The Advantage of Familiar Objects in Alzheimer's Dementia
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Abstract

The present research aimed to investigate the relative advantage of personal familiarity for object naming and use in individuals with Alzheimer’s Dementia (AD). Eleven (n = 11) patients with probable AD diagnosis participated. Prior to testing, the participant’s caregiver was asked to identify and bring to the laboratory 12 portable household objects that the participant had been using regularly. Laboratory analogs for each personal object were created. The experimental tasks were performed with (a) the familiar objects and (b) the laboratory analogs, and included naming, gesture, personal object decision, and semantic script generation tasks. Participants’ performance was coded and analyzed for differences between familiar objects and laboratory analogs. Results suggest that participants performed better on the familiar objects than on the laboratory analogs. The study is the first to provide evidence for the relative advantage of AD patients.

1. Background

Research on the effects of personal familiarity in object naming and use (Bozeat, Lambon Ralph, Patterson, & Hodges, 2002a, 2002b; Brandt, Patterson, & Hodges, 2004; Funnell, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Snowden, Griffiths, & Neary, 1994, 1996) has shown that individuals with semantic dementia are better able to:

- Name and demonstrate the use of their own objects as opposed to laboratory analogs of those objects.
- Recognize and use correctly objects in the right context, with their performance deteriorating in novel contexts.

2. Research Objectives

- Can the personal familiarity effect be observed in other dementia populations?
- Will patients with Alzheimer’s Disease (AD) exhibit better performance in naming and using familiar objects relative to laboratory objects?

3. Participants

- Eleven (N = 11) patients (2 females; mean age = 79; mean years of education = 13.55) with probable AD diagnosis participated in this study.
- All patients showed either mild or moderate impairment (mean MMSE = 20.91, SD = 4.95, MMSE scores ranging from 11 to 26).
- Four experimental tasks were employed. The tasks appear in Table 1.
- The experimental tasks were performed with (a) the familiar objects, or (b) the laboratory analogs.
- All sessions were videotaped with participants’ consent.

4. Materials

- Prior to testing, the participant’s caregiver was asked to identify and bring to the laboratory 12 portable household objects that the participant had been using regularly.
- Laboratory analogs for each personal object were created.
- Similarity between each familiar object and its analog was assessed in terms of size, shape, and color.

5. Procedure

- Each object was familiar to them.

6. Results

- Four experimental tasks were employed. The tasks appear in Table 1.
- The experimental tasks were performed with (a) the familiar objects, or (b) the laboratory analogs.
- All sessions were videotaped with participants’ consent.

7. Discussion - Conclusions

The present study aimed to examine whether the advantage of familiar objects relative to laboratory objects that has been observed among semantic dementia populations also holds for AD patients.

The results of the study support the conclusion that AD patients do not exhibit the personal objects advantage to the same extent as semantic dementia patients. Nonetheless, they seem to be able to provide more substantial information regarding use if the objects are familiar to them.

8. References


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