

When words don't come easy: Word finding difficulties in Primary Progressive Aphasia

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State of the art: Word finding difficulty (WFD) comprises a myriad of behaviors that reflect reduced ability to produce an intended word. Although WFD is a common and early manifestation of Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA), seldom is it measured in routine clinical practice. We aimed to develop a clinical scale to estimate severity and range of WFD in PPA and distinguish it from WFD observed in normal ageing.

Methods: Distinct WFD features were identified through a two-stage process: operational definition of WFD behaviors after a literature review; and careful observation of video-recorded clinical interviews of 38 logopenic (lvPPA), 29 non-fluent (nfvPPA), 36 semantic (svPPA) variant PPA patients, as compared to 20 old healthy controls.

Results: Nine behaviours associated with WFD were defined. Analysis of audio-video transcriptions showed that the PPA group overall displayed higher frequency of WFD behaviours than controls (30 ± 18 versus 10 ± 4 occurrences per 100 words, $p < .001$), with nfvPPA (37 ± 22) and lvPPA (36 ± 17) showing the highest frequency of WFD behaviours. Filled pauses, partial and complete word repetitions, retracing and metalinguistic comments were more likely in the PPA group than in controls. No differences were found between groups for gesture and pantomime, silent pauses, phrase repetition or circumlocutions. A simplified 3-item WFD scale consisting of "limited vocal output", "speech disruptions" and "compensatory strategies" is under clinical validation.

Conclusion: WFD is a common but multifaceted manifestation of PPA, which can be assessed by a novel clinical tool.

Conflicts of interest

N/A