

Larsson I, Thorén-Jönsson A-L (2007) The Swedish Speech Interpretation Service: An exploratory Study of a New Communication Support Provided to People with Aphasia. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 23(4): 312-322.

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The purpose of this summary is to inform occupational therapists of the findings of this qualitative research approach article. The aim of the research was to examine how persons with aphasia experienced the service of a professional interpreter. The results showed that the purpose of using an interpreter is to retain autonomy, maintain the integrity and to avoid being a burden on family members.

Background

The author conducted a literature review to gain a better understanding of the different aspects of aphasia and the communication is one of the most important and most complex aspects of human life. Aphasia increases the possibility of participation in the daily speech with other people, family and friends. So the author would like to study if the Swedish Speech Interpretation Service (SSIS) can help people with aphasia to be more involved in society.

Methods

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of four Swedish universities. The research objective was to explore individual experiences associated with the use of professional interpreters of assistance with daily activities. A qualitative research approach was chosen to reveal and aid understanding of this hitherto little known phenomenon.

Twelve persons with aphasia, seven men and five women that were current consumers of SSIS, were recruited to participate in the study. The criterium of the participation were:

- a) Aphasia as the sole cause of complex communication needs.
- b) At least six months experience as a consumer of the SSIS.
- c) Ability to participate in an interview through the use of a variety of communication modes such as speech, gesture, drawing and support from the interviewer.

It was staff from SSIS within four counties that assisted with the recruitment of the participants and they informed the potential participants about the study either in writing, orally or with a tape recording.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The participants chose where they preferred to be interviewed. The duration of the interviews varied between one and two hours. An interview guide was developed around the following themes:

1. Reasons for using an interpreter.
2. Experiences of using an interpreter
3. Differences between using an interpreter and receiving communication support from friends and relatives.
4. How participants felt while using an interpreter.

The interviewer had been working as an occupational therapist and now as an interpreter in one of the county SSIS. The participants felt that they could speak

freely because the interviewer was not from the participant's local SSIS office. However to interview a person with complex communication needs is demanding for both the interviewer and the interviewee and it is very common that a person with aphasia also have impressive problems. Because of the aphasia the language is pronounced without nuance and with a melody that also affects what a person with aphasia really wants to say. For example, due to word-retrieval difficulties, the participants needed several communication turns in order to complete their answers.

Results

The findings were divided into two themes with six categories. The two themes were:

1. Purpose of using an interpreter

The categories were:

- a) Issues relating to autonomy, and this means in this context possibility for a person to make up his/her mind when and how he/she communicates with the environment.
- b) Issues to maintain the integrity. When you use SSIS you can be anonymous and the interpreter has professional secrecy.
- c) Issues relating to being a burden on family members. To use an interpreter can avoid being a burden on family members.

2. Perceptions of quality.

The categories were:

- a) Issues relating to skill of the interpreter. A key skill associated with interpreting on behalf on individuals with aphasia is the ability to adapt to different settings.
- b) Issues relating to professional behaviour of interpreter. The participants said it is important for the interpreter to behave in a professional manner at all times, by respecting privacy and maintaining neutrality.
- c) Issues relating to accessibility to interpreters. The participants stressed the importance of interpreter accessibility, but it was a big difference because some counties have only one interpreter employed who was overworked and forced to travel widely.

Conclusion

Although the article has high face validity, it is very difficult to interview people with aphasia because of the communication problems. So the interviewer needed to interpret the participants' body language and in their speech so many words are missing so you can misunderstand what the person really means.

How the participants were recruited can always affect the result. Ten of the twelve participants lived alone, and they needed more help because they do not have a family to speak with and to cooperate with.

The study did not give answers from persons that have use SSIS and stop using it. The study was intended for persons that have used SSIS for at least six months as a consumer. The result of the study showed that there are big needs to increase availability to SSIS and knowledge round aphasia also needs to develop to provide more knowledge among the general public. When you have a stroke and aphasia you can also have problems with the memory and the ability to concentrate. They may misunderstand the point of the questions, and because of this, answers may be misinterpreted.