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A Study of the Strategies Used by Aphasics in the Retrieval of Words in Their First Language

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Word retrieval difficulty is a characteristic of Aphasia, which is a language impairment that occurs due to brain damage. Stroke is the main cause of brain damage that results in Aphasia. Individuals utilize various strategies to retrieve words in their speech. Finding out the successful strategies used by individuals experiencing Aphasia can be implemented in therapy activities as well as in facilitating communication in daily settings. The specific objectives of the study are to identify strategies used by Sinhala speaking individuals who experience Aphasia when retrieving single words in a picture-naming task, to identify strategies used when retrieving single words during a conversation and to identify the strategies used by the carers to support word retrieval. A descriptive study was carried out in a government hospital Speech and Language Therapy unit on 10 individuals experiencing Aphasia and their carers who were selected through consecutive sampling. Each pair carried out two conversational tasks and a picture-naming task. Video recordings were done of the activities carried out and verbatim translations were made. The strategies were identified which were used in successful retrieval of a predetermined set of nouns. These were analysed using psycholinguistic theories. Four findings emerged as successful strategies used by the individuals experiencing Aphasia, which were fillers, circumlocutions, conduit d'Approche and gestures. Semantic cues and phonemic cues were identified as strategies used by their carers in facilitating word retrieval. Individuals experiencing Aphasia with word retrieval difficulties can be supported in word retrieval using different strategies, which are self-generated, as well as carer prompted. Carers need advice and training in strategies that can be used in helping word retrieval other than semantic and phonemic cueing.

Key words: Aphasia, Language, Sinhala, Stroke, Word Retrieval Strategies