The Relationship between Discourse Performance and Life Participation in Persons with Aphasia

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Introduction

- Life participation, as defined by the WHO-ICF, is the nature and extent of a person’s involvement in life situations.
- There is limited understanding of the predictors of the participation of persons with aphasia (PWAs) in community, civic and social life.
- Language difficulties experienced by PWAs often prevent their participation in a variety of life roles that require communication (work, community engagement, relationships, etc.).
- Measurement of communicative ability during conversation and/or structured discourse has been demonstrated to reliably predict real-world conversational abilities, listener perceptions, social integration and quality of life.
- Research demonstrates that even those with mild aphasia produce discourse samples that, though well-structured, are characterized by reduced complexity, content length, coherence and lexical diversity.
- Discourse abilities may therefore have a strong and positive relationship with life participation. This relationship has not been explored, and the discourse measures best suited for exploring this relationship need to be established.
- For example, what combination of word-level, cohesion/coherence, “gist”, correctness, and efficiency measures would best predict life participation?
- Research Question: Is there a relationship between discourse performance and life participation?
  A. Is there a relationship between lexical diversity during discourse and life participation?
  B. Is there a relationship between the ability to express essential concepts during discourse and life participation?

Methods

Participants
- A total of 39 individuals with stroke-induced aphasia participated in this study.
  - 7 PWAs were excluded: 5 did not complete all 3 narratives; 2 had insufficient number of tokens for the VOCD analysis.
  - Our final sample included 32 PWAs (13 female)
  - Age: Mean 61.9 years (SD 11.5), range 39 – 80 years
  - Race: 23 Caucasians, 8 African Americans, 1 American Indian
  - WAB-R AQ: Mean 79.4 (SD 12.4), range 49.7 to 97.4

Life Participation
- The Assessment for Living with Aphasia’s (ALA) Life Participation subscales relate to the PWA's actual participation in everyday life roles that require communication (work, community engagement, relationships, etc.).
- PWAs were asked to produce monologic narratives following standardized administration techniques.
- Three narratives assessed: Broken Window picture sequence description (see Figure 2), Cinderella story retell (see Figure 3), and procedural explanation of making a PB.

Discourse Production
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Methods cont’d

Discourse Production (cont’d)
- A - Main Concept Analysis
  - A measure of narrative adequacy, or how well one conveys the main “gist” of a picture, story, etc.
  - PWA transripts for each narrative were scored using a list of MCs, which were identified by previous research as MCs produced by 50% of controls.
  - A multi-level coding system was used to determine the accuracy and completeness of main concepts.
    - 0 - Absent (AB): The participant did not produce any portion of the MC.
    - 1 - Inaccurate/Incomplete (II): The participant attempted to produce a portion of the MC, but it was missing at least one essential element and another essential element was incorrect.
    - 2 - Inaccurate/Complete (IC): The participant produced a complete MC, but at least one essential element was incorrect.
    - 3 - Accurate/Incomplete (AI): The participant produced an accurate MC, but at least one essential element was missing.
    - 4 - Accurate/Complete (AC): The participant correctly produced all essential elements.
  - Scores for each MC were summed to yield the MC overall score.
- 2 - VOCD-D
  - A metric of lexical diversity that overcomes the varying sample size limitations of the Type-Token Ratio (LTR) by mathematically modeling how new words are introduced into larger language samples.
  - There is a minimum of 50 tokens-per-sample requirement.
  - Each narrative was transcribed using AphasiaBank’s CHAT format, which is integrated into CLAN.
  - The transcripts of the three narratives for each PWA were combined for analysis.

Data Analysis
- Descriptive statistics (Figure 4 – 6) and statistical analyses (Table 1, Figure 7-8) for our continuous data were completed using SPSS 22 (IBM SPSS, Inc.).
- Data were first screened to ensure assumptions of planned correlation analysis (Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient [r] or Spearman’s rank-order correlation coefficient [r]), were not violated. Screening included evaluation of normality (skewness, kurtosis, Q-Q plots, Shapiro-Wilk normality tests), and linearity and monotonicity (visual inspection). Our variables were normally distributed and linearly related, thus Pearson’s r was determined to be appropriate for use.
- For Question A, a one-tailed, Pearson’s r was calculated between the ALA - Life Participation subscale and the VOCD-D.
  - For Question B, a one-tailed, Pearson’s r was calculated between the ALA - Life Participation subscale and the overall Main Concept score.

Results

- There are strong, positive correlations between life participation and both discourse measures, lexical diversity and main concepts.
  - Therefore, PWAs with greater lexical diversity (a larger VOCD-D) reported higher life participation scores.
  - PWAs who produced a greater number of main concepts reported higher life participation scores.
  - Strong correlations of both discourse measures with the life participation measure may suggest that one may be predictive of the other.

Discussion

- Both discourse measures investigated in this study were significantly correlated with life participation scores, with large effect sizes (> .50).
- Our findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that discourse abilities were related to social integration and quality of life in persons with aphasia.
- These findings support the need to continue to develop and refine therapy methods that focus on discourse and conversational abilities rather than the more commonly addressed discrete language deficits.
- These findings provide further support for the need for clinician-friendly discourse measures, which may actually galvanize the speech-language community into incorporating functional discourse tasks into treatment.
- With such tools, clinicians and clinical researchers could increasingly target narrative discourse during treatment of PWAs.
- It is hoped that an increased emphasis on discourse in assessment and treatment would result in greater life participation and quality of life for PWAs.
- Limitations and Future Directions:
  - Discourse measures were limited to verbal output and, therefore, did not include non-verbal aspects of communication, such as facial expressions and physical gestures, which are often used by PWAs in place of linguistic information. Allowing a gesture to serve as an essential element in a main concept would have increased the main concept scores for many of our participants.

References