

Is there Phonology without Meaning? The case of jargon aphasia

Phonology has been called 'linguistic phonetics' (Ladefoged, 1971), and most accounts of phonology emphasize the contrastive function of phonology. Current models of phonology, whether theoretical or psycholinguistic, also have meaning as central to phonology.

In certain types of disordered speech semantic content appears to be missing. So, can such speech be described phonologically; is there phonology without meaning? In this presentation I describe two examples of jargon aphasia. The first example consists of non-perseverative non-word jargon, produced by a Louisiana French-English bilingual woman with aphasia (see Müller & Mok, 2012). The second is an example of partly perseverative non-word jargon produced by a British English speaker with aphasia. It should be noted that speakers with jargon aphasia generally have no comprehension difficulties. We present a phonetic analysis of two short speech samples from the speakers.

Ball and Müller (2002) discuss the importance in clinical phonetics and phonology of considering the perspective of both the speaker and the listener. In the cases presented here, we argue that both speakers access (at least parts of) their phonology and from their perspective they are intending to signal meaning contrasts. The listeners though fail to perceive the intended meanings. Our answer to the question posed in the title, therefore, is that there is (at least partial) phonology for the speaker, if not for the listener. Therefore, such speech is amenable to analysis by the clinical phonologist, as well as by the clinical phonetician.

References

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