

Conversational Analysis in Aphasia*

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•The smooth flow of thoughts and ideas that is characteristic of communication between normal individuals may be absent in case of aphasics and a communication gap may exist between an aphasic person and his interlocutor. Despite this fact it is also known that the aphasic person retains the functional use of language to some extent.

An attempt has been made here to identify the pragmatic strategies, extraverbal and verbal, that anterior aphasics may employ to overcome this linguistic deficit which enables them to make functional use of the language available to them.

A number of studies have been carried out by many to study the strategies employed by aphasics ; but each of these have studied any one strategy. In contrast this study deals with several pragmatic features.

9 males and 1 female expressive aphasics were selected as a sample for the study. They were administered the first four subtests of the Western Aphasic Battery, *viz.*, Spontaneous Speech, Comprehension, Repetition and Naming, for differential diagnosis. In addition, the conversational sample was elicited through the following procedures :

- Story narration.
- Communication interaction between the aphasic subject and his conversational partner.
- Conversation with the tester.

The entire conversational sample was recorded, and along with it, the different gestural behaviours of the subjects were noted down. The data were analysed in terms of linguistic :

- (a) The linguistic constraints encountered by the subject.
- (b) The choices made by subject to overcome these constraints.
- (c) The effects of the aphasic's use of language had upon his conversant.

As in published literature on expressive aphasics, syntactic errors were found to exceed phonological errors ; and few semantic errors were observed.

Extraverbal choices, particularly gestures specifically the Pantomimes and Emblems, were used as a compensatory and supportive strategy to the defective verbal output and the extent to which they are made use of is in direct proportion to the degree of linguistic constraints.

Verbal choices, particularly Repetitions, were used in inverse relation to the degree of linguistic constraints.

* Master's Dissertation, University of Mysore, 1985.

Thus nonverbal strategies do not appear to be 'parasitic' upon speech. They can sometimes take the lead. The central organizer which is supposed to determine the complexity and clarity of both speech and gesture may retain some flexibility about which modality to employ preferentially.

In the interaction between the aphasic and his conversant, the conversant was the dominant conversational partner.

The number of morphemes/utterance used by him were more ; he took more number of turns ; he shifted the topic and/or shifted focus more often ; he was responsible for communication breakdown less often and used more conversational saves. The duration of the interaction was very short, which could be due to the fact that the "give and take" characteristic of normal conversation was missing.

The aphasic's speech came across as clear to the listener and as has been observed in the study carried out by Ciconc *et al.* (1979), and so also in this study, it could have been that much of the information communicated by anteriors was inferred from questions asked by the interlocutors. So also the conversants tend to make shrewd inferences about topics and comments which the aphasics are seeking to convey. The conversants are likely to supply contexts where the aphasics can successfully exploit their meagre linguistic and gestural repertoire.

Thus this study suggests that anterior aphasics can communicate effectively to a large extent in communicative situations, because of the pragmatic strategies, they use to overcome the linguistic deficits and the contributions made by conversants to their normal capacities, in structuring discussion and supplying contexts where these expressive aphasics can successfully perform.