The Cambridge Handbook of Communication Disorders

Many children and adults experience impairment of their communication skills. These communication disorders impact adversely on all aspects of these individuals’ lives. In thirty dedicated chapters, The Cambridge Handbook of Communication Disorders examines the full range of developmental and acquired communication disorders and provides the most up-to-date and comprehensive guide to the epidemiology, aetiology and clinical features of these disorders. The volume also examines how these disorders are assessed and treated by speech and language therapists and addresses recent theoretical developments in the field. The handbook goes beyond well-known communication disorders to include populations such as children with emotional disturbance, adults with non-Alzheimer’s dementias and people with personality disorders. Each chapter describes in accessible terms the most recent thinking and research in communication disorders. The volume is an ideal guide for academic researchers, graduate students and professionals in speech and language therapy.

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The Cambridge Handbook of Communication Disorders

Edited by

Louise Cummings
In memory of
R. Steven Ackley
A committed author and audiologist
Contents

List of figures  ix
List of tables  xi
Notes on contributors  xiii
Preface  xxiii
Acknowledgements  xxv

Part I  Developmental communication disorders  1
1 Cleft lip and palate and other craniofacial anomalies  John E. Riski  3
2 Developmental dysarthria  Megan Hodge  26
3 Developmental verbal dyspraxia  Brigid McNeill  49
4 Developmental phonological disorder  Susan Rvachew  61
5 Specific language impairment  Susan Ellis Weismer  73
6 Developmental dyslexia  Catherine Christo  88
7 Intellectual disability and communication  Katherine Short-Meyerson and Glenis Benson  109
8 Emotional disturbance and communication  Gregory J. Benner and J. Ron Nelson  125
9 Autism spectrum disorders and communication  Courtenay Frazier Norbury  141

Part II  Acquired communication disorders  159
10 Head and neck cancer and communication  Tim Bressmann  161
11 Acquired dysarthria  Bruce E. Murdoch  185
12 Apraxia of speech  Donald A. Robin and Sabina Flagmeier  211
13 Aphasia  Roelien Bastiaanse and Ronald S. Prins  224
14 Right hemisphere damage and communication  Yves Joanette, Perrine Ferré and Maximiliano A. Wilson  247
15 Dementia and communication  Jamie Reilly and Jinyi Hung  266
## Contents

16  Traumatic brain injury and communication  
    Leanne Togher  
    284
17  Psychiatric disorders and communication  
    Karen Bryan  
    300

### Part III  Voice, fluency and hearing disorders
18  Functional and organic voice disorders  
    Nadine P. Connor and Diane M. Bless  
    321
19  Stuttering and cluttering  
    Kathleen Scaler Scott  
    341
20  Hearing disorders  
    R. Steven Ackley  
    359

### Part IV  Management of communication disorders
21  Developmental motor speech disorders  
    Kirrie J. Ballard and Patricia McCabe  
    383
22  Acquired motor speech disorders  
    Anja Lowit  
    400
23  Developmental language disorders  
    Laurence B. Leonard  
    419
24  Acquired aphasia  
    Anne Whitworth, Janet Webster and Julie Morris  
    436
25  Disorders of voice  
    Linda Rammage  
    457
26  Disorders of fluency  
    J. Scott Yaruss  
    484

### Part V  Theoretical developments in communication disorders
27  Motor speech disorders and models of speech production  
    Karen Croot  
    501
28  Adult neurological disorders and semantic models  
    Tobias Bormann  
    524
29  Language in genetic syndromes and cognitive modularity  
    Vesna Stojanovik  
    541
30  Pragmatic disorders and theory of mind  
    Louise Cummings  
    559

References  
    578
Index  
    671
Figures

1.1 Children with cleft lip page 4
1.2 Drawing of midline cleft palate 4
1.3 Muscles of the velum 5
1.4 Lateral radiographs showing velopharyngeal port 13
1.5 Closure of palatal cleft in a palatoplasty 15
1.6 Pharyngeal flap 15
1.7 Hynes or sphincter pharyngoplasty 17
1.8 Pharyngeal speech bulb obturator 19
1.9 Palatal lift 19
2.1 Word and sentence intelligibility scores 36
2.2 Words per minute and intelligible words per minute speaking rate scores 37
6.1 Information about words 92
6.2 Development of competent reading 104
8.1 Structural model depicting the interrelationships among language skills, externalizing behaviour, academic fluency and their impact on academic skills 134
8.2 Multi-level prevention system in Response to Intervention 139
10.1 Partial glossectomy of the left lateral free margin of the tongue 166
10.2 Speech bulb appliance 174
10.3 Transcervical electrolarynx 180
10.4 Electrolarynx with oral adapter 181
10.5 Tracheo-oesophageal speech 183
13.1 Illustration of how blood flow diminishes due to thrombosis and how an embolus blocks the artery 226
13.2 Illustration of a weak spot in the artery resulting in a haemorrhage 227
List of figures

13.3 Localization of the ‘language areas’ of Broca and Wernicke 239
13.4 Six stages of naming a visually perceived object 239
15.1 Successive MRI scans of a patient with semantic dementia 274
18.1 Factors that contribute to the development of voice disorders 335
20.1 Pinna of person with Down’s syndrome 361
20.2 Oculo-auriculo-vertebral spectrum 361
20.3 Middle ear anatomy 364
20.4 Tympanic membrane 367
20.5 Structures of the inner ear 370
20.6 Normal cochlear hair cells and hair cell damage 374
20.7 Endolymphatic hydrops 376
20.8 Acoustic neuroma 376
21.1 Assessment process for developmental motor speech disorders 387
21.2 Interventions for paediatric motor speech disorders 397
25.1 The ALERT model for management of voice disorders 460
25.2 Aerodynamic voice assessment 463
25.3 Phonetogram showing fundamental frequency and vocal intensity 464
25.4 Perturbations in the glottal source waveform 465
25.5 Sampling of the phonatory cycle in stroboscopy 467
25.6 The Stroboscopy Evaluation Rating Form 468
27.1 Box-and-arrow diagram of the language production system 504
27.2 Gestural score and co-ordinates at three levels of the dynamic model 508
27.3 Model of phonological encoding and articulatory planning 510
27.4 Schematic representation of a generic adaptive model of speech motor control 513
27.5 The DIVA model of speech acquisition and production 516
27.6 Model of phonological encoding, articulatory planning and prosody generation in connected speech 519
Tables

2.1 Articulatory error patterns of children with cerebral palsy  

3.1 Sean’s responses to selected items of the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology  33
3.2 Liam’s responses to selected items of the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology  53
3.3 Anne’s responses to a personal narrative speaking task  55
3.4 Spoken and written attempts by Ryan in an informal spelling task  56
6.1 Reading assessment flowchart  105
6.2 Word-level assessment  106
7.1 Characteristics of types of communicators  113
11.1 Clinically recognized types of dysarthria together with their lesion site  186
11.2 Lower motor neurons associated with flaccid dysarthria  188
11.3 Neurological disorders of lower motor neurons causing flaccid dysarthria  189
11.4 Diseases of the cerebellum associated with ataxic dysarthria  196
11.5 Major types of hyperkinetic disorder  200
19.1 Definitions of disfluency by type  342
21.1 Suggested areas for assessment in differential diagnosis of paediatric motor speech disorders  388
21.2 Primary symptoms which may differentiate childhood apraxia of speech, dysarthria and phonological disorders  392
### List of tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>Selection of published scales to assess psychosocial effects of acquired communication disorders</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>Summary of the primary principles of limb motor learning</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Communication disorders rarely achieve the prominence of a large range of other conditions that compromise human health and wellbeing. Yet, these disorders represent a significant burden on society in general, and compromise the quality of life and opportunities of the children and adults who experience them. In the UK, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists estimates that approximately 2.5 million people have a communication disorder. Some 800,000 of these people have a disorder that is so severe that it is hard for anyone outside their immediate families to understand them. In the USA, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders estimates that one in every six Americans has some form of communication disorder. If these figures do not make a compelling case for the assessment and treatment of communication disorders, then perhaps the reader will consider these comments made in 2006 by Lord Ramsbotham, the Chief Inspector of Prisons in the UK: ‘When I went to the young offender establishment at Polmont I was walking with the governor, who told me that if, by some mischance, he had to get rid of all his staff, the last one out of the gate would be his speech and language therapist’. No statement more forcefully demonstrates how an individual’s life chances are adversely affected by communication disorders, or the extent to which speech and language therapy can successfully intervene in these disorders.

Of course, speech and language therapy (speech-language pathology) is only possible to the extent that communication disorders are the focus of intensive academic study and clinical research. The chapters in this handbook are intended to bring to the reader the very latest knowledge of those disorders, from the epidemiology, aetiology and clinical features of communication disorders through to their assessment, treatment and theoretical significance. Each contributor has been chosen for his or her expertise in a particular communication disorder or group of disorders. This expertise is founded upon a substantial record of research in each
case alongside direct clinical experience of the disorders in question. The result is a collection of chapters that represents the state of the art in communication disorders, both in terms of how these disorders are conceived and how they are clinically managed.

The expansion in clinical communication sciences has been such that each aspect of a communication disorder is now the focus of extensive research. The researcher who is concerned with investigating the epidemiology and aetiology of specific language impairment in children will certainly be aware of how this disorder is assessed and treated without directly contributing to the development of techniques in these areas. It is not possible to do justice to these different dimensions of communication disorders within single chapters. It is in an effort to capture the depth of research in each of these areas that the volume has been divided into five parts. Parts I, II and III examine the epidemiology, aetiology and clinical features of the full range of developmental and acquired communication disorders. These disorders include impairments in speech and language (Parts I and II) as well as voice, fluency and hearing (Part III). Part IV examines the clinical management of communication disorders. The chapters in this part reflect current thinking about how communication disorders can best be assessed and treated. In doing so, they address areas where the evidence base for clinical practice is poorly developed as well as areas where there is a much higher level of evidence in support of specific techniques and practices. Finally, a number of theoretical developments have enhanced our understanding of communication disorders. Similarly, communication disorders can make a significant contribution to theoretical debates in speech-language pathology and beyond. Part V in this volume contains chapters which explore theoretical developments at the levels of phonetics and phonology (speech production models), syntax (cognitive modularity), semantics (semantic models) and pragmatics (theory of mind).
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