

## Summary

“Why this now?” reflects on the communicative potential of the verbal expressions of people with aphasia. Aphasia is a language impairment caused by brain damage. This study focusses on the non-fluent type of aphasia which is generally characterized by word finding difficulties, phonemic substitutions and/or omissions and a lack of grammatical elaboration. Speech is effortful and elliptical but language comprehension and passive linguistic knowledge is relatively spared. People with aphasia still ‘know their language’ but they are limited in their use of linguistic resources and this affects their ability to engage in communicative interaction. This study stems from the desire of a speech and language therapist to better understand the verbal choices of people with aphasia and to explore whether there is a way to appreciate their utterances to a fuller extent.

This thesis starts from the assumption that all verbal expressions, be it aphasic or not aphasic have a meaning within their associated conceptual frame of reference. This frame is a cognitive schema of knowledge and actions that is socioculturally and experientially tied to a particular type or ‘genre’ of interaction. A cognitive genre model is a complex set of contextual, textual, and linguistic *know how* and *know what* that participants of interaction use as a resource to act sensibly in concrete social situations. Thus, for example, at the local pub (context), one orders a beer (text) preferably in an informal style of speech (code), and in the court room (context), one enters a plea (text) with careful rhetorical composition (code). Participants of interaction assume that they act from socioculturally shared genre models and that any deviancies from these conventional cognitive projections are (verbally) indicated so they be appreciated and intelligible. In interactive events, participants may diverge from common genre projections if an individual projection is more compatible with their goals and values.

Interactive events – or ‘genre events’ – that include aphasic language use may be regarded as problematic or impaired. When non-aphasic persons are engaged in such an event they may feel that they share with the aphasic person a frame of reference and a perspective on its contextual, textual and linguistic definition. They may think that this frame is just poorly exploited because of the linguistic limitations brought about by their aphasic co-participant. The current study questions the assumption of shared ground in mixed aphasic / non-aphasic interactions. My hypothesis is that the meaning potential of a reduced verbal expression may still be appreciated if that expression is recognized as a meaningful part of an active genre model. However, against the ‘wrong’ background its meaning potential may not be well received. To explore these intuitions this study is designed to answer the following research question: *How, in an interactive event that includes an aphasic and a non-aphasic participant, do the participants share ground on knowledge and actions associated with that discourse situation?* I address this question through the following sub-questions: 1) *Is it possible that an aphasic and a non-aphasic participant of verbal interaction project diverging genre models of the interactive event they are engaged in without them being aware of it?;* 2) *If so, how do these models diverge in respect of the contextual, textual and linguistic dimensions of the discourse?;* 3) *How does aphasia interfere with establishing shared ground on knowledge and actions associated with this interactive event?*

I research these questions by way of a qualitative method of discourse analysis that is connected with the theory of genre proposed by Steen (2011) performed on the empirical data of three distinctive mixed aphasic / non-aphasic interactive events. As a 'genre analyst' I aim to reconstruct participants' genre projections from their respective verbal expressions in the discourse. I take an ethnomethodological stance, using all knowledge that I assume is associated with the genre events under scrutiny thereby drawing on relevant scientific resources and my own experience as a language user and participant of interactive events. In **chapter 3** I present the selected analytical categories and demonstrate how a genre analysis may be performed on recorded data of personal interviews. The demonstration data comprise interviews with non-aphasic interviewees who have experienced a sudden loss of function as did the aphasic participants in the focus data of this study. Chapter 3 thus also offers some background information on the type of genre event that is under investigation. In genre analysis, concrete genre events are examined successively from three different angles: from their contextual, their textual and their code level perspective. For each functional it is established how its associated genre variables are manifest in the participants' concrete verbal expressions. For the context level that implies the variables of medium, situation and setting, the roles and relations of the participants, domains, and goals or functions. The text level of the genre model includes content, type, form, and structure and its code level includes modality, register, style, and rhetoric. The analytical proceedings imply that each interpretive round – respectively concerning context, text, and code level – is also a critical review of earlier interpretations connected with the other levels of the genre model. The result is a truly integrated approach to the data at hand. Chapter 4, 5, and 6 report on the genre analyses that I performed on auditory data and associated transcriptions of three personal interviews between a non-aphasic interviewer and an aphasic interviewee. Topics of interest include the event of stroke and daily life with aphasia. In each case the research questions of this study are answered by way of a reconstruction of individual and shared genre projections based on used utterances.

**Chapter 4** reports on the case of the personal interview between the participating researcher and Sara, a 67-year-old aphasic woman. The interview is held in her room at the nursing home where she lives. The interviewer's context level projections include Sara as a stroke ridden and communicatively handicapped person who is unfortunately bound to spend the rest of her life in a nursing home. Her text level projections include a 'stroke report,' that is a simple account of the sequence of concrete details associated with the past event of stroke that has caused her current aphasic condition. Her code level projections include an agrammatic style of speech with possibly a creative use of ellipsis – e.g., topic-comment structure, direct speech, formulaic structures in service of economic use of linguistic resources and / or referential clarity. In respect of register and rhetoric, the interviewer projects a conventional schema that values decency and care for polite participant relations. Sara's context level projections comprise a person whose condition may represent some losses, but foremost provides her with a safe living environment. Before stroke she has experienced significant psychosocial difficulties that define who she is more than does stroke or aphasia. She profiles as an active, independent person. Sara's text level projection includes an abstract and complex illness story, notably a 'quest narrative' that conceptualizes the significance of stroke in her life. Here, the event of stroke is represented as a solution to the complications of a tempestuous past, which includes a history of child abuse. Sara's code level projection comprises a style of speech that pre-eminently draws on the assumption of shared conceptual knowledge. She uses lexical elements

that indicate conventional socio cultural schemas – even stereotypes – seemingly ignoring the politeness restrictions on register (e.g., ‘papa sexual’ referring to her history of abuse, and ‘all sick and dying’ (referring to her current living environment), and selected grammatical elements to indicate conceptual relations. The analysis thus uncovers how the aphasic and the non-aphasic participant of this discourse event project divergent models of knowledge and action in respect of the context, text and the code level of the genre event they are jointly performing. This means they are guided by different expectations of how the other’s verbal structures are coordinative to them for establishing successful communicative interaction.

**Chapter 5** reports on the case of the personal interview between the participating researcher and aphasic speaker Ben (age 64). The interview is conducted at the aphasia centre of which he is a regular visitor. The interviewer’s context level projection includes Ben as an independent, assertive person. Participant relations are profiled as equal and robust enough to openly and extensively deal with communicative difficulties when they occur. Her text level projections comprise a concrete and literal stroke report capturing the historical sequence of events connected with the incident of stroke. Her code level projection includes a strategic style of speech supporting clear reference and contextual values like politeness, bonding, and coping with communicative difficulty in conversation. In this respect, it allows for use of therapeutic strategies like conversational repair sequences. Ben appears to share the interviewer’s context level projection with its prominence for good and open participant relations. His individual goal to use the event as a chance to demonstrate and evaluate his conversational skills adds to that projection. His text level projection comprises a narrative account of his experience of stroke as a near death experience, that is a testimonial story. His code level projection includes a polite, sociable conversational register. His style of speech includes agrammatic and word finding difficulties and it is characterized by intensive use of fixed structures (idiom, proverbs, ways of saying). These structures typically indicate socioculturally shared knowledge (‘af en toe meng ik mij in de strijd / now and then I get myself involved in the dispute’ (about talking with his friends) and ‘zo is gebeurd nu moet ik verder gaan / it thus happened and now I must go on’ (referring to his attitude towards his stroke). The analysis demonstrates how the aphasic and the non-aphasic participant share a contextual projection and, to some extent, a code level projection but not a text level projection.

**Chapter 6** reports on the case of the personal interview between aphasic speaker Ronald (age 31) and a familiar health care professional. The interview is openly conducted in favour of data collection on behalf of a non-present research board. The interviewer’s context level projection comprises complex participant relations that involve Ronald and herself as both interviewer and interviewee and therapist / client as well as a third party, notably the future analysts / member(s) of the research board. Her projection includes Ronald as a familiar client and a good candidate for the job, who will admit to a quick and easy performance of this obligation. Her text level projection includes a concrete report of the subsequent details associated with the event of Ronald’s stroke, a story she is already familiar with but must now be repeated for sake of scientific analysis. Her code level projection comprises informal register and an agrammatic style of speech that is highly strategic, featuring topic-comment structures, direct speech, formulaic sequences and intensive use of re-enactment. This style typically supports referential clarity. Ronald’s contextual projection profiles the informal therapist-client relation. It includes the protocol-scenario associated with data collection but his role as a research subject is backgrounded relative to his identity as a young stroke patient on the verge of the chronic

stage of aphasia and disability. His projection allows for challenging participant relations. His text level projection profiles content that is associated with actual events and, relative to the past event of his stroke, comprises a quest narrative in service of identity construction. He shares a code level projection with the interviewer although the projections differ in that in the interviewer's projection, the figurative and evaluative potential of Ronald's linguistic choices are backgrounded in favour of their referential value. Thus, the analysis demonstrates that the aphasic and the non-aphasic participant do share genre projections on context, text and code level, but important parts of Ron's individual projections remain backgrounded: on context level his identity as a rehabilitee client, on text level his story as illness conceptualisation and how it represents his (current) identity, and on code level the appreciation of his strategic linguistic choices as carriers of individual perspective and evaluation too.

In each of the interviews, participants make unexpected moves or the general course of the event differs from what is expected in advance. That feeling of 'why this now?' referred to in the title of this book is clearly apparent in the interview with Sara when she seemingly out of the blue comes up with a story of abuse when the interviewer was prepared for just a simple stroke report; in the interview with Ben it is the bit of a friction between participants' seemingly good conversational performance and their inability to share Ben's story, even after lots of mutual efforts and repair sequences; in the interview with Ronald there is the peculiarity that although he was informed in advance on the target content of the interview and has good comprehension skills, he responds to the request to tell about the event of his stroke with the 'wrong' story, notably about a recent seizure.

In **chapter 7** I discuss how the analytical results may be interpreted. Roughly speaking, in the presented case studies the genre models projected by the non-aphasic interviewees valued good participant relations, politeness, a marginalized identity particularly caused by aphasia and care for that (context); a simple, concrete story representing the chronology of past events. On an evaluative level, emotions are appreciated but individual conceptualization or perspective backgrounded (text); linguistic strategies – that is functional varieties in elliptical structures like topic-comment structure, direct speech or formulaic structure are appreciated as aphasic speaker's 'smart' alternatives for common descriptive reference (code). The aphasic interviewees projected models that valued good relations and politeness (Ben) but allowed for challenging or backgrounding such values relative to textual values (Sara, Ronald). On the text level they did not project any boundaries in respect of what could be conveyed. On the code level linguistic choices were fully oriented on coordination of the co-participant within the full scope of sociocultural knowledge and action connected with personal interviewing: personal disclosure on experience of trauma, illness and coping with life. Code level, but also text level choices, however elliptical, were used to indicate conventional cultural schemas. The interviewees did show a difficulty in appreciating these choices as such. For example, when Sara used 'me drunk cause papa always sexual' the interviewer first tried to subordinate that abuse-scenario to her own textual projection of the stroke report suggesting a causal relation between alcohol abuse and stroke. However, within the common frame of reference such an explicit linguistic construal may have had enough taboo value to assume an independent story was intended. When Ben used 'heen en weer geslingerd / swayed back and forth' the interviewer suggested a literal referent: 'you mean your body?' However, if her textual projection had not profiled the condition of aphasia at the cost of other experiences, like stroke as a traumatic event in itself, she might have appreciated 'heen en weer geslingerd / swayed back and forth'

as part of the expression of a near death testimonial – accepting the figurative or formulaic expression ‘heen en weer geslingerd tussen hoop en vrees / swayed between hope and fear.’ When Ronald narrated on how he was finally found after his stroke he used ‘Tadaa!’ and the interviewer responded ‘so then they finally found you?’ However, if she had received his story as a means for illness conceptualisation and identity building she might have appreciated the genuine meaning of ‘Tadaa!’ and responded ‘So he finally solved the quest (of discovering you, after having no clue where you were for such a long time)?’ recognizing Ronald’s active part in this story and his equality relation with his rescuer. In these examples, the second is actually the more common interpretation of these utterances. Something caused the interviewers not to appreciate these utterances in a serious way but to attend to them as a minimal reference, securing clarity on what is talked about. And hence they missed the point.

It was only in the interview with Sara that participants became aware of divergent projections and successfully explored these. Early on in the interview she came up with an unexpected story of abuse in very direct and explicit formulations. This shocked the interviewer and to save her face she was forced to take Sara’s story as a serious move and search for the rationale behind it, that is, search for a compatible text model. This resulted in the co-construction of Sara’s complex quest story in which Sara took an active role in linguistic coordination. In the other interviews divergent projections might have been sensed but were not explored. Ben eventually adapted his style of speech and aligned to the interviewers descriptive, chronological report. However, at the cost of leaving out the key episode of his original story. Ron challenges the interviewer on the inter personal level but he does not succeed in recognition of a potential evaluative layer of content in his story (and a possible functional link between his ‘wrong story’ and his stroke story).

This study is explorative and it only represents the genre analysis of three individual cases but it suggests that it is important to take aphasic speakers’ linguistic choices (relative to context, text and code level) seriously. That is, as genuine (parts of) linguistic tools that are conventionally associated with the particular genre of interaction that one is engaged in. Also, the study suggests that it may be important to realize that aphasic participants may have different intuitions about adaptation to non-fluency compared to aphasic speakers. The non-aphasic strategy in the examined cases entailed a reduced text level and a profiled context level projection: if you have no fluent command of language, keep your message simple and use your resources for conversational management. Aphasic participants in this study demonstrated that to them however, the condition of aphasia did not pose limits on the stories they could and wanted to tell. Aphasia only called for linguistic choices that tuned in to the world they assumed to share with their co-participant.

