

## **CONVERSATIONAL MOVES AND COMMUNICATIVE WILLINGNESS IN PERSONS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**

Over the past years, the study of persons with dementia's communicative abilities has increasingly relied upon a conversational approach, since casual conversations are the communicative situation par excellence in everyday life and where it can be determined more reliably if language therapy is effective (Wilkinson, 2014). Several authors have pointed out that the cognitive deficits caused by the disease affect mainly to the semantic level, conversational management being an ability that remains almost intact until the last stage of the dementia (Guendouzi & Müller, 2002).

The objectives of this study were 1) to analyze the communicative willingness of persons with Alzheimer's disease (AD) through their use of conversational moves; 2) to study how each participant contributes to the progression of the conversation; and 3) to check to what extent the conversational performance of persons with AD is derived from their interlocutors' attitude.

The main methodological approach used in this research is Conversational Analysis, which identifies patterns within talk by focusing not only on the contributions of the persons with AD but also on the input of their interlocutors and how this may enhance or diminish the communicative abilities of the first group (Perkins *et al.*, 1998). Our study employs a classification of conversational moves proposed by Gallardo-Paúls (1996), who follows a tradition initiated by the Birmingham school (Sinclair and Coulthard) and the ethnomethodology (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson), and which categorize moves according to their illocutivity and their interactive orientation.

For this study we have analyzed a corpus of 27 conversations among persons with AD, their caregivers and the investigator. The participants with dementia vary from mild to severe cognitive impairment, as one of our aims is to discover how the progression of the disease may affect the person with dementia's communicative abilities. In order to provide our research with ecological validity, the interactions were recorded at participants' home and no topic was previously proposed.

The results of the analysis show that no significant differences could be observed along the progression of the dementia. The participants with AD uttered approximately the same number of initiative and reactive moves, but clear distinctions can be made in terms of interactive orientation. Their initiative moves were mostly non-predictive, that is, they asked very few questions. However, we can observe a much more balanced proportion of response and assessment turns. On the other hand, the performance of caregivers and the researcher differed both in terms of illocutivity and interactive orientation. The first ones uttered a greater number of initial and report turns while the researcher tried to limit his participation to assessment turns.

In conclusion, although other communicative aspects might be compromised, people with AD retain a good sense of turn-taking until a fairly advanced stage and their communicative intention remains. Furthermore, we have observed different strategies of elicitation of talk by

caregivers and the researcher, what affects undoubtedly the person with dementia's conversational performance.

*References:*

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