Re-situating brain injury within functional systems: Bridging brain-behavior-environment

Seminar Outline:

Introduction: Functional systems in cultural-historical psychology  Paul A. Prior
Research on aphasia in functional systems  Julie A. Hengst
Research on amnesia in functional systems  Melissa C. Duff
Clinical implications  Melissa C. Duff

Seminar Abstract: In the mid-20th century in the USSR, Alexander Luria did pioneering work on what brain injury reveals about neurological structure and function and on innovative approaches for neuropsychological diagnosis and intervention. Although this work became well-known in Western neuropsychology and clinical practice, it was taken up without contextualizing it in the cultural-historical school of psychology founded by Luria and his close colleague, Lev Vygotsky. This seminar takes up Luria’s project through the lens of current cultural-historical psychological work by examining acquired neurogenic communication disorders as disruptions within functional systems. Specifically, we introduce key tenets of current cultural-historical psychology, present research examining communicative practices in individuals with aphasia and amnesia and their routine communication partners, and encourage discussion of how this approach and these data can/should inform clinical work.

Key Clinical Applications

• Seeing clinicians as communication partners in functional systems is valuable (Hengst & Duff, 2007). This shift involves a) modeling clinician behaviors more closely to the behaviors that support everyday conversation and b) recognizing that the clinician is always co-producing discourse in interactions. The study showed that this shift had a visible effect on discourse elicitation and that it was perhaps as difficult to change the routine behavior of the clinician (norms of clinical performance) as it was to change the behavior of clients.

• Hengst, Duff, & Prior (2008) reported an initial pilot study translating the barrier task protocol from a research tool to a means of treatment. Analysis of the data from that study highlighted the heterogeneity of discourse practices that emerged as client and clinician-as-communication-partner blended interactions about the barrier task with references and stories about everyday experiences. The analysis also highlighted rich patterns of conversational repetition as the pair re-envoiced each other's words and acts, replayed discussions around target cards, repeated labels, and recycled words, actions, and stances of each other's utterances across sessions.

• Hengst, Duff, & Dettmer (2010) develops the notion of repeated engagement in barrier task treatment protocols. Repeated engagement involves designing clinical practice around the goal of creating motives and structures for repeated, meaningful (goal-directed) activities, which in turn prompt the emergence of varied forms of conversation repetition. Designing for repeated engagement takes advantage of the robust power of everyday social grounds for learning.
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Presenters’ Selected Publications


