Chapter 12
Discourse Elicitation in Aphasia: An Indian Framework

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ABSTRACT

Persons with aphasia (PWA) face varying difficulties of communication breakdown through different stages of recovery. With speech-language therapy, significant recovery may be seen at unitary levels, but the ultimate success of therapy is evident when the PWA uses all of the units as a whole and is able to communicate optimally to sustain social identities. An individualized intervention program as the focus, a protocol is proposed with seven semi-structured interviews aimed at eliciting discourse incorporating the philosophies of the social model, LPAA, SCA, AphasiaBank Protocol, and Protocol to Measure Participation of Persons with Aphasia. The interviews with the PWA and their communication partners in individual and joint sessions can help the clinician answer questions regarding the PWA’s physical abilities, dietary issues, functional independence, personal traits, relationships at home, different social roles played, and subsequently plan a treatment program, and track the holistic recovery of the PWA.

DISCOURSE IN COMMUNICATION

Successful social bonds form the foundations of human communication. Social networking is cemented with concrete conversational episodes whose primary purpose is information exchange. Each individual’s innate desire to communicate brings about the multitude of language forms witnessed in the environment. Language is molded, modified, scaffolded and presented as discourse for sharing of ideas, thoughts and feelings. This transmission of information between individual units is indispensable for the existence of the unit as a whole. Language disorders hinder the smooth flow of information causing an imbalance in

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Discourse Elicitation in Aphasia

Discourse is defined as the basic unit of human communication. Pragmatics, component of language, defines the contextual use of language. The mutual relationship of language and context determine “why a speaker says something, when the speaker says it; to whom the speaker says it and how it is said”. Yet, words and sentences alone cannot completely describe how discourse is produced, given the variations in the linguistic structures based on the context. The cognitive and social aspects of language play exhibit a symbiotic reaction in discourse. Cognition and language are two interrelated domains working on the various aspects of information processing in the brain. The role of cognition in language dissemination is visible in the pragmatic ability of an individual. Discourse being the denouement of the interaction of cognition, language and context, deserves a multifaceted investigation (Cherney, Shadden, and Coelho, 1998). The pragmatic appropriateness of discourse revolves around three context: extra-linguistic, paralinguistic, and linguistic contexts (Davis, 1986). The extra-linguistic context is inclusive of external-physical surroundings, time of the day and the number and location of the participants- and internal factors of participants. The paralinguistic context refers to the prosodic and suprasegmental component of an utterance. The linguistic context refers to the verbal output. Discourse is a series of connected sentences that convey a message. Although typically discourse is longer than a word, it has been argued that when a word alone expresses a message, it may be considered discourse. This is particularly relevant for persons with aphasia (PWA) in which the unit of analysis may be as short as a word.

Types of discourse entail descriptive, narrative, procedural, persuasive, expository and conversational. Discourse is classified based on the functions it serves. Analysis of discourse involves multilevel examination that (a) assesses PWAs’ performance across discourse tasks that require different cognitive and discourse skills and (b) assesses different aspects of discourse performance within the same task. Microstructural analyses focus at the local level of the word. They are concerned with the small elements in a text and the relations between these small elements. Macrostructural analyses focus at the level of the entire text. Superstructural analysis overlies the text and includes the analysis of story grammar. PWA may show differential impairments at each level. Therefore, it is important to use a variety of discourse elicitation and analysis procedure to identify the specific discourse impairments of the PWA.

ASSESSMENT OF DISCOURSE

The proliferation of research on discourse analysis has occurred concomitantly with changes in health care that emphasizes the need for determining functional goals for communicatively impaired PWA and measuring functional outcomes in clinical practice. The environment determines the nature of communication; if the environment changes, the communication changes accordingly. Functional communication goals for a specific person can be determined only with respect to that persons’ own social and physical setting and therefore can be defined only with respect to the individual (Hartley, 1995). Discourse analysis procedures provide the clinician with a set of evaluation tools that (a) describe the impairment in objective and measurable terms, (b) help identify the underlying cognitive or linguistic processes that contribute to the discourse impairment, (c) assist in treatment planning, and (d) are sensitive to changes over time. It is important to consider the discourse of PWA. However, the systematic application of discourse analysis procedures may not be warranted for all individuals, particularly, if the communication...