA 21 99.2

- 5 participants
  - History of aphasia after stroke or traumatic brain injury
  - Prior diagnosis of clinically significant aphasia
  - WAB-R A-Q > 93.8
- Structured Interview:
  1. Rated difficulty of twenty situations as difficult, somewhat difficult, not difficult, n/a
  2. Asked to expand on situations rated as difficult

Communication Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>task with healthcare staff</th>
<th>do several things at once</th>
<th>are in a new or unfamiliar situation</th>
<th>talk with former or current work colleagues</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ask for help/directions</td>
<td>argue or debate</td>
<td>attend religious services</td>
<td>go out to restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk with children</td>
<td>feel sick or tired</td>
<td>exercise</td>
<td>go shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk about important or emotional issues</td>
<td>read letters, emails, or notes</td>
<td>talk one on one with family</td>
<td>write letters, emails, or notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk with children</td>
<td>attend social gatherings or parties</td>
<td>talk with several people at once</td>
<td>talk with people you don’t know</td>
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Results

- Iterative process used to conduct a qualitative analysis of the recorded discussion
- In vivo and descriptive coding techniques applied to identify recurring themes
  1. Summarized reflections with an open coding system
  2. Condensed these codes via a 24-item codebook
  3. Identified themes across codes and assigned them to one of the four A-FROM domains

A-FROM Domain | Participation in Life Situations | Personal Identities, attitudes, and feelings | Communication and Language Environment | Language & related Impairment
---|---|---|---|---
*Reduced Social Participation* | *Feeling emotional* | *Awareness of conversation partner attitudes* | *Everyday difficulties with language use* | *Feeling of self* | *Need for preparation* | *Need for focused attention* | *Advocating for self* |

“People try to tell me that they really and truly can’t hear my aphasia. I can hear it immensely just in my language is not enough. I have to do dry runs all the time. I have to think about what I’m going to say and I don’t go much to parties for the very same reason.”

“If I try to speak to a lot of people at once, then I say I get held up on ‘I’m just kind of standing there like…duh.’ If I try to speak to a lot of people at once, then I say I don’t go much to parties for the very same reason. We went to Thanksgiving in [state] and I met some people that I had never met before. And for me that’s a very uncomfortable situation. I’m trying to think of something clever and witty to say and I just kind of standing there like…duh.”

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“My words are not fluent, the language is not nice… it comes out in parts and pieces.”

Discussion

- People with very mild aphasia have salient intervention needs in all four A-FROM domains.
- Communication challenges may not be readily apparent to communication partners, but they are often painfully obvious to the person with aphasia.
- Suggestions for possible intervention and research:
  - Acceptance and self-advocacy
  - Graded exposure with increasing challenges
  - Complex language production and personal strategies
  - Task simplification in demanding settings
  - Self-efficacy and confidence

References


Disclosures

Dr. Haley is a valued employee at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We have no other financial or nonfinancial disclosures to report.