



Subjective Experiences of Word-Finding Difficulties in Aphasia: Metaphor Analysis of Written Text

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Subjective experiences of word-finding difficulties in aphasia: Metaphor analysis of written text.

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Introduction

Word-finding difficulties (WFD) are a universal feature of aphasia. The processes involved are commonly investigated from psycholinguistic or neuropsychological perspectives, with little attention to the subjective experience of the impairment itself for people with aphasia (PWA). Metaphor analysis of retrospectively written accounts allows for an examination of conceptualization and communication of this experience in self-paced written communication outside a clinical or research setting. This study aims to discover how people with aphasia use metaphor to describe word-finding difficulties in written accounts, and to consider the implications for clinical practice.

Methods

Thirteen published accounts of personal experience of acquired aphasia were selected to represent a wide range of aetiologies, social histories and impairment type, severity, and comorbidities.

All descriptions of word-finding and use (i.e. including successful and unsuccessful word-finding, linguistic thought, retention in short-term memory and production in speech) were identified, and Cameron and Maslen's (2010) adapted version of the Pragglejazz (2007) procedure was used to identify metaphors in these selections.

Metaphorical source domains were coded for each text individually and then made consistent across texts. This allowed for patterns of metaphor usage to be explored within and across the texts, following a discourse-based approach (Semino, 2008). Table 1 shows coded data.

Results

8146 metaphorical expressions referring to language use or impairment were identified in total, 4056 concerning expressive language (in writing, speech and thought). A number of source domains were used across all or most texts and constituted a majority of the instances of metaphorical language. The most common source domains (across all modalities) were PHYSICAL OBJECTS (1175), PERSONIFICATION (737), JOURNEY/LANDSCAPE (543) and CONTAINER (496).

The use of these source domains to describe WFD showed a basis in the conceptual frameworks common in description of unimpaired language (Semino, 2008), but with extension or elaboration to communicate salient aspects of the aphasic experience. From the

starting point of the conventional metaphor WORDS AS OBJECTS, the difficulty of word finding was emphasised in a variety of ways: as physical properties (hard to ‘grasp,’ or ‘floating around’), personification or animacy (e.g. as ‘misbehaving’ or ‘fugitive’), and proximity (e.g. appearing ‘further away’). MIND AS CONTAINER also varied within and across texts to describe the overall experience of WFD, along dimensions of accessibility (locked, hard to open) and size or type (file, black box, house). There were also novel metaphors with striking similarities across a subset of the texts. e.g. APHASIA AS A DISMEMBERED TREE.

Conclusions

Variation across the texts suggests that the experience and conceptualization of aphasia may be influenced by social history and/or aphasia type. Extended metaphors within texts show that metaphors used by an individual about early recovery can provide a conceptual framework within which to interpret later changes and challenges. Novel metaphors or creative elaboration of conventional metaphors highlight aspects of the experience of aphasia that our usual ways of talking about language may fail to capture.

Exploring individual conceptualizations of WFD with PWA may therefore be useful for a meaningful, collaborative approach to therapy.

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author	Metaphorical text	pg	Source domain 1	Source domain 2	Target/meaning
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Taylor	it was as if all the drawers had been slammed shut and the cabinets pushed just beyond my reach.	48	container/boundary/barrier	file/folder/filing cabinet	Mind/brain/lexicon
Taylor	sleep was filing time	90	container/boundary/barrier	file/folder/filing cabinet	Mind/brain/lexicon
Taylor	I wondered what it would take to recall all those filing cabinets lining my brain, which contained the details of my previous life.	98	container/boundary/barrier	file/folder/filing cabinet	Mind/brain/lexicon
Resch	a black box, words locked inside, no door, only a few words drifting outside.	7	container/boundary/barrier	locked/closed	Mind/brain/lexicon
Resch	I clutch at the door, wrestle to pry it open, put my foot on the sill as a wedge,	30	container/boundary/barrier	locked/closed	Mind/brain/lexicon
Resch	I can't open the black box of words at will.	60	container/boundary/barrier	locked/closed	Mind/brain/lexicon

Table 1: Extract of metaphor instances with coding of source domain at two levels.