

COMMUNICATION IMPAIRMENTS IN PATIENTS WITH RIGHT-HEMISPHERE DAMAGE

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Damage to the right hemisphere can result in poor communication skills, which in turn might engender marked disabilities. Impaired communication skills following to right hemisphere damage differ from deficits characterizing aphasia and may affect speech, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, as well as prosodic components of communication.

The above-mentioned communication deficits seem to affect almost 50% of these patients. Nevertheless, they have usually been studied in isolation from one another; their coexistence within the same individual is still scarcely known. Moreover, the clinical profiles of communication impairments following to a right hemisphere damage, including their correlation with underlying cognitive deficits, are still unreported.

The objective of this study was to provide an overview of verbal communication deficits that can be found in individuals with right-hemisphere damage. Those deficits can differentially interfere with prosody, the semantic processing of words and speech, and with pragmatic abilities.

Despite the severe deficits they can cause, communication impairments due to a right-hemisphere damage are usually neglected. Underestimation of the damage size is likely to be done to either inappropriate classification or to the lack of proper assessment tools. Indeed, patients with right-hemisphere damage might present with severe communication deficits, despite they perform correctly on aphasia tests; this simply happens because aphasia tests are specifically designed to detect left-hemisphere damage.

The enhancement of our knowledge about the role of the right hemisphere in verbal communication might have a major impact in the theoretical and clinical fields; moreover, it would facilitate the clinical practice in diagnosing patients with right-hemisphere damage and would lay the foundations for developing new methods and strategies of intervention.

Keywords: Right Hemisphere, Verbal Communication, Discourse, Lexical, Semantics, Pragmatics, Prosody

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