

Cambridge Language Sciences Annual Symposium 2023

Language and Mental Wellbeing: 16 November 2023

Research Dialogue 1: The relationship between language and more general cognition, and implications for wellbeing

Language and thought: residual thought in global aphasia

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The human species is marked out by possession of sophisticated cognition and a similarly elaborate culture, characterised by achievements such as science, religion, the arts, as well as complex social relationships. Humans also appear unique in the possession of language, raising questions as to whether language is necessary in the creation and maintenance of a distinctively human mind. This issue has been addressed by researchers across disciplines and across cognitive domains, such as social reasoning, mathematics, categorisation and event perception.

In a series of studies, we have explored claims of language mediation in various forms of thinking by recruiting people with severe (global) aphasia and dense impairment of language processing across modalities. These investigations reveal residual capacities in, for example, theory of mind reasoning and calculation, in some people with global aphasia. Given evidence of residual cognitive capacity and retention of high-order abilities even in people with very severe language impairment, this spurs the development of better therapies for neurodisability. In a final segment of the talk, I will discuss how new technologies will drive innovation and enhancement in neurotherapeutics.

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