

Comprehension of Coherent and Noncoherent
Narrative Discourse by Aphasic and Nonaphasic Listeners

Martha L. Wegner
University of Minnesota

Robert H. Brookshire
Linda Elmore-Nicholas
Veterans Administration Medical Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

(Abstract)

Aphasic and nonaphasic listeners heard spoken narratives that were approximately 100 words long. Half the narratives were coherent. They focused upon a single topic to which all sentences in the narrative related. The other half were noncoherent. The topic changed with every third or fourth sentence. Each paragraph contained four main ideas and one or more details that related to each main idea. Subjects' comprehension of narratives was measured by yes-no questions about their content, asked immediately after each narrative was presented.

Nonaphasic listeners' overall comprehension of narratives was better than that of aphasic listeners, but some aphasic listeners performed as well as nonaphasic listeners. Both aphasic and nonaphasic listeners comprehended main ideas from narratives better than they comprehended details. Coherence had no significant effects upon comprehension of main ideas for either nonaphasic or aphasic listeners. Coherence had no significant effect upon comprehension of details for nonaphasic listeners. However, aphasic listeners' comprehension of details in noncoherent narratives was better than their comprehension of details in coherent paragraphs. No meaningful correlation was found between aphasic listeners' comprehension of narratives and their performance on the Token Test.