Selling the Story: Narratives and Charisma in Adults with TBI

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Introduction

Social communication impairments are common among individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) [1], and may contribute to negative social outcomes [2]. To date, most research on social communication has focused on narratives. Narratives are prevalent and important in daily conversation, and tax linguistic, communicative, and cognitive skills [3]. Thus, this genre provides a useful means with which to look at social communication skills in individuals with TBI. The current literature on narratives of individuals with TBI is limited, however, in that it has focused primarily on verbal aspects of performance, rather than considering the performative aspects of telling a story, i.e., the ‘acting’ part of storytelling. Differences in performance may underlie previously unexplained differences in social and communication outcomes of individuals with TBI, and could lead to a new direction in social communication rehabilitation. In this study, individuals with TBI shared a personal narrative that was analyzed for performative features and rated by unfamiliar listeners on a measure of social communication. The purpose was to learn whether performance skills influenced others’ perceptions of adults with TBI, as well as others’ interest in conversing with them in the future.

Methods

Narrative Elicitation

With male confederate:
- Relationship Closeness Induction Task (RCIT) [4]
- Accident Narrative

Narrative Analysis: Narratives were transcribed orthographically and the first minute of each was analyzed for use of performative behaviors
- Performance Density Measure (tokens/T-units)
- Performance Diversity Measure (types/T-units)

Performance Measures

Tonal Use: Use of intonation, rhythm, direct-reported speech, and elongation of vowels [5]

Gestures:
- Temporarily accompany speech
- Seem related to the speech they accompany
- Made only by the person who is speaking [5]

Audience Engagement:
- Narrator asked a question of the interlocutor that related to the story
- Narrator asked the interlocutor to carry out a task that would move the story forward
- Commented about the happenings of the story to the interlocutor [5]

Sound Effects: Non-speech sounds used to amplify action in the story [5]

Perceived Charisma Measure

Raters watched the first minute of each narrative in randomized order and completed the Charismatic Leadership Communication Scale (CLCS) [7]

Additional Measures
- Charisma Ranking
- Interest in future conversation
- Yes/No
- Why/why not?

Analysis

Spearman rank-order correlations:
- Performance Density
- Performance Diversity
- Self-ratings of charisma
- Others’ ratings of charisma

Results

Do performative behaviors correlate with self- and others’ perceptions of charisma?
- Performance density correlated with self- and others’ charisma ratings
- Performance diversity not correlated with self- or others’ charisma ratings

Do self-ratings of charisma correlate with others’ ratings?

Performance diversity not correlated with self- or others’ charisma ratings

How do gesture use and others’ charisma ratings correlate with reported interest in future conversation?

What themes did the raters comment on regarding interest in future conversation with the participants?

- Communicative abilities
- Performative behaviors
- Story characteristics
- Overall impairment
- The participant’s impact on the rater
- The participant’s internal state of mind

Discussion

• Results suggest that nonverbal communication aspects, namely gestures and speaking rate, influence ratings of charisma and reported interest in future conversation
• Results suggest a potential contributor to differences in social outcome among adults with TBI
• Individuals with TBI and naïve observers agreed on the performative skills of participants with TBI, which might lead to a potential avenue for treatment
• Provides a new perspective on communication function in individuals with TBI, linking micro- and macro-structural perspectives on storytelling, and showing a novel area in which skills can be revealed

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References