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## The need for awareness of aphasia symptoms in different languages

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**Abstract**—The likelihood of encountering aphasic patients who speak a language other than that of the clinic in which they are assessed is rapidly increasing to the point of becoming commonplace. It is therefore more important than ever to become aware of the manifestations of aphasia in languages other than one's own. A number of factors conspire to influence the symptoms in each language, from the phonological and morphosyntactic structure of the language to the frequency of obligatory contexts, the importance of the form for the derivation of meaning, and the degree of redundancy. Therefore, the same underlying deficit may cause different surface manifestations in different languages. It is important to recognize these different manifestations as language-specific instantiations of the same underlying cause rather than symptoms of different types of aphasia.

*Key words:* cross-linguistic aphasia, language-specific symptoms, bilingualism, symptom manifestations

At its August 1998 meeting in Amsterdam, on the occasion of the XXIVth Congress of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatics (IALP), the Aphasia Committee undertook to prepare a report on manifestations of aphasia symptoms in different languages, to be presented at the XXVth IALP congress in Montreal in August 2001.

A first draft of these investigations was discussed by the contributors at a meeting held in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, on 22 and 23 June 2000. After a thorough discussion of each contribution, each author wrote a final report which is published in the present volume. Hence, all contributions report on research conducted specifically for this publication over the past three years by members of the IALP Aphasia Committee and their collaborators.

Since Grodzinsky's (1984) article and the publication of the first sourcebook on cross-linguistic agrammatism (Menn & Obler, 1990), researchers and to some extent clinicians have become aware of the language-specificity of aphasia symptoms. The aim of this collection of papers is to provide specific indications on the characteristic manifestations of aphasia symptoms in 14 languages, in the Germanic, Finno-Ugric, Indo-Iranian, Romance, Semitic, and Slavic language families (including Czech, the most inflectional of the Slavic languages). More specifically, characteristics of African-

American English, Afrikaans, Basque, Catalan, Czech, Farsi (Persian), Finnish, Friulian, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Polish, Spanish, and Swedish are described in this volume, so that researchers and clinicians may know what to look for and how to interpret the symptoms they observe, in terms not of a universal description but of specific traits linked to the language spoken by their patient. Some of these manifestations are widespread, cutting across language families, and may even be universal, whereas others are specific to a language family or even to a particular language. Such specificity may be manifested in forms of agrammatism and/or paragrammatism, and/or phonological deficits.

For the purpose of this special issue of the *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, it is the quality of the error which is of the greatest importance; that is, if an error is produced, the form it takes is of primary interest. The frequency of occurrence of the relevant structure in a given language is of secondary relevance, though it may have an influence on the saliency of this type of error. It is linked to some extent to the structure of the language (e.g., the extent to which it is morphology-rich or morphology-poor, from which we can predict the frequency of a particular type of error). The absolute number of errors produced by a patient is of no interest; only the percentage of errors produced relative to the number of obligatory contexts present in the sample is indicative of severity and can be meaningfully used in cross-linguistic comparisons between individuals or within polyglot individuals.

Three types of studies are provided: (1) group studies; (2) small series of single case studies; (3) experimental studies focussing on a particular salient feature of a language. Each contributor was asked to describe the relevant aspects of the language in question, give a brief review of previous findings (from the literature, if any), and give a characterization of the *types* of errors observed in their language, i.e., what the most conspicuous manifestations of agrammatism, paragrammatism, or phonological errors look like. Every author was then asked to report what is the most salient deficit in the type of aphasia under consideration in this language, based on their data, and try to infer *why* this is so, in light of the structure of the language under review. For technical reasons, reports on Chinese, Galician and Japanese are not included but will be published at a later date.

#### *Corollary to Murphy's Law*

The manifestations of aphasia in any given language are constrained by the corollary to Murphy's Law that states that only that which can go wrong will go wrong (Paradis, 1989). In other words, the structure of the language determines what types of errors may occur. The reason why a certain type of error is salient or conspicuous in a given language may be due to one or more of several factors: (1) the incidence of obligatory contexts, (2) the importance of the form for the derivation of meaning, (3) the frequency of use of the item in a language/culture, (4) the structural complexity of the item (e.g., number of deviancies from the canonical form), (5) the presence or absence of redundancy (e.g., word order and agreement vs. either word order or agreement); (6) the presence or absence of a zero morpheme and whether nouns and verbs exist as bare roots or must necessarily be inflected; (7) whether, when inflections are omitted, the remaining form is pronounceable or not; and (8) whether the form is memorized or derivable by rule, i.e., whether it is regular or irregular. The form of the error will likely depend on the type of aphasia (e.g., omission versus substitution and/or type of substitution), but the pool of

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