
Evaluation of Sentence Comprehension in Dementia and MCI - Theoretical and Clinical Implications

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INTRODUCTION: Language production and comprehension disorders are frequent in dementia. Language comprehension at the single word level (i.e. in picture-word matching task) can be in mildly cognitively impaired patients preserved, so clinically the language processes seem to be normal, but more comprehensive language testing (i.e. at sentence level) can reveal substantial impairments even in patients with mild dementia.

AIM: To detect the language deficits in patients with MCI and dementia and to determine the relationship between these deficits and the severity of cognitive disturbances.

METHOD: In the sample of 72 cognitively declined patients of Department of psychiatry of University Hospital in Bratislava, Slovakia we evaluated severity of cognitive impairment by MMSE and MoCA instruments. We used our own sentence comprehension test, designed for Slovak speaking individuals.

RESULTS: Normal performance in sentence comprehension test we registered in 5 from 7 patients with MCI, but only in 2 patients from 29 with mild, 2 patients from 32 with moderate and no patient from 4 with severe dementia.

CONCLUSION: Testing of language functions in patients with dementia only at the single word level (what is typical in routine clinical practice) doesn't capture real communication disturbances. At least in patients with MCI and mild dementia is very useful to carry out more detailed language testing (including items at sentence level), which can reveal the onset of language disturbances. Language specific test should be used to discover comprehension deficits at early stage of dementia.