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Published in:
Journal of Interactional Research in Communication Disorders

DOI:
10.1558/jircd.31342

Publication date:
2017

Document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):

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Download date: 31. Jul. 2019
Achieving a common understanding of a person with aphasia’s self-assessments of progress in speech and communication

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how a person with aphasia (PWA) and a speech and language therapist (SLT) collaboratively arrive at a common understanding of the PWAs assessments of his progress in speech and communication. This is done as part of a mandatory outcome evaluation of aphasia therapy. Interactional adaptive strategies known from Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA) are used. By making use of conversation analysis we analyse an assessment sequence initiated with an open question and a sequence initiated with several closed questions and pen and paper. The analyses confirm that adaptive strategies may lead to communication characterised by less interactional trouble, i.e. ‘repair’. The analyses also point at how question formatting and sequential organization may be used to guide, model and transform the PWA’s answers. Building on previous research as well as participants’ displayed understandings in the interaction we discuss perspectives of using SCA strategies in institutional interaction involving PWA.

Keywords: Outcome assessment, Aphasia, Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia, Person-centred care, Conversation Analysis, Self-assessments, Question formatting.
1. Introduction

Danish legislation requires outcome assessments after adult special education such as aphasia therapy. Active participation from all participants is a requirement (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, including a person with aphasia (PWA) in this process may, of course, poses a challenge since his language and communication functioning are impaired (Isaksen, in review).

In this article we scrutinise how a speech and language therapist (SLT) and a PWA accomplish a common understanding of how the PWA assesses his progress in speech and language therapy which is done as an element of a planned session of outcome evaluation. A common understanding is arrived at by the SLT and the PWA by making use of resources in the sequential organisation of interaction and by making use of strategies to support communication known from Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA) (Kagan, 1998). Such strategies include resources besides speech such as gesture, pen and paper as well as strategies to ensure or clarify comprehension such as requesting clarification and verifying comprehension (Kagan, 1998; Kagan, Black, Duchan, Simmons-Mackie & Square, 2001).

By making use of conversation analytic methodology (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) we show features of interactional turns in which this is accomplished by the participants. We outline interactional features of sequences which are initiated by the SLT by A) asking open questions that invite the PWA to assess his progress in speech or communication and by B) asking closed questions in a series and by making use of pen and paper as a resource for communication.

We focus on how the participants collaboratively arrive at a common understanding of how the PWA assesses his progress. As indicated, this is done by making use of specific interactional resources such as question formatting and by making use of methods intended to support conversation with people with aphasia. We show how this is interactionally accomplished, pointing out how these strategies model, guide and transform answers provided by the PWA.

We also notice how the overall organisation of the interaction contributes to modelling, guiding and transforming the PWA’s answers. We show how this sequential organisation may be in service of accomplishing an institutional task; to include the PWA in the professional and mandatory outcome evaluation of the therapy in order to determine whether or not and possibly how therapy should continue. That is to say in the interaction there is an orientation towards not simply arriving at a common understanding between the participants, but also towards accomplishing an institutional task which is involving the PWA in the outcome evaluation as required. As argued by Worrall (2006), aphasia therapy should focus more on the PWAs’ perspectives in order to produce therapy outcomes that are meaningful to them. Building on the analysis of how this activity is collaboratively constructed between the participants, we discuss the ‘person-centered’ and ‘supportive’ nature of these interactional strategies in institutional interaction such as outcome assessments.

2. Methodology: Conversation analysis of atypical interaction

Conversation analysis (CA) is a method for analysing the practical accomplishment of mundane activities in which people are engaged. CA has been widely applied in order to study social interaction within institutional settings (Drew & Heritage, 1992), and thus also within healthcare
settings (Heritage & Maynard, 2006), educational settings (Koole, 2015), and to study interactions involving PWAs (Wilkinson, 2006).

CA holds that meaning is accomplished by the participants, in the light of the sequential context. This is accomplished by the turn-taking system, i.e. participants speak after one another. This provides for interlocutors to monitor and pick up on every turn-at-talk (Schegloff, 2007). Hence, sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction is a key feature and resource for participants to accomplish social action and meaning.

CA studies have focused mostly on explicating methods for achieving a common understanding between adults that are fully competent members of a speech community. However, contemporary studies within CA increasing focus on atypical populations (Antaki & Wilkinson, 2013) and also widen the scope to include the use of objects (Nevile, Haddington, Heinemann, & Rauniomaa, 2014) and embodiment (Hazel, Mortensen & Rasmussen, 2014) as resources to achieve a common understanding in interaction.

Much of the CA work that focuses on interactions involving people who have speech and/or communication disorders (Wilkinson, 2013), cognitive impairments (Goodwin, 2003a) or hearing impairments (Egbert & Depperman, 2012) has pointed out possible interactional troubles in such interaction, referred to as repair\(^1\). In conversations involving PWAs repair in the form of self-initiated repair by the PWA, for example to launch word searches, or to replace an error is common as well as repetitions of parts of the PWA’s turn by a co-participant, i.e. other-initiated repair, due to difficulties in understanding the aphasic speech (Antaki & Wilkinson, 2013). The data we show in this article entails such repair types.

CA studies focus on the collaborative nature of social interaction as pointed to above. Conversation analytic research on interactions involving PWAs has, for example, shown that it is not only the PWA who adapts his/her behaviour to the communicative limitations caused by the aphasia. Co-participants may also orient to communicative limitations by designing social actions that adapt to that. Adapted forms are reported to lead to fewer self-initiated repairs and other delays in talk than non-adapted forms. Thus, adapted behaviour by one participant influences the production of adapted behaviour in the other (Wilkinson, 2015). One type of adapted behaviour may be to introduce other resources than speech to assist communication. In our data there is paper and pen available as such a resource.

As we show two sequences in which such adapted behaviour is used in different ways, we can show how the SLT seeks to include the PWA by attending to the interactional resources available to him and we are able to unfold the interactional details of how this is picked up on by the PWA. We analyse one instance in which an answer to an open question is followed by a clarification request and another instance in which a self-assessment sequence is initiated with open questions in a series as well as the use of pen and paper as a resource for communication.

Conversation analytic research has, as mentioned, focused on resources used in interaction besides speech. These include the use of objects, gaze, gestures and facial expressions. Such a focus is also found in conversation analytic research on interactions involving PWA’s as well as in intervention methods. The use of embodied resources in interaction with PWAs may be seen as a compensatory

\(^1\) ‘…when the ongoing production of whatever else was in progress is suspended so that managing troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding comes to be the focal activity of the interaction, we will call that “repair”’ (Hayashi, Raymond, & Sidnell 2013:13).
strategy and as a means of adapting to the communicative limitations caused by aphasia (Klippi 2015). Pointing (with the index finger) is a gesture that is being used by the PWA in our data. As Klippi (2015) points out, although a pointing gesture may be seen as a simple movement and a basic, common and universal gesture, it cannot be understood in isolation. Referring to Goodwin’s work (2003b), Klippi (2015) points out that specific resources are needed in order for a pointing gesture to be understood as a referential gesture that indicates something, i.e. participants must use their bodies and talk in order to make sense of the pointing gesture by orienting to each other and the pointing space, embedding the pointing gesture into a larger activity. In one of the shown examples pointing is used as a main resource to answer a question in coordination with a single turn at talk when pen and paper have been introduced as a resource.

3. Data and background

Data for this study focuses on a single conversation between SLT (called SLT D) and a PWA (called PWA 5 and referred to as “Marty” in the transcript). The objective of the conversation is to do an outcome evaluation. The Danish legislation requires outcome assessment after adult special education (here aphasia therapy). Active participation is a requirement (Ministry of Education, 2015) and is also described in other studies based on Danish data (Isaksen, 2014; Isaksen & Brouwer, 2015; Isaksen, in review). The material comes from a larger data set of 34 naturally occurring video recordings of 12 SLTs and 28 PWAs assessing outcomes after a course of aphasia therapy (in total 17 hours).

Aphasia has over the years been defined in many ways. One of the more recent definitions takes into consideration not only what aphasia is, but also the consequences of it:

[Aphasia is] an acquired selective impairment of language modalities and functions resulting from a focal brain lesion in the language-dominant hemisphere that affects the person’s communicative and social functioning, quality of life, and the quality of life of his or her relatives and caregivers. (Papathanasiou & Coppens, 2013: p. XX)

Aphasia is often classified into different types or is characterised as either fluent or non-fluent. PWA5 (or ‘Marty’) has a moderate and fluent type of aphasia. He can produce small sentences characterised by jargon, a limited number of content words and numerous word searches that often leads him into lengthy sequences. His speech contains many of the same phrases, for example ‘maybe yes’ and ‘I think’ or ‘think so’.

As the definition points at, aphasia also affects the conversation partners of people with aphasia. Within the last few decades a number of treatment methods have been developed to target the challenges occurring in communication between people with aphasia and their conversation partners (e.g., Beeke et al., 2014; Boles, 2009; Kagan, 1998; Lock, Wilkinson & Bryan, 2001, Simmons-Mackie, Raymer, Armstrong, Holland & Cherney, 2010; Simmons-Mackie, Raymer, Cherney, 2016). Some of those methods target only the non-aphasic conversation partner (e.g. Lock, Wilkinson & Bryan, 2001) whereas others are focusing on the dyad (e.g. Beeke et al., 2014). Others are developed mainly for close conversation partners (e.g. Boles, 2009), and yet others also include more distant partners as healthcare professionals (e.g. Kagan, 1998).

The strategies for supporting conversation which are used by the SLT in our data build, as before mentioned, on SCA (Kagan, 1998). SCA builds on the idea conversational partnerships, focusing on
providing PWAs’ co-participants with strategies and materials for supporting conversation. One of the techniques is to reveal the competence of the aphasic partner. This involves:

(1) ensuring comprehension, e.g. using gesture, written key words, drawing, or resource material to make the topic of conversation clear;
(2) ensuring that the aphasic partner can respond and/or express what he/she thinks, knows and feels, e.g. using skill in asking yes/no or fixed-choice questions, providing appropriate response avenues, and giving the aphasic partner time to respond; and
(3) verifying responses, e.g. using writing to reflect, expand or summarize what has been communicated. (Kagan, 1998:820)

The SLT in our data is using some of the SCA-strategies mentioned here, most noticeably question formatting, verifying responses by using requests for clarification and formulations, and drawing and writing. While these strategies have a goal of supporting conversation, revealing competencies, and specifically ‘ensuring that the aphasic partner can respond and/or express what he/she thinks, knows and feels’ (see quote above) our analysis suggests that the strategies themselves may jeopardise this ambition, since the strategies may entail ‘support’, models, guidance and preferences for how to respond to such an extent that it may be questionable whether they allow for the PWA to express himself. On the other hand, our analysis also documents how the SLT recurrently checks whether her understanding of the PWA’s actions is consistent with what he meant to say, allowing him the right and possibility to clarify misunderstandings and providing him with a sense of speaker autonomy. Moreover, using ‘supportive’ or ‘adaptive’ strategies such as closed questions, pen and paper in our material do lead to fewer lengthy repair sequences. Sequences characterised by extensive repair work may highlight the speaker’s incompetence and displays of frustration (Wilkinson, 2006) and is also apparent in this material (see Example 2A).

4. Analysis

4.1 Sequential organisation of self-evaluation sequences

Sequences that are initiated by the SLT by posing a question inviting the PWA to make an assessment of his progress in speech or communication have a recurrent and recognisable structure in the data:

SLT: Question
PWA: Answer (attempt)
SLT: Answer feedback (Clarification request or repetition)
PWA: Clarification/2\textsuperscript{nd} answer (attempt) or acknowledgement
SLT: Formulation
PWA: Acknowledgement
We now analyse the interactional moves in two self-assessment sequences from the data, sequence A initiated with an open question, and sequence B initiated with closed questions in a series and the inclusion of pen and paper as a resource for communication.

4.2 Questions

The SLT makes use of different question formats (Hayano, 2013) to initiate sequences inviting the PWA to assess his competencies. She uses so-called wh-type questions (for example ‘What do you think has become better about your language’, Example 1A) mostly in sequences in the initial part of the activity; yes/no-type questions (‘Is it the same’, Example 2A), or choice questions (‘Is it the same or is it much much better’, Example 2A) and the inclusion of pen and paper as resources are used later on. Declarative questions (Heinemann, 2010) such as ‘You think it is somewhat better’, Example 4, are also used by the therapist, however, they are used to formulate an understanding of the PWA’s answers (see below).

Wilkinson (2006) notes that questions posed to the PWA create a sequential context which can be constraining and create difficulties for the PWA, as the PWA is allocated as the next speaker rather than having the possibility to self-select, and as the questions posed may elicit specific lexical information which the PWA may have difficulties producing.

As already noted, the SLT uses open question formats in the initial part of the interaction. One such instance is shown in Example 1A. In this example she specifies to the PWA that the question she poses is ‘without help’ (line 3-4) and that she will ask questions ‘with help’ afterwards (line 6).

Thereby the SLT orients to the design of questions as something which is consequential for the interactional development, as something which the PWA might anticipate as consequential, and as a possible interactional strategy.

Example 1A2

1 SLT D: i det her (1.7) forløb (0.5) du har været
   in this course you have been
   ((grabs paper, moves it closer to herself))
2 PWA 5: mm
   mm
3 SLT D: Marty nu prøver jeg lige at spørge dig uden å
   Marty now I’ll try asking you without
   (0.4) å hjælp dig
   helping you
4 PWA 5: ja
   yes
5 PWA 5: =okay
   okay
6 SLT D: det gør jeg bagefter=
   I will afterwards
7 PWA 5: =okay
   okay
8 PS: (1.4)
9 SLT D: hva synes du der er blevet bedre (.) ved dit sprog
   what do you think has become better about your language

---

2 Data has been transcribed according to CA conventions (Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008). A gloss of the Danish speech is provided below each turn at talk. Non-verbal action is indicated in double brackets.
In this example the SLT introduces the action she will perform, asking a question without ‘helping’ the PWA. After an acknowledgement by the PWA she poses the question in line 9: ‘What do you think has become better about your language’. This is a wh-type question, i.e. an open question. It makes relevant that the PWA provides an answer that in some way indicates his opinion about elements about his language skills that have increased.

The wh-type question format is indicated by the SLT to be a question ‘without help’ (line 3-4, 6). At a later stage in the interaction, the SLT moves on to formulate closed questions and even closed questions in a series that can be seen as specifications or reformulations of the initial question. The SLT also specifies the resources the PWA should use when responding. The resources used are pen and paper and specifically some drawing and writing on it which the SLT has produced or produces while constructing the question which the PWA should respond to. Such an instance can be seen in Example 1B:

Example 1B

1 SLT D: og så er spørgsmålet om
   and then the question is
2 PS:  (0.6)
3 SLT D: nu prøver jeg lige at lave den her igen
   now I will just try and make this again
4 SLT D: nu tar vi lige den her så behøver jeg ik
   now we will just take this then I don’t
5 sa tegne den igen nemlig
   have to draw it again
   ((moves pen close to paper))
6 SLT D: den her skala her
   this scale here
7 PWA 5: ja
   yes
8 SLT D: hvis nu det her det før
   if this was before
9 SLT D: og før det
   and before
   ((moves pen up and down))
10 betyder før vi to begyndte at arbejde sammen
   means before the two of us started working together
   ((uses pen to point at PWA and herself back and forth))
11 PWA 5: ja
   yes
12 SLT D: ing
   right
13 SLT D: i november måned
   in the month of november
14 PWA 5: okay
   okay
15 SLT D: hvis nu at det her det var den måde du talte på
if this was the way you spoke  
((moves pen close to paper))
16 PS: (5.9)  
((SLT starts writing))
17 SLT D: i november  
  in November
18 PWA 5: ja  
  yes
19 SLT D: ja  
  yes
20 PWA 5: *hh
21 SLT D: hvor synes du så det er nu  
  where do you think it is now
22 PS: (1.2)
23 SLT D: er det det samme  
  is it the same
24 PS: (1.8)  
  ((draws with pen))
25 SLT D: eller er det (. ) meget meget bedre  
  or is it much much better
  ((points with pen))
26 PWA 5: ja:  
  yes
27 PWA 5:  *hh  
  ((index finger points to paper))
28 SLT D: en lille smule bedre  
  a little bit better

In this sequence the SLT again invites the PWA to make an assessment of the progress of his speech and/or communication skills. However, notice that she builds in methods for responding in her question formulation. She initiates by announcing a question (line 1), but then stops before having finished her turn and moves the paper on the table around while stating that she is bringing ‘it’ forward again. Hence, she is categorising her own actions and also (re-)introducing the objects (the paper) as a resource in the interaction. While doing so the PWA gazes towards the paper. The SLT then describes what is on the paper as ‘this scale here’ (line 6) while gazing towards the PWA. The explanation is constructed by using an if-clause (‘if this was before’, line 8, specified in line 9-17) projecting a then-clause which follows and is formulated as a question: Where do you think it is now’, line 21. Both the SLT and the PWA gaze toward the paper (and hence ‘the scale’) during the pause after this question in which the PWA might have initiated a response. What happens instead is that the SLT provides the PWA with options for how to respond by producing a yes/no-type question while drawing on the paper with her pen (line 23). Upon turn-completion the SLT gazes at the PWA. The yes-no-question is then turned into the first part of an either-or-question while
moving the pen and pointing at another spot on the paper (line 25). The SLT gazes at the PWA in
the latter part of her turn. The PWA responds with a ‘yes’. This is pronounced with a prolonged
vowel and with a slightly falling intonation, making it hearable not as an answer to the question, but
as a minimal response token indicating that he has understood the question as he at the same time
continuously gazes at the paper rather than for example gazing at the SLT after having provided a
response. The SLT provides another option for answering, ‘a little bit better’ (line 28), while at the
same time having the pen pointing towards a spot on the paper.

Reformulating an open question into closed questions in series and including pen and paper as
resources in interaction may be seen as strategies to support interaction as suggested in SCA
coaching. Yes/no-type questions and or-type questions give the co-participant a ‘model’ of the types
of answers that would be satisfactory, i.e. it offers a candidate answer (Pomerantz, 1988).
Svennevig, building on Pomerantz’ notions, suggests that this ‘...is a useful practice when speakers
have a reason to guide their interlocutor to respond in a particular way, either because they are
interested in some particular piece of information or because the interlocutor has difficulty in
giving a satisfactory answer’ (2013:194). In fact, both of these reasons may apply in the case
investigated as the interaction has a pre-established purpose of making an evaluation of the PWA’s
progress in speech and communication by involving him in the process and as the SLT has to
reason to suspect that the PWA has difficulties in answering. Difficulties may even be understood
to have been documented or demonstrated in the interaction when she invited the PWA to answer
open questions (see below).

4.3 Answers

Questions, used as first pair parts, make a second pair part, an answer, conditionally relevant
(Schegloff, 2007). As pointed to, for example in the CA literature (Raymond, 2003), the question
type or format project what type of answer should be delivered. The fact that a specific type of
answer has been projected by the question format does not necessarily trigger it, of course; Answers
to questions may then either be produced as so-called type-conforming or non-type conforming
(2003).

The type of answer projected to be delivered as a response to a question is an important issue when
the person selected as the answerer is a PWA, i.e. a person who both has difficulties with
understanding and producing speech, since providing a type-conforming answer to a yes/no-type
question (i.e. a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’) is a different task that proving an answer to a wh-type question. It is,
for example, well-known and has been documented that PWAs have word retrieval difficulties
(Oelschlaeger & Damico 2003), and cases have been reported in which PWAs’ productive
vocabulary is either exclusively the words ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘and’ (Goodwin 1995;Goodwin &
Goodwin 2003), or extensively dominated by the (response) words ‘yes’, ‘no’ and variants of these
as well as a few pronouns, conjunctions, adjectives, adverbs and fixed phrases (Lind 2007).

Open questions do not provide a model for the types of answers that would qualify as a relevant
answer. Answering an open question such as the question in Example 1A, ‘What do you think has
become better about your language’, can be expected to provide a PWA with challenges of both
choosing a relevant answer format and mobilising words that are not necessarily immediately
present in the prior turn in the interaction. The PWA’s answer (attempt) to the SLT’s open question
in Example 1A is shown in Example 2A.
Example 2A

10 PWA 5: øhhh
   ehm
11 PS: (?)
12 PWA 5: øhhh sst stemme hedder det nu m muu
   voice is it called m muu
   ((points fingers on left hand to lips))
13 PWA 5: stemme hedder det
   voice is it called
14 PWA 5: stemme hedder det å så øhh
   voice is it then called ehm
15 PWA 5: øhh hhh så hedder det så øhm:
   then it is called ehm
16 PWA 5: sang sang n sang hedder det øh
   song song n song is it called
   ((shakes head))
17 PWA 5: stemme og: (. ) øh:
   voice and ehm
18 PWA 5: (le) lektier (l) lektier
   (ho) homework (h) homework
   ((points at paper))
19 PWA 5: (hva hedder det)
   (what’s the name)
20 PWA 5: ja
   yes
21 PWA 5: (hva hedder det)
   (what’s the name)
22 PWA 5: ei
   ah
23 PWA 5: [det] svær
   it difficult
24 SLT D: [mm]
   mm

The PWA takes the turn with a hesitation sound (‘ehm’), thereby orienting to having understood the SLT’s prior turn as making some response on his part relevant. He continues to indicate words: ‘voice’ (line 12-14 and 17), ‘song’ (line 16), and ‘homework’ (line 17). These indications include word repetitions, searches for words and word search statements or ‘dummy terms’ (‘what’s the name’, line 19) (Hayashi, Raymond & Sidnell, 2013)). As mentioned, these types of self-repair initiations have been reported to be common in aphasic speech (Antaki & Wilkinson, 2013). The repair sequence is extremely long compared to non-aphasic talk. This structure goes against the ‘preference for progressivity’, i.e. the expectation that a turn at talk is produced as the next part projected by the previous one (Wilkinson, 2006) described as a feature of the organisation of ordinary interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). For the PWA this may, therefore, be a cause for distress.
Although it is not fully clear how many items the PWA is actually suggesting in this word search sequence, the PWA produces two words, ‘voice’ and ‘homework’, and coordinates them with the conjunction ‘and’ (line 17-18). This structure may suggest that the PWA is searching for two items. Subsequently this is what the SLT treats his answer as doing (see below). The PWA also indicates that it is difficult (line 23) (either answering the question or accomplishing therapeutic tasks more generally). Hence, the PWA may be seen to verbally indicate that answering the question posed by the SLT is a difficult task.

The answer to the closed questions in a series in which the SLT has introduced a ‘scale’ on a piece of paper has a very different sequential structure than the one just analyzed. It is produced as a single turn indicating two numbers coordinated with an indexical pointing gesture, here accomplishing the provision of an answer to a question in the format that has been projected in the turn that follows upon the question formulation, i.e. orienting to a preference for progressivity:

Example 2B

29 PWA 5: øhh fire fem
ehh four five
((PWA 5’s index finger touches paper))

In the sequence leading up to the answer (see Example 1B), the SLT had produced a series of closed questions. The questions were formulated as yes/no-type questions and as choice questions. While producing these questions the SLT pointed at different locations on the ‘scale’ on the paper on the table between the participants, showing how an acknowledgement to each question would correspond to a location on the scale. Previously in the conversation locations had also been given values between 0 and 10 (not included).

The PWA takes the turn with some initial hesitation (‘ehh’) and answers not by providing a yes/no-type response or by stating one of the options provided by the SLT by using verbal language, but by stating two numbers (‘four five’) and by coordinating this response with pointing with his index finger at a spot on the paper while also gazing towards it. He continues to gaze at the paper while leaning back, possibly indicating that his verbal and non-verbal actions should be taken as a response to the SLT’s question.

Hence, the PWA orients to the non-verbal resources for responding provided by the SLT in her formulation of her question as his response is accomplished by using these resources. In this way verbalising numbers and pointing at a location on a paper has become legitimate, understandable and recognisable ways of responding to the SLT’s question about how the PWA would assess his progress in speech since he started speech and language therapy.

4.4. Answer feedback

It has been shown that different kinds of feedback occur in response to answers to questions in different settings. An answer receipt may for example be used to acknowledge, evaluate (Mehan 1979) or assess (Antaki, Houtkoop-Steenstra & Rapley 2000) the answer.

In our data we find that the SLT in response to the PWA’s answers to open questions does not recurrently provide an answer receipt such as an acknowledgement, but something we can call an answer check or request for clarification similar to a strategy parents to small children have been
documented to use to clarify meaning (Chouinard & Clark, 2003). She indicates her understanding of what the PWA has answered and invites a confirmation. Several examples of this can be seen in Example 3A (see line 25 and 27 as well as line 49, 56 and 58), which follows the PWA’s lengthy answer attempt shown in Example 2A:

Example 3A

25 SLT D: du siger lektier
   you say homework
26 PWA 5: ja for[dì
   yes because
   ((hand towards paper))
27 SLT D: [er det det du mente
   is that what you meant
28 PWA 5: fordi det øh det
   because it ahm it
   ((index finger points at paper))
29 PWA 5: skriw: skriw skriw skriw øh
   write write write write ahm
30 SLT D: ja
   yes
31 PWA 5: ja
   yes
32 SLT D: det med at skrive
   the thing with writing
33 PWA 5: ja
   yes
   ((lines 34-48 omitted))
49 SLT D: når nu du siger stemme
   when you say voice now
50 PWA 5: ja hva hedder det stemme (hedder det)
   yes what is it called voice is it called
   ((PWA 5 takes fingers close to mouth))
51 PWA 5: øh /sang
   ahm song
   ((takes fingers to mouth))
52 PWA 5: sang sang sang
   song song song
   ((PWA 5 takes hand out in front of himself))
53 PWA 5: hedder det sang nej
   is it called song no
   ((SLT D turns paper towards herself and starts writing))
54 PWA 5: nej øh mh øh hedder det øhm
   no ahm is it called ahm
   ((PWA 5 turns face toward paper))
The first clarification request is constructed by the SLT by making a statement about elements (a word) that the PWA has indicated in his answer (‘you say homework’, line 25) followed by a request for clarification formatted as a yes/no-type question (‘is that what you meant’, line 27). By referring to elements of the PWA’s answer, the SLT shows that she bases her candidate understanding of his answer on what he said. Although these requests may be responded to with an acknowledgement (‘yes’ or ‘no’), the PWA does not recurrently provide that. Instead he seems to initiate a second attempt at answering or accounting, thereby treating the request for clarification as a prompt to reformulate his answer. He initiates a turn with the conjunction ‘because’ commonly used to initiate dependent clauses expressing reasons or causes (line 28), but then starts a new turn before a recognisable completion point has been reached, now indicating a new word (‘write’, line 29) which he repeats several times. The SLT in the next turn provides an acknowledgement, and so does the PWA before the SLT formulates a version of his turn which is more elaborate (‘the thing with writing’, line 32), thereby showing that she takes this as a relevant answer to her question. A second (partial) answer to the SLT’s question (Example 1A) is accomplished collaboratively by the PWA and the SLT. This is done here by using a clarification request by which the SLT creates a possibility for the PWA to acknowledge her understanding of his initial answer or reformulate it. Although the clarification request, in this case, is taken as a prompt to provide another answer, it provides the PWA with the possibility to acknowledge, correct or clarify understanding at this point, thereby orienting to speaker autonomy.

The SLT elaborates on the reasons why writing is a relevant category to mention in an answer to her question (omitted from the transcript), before she makes a statement about another word mentioned by the PWA as part of his initial answer attempt (Example 2A) (‘when you say voice now’, line 49). This is formulated as a dependent clause projecting more to come, however, the PWA takes the turn and starts another word search sequence in which he attempts to reformulate a part of his initial response. The PWA comes up with the word ‘song’ but does not seem satisfied with it himself as he rejects it (line 51-53) and makes yet another attempt by prompting himself by indicating an item that he is satisfied with followed by a conjunction (‘write and’, line 55). The PWA does not provide a second item. Instead he repeats the conjunction ‘and’ indicating that he is searching for a second item. The SLT at this point comes to his assistance by providing a suggestion for a second item: ‘do you mean speech’, line 56. This suggestion is formatted in such a way that it may be understood as a completion of her grammatically incomplete statement in line 49 in which she indicates a category she has noticed in the PWA’s initial answer. Furthermore, it works as a clarification request with an embedded correction suggesting another category than the one suggested by the PWA. This request is formatted as a yes/no-type question, making a yes/no response the type conforming way of
answering. As in the previous case, the PWA does not provide that straight away although he uses ‘yes’ and ‘no’ formatted responses on other occasions. Here he repeats the category suggested by the SLT (‘speech’) several times with minor deviations from standard pronunciation and then an acknowledgement. We suggest that the repetition of the category may be a way of demonstrating or recognising this category as a relevant answer and only possibly as the answer he was attempting at producing. The SLT orients to the atypical response format as she makes another clarification request (‘was that what you meant’, line 58) which is acknowledged by the PWA and then by the SLT. Since it was the SLT and not the PWA who came up with the category on this occasion, this clarification request, although very similar in its formatting to the clarification request in line 27, has the function of securing that the category the SLT suggested was, in fact, the category the PWA was searching for in contrast to the clarification request above which worked to prompt the PWA to search for another category which he succeeded to do.

In contrast to the above, in responses to answers to closed questions in a series also involving pen, paper and gestures as resources for communication, the answer feedback is recurrently done by a form of repetition or formulation of the answer. Hence, the resources used in the answer (a short answer coordinated with a pointing gesture) are oriented to in the answer feedback.

The sequence shown in Example 3B follows upon the answer provided by the PWA in Example 2B and shows such an instance of answer feedback by repeating or reformulating the answer:

Example 3B

30 SLT D:måske her
   maybe here
   ((SLT points at paper with pen and then draws on paper))
31 PWA 5:ja
   yes
32 SLT D:ja
   yes

The SLT treats the verbal and non-verbal actions by the PWA (see Example 2B in which he states some numbers and points at a location on the paper) as an answer as she points at the paper with her pen while stating ‘maybe here’, line 30, which may be understood as a reformulation both indicating and acknowledging her understanding of his action as a response and possibly inviting the PWA to confirm her understanding which he then does by acknowledging her understanding followed by another acknowledgement on the part of the SLT.

4.5 Formulations

When the SLT provides answer feedback, she does that by formulating versions of the PWA’s answers in different ways, for example by repeating elements from his answer (attempt) and requesting clarification or inviting to acknowledgement. Hence, the answer feedback is typically designed as recognisably similar to the answer (attempt) and formulated as yes/no-type questions entailing a candidate answer. The SLT thereby demonstrates that the basis for formulating a candidate answer in her answer feedback can be found in the answer provided by the PWA. In the
data, and most significantly in sequences in the latter part of the conversation following closed questions in a series, answers, answer feedback and acknowledgements, we find another type of answer formulation suggested by the SLT in which the formulations are recognisably different in formatting than the answer provided by the PWA. She does that by asking questions with inbuilt candidate answers (Pomerantz, 1988) or statements that propose ‘... a version of events which (apparently) follows directly from the other person’s own account, but introduces a transformation’ (Antaki, 2008:26). This is known as formulations. Building on Heritage & Watson’s work (1979), Antaki (2008) describes how formulations of another person’s words (in psychotherapy) are used rhetorically: ‘The formulator times her or his words to come relevantly after the first speaker’s, designing a version of them to sound as if they are a mere summary or natural upshot – and projecting agreement’ (2008:33). Hence, as Antaki (2008) notes, formulating another person’s words may be a way of getting alternative versions on record. In fact, formulations have been documented to be more frequent in institutional interaction than in conversation and are recognised as a strategy used by questioners (2008). Research on the use of formulations in psychotherapy (Hutchby 2005; Vehviläinen 2003) shows that formulations of clients’ answer to therapists questions can be used by therapists to reshape the answer into “therapeutic language”. Formulations are beneficial because the formulator claims to find the new description in the very words of the previous speaker and because there is an inbuilt presumption that this new description is to be agreed with (Antaki, 2008:33). An example of a formulation that introduces a transformation of the answer and projects agreement can be seen in Example 4. This sequence follows the sequences shown in Example 1B, 2B and 3B initiated with closed questions in a series and pen and paper as a resource for communication.

Example 4

33 PS: (7.4)  
((SLT D continues to draws on paper))  
34 SLT D: ja du synes det går noget bedre  
yes you think it is somewhat better  
35 PWA 5: ja  
yes  
36 SLT D: med å  
with  
37 PS: (0.5)  
38 SLT D: t[ale]  
speaking  
39 PWA 5: [det] tror jeg  
I think so  
40 PWA 5: tror jeg  
think so  
41 PWA 5: tale  
speaking  
42 SLT D: ja  
yes  
43 SLT D: ja  
yes
The SLT states a candidate understanding of how the PWA assesses his own progress: ‘You think it is somewhat better’, line 38. This is also acknowledged by the PWA, and after the SLT has specified what type of progress is assessed, ‘with speaking’, line 36-38, it is acknowledged again in a mitigated way ‘I think so’, line 39-40. This candidate understanding is formulated by the SLT by using verbal resources which the PWA does not have access to and which he did not use in his answer (Example 2B). Here he stated numbers and pointed at the paper.

She formulates her understanding as a statement about what the PWA thinks, using a format that resembles the options she provided verbally in her question formulations (Example 1B). In her question formulations she asked the PWA to assess his progress in speech by asking closed questions such as ‘is it the same’, ‘or is it much much better’, line 23 and 25. The formulation statement is placed after the PWA has provided an answer to the SLT’s question by pointing and verbalising minimally, hence it is constructed as a reformulation of the PWA’s answer both sequentially and in terms of content, constructing it as a statement about what he thinks. By building sequences in the conversation in such a way, the SLT and the PWA work at achieving a common understanding of the PWA’s self-evaluations of progress in speech and communication in therapy. Thereby the questions, answers and assessment formulations are formatted and constructed in such a way that they can be used in the institutional context of making self-assessments of progress in speech and communication by the client as part of the obligatory therapy evaluation.

5. Discussion: Support at a cost?

It can pose a challenge to do an evaluation of the PWA’s progress in speech and communication with an ambition and requirement to involve him in the activity, allowing him to express his opinion about it independently of the SLT who has expert knowledge in assessing speech and communication abilities and competencies. By initiating with open questions the SLT allows for the PWA to formulate answers in his own words, i.e. by using resources he can mobilise himself. However, as conversation analytic studies point to, and as we show, answers are arrived at and negotiated collaboratively.

We have shown how an SLT makes use of supportive and adaptive strategies in outcome assessment; sequential organisation, question formatting and non-verbal resources. We have shown how these strategies have advantages of minimising interactional troubles, which may cause distress while preserving some sense of speaker autonomy.

However, it should be noticed that such adaptive strategies come at a cost. The production of a self-assessment as an answer to a question becomes highly co-constructed. The strategies used by the SLT to involve the PWA in the evaluation of the therapy by asking him to assess his progress entail guiding, models for answering, and prompts. While supporting conversation by targeting strategies to adapt to communicative limitations caused by aphasia, there is a sense in which the strategies can be seen as possibly manipulative.

The fact that answers are co-constructed and that questions entail candidate answers and preferences is, however, not particular for interaction in which supportive strategies are used in communication. Question formatting (Houtkoop-Steenstra & Antaki, 1997), reformulations (Svennevig, 2013), and formulations (Antaki, 2008) have been found in various forms of institutional interaction and have been described as strategies for achieving interactional and institutional purposes. Based on previous findings on aphasic interaction pointing to how PWAs
may feel distressed when dealing with interactional troubles (Wilkinson, 2006) as well as on the displayed interactional difficulties for the PWA in responding ‘without help’ in our data, there is evidence to suggest that SCA strategies used judiciously and in specific sequential and interactional contexts may work for the benefit of both parties in the interaction in order to secure the imperative that PWAs’ perspectives are included in the outcome evaluation (Worrall, 2006).

6. Conclusion

In this article we illuminate how an SLT and a PWA accomplish a common understanding of how the PWA assesses his progress in speech and communication since he started speech and language therapy. More specifically, we concentrate on interactional and adaptive strategies initiated by the SLT which may be seen as attempts to include the PWA and his perspectives in the evaluation process by attending to possibilities and limitations for participation caused by aphasia. A common understanding is arrived at by the SLT and the PWA by making use of resources in the sequential organisation of interaction and by making use of resources such as gesture, pen and paper. Such strategies are suggested in the intervention program SCA which the SLT in the data presented has been coached in.

We have focused on two sequences; one in the initial part of the conversation which is initiated by the SLT by asking an open question that invites the PWA to assess his progress in speech or communication and one later in the conversation in which the SLT initiates the sequence by asking closed questions in a series and by making use of pen and paper as a resource for communication.

The participants themselves orient to the former as a question posed ‘without help’ and as ‘difficult’. Open questions do not provide a model for responding and the question itself may not entail words that the PWA can use as resources when answering. The answer sequence is characterised as extended, with numerous turns following each other entailing hesitations, word searches, word repetitions, and accounts. Upon this the SLT does not simply move on or acknowledge the answer minimally. She requests clarification. She does that by singling out something he said (i.e. a word) and she then asks him to acknowledge whether or not that was in fact what he meant to say by using a yes/no question format. However difficult for the PWA, he gets the possibility to indicate his opinion about his progress in his own words by making use of the resources he can mobilise. As part of an evaluation of progress in speech and communication in which the PWA is expected to participate, this allows for the PWA to bring in perspectives and opinions which have not already been (candidate) formulated by the SLT, and which are ideally not influenced by the SLT’s preferences and opinions which are embedded into closed question formats.

The sequence initiated with closed questions follows some minutes after the sequence initiated with the open question. The SLT poses closed questions in a series, thereby presenting the PWA with models and options he can use in his answer. She also makes use of pen and paper as resources, creating a ‘scale’ illustrating progress since the initiation of therapy on the paper which the PWA is invited to use when providing an answer. This, of course, extends over quite a few turns. The PWA’s answer, however, does not. His answer is provided in a single turn coordinating with a pointing gesture thereby indicating his assessment of his progress on the scale as invited to. The answer feedback is done by a repetition and an acknowledgement. A strategy for achieving a
common understanding, formulating another’s words, is also used in the interaction. This strategy may occur after answers to closed questions.

By organizing the conversation in which the PWA is invited to assess his own progress in speech and communication by initiating with open questions, then closed questions in a series and finally with formulations of prior speech, the SLT can pick up on the understandings and opinions provided by the PWA in his initial answers, thereby modelling and negotiating understandings on the basis of the PWA’s indicated perspectives. Besides question formatting, our analyses documents that the use of adapted resources such as pen and paper work to reduce lengthy answer- and repair sequences and secure conversational progression which may give the PWA a sense of interactional competence.

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