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PTECCA: An ecosystemic approach to aphasia
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Keywords: Aphasia; Communication; Ecosystemic approach; Functional valuation; Conversational analysis; Communicational handicap; Readaptation

Communication restrictions generated by language deficits penalize aphasic persons in their everyday life. To deal efficiently with this handicap, affecting both the aphasic subject and his/her interlocutors, the speech therapist has to complete the rehabilitation work with the patient by an assessment and an adaptation of the environment depending on the residual communication abilities. This approach, known as “ecosystemic”, implies associating the aphasic person’s family in the assessment process and speech therapy, in order to train the patient’s main communication partners about efficient communication, adapted to the person’s individual speech deficits.

Purpose.– Elaborate a communication ecosystemic assessment protocol with his or her spouse (it is Ponziò’s “aphasic couple”) and define an ecosystemic valuation and therapy of aphasia.

Method.– Elaborated by our research team UNADREO (LURCO-ERU 27), the purpose of the PTECCA (Protocole toulousain d’évaluation de la communication du couple aphasique) was to identify both the interlocutor’s behavior of communication in order to propose adjustments adapted to the patient and his or her partner’s difficulties and needs. The tools we proposed consisted in two complementary evaluation charts: a global one, completed by another more detailed chart. Both were based on linguistic and pragmatic theories: communication’s functions by R. Jakobson, principle of cooperation by H.-P. Grice, certain rules of dynamic organization of speech. A group of tests, based on information sharing and cooperation in the exchange, enabled in interaction between spouses.

Patients.– As a first step, we conducted ten tests. The protocol was readjusted according to the results obtained, and tested on ten indicator (not aphasic) couples. A therapy attempt was also undertaken with one aphasic couple using a pre and post-speech therapy test and a re-test in order to assess the efficiency of the tool and of the therapy.

Discussion.– Our tool has numerous qualities and enables the emergence of a readable profile of each participant’s communication behavior. Nevertheless, the tests have to be revised as well as the ergonomy of the detailed evaluation chart, since use remains long.


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Theory of Mind and communication ability: An exploratory study in brain-damaged patients
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Keywords: Communication; Theory of mind; Social cognition; Brain damage

Communication is a complex interactive behaviour which involves many higher-level cognitive processes. Advances in social cognition understanding suggest that communication impairments observed in brain damaged patients might be related to deficits in some social cognitive process such as Theory of Mind (ToM).

Objective.– To look at relationships between impairments in verbal, non-verbal, cognitive and affective components of ToM and communication disability in brain-damaged patients.

Subjects and methods.– We studied 7 patients with left-sided Sylvian stroke (LSP), 7 others with right-sided Sylvian stroke (RSP) and 14 paired controls. Assessments included 2 well-validated communication tests: the Test Lillois de Communication (TLC) and the Montreal Evaluation Communication protocol (MEC), and 2 ToM tasks: one cognitive and non-verbal: Sarfati’s attribution of intention task (AI) and the other verbal and affective, the Stone’s faux pas task (FP). In both tasks, some items allow for disentangling specific ToM process from simple logical understanding.

Results.– Patients’ scores were significantly lower than controls’ in all communication and ToM tests, with exception of TLC non-verbal communication, MEC prosodia understanding, and MEC language act decoding. But no significant difference was found between LSP’ and RSP’ scores. In patients and controls as well, the FP task was significantly related to TLC verbal communication and some MEC items. The AI task was only related to one MEC item, narration.

Discussion and conclusion.– Although ToM deficits are often related to frontal lesions, our patients with Sylvian strokes did suffer from communication disabilities that were significantly related to some ToM deficits. However significant correlations were also found with logical understanding tasks, so one cannot exclude that impairments in such process might participate in our findings aside from ToM deficits. Further studies should be undertaken on broader patient samples.


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Evaluation of communication competency problems in severe traumatic brain injured subjects: Preliminary validation of an observation grid of pragmatic communication (GOCP–“grille d’observation de la communication pragmatique”) in 28 severe traumatic brain injury patients
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Keywords: Brain injury; Communication; Pragmatic; Evaluation; Real-life situation

Communication problems figure amongst the most disabling after-effects following traumatic brain injury (TBI), proving detrimental to family, social and occupational reinsertion of traumatically brain-injured subjects. While language capacity maybe globally preserved, their difficulties are of a pragmatic order and concern the use of language in the context of interaction. Numerous tools enable us to approach problems of pragmatism, however none of them, to our knowledge allows us to obtain an objective measured of these problems in real-life situations. In order to better target the difficulties of TBI subjects, we chose to follow-up the project of statistical validation of the observation grid of pragmatic communication (GOCP) created in the specialised rehabilitation centre LADAPT Chateau-Rauzé (Cénac, Girond), which makes it possible to study the communicational competencies in four daily life situations.

The statistical analysis of the results obtained in the GOCP by 28 TBI subjects, comparable in age, sex and socio-cultural level, revealed significant differences in pragmatic communication performance, in favour of control subjects. Reliability and relevance of the GOCP were demonstrated. Furthermore, the comparison between scores obtained in real-life situation, with those obtained in the communication evaluation using the Test Lillois de Communication (TLC), enabled us to conclude that there is real complementarities between “real-life” evaluation tools (such as the GOCP) and the “laboratory” evaluation tools (such as the TLC).

The GOCP may therefore be seen to be an effective measure of communication difficulties specific to TBI subjects. Following up and finalising the validation of this new tool has for the objective, in time, the improved targeting of management of these problems, thus allowing improved rehabilitation and reinsertion of traumatic brain injured subjects.