REVIEW OF: Tell Me Your Story: Analysis of Script Topics Selected by Persons With Aphasia By: Holland, A., Halper, A., & Cherney, L.[*]

Background Information

- Clinicians have been incorporating scripts or script therapy into their aphasia intervention because recent studies have shown that many persons with aphasia (PWA) are capable of communicating short segments of fluent speech on a specific topic. A script is a pre-planned interaction– similar to a movie script - that gives the PWA a chance to follow the natural flow of the interaction and respond appropriately. The clinician might tape-record or provide the written script for practice in the therapy session or at home. Another alternative could be a type of virtual therapist computer program, such as the one used in this study.

- Research shows conversational topics used for intervention during the beginning of language therapy sessions are primarily chosen by the therapist rather than the PWA. In addition, the topics chosen by the therapist are more "narrowly selected and typically ties to the aphasia and communication problems."

- The researchers in this study speculate that if PWA had more control of topic selection, they may instead choose topics related to their personal interests, activities and participation in their home and community.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to identify specific topics about which a person with aphasia might choose to communicate in order to provide clinicians with content for treatment that is meaningful to the individual.

The authors proposed these questions: "If you had a severe language disability and an SLP could miraculously help you to relearn 20 words, what would they be? If she could teach you a few monologues and dialogues, what would they be? To whom would they be addressed?"

Research Method

In order to provide insight into desired topics, the 33 participants in this study worked with a clinician (and family members if necessary) to develop a script (collaborative scripting) of interest or that would be "useful to them". Once finalized, each participant received at least 3 scripts to practice at home with a computerized virtual therapist (AphasiaScripts). Script performance was recorded; however, not discussed specifically in this article as the main goal of the study was to explore the detail and content of the scripts.

100 reviewed scripts were categorized as monologues (28) or dialogues (72). Dialogues were then divided into two groups: the PWA as the responder (32) or the PWA as the initiator (40). From all of these, "themes" of the scripts were categorized and frequency was calculated.

Key Findings

- **Most Common Themes for Monologues:**
    1. Life stories (largest category)
        a. Sub-themes included:
            - Monologues about the stroke
            - Introduction of self to others
            - Prestroke stories
            - Retelling impersonal story/event
    2. Prayers, testimonials, speeches and lectures
    3. Outside interests
    4. Making plans

- **Most Common Themes for Dialogues:**
    1. Conversations with family (especially important were conversations about daily life)
    2. Seeking or providing information
    3. Outside interests
    4. Ordering in a restaurant
    5. Talking on the phone
    6. Conversations with others
    7. Stories from life (present, prestroke, retelling event)
    8. Work talk
    9. Making plans
- Script training or "whole task training" may be an additional clinical tool in aphasia intervention. Studies show scripting to increase the performance of fluency, sentence structure and semantic or grammatical access for PWAs.
- Clinicians might seek to incorporate topics, such as those identified in this study, that are more meaningful to the PWA, regardless of the type of intervention utilized. When intervention is meaningful, PWA may be more motivated to participate and practice.
- Finally, beyond the topics discovered in this study, the content of the scripts reveals that PWA desire to use a variety of communicative functions within their conversations no matter how brief. For example, within the dialogues, many scripts included to seek specific information about family members, foster interactions by asking questions or providing information by answering questions. The authors suggest that although asking questions is not a regular focus of aphasia intervention, it could be "extremely manageable".

Application of Key Findings in DynaVox Compass™

- **Topics:** Many of the Topics included in the DynaVox Compass™ were chosen directly from the themes and sub-themes identified in this study.
- **Access to Topic Messages:** Topic Messages can be used to trigger speech, assist in repairing speech and/or serve as an alternative to speech. Three types of Topic Messages provided are:
    1. **Topics/Topic Messages** provide individual messages that can be produced at will. For example, "Van Outing" has related Topic Messages such as "I'm ready to go." or "Where are we going?" under the Topic image.
    2. **Sub-topics** within the general Topic are identified by yellow Hotspots around a particular object (e.g., a "bench" or "picnic table" in the "Park"). Sub-topics can be used to encourage lengthier or deeper interactions. For each Topic Message and Sub-topic, we have four intents in columns – Questions, General Comments & Requests, Positives and Negatives.
    3. **Scripts** are a series of messages that appear in order to help you communicate in important situations. Scripts can be used to tell stories, share information back and forth, and to practice, as a cue for what to say verbally. Every Topic has three scripts that you can use "as is" or edit , or add your own.

*Holland, A., Halper, A., Cherney, L (2010). Tell me your story: Analysis of script topics selected by persons with aphasia. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 19,* 198–203.