A comprehensive approach to the analysis of narrative discourse production by Greek speakers with aphasia

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Background
Narrative discourse as a form of connected speech has received extensive attention in aphasia research. Studies of narrative production of speakers with aphasia (SWA) have reported disruption at a macrolinguistic (intrasentential) level, relative preservation of skills at a microlinguistic (suprasentential) level in terms of producing sequences of events and actions (e.g., Glosser & Deser, 1990), and a reduction of language complexity at both the sentence and the discourse level (Ulatowska et al., 1983, Armstrong, 2000).

Assessment of narrative discourse is important for SWA, because production of narratives is necessary for relaying the relationships between events and characters in everyday life, and because SWA are impaired in narrative discourse. Interrelations between sentence-level and discourse-level phenomena in the narrative production of SWA have received insufficient attention and are poorly understood.

Aims
To integrate the microlinguistic and macrolinguistic levels of analysis in narrative production and to place narrative analysis in the context of cognitive and linguistic evaluation, we propose a comprehensive approach to the analysis of narrative discourse production in aphasia.

Materials and procedures
A battery of 4 narrative tasks was designed to include a combination of elicitation techniques (McNeil et al., 2007; Menn et al., 1994), providing different degrees and types of support: (a) unaided self-generation of a personal narrative ("stroke story"); (b) novel story production based on a 6-picture sequence ("the party"); (c) story retelling after presentation of a 5-picture sequence with concurrent listening to a matching original story ("the ring"); and (d) retelling (after listening) of a familiar Aesop’s fable ("hare and tortoise")

Macrolinguistic- and microlinguistic measures
Macrolinguistic-level analyses include (a) structural and propositional analyses, such as number of story propositions and main ideas related; (b) coverage of primary (orientation-action-resolution) and secondary (abstract-evaluation-coda) narrative elements; (c) analyses of selective linguistic devices of evaluation (direct speech, apophistic, psych verbs and nouns), based on Labov (1972).

Microlinguistic-level measures include (a) verbal productivity, such as total number of completed words, words per minute, number of utterances; (b) syntactic complexity (proportion well formed sentences, independent and embedded clauses, conjunctions); (c) verbal disruption (abandoned sentences, mazes).

Pilot testing – participants
The elicitation tasks were administered to 3 men 54–61 years old, who had suffered left CVA s 5–19 months earlier and were diagnosed with mild to moderate nonfluent aphasia, and to 4 native Greek speakers (1 female) without aphasia, of similar age and education (12-17 years).

References


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