

The Therapy Path

word finding, where he named some words more than once and finding the common feature in a group of words.

Sentence processing

Informal task measured Mr. Client's ability to analyze verbal information and formulate logical responses to verbal problems.

Explain similarities and differences

Finger and toe: "The same is because it's on your body, your finger you could feel it and a toe you could feel it. But their different because a toe is in your shoe where you walk on and a toe, a finger is what you hold your coffee with."

Wednesday and January: "Well there's Wednesdays in January, but there's no Wednesdays, like there's always a Wednesday but there's not always a January. So January is a time of year where it's winter, and uh there's Wednesdays four in there or three or whatever, but they only come once a year."

Cake and a pie: "Well a cake and a pie is the same for something to eat. It's not taste the same but it's still something to eat. A cake is when you go to a birthday party and you have a cake. A pie is when you have a normal supper and you have pie for desert."

Apple and strawberry: Well an apple a day will keep the doctor away, but a strawberry you don't get every day so you gulp it. The difference, an apple and a strawberry taste different but they're both sweet.

Bell and horn: A bell you could ring when you walk into a restaurant to ring the bell or a motel ring the bell to get the attention of the worker and the horn is when you're in the car and you want to get someone out of your way or something, you peep the horn to get their attention. But it's not the same as a little bell, just one person attention or something, it's not like a horn to get the other vehicle's attention, that's the difference. (cue) They both make sounds.

Rain and snow: It rains all summer long and it snows all winter long. It's the same as you, yearly, yearly you will get rain and you will get snow in the winter, rain in the summer, snow in the winter, in the winter, but it's the same as weather, but snow is cold and hard and you could play with it but water you can't, you can't play with rain.

These results indicate that Mr. Client has significant difficulties identifying the most important/relevant features of verbal problems. For example, the following elements were missing for Wednesday and January (Both time, one is day of week the other is a month) and cake and pie (both round sweet desserts, fruit filling with crust vs. layers with icing). This coincides with his difficulty with the word feature task in the word processing above. This could lead to ineffective solutions to personal problems or increased frustration when attempting to resolve social conflicts. Similar difficulties were noted with a task where he was required to provide solutions to certain problems (4 appropriate responses out of 6). What happens if a person takes alcohol? ("You loose it, don't want to hurt kids.") What would happen if your neighbour's dog bit you on your property? ("I would kill it. (cue) With my bare hands.").

Mr. Client successfully answered 3/3 simple verbal math problems involving time, quantity, and/or distance given a pen and paper. This was done in a timely manner, and on one occasion without use of the pen and paper. This indicates that short-term memory and mental operations are sufficient for managing schedules and quantities in simple immediate contexts. His low energy would, however, make him more prone to errors, particularly after extended periods of work, which quickly leads to fatigue.

Expressive Language

On the Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test, Mr. Client scored in the 10th percentile (using 18 year old norms) indicating moderate difficulties with picture naming. He could not name words for chess, graph, hoof, clarinet, or otter. His naming skills were timely without signs of word finding difficulties. Upon questioning, he indicated that he had significant word finding problems during the first months following the accident. At the time of this assessment, he reported that word finding difficulties occur only 3 to 5 times per day.

Expressive syntax was judged to be within normal limits, however his expressive language was affected by his language processing, which reduced the coherence of his discourse.

The Therapy Path

Social Pragmatics

Mr. Client was responsive to me as he answered my questions and completed tasks according to my instructions. He also asserted himself appropriately by asking me questions or by making comments related to the task or discussion. His difficulty with attending to relevant features of issues and sometimes-inappropriate solutions to problems would significantly affect the quality of his relationships with close friends and family.

Reading

Reading decoding skills were normal as he read a grade 8 level text at a normal rate of 90 to 100 words per minute. His comprehension and retention was judged to be in the low average range, as he recounted approximately half of the information in the text. Verbal cues helped to elicit some information that he did not recall. While he was explaining the details of the text, had no clear organizational strategy (beginning to end, grouping related information). Such strategies are the means by which we effectively encode, store, and retrieve information.

Attention, Memory, and Executive Function

Mr. Client's focused attention during the verbal/written math problem task was very functional, though he stated that rapid fatigue limited how much work he could accomplish in a day at this time. He showed no signs of distractibility in the quiet assessment setting of the clinic, though he admitted that listening in group situations and in the presence of visual distractions is much more difficult than in the past. I suspect that divided attention would also be a challenge for him as well as effective attention shift.

Short term memory of words and sentences was functional, though I expect that fatigue and alertness may have an effect on this.

Long term semantic memory (word meaning) is returning and episodic memory is functional as he could recount recent and more distant past experiences with ample detail. He complained of difficulty with procedural memory (working in the garage).

Executive function has been affected (tools in great disorder in the garage since accident, poor organization). This should be further investigated.

SUMMARY AND GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Testing revealed that Mr. Client's speech, vocabulary and expressive syntax is commensurate with pre-accident levels and within normal limits. Word finding difficulties have mostly resolved and are now insignificant. Language processing skills were mixed, with generally normal word processing (with the exception of a task requiring him to identify common features in a group of words) and a significant difficulty with verbal problem solving, particularly in areas of identifying the main point of a problem and providing appropriate solutions. Expressive language was compromised by difficulties structuring his ideas in discourse (incomplete and somewhat disorganized). His reading decoding skills were normal, however his retention of details is impaired.

These language impairments present a significant handicap, which could adversely affect the quality of his social relationships with friends and family. Mr. Client indicated that communication and conflict resolution difficulties cause significant familial stresses. Prognosis for improving these skills is fair given family support, past work ethics, and overall normal language skills. Factors that are obstacles to his success include his fatigue, level of education, and suspected difficulties with attention, memory & executive function.

The Therapy Path

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Client would benefit from speech and language therapy to improve language processing skills, social pragmatic skills, and reading comprehension. Upon request of services, a treatment plan will be provided outlining the details.

That Mr. Client receives family counseling to help manage difficult familial issues arising from the head injury. Difficulties with money management, judgment, and conflict resolution are among the families important concerns.

That Mr. Client undergoes a psychological assessment and neuropsychological assessment to more clearly define cognitive impairments resulting from the accident.

John Stark, B.Sc., M.A. Reg. CASLPO (C)
orthophoniste / Speech Language Pathologist