

Academy of Aphasia 2012

‘I’m Not a Liar’: What Confabulation Can Reveal About Language and Cognition in Aphasia

Tubero A.*

Clinica de Fonoaudiologia

The aim of this paper is to discuss confabulation in aphasia not as the place where invention or falsehood originates, but as a text that consists of pragmatic-discursive and cognitive elements mobilized by the aphasic in the situation of interlocution.

The method used was analysis of data collected and transcribed in situations of communication among a multilingual subject ST (L1: Italian and Italian dialect, L2: French, German, Spanish, Portuguese), the speech therapist AL and a relative GT (brother of ST). ST became aphasic after a ruptured aneurysm in the anterior communicating artery.

The subject speaks ST presented jargonaphasia characterized by lexical paraphasias and neologisms. He appears to be anosognosic in relation to any aspect related to neurological problems, surgery or the linguistic and cognitive deficits arising thereof. There was a lack of any motor side-effects; just a feeling of awkwardness in the patient’s surgical scar. There was time and space disorientation, with significant changes in both short-term and episodic memory. The speech was confabulatory and confabulation could be observed in various textual configurations exhibited by ST during the interlocution with AL and / or GT: replies, comments, explanations, narratives. However, further analysis of the data revealed that his confabulation is anchored in *frames* that correspond to social generalized models, related to social and cognitive representation of the external world. In addition, the *frames* appeared related to semantic memory and the selective activation of that social memory: ST maintained the scene of enunciation in situations such as "being in the office", "presiding over a meeting", "being interviewed", "talking on the phone", "going to the restaurant", "staying at a hotel", "choose appropriate idiom". If the linguistic levels – both discursive and semantic – are altered, the pragmatic and syntactic take on an organizing role in the language of ST. The *frames* activated by ST are textual representations of everyday practices, selectively and pragmatically implemented, enabling interlocution.

If confabulation is just considered *per se*, strictly by what is enunciated by ST and, in essence, for what can be observed during the interaction, the comment made by GT makes absolute sense: *Tutto ... inventato tutto ... tutto inventato*.

Now, glimpsing the *frames* used by ST means that the speaker has taken into account the linguistic and cognitive phenomena underlying confabulation. It also reveals the mechanisms of the cognitive-linguistic work in which the aphasic undertakes in the construction of meaning. In this sense, the interlocutor and ST can interact with shared assumptions and understanding of the outside world, negotiating and co-constructing meanings, reformulating and attaining enunciation and interpretative adjustments, despite the constraints of confabulation and aphasia.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 55 11 38849555 .
E-mail address: anaturero@afasia.com.br .