Automatic Processing and Recovery Of Complex Sentences in Aphasia

The production and the comprehension of syntactically complex sentences is impaired in aphasia. For example, both Wh-movement sentences (such as object-extracted, relative clauses) and NP-movement sentences (such as passives) elicit chance performance by adults with aphasia in off-line comprehension tasks like sentence-picture matching. However, it remains unclear how, exactly, impaired adults try (and often fail) to comprehend such sentences in real time. This talk reviews evidence from a series of studies examining the on-line comprehension of complex sentences by adults with aphasia. The evidence suggests that significant residual capacity for syntactic processing remains following brain damage, capacity that may go undetected using traditional, off-line methods. Furthermore, this intact capacity may be what underlies successful response to language treatment targeting complex sentences. Language treatment that directly stimulates aphasic adults' capacity to use this residual ability has significant evidence of efficacy, and on-line tasks that tap this ability may be useful in predicting treatment outcomes in aphasia.

RECOMMENDED READING: