Own Words

On Achieving Normality through Paraphasias

Oh no, I've said too much
I haven't said enough
R.E.M. “Losing My Religion”

As Harvey Sacks never tired of pointing out, ordinary conversation holds its own measure of poetic language, in the sense of Jakobson (1960). Of course, this is pleasing to our self-esteem as practicing conversationalists, for poetic talk, unlike normal talk, is regarded as a fine achievement, something laudable and hard to come by. However, we should actually be as pleased with our capacity to produce pedestrian “normal” talk. As more than thirty years of Conversation Analysis have shown, normal talk is as much of an achievement as is out-and-out poetic talk.

Ordinary conversation can, in fact, become too poetic. If talk strays too far from the received stocks of linguistic resources on which normal talk about familiar topics in familiar activities typically relies, if “people begin to toss around old words in new senses, to throw in the occasional neologism, and thus to hammer out a new idiom,” as Rorty (1991: 88) puts it, then words begin to stand out as words and meaning becomes problematic, for words thereby lose their character as transparent vehicles of meanings, which allow us to “hear meanings” in an almost unmediated fashion.

Compare, for instance, the standard greeting in example 1a, with the version of it in example 1b, to be found at the very beginning of the sixth chapter of James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake.

Example 1

a. How do you do tonight, ladies and gentlemen?

b. Who do you do tonight, lazy and gentleman?

Heard in the right kind of context, 1a would attract no attention at all, would be completely transparent to an immediately assimilable meaning, and would get its work
done in a swift and hardly noticeable way; I, in contrast, would attract attention to
itself, its meaning would be a problem, and it would not get any practical work done,
in almost any kind of context.

Thus, a balanced measure of normality needs to be achieved in conversation.

In this chapter, I will focus on a kind of aphasia that has precisely the effect of
making people too poetic, making them toss around old words in new senses and
throw in neologisms all the time. For such people, normality is particularly hard to
come by. The purpose of this chapter is to compare two closely similar conversa-
tions, one in which normality is not achieved and one in which it is, to discern by
which methods such people can, against tough odds, achieve a working normality.

A case in point

A woman in her seventies—call her Bernardina Höglund—who has suffered a hem-
orrhage in the left hemisphere of her brain and as a result has developed an aphasic
condition, meets her speech therapist—call her Marianne—for a training session. As
part of the training, Bernardina is asked to read a short story aloud and then retell it.
However, the retelling does not go well and it ends on a note of failure:

Example 2 Bernardina I
Marianne: hur gick de på sluten då
Bernardina: ja de va att han hade ranla men han vet 'först'
((laughs)) nimen kan (du fatta
Marianne: (skar vi gg oss då
Bernardina: ja faste ju utan vidare lid ju
(Marianne: how did it end then
Bernardina: yes it was that he fell with his head "first"
((laughs)) nu but can [(you understand
Marianne: (shall we stop it then
Bernardina: I read without problems then you know)

A month later, Bernardina and Marianne meet again, and Bernardina is again asked
to read the story aloud and then retell it. This time, the retelling is successful and is
followed by a fairly elaborate and mutually reinforcing closing sequence:

Example 3 Bernardina II
Bernardina: ännu i alla fall blev pojen ihåg djupt skadad
och: de e idet de va en s en han en helt otick skada
för pojen hade såmat med havet före
Marianne: (pp)
ja just de
Bernardina: va de nå mnr ((laughs))
Marianne: [nå de va väl då va]
Bernardin: [(laughs)]
Marianne: [tyckie du att du fick mig allthopa]
Bernardin: [(laughs)]
va skadad
de va ju kul på sätt å s också
å de va ju nå slit ju
Marianne: []
Bernardin: javisst de fanns en poäng [(laughs)]
Marianne: [(laughs)]
visst gjorde de de
(Bernardin: eln yes in any case the boy was ehh deeply injured
and: it is clear it was a s a ban a bali nasty school
for the boy had fallen with his head first
Marianne: (pp)
that’s right
Bernardin: was there anything else [(laughs)]
Marianne: [no that was it]
Bernardin: [(laughs)]
Marianne: [do you think you got it all]
Bernardin: [(laughs)]
how injured
it was nice in a way too
and there was something funny
Marianne: yes there was a point there
Bernardin: sure there was a point [(laughs)]
Marianne: [(laughs)]
certainly there was

A tough case

The story that Bernardina is asked to read aloud and retell is reproduced in example 4.
The story takes the form of a reported dialogue between a boy and a farmer, and thus
consists of a number of units with the format of “X says Y.”

Example 4

En pojke kom en dag inspringande på en bondgård
och frågade om han kunde få låna en spade.
När bonden undrade vad han skulle ha den till
svarade pojken att hans bror hade ramlat i ett träsk
och att han måste gräva upp honom.
Hur djupt har han ramlat i, frågade bonden.
Upp till vristen, blev svaret.
Men då kan han väl gå därifrån utan din hjälp.
da behöver du väl ingen spade.
A problematic start

In the first session, Bernardina reads the story aloud and then volunteers her name.

Example 5 Bernardina 1
11. Bernardina: de e [Bernardinna Häradson]
12. Marianne: [mm va fin] ja
13. Bernardina: ((laugh)) til blir de

(11. Bernardina: it is [Bernardinna Häradson]
12. Marianne: [men bow fise yes]
13. Bernardina: ((laugh)) so goes it)

Then, Marianne asks Bernardina to retell the story from memory, and Bernardina starts doing so, after some negotiation:

Example 6 Bernardina 1
14. Marianne: ska vi se om du kan berätta ro där nu
15. Bernardina: så ska ja spelu de utan
å de sku du ha på paper också
16. Marianne: (pp) a vi prjivar
(p) mn
17. Bernardina: jaa (p) de va en otlick (p) skgg (p) sega sam skggale
((laugh)))
18. Marianne: [(laugh)]
va vare de bnylad om

(14. Marianne: let's see if you can tell that now
15. Bernardina: so I'll play it without
and that you'll have on paper too)
16. Marianne: (pp) ok let’s try
(p) mm
17. Bernardina: weel (p) it was a nasty (p) forest (p) see that skogale
((laughs))
18. Marianne: ((laughs))
what was it it was about

However, the retelling almost immediately crashes. The reason for this is not hard to see. Let us look at 17 again, breaking it down more carefully into its parts:

Example 7 Bernardina 1
17. Bernardina: jaa (p)
de va en otick (p)
skog (p)
sega som skogale.
((laughs))
17. Bernardina: well (p)
it was a nasty (p)
forest (p)
sega that skogale.
((laughs)))

After a normal, run-of-the-mill opening, consisting of a planning or hesitation marker (“jaa”), followed by a routine presentational format (“de va en __”; “it was a __”) and a contextually reasonable adjective, “otick” (nasty), fitted into that format, 17 becomes progressively more and more incomprehensible.

The next item is the noun “skog” (forest), which does not figure at all in the story, but of course has some connection with the place nouns that do figure in the story, “bondgården” (farm) and “träsk” (swamp). However, its combination with “otick” is quite unexpected, because it is the events, not the setting, of the story that can reasonably be glossed as nasty.

The final part of 17, “sega som skogale,” is completely incomprehensible. The word form “sega” exists in Swedish; it is the singular definite or plural form of the adjective “seg” (tough). However, in 17, sega is used as a noun, as evidenced by the relative clause opening (som) that follows it. In Swedish, adjectives can be used as nouns, provided that a “real” noun can be inferred from the context, as in example 8.

Example 8 (Speaking of candy)
De sega imakur bittre än de mjuka
(the tough tastes better than the soft)
(“The tough ones taste better than the soft ones”)

In 17, however, no plural noun can be inferred, so sega can only be interpreted as a nonsense noun, homonymous to a form of the adjective seg.
The relative clause in the final part of 17 comes out even worse. After som, one would expect a finite verb, but skogare is not a Swedish verb form. There is no verb "skog" in Swedish, and there are no Swedish verb forms ending in -ale. It would actually be possible to coin a verb skoga (meaning "to forest") in Swedish, which would have the past tense form "skogade"—with d instead of l—but it is not easy to figure out what sense something like "forested" would make in the context.

It is highly probable—but impossible to demonstrate conclusively—that nega som skogare is an attempted repair of "otäck skog." Both expressions are noun phrases and the format ("de va en "; "it was a ") allows just one noun phrase to fill its variable slot.

Bernardine ends skogare on a falling intonation, thus marking it as a self-contained unit. Then she starts laughing. As Marianne picks up the laughter, and then lets it develop into a request for a repair, it is not unreasonable to hear Bernardine's laughter as a kind of comment on the strange way in which 17 came out.

This analysis is further supported by the similar ending of the name sequence in example 5, where Bernardine's failure, in 11, to pronounce her own name correctly is followed in 13 not only by a laughter but also by an explicit comment on the way she just pronounced her own name.

Wernicke problems

Bernardine's problem in 17 is best understood as an inability to complete the presentation format ("de va en ") with a received and relevant content word.

Bernardine shares this problem of not being able to fit a received and relevant word or phrase into a chosen frame with other people who have suffered insults to Wernicke's area in the left hemisphere of their brain and as a result have acquired aphasia.

No content words

At one extreme, this kind of aphasia results in speech completely lacking in content words. In example 8, for example, Sonja (S) is using the format "di skulle ___"—a not uncommon format for reporting on previous treatment—but fails to fit anything more specific than the auxiliary verb "göra" (do) and the pronouns "de" (neuter it, that) and "den" (non-neuter it, that) into that format.

Example 9 Vislund

V1. Therapist:  va (p) va giarte ni för någotning
V2. Sonja:  jaa hun fick (p) äs di skulle ju göra (p) ech (p) me själva
           [dc]
           [(points to right leg)]
V3. Therapist:  benet?
However, Sonja compensates for her unspecific words by pointing first to her right leg and then to her right arm, thus inducing her speech therapist to engage in supporting other-repairs, in V3 and V7, of a kind analyzed in detail by Charles Goodwin (1995).

Such repairs typically involve the following steps:

1. Aphasic says something, s
2. Other proposes a more specific formulation of s, s′
3. Aphasic accepts or rejects s′

These repairs amount to the co-construction of a turn that in the end is heard as being meant by the aphasic. Thus, through V6, V7, and V8, Sonja is heard as having meant “and then the arm.”

Paraphasias

At the other extreme, we find aphasics such as Bernadina, who produce fluent speech with what appears to be a normal measure of content words. However, a surprising number of these content words are “strange”: either neologisms, such as skogile in T7 or contextually inappropriate received words, such as skog in T7.

Such strange words are known as paraphasias in the aphasiological literature. Lesser (1978: 187) contains a well-known classification of paraphasias. Lesser’s first distinction is between “dictionary words” and “not dictionary words,” that is, be-
 tween word forms that “belong” to the language used and word forms that do not belong to that language. In B7, skog is a dictionary word, and skogale is not. The classification of sega is slightly problematic, but as I argued, sega is best understood as a word not in the dictionary but homonymous to a dictionary word.

Lesser’s second distinction is between “target word identifiable” and “no target word identifiable.” A target word is a form that the analyst assumes the speaker would have produced instead of a strange word, had he or she had access to it. A target word is inferable from an actual word form if it is sufficiently similar to the actual word form phonologically, morphologically, or semantically. If the actual word is not a dictionary word, only phonological similarity is held to be relevant.

Skog, sega, and skogale all belong to the category of “no target word identifiable.” There are no obvious sound-alikes or mean-alikes that could be substituted for skog, sega, and skogale in B7 and “rescue” the sense of that turn.

An instance of “target word identifiable” can be found in example 10.

Example 10  Petra 1
PH1. Petra:  javisst ja (p)
            de där en där [också]
PH2. Therapist:  [där är] också en ja

(PH1. Petra:  right (p)
            there this one ‘there’ [too]
PH2. Therapist:  [there is] one too yes)

The speech therapist’s response to Petra, in P2, is cast in a normal echo format, which allows us to identify Petra’s utterance “de där en där också” as a slightly distorted version of “de är en där också.”

In contrast to skog, sega, and skogale, där and dar are thus words from which target words can be inferred: they are phonological distortions of där and dar, respectively.

When we combine Lesser’s two distinctions, we get four basic types of paraphasia, as shown in table 8.1.

Dictionary words from which target words can be inferred are instances of verbal paraphasia, while dictionary words from which target words cannot be inferred, such as skog, are instances of semantic jargon. Words that are not dictionary words, but from which target words can be inferred, such as dar, are instances of phonemic paraphasia, while words that are not dictionary words and from which no target words can be inferred, such as skogale, are instances of neologic jargon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paraphasia</th>
<th>Dictionary word</th>
<th>Not dictionary word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target word identifiable</td>
<td>Verbal paraphasia</td>
<td>Semantic jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No target word identifiable</td>
<td>Phonemic paraphasia</td>
<td>Neologic jargon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goodwin, Charles (Editor). Conversation and Brain Damage.

Får inte återges i någon form utan tillstånd från utgivaren, förutom rättvisa användningar under amerikansk eller annan tillämplig upphovsrättslag.
Verbal paraphasia is then further subdivided into formal verbal paraphasia and semantic verbal paraphasia, depending on whether inference of a target word is based on formal similarity (e.g., där → där) or semantic similarity (e.g., no → yes or boy → girl).

Repair

Wernicke’s aphasics of Bernardina’s type are not necessarily helped by repairs. Unlike aphasics of Sontja’s type, who fail to make their turns specific enough, thus flooting Grice’s First Maxim of Quantity (Grice, 1975), Bernardina and people like her say too little and too much at the same time. They produce all the time repairable content words, with unclear meanings, but attempted repairs of such words may result only in other equally repairable content words. This holds both for self-repair, as it shows, and for other-repair, as can be seen from P13 in example 11, where Petra, instead of accepting the therapist’s word blåbär (blueberry), substitutes the eminently repairable nonce-word pilsul for it.

Example 11 Petra II

PH1. Petra: och (p) det här är
PH2. Therapist: blåbär tycker ju de ser ut som:n:
PH3. Petra: [ja] (p)
PH4. Therapist: pilsul ettje ja
PH5. Petra: mm
PH6. Therapist: [ja]

(PH1. Petra: and (p) this is
PH2. Therapist: blåbärries I think it looks al:s;
PH3. Petra: [yes (p)
PH4. Therapist: pilsul it is yes
PH5. Petra: mm
PH6. Therapist: [yes]

Reframing

Repair also fits into a wider context, where speakers’ competence and self-image are at stake. In his study “Radio Talk,” Erving Goffman (1981) points out that everyday activities typically are carried out on the presumption that the people involved in these activities share certain basic competences. One such activity is, of course, ordinary talk. Thus, when people contribute to a round of talk, they not only add something to the topics at hand; they also project themselves as ordinary competent speakers.

This means that lapses in talking (and in other everyday activities) must be dealt with in such a way that they do not call into question a person’s basic competences.
As Goffman shows, there are several techniques for doing that. One such technique is repair. A lapse can be constructed as something temporary and contingent, if it is adequately repaired at the first possible occasion by the one who produced it. Hence, we have the preference for self-repair in roughly egalitarian contexts (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). A second technique is to redefine the speaker’s and the other participants’ relation to a stretch of talk where a lapse occurs, to do what Goffman calls a change in footing. Through such a change in footing, the stretch of talk where a lapse (or some other conversational problem) occurs is reframed and normal expectations of it are lifted.

Reframing can be done in several ways, which can be combined. A basic means of reframing a stretch of activity is laughter (Freud, 1992/1905; Goodwin, 1990, chap. 5; Sacks, 1992, vol. II: 207). As Sacks (1992, vol. II: 207) shows, laughter works both proactively, before the fact, as a way of preparing the scene for something problematic, and retroactively, after the fact, as a way of reframing something that has already occurred. Other displays of emotion, such as moaning or sighing, can have the same function. A further means of reframing is a change in voice or accent (Anward, 1993). Finally, as Goffman (1981) discussed at length, explicit comments, both proactive and retroactive, puns, and jokes are frequent means of doing reframing.

In sum, by laughing (or moaning) about it, by producing it in a different voice or accent, by commenting on it, punning on it, or joking about it, a speaker can mark a stretch of talk as something out of the ordinary, displaying in this way her or his knowledge of normal expectations, thus blocking any doubts about competence.

A constant dilemma

Aphasics of Bernardina’s type seem very reluctant to abstain from content words and be reduced to the same competence level as aphasics of Sonja’s type. This puts them in a constant dilemma. To the extent that they are aware of their own words, they need to relate to their paraprasias as competent a way as possible.

Of the techniques we have reviewed for preserving competence in the face of lapses, I have already suggested that repair is of limited use to this category of speakers. This leaves change in footing. And of the various means to do a change in footing, proactive measures and puns appear to be beyond their capacity. Thus, retroactive laughter or comments, precisely what Bernardina is using in 13 and 17, seem, along with change of voice, to be the means by which aphasics of this type can project their competence.

The cards that are dealt Bernardina are then a severe inability to find received and relevant content words; a reluctance to abstain from content words, because of the self-image such an abstinence would project; and a limited repertoire of competence-projecting devices. Let us now turn to how Bernardina plays this hand in the two retellings.
Sequential structure of the first retelling

We return to the first retelling. After Bernardina's story has crashed in 17 and Marianne has requested a repair in 18, Bernardina repairs 17 in 19.

Example 12. Bernardina I
17. Bernardina: jaa (p) de va en otäck (p) skugg (p) sega som skuggle
((laughs))
18. Marianne: ((laughs))
va vare de handlade om
19. Bernardina: de va en en oturelig o olycka kan vi säga ((laughs))
10. Marianne: aa
(17. Bernardina: well (p) it was a nasty (p) foge (p) sega that skog
((laughs))
18. Marianne: ((laughs))
what was it it was about
19. Bernardina: it was an unexpected a accident we can say ((laughs))
10. Marianne: yes

The repair is immediately reframed by an explicit comment on its approximate nature ("we can say") and a unilateral laughter, which can be heard as indicating that this may do for now, although it may be some distance away from the headline she is trying to reproduce. Marianne accepts this, and Bernardina then moves on.

Example 13. Bernardina I
17. Bernardina: jaa (p) de va en otäck (p) skugg (p) sega som skuggle
((laughs))
18. Marianne: ((laughs))
va vare de handlade om
19. Bernardina: de va en en oturelig o olycka kan vi säga ((laughs))
10. Marianne: na
11. Bernardina: benn barnen (pp)
att den ena kom in till en bude å sa att (p)
fråga om hun fick han en en spade (p)
efter honom så han kunde hjälpa mm ssk
nå ja kan inte
11. Marianne: joodå
13. Bernardina: ja kunde förut ((laughs))
ja kan inte nu
han ehm han ha å få nått att en spader å hjälpa å få upp
%fran sin% :hh
14. Marianne: va skulle han få upp
15. Bernardina: :huh nå ju jag inte hhh
16. Marianne: va vare han skulle få upp för nånting
(va skulle han gräva upp)
200 REPAIR

117. Bernardina: [han ]skulle få upp brödern som kom ur ur ur laget
ja men om han har om han löser se se se härarna så
nii nu kan jag inte (p)

-lnä

118. Marianne: hur gick de på skola då

119. Bernardina: ja de va att han hade ramla me huvud "först"
((laughs))
nämnen kan [du fattu]

120. Marianne: [skan vi ge oste då]

121. Bernardina: ja liiste ja utan vidare då ju

17. Bernardina: well (p) it was a nasty (p) forest (p) saga that skogsle
((laughs)))

18. Marianne: [((laughs))]

what was it it was about

19. Bernardina: it was an unfortunate a accident we can say ((laughs))

10. Marianne: yes

111. Bernardina: among the children (pp)
that the one came in to a farmer and said that (p)
asked if he could borrow a a shovel (p)
after him so he could help run sak
no I can't

12. Marianne: yes you can

113. Bernardina: I could before ((laughs))
I can't now

he-ehm he ask to borrow a a spades and help to get up %wife his%

114. Marianne: what would he get up

115. Bernardina: hhh no I don't hear hhh

116. Marianne: what was it he would get up for something

[what would he dig up]

117. Bernardina: [he] would get up the brother who came out-of out-of out-of
the team

yes but if he just if he loosens we see s s the hugh then
no now I can't (p)

-hno

118. Marianne: how did it end then

119. Bernardina: yes it was that he fell with his head "först"
((laughs)) no but can you understand

120. Marianne: [shall we stop it then]

121. Bernardina: I read without problems then you know)

In 111, Bernardina first produces three complete syntactic units without any paraphasias in them, successfully reproducing the beginning of the story. However, when she is unable to finish the fourth such unit (in the fourth line of 111; "hjälpa" [help] requires an object), she breaks off the retelling, changes footing, and explicitly states her inability to go on with the retelling. After a reaffirming response from Marianne
(112), Bernardina elaborates on her current situation, contrasting her former ability (first line of 113) to her present inability (second line of 113).

Then she backs up to the unit of the third line of 111, repeats it in a slightly worse version (the third line of 113), and produces a new version of the unit that was interrupted in the fourth line of 111. This time, Bernardina manages to provide “help” with an object, and thus completes the unit. However, she cannot find the right wording of the object, and she seems to recognize that also, because she speaks the object phrase in a different, very flat voice, which it is natural to interpret as a framing device.

In response to that, Marianne requests a repair (in 114). We can see a pattern emerging here. The repairs so far are all self-repairs. In two cases, they are othere-initiated, and there seems to be a recurring context for such other-initiation. Not all paraphasias that Bernardina produces are followed by a request for repair. Other-initiations seem to be by the way Bernardina relates to her own choice of words. Only when Bernardina frames a token of paraphasia as problematic, by means of a laughter, as in 117, or by means of a change in voice, as in 113, does Marianne request a repair of Bernardina. Notice also that this does not happen in 13 or 111, where paraphasia or breakdown is reframed by an explicit reflexive comment by Bernardina. The context for other-initiation of repair is thus the occurrence of something that Bernardina treats as a problem but takes no explicit stand on.

Yet Bernardina does not accept Marianne’s request for repair and instead does another footing change, this time formulating her inability as an even more fundamental inability, as an inability to hear. Marianne then repeats her request twice, with raised voice, before Bernardina finally, overlapping with Marianne’s second request, produces a third version of the unit that was interrupted in 111 and is able to move forward again. She expands the “get up”-unit with a relative clause, which contains an instance of paraphasia, and then starts a conditional sentence, left unfinished (the second line of 117).

At this point, Bernardina does yet another change in footing, this time stating her inability to go on in more final terms (the third line of 117), and underlining her statement with a following inhaled “no.” This makes Marianne change her strategy. Instead of requesting yet another repair, she simply prompts Bernardina to wrap up the story (118), which Bernardina finally is able to do, in 119.

After that, both Marianne and Bernardina break frame, and Bernardina once more contrasts her present inability to her former ability.

Sequential structure of the second retelling

The second retelling starts in 119, again after some negotiation. Bernardina reproduces the beginning of the story successfully, but then interrupts herself (the seventh line of 119; the verb “prova” [try] needs a complement), just as in the first retelling. However, this time, Bernardina does not attempt to repair the interrupted unit but
just moves on. Even though she produces paraphasia in each unit from then on, she is able to cover two more turns of the story dialogue and get positive feedback from Marianne, before she comes to a unit she is unable to finish (the first line of I121). The change in footing that follows this breakdown takes the form of an explicit comment (the second line of I121). However, this time she does not ascribe inability to herself but simply notes that it is harder to retell the story from memory than it is to read it aloud. Marianne then encourages Bernardina to go on, which she does in I123. She connects back to I119, invokes the headline, producing paraphasia in both these units, and is finally able to bring the story to an appropriate end.

Example 14  Bernardina
I114. Marianne:  sen Bernardina så skulle ja faktiskt vilja att vi fÃ¶rsÃ¶kte berÃ­tta den dÃ¥ historien (p) utan att titta pÃ¥
I115. Bernardina:  den dÃ¥ pusklen
I116. Marianne:  pÃ¥ igen
I117. Bernardina:  ja
I118. Marianne:  du kan fÃ¶rsÃ¶ka berÃ­tta va re va re handla om
I119. Bernardina:  ja
  de va tvÃ¥ puskkar dom va brÃ¶der fick man (p) vadevarat
  han va (p)
  han va va ste ute pa lande pa lande som han inte kunde till
  ah dÃ¥ gick a in till en hund och frÃ¶gade honom
  om han kunde fÃ¶r lÃªna e p spade r (p) till honom (p)
  a prova av
  ja va va blyten bura han mycket skadad dÃ¥
  ja va va steg mc f mc mc f s sedan uppsti sa grabben
  ja (slugga)
I120. Marianne:  mm
I121. Bernardina:  ( ) grabben mhm grabben va fÃ¶d va (p)
  nÃ¥t de gÃ¥r inte alls lika bra nÃ¥r man inte har nÃ¥t tÃ¶jshette
I122. Marianne:  juem de gÃ¥r ju jÃ¶tebra
  du har ju berÃ­tta nÃ¥stan allihopa redan
I123. Bernardina:  sÃ¥ dÃ¥ i alla fallet blev pojkens sitt djup skadad
  och de e klart de va en s en han en bali stÃ¶ck skyla
  fÃ¶r pojkens hade ramlat med huvet fÃ¶re
I124. Marianne:  (pp)
  ja just de
(I114. Marianne:  then Bernardina I would actually want that we continued with
your trying to tell that story (p)
without looking at
I115. Bernardina:  that buy
I116. Marianne:  at the text.
I117. Bernardina:  yeses
you can try telling what it was it was about

yees

it was two boys they were brothers you got (p) what-it-was
he was (p)
his was out in the country in the country that he didn’t know
and then he went in to a farmer and asked him
if he could borrow a plow shovel then (p) to him (p)
and try and
yes said said the farmer was he very injured then
yes he stood with f with with f’s seden up said the guy
yes (laughs)

num

( ) the guy mhm the guy was fell (p)
no it doesn’t work at all as good when you don’t have any text

yes but it is working very good
you have told almost all of it already

ehm yes in any case the boy was elb deeply injured
and: it is clear it was a a bad nasty school
for the boy had fallen with his head first

( pp )
that’s right

In keeping with the whole atmosphere of the second retelling, the comments after it (cf. example 3) do not at all concern Bernardina or her abilities but concentrate on the quality of the story retold.

No doubt, the second retelling is more successful than the first one, but not because the second retelling is somehow a “better” retelling than the first one. The original story does not come across in comprehensible form in either of the two retellings. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the number of paraphrases in the two retellings. Rather, what seems to be happening in the second retelling is that Bernardina manages to mobilize her resources in such a way that she does not feel compelled to raise the issue of her own competence at every step. Hence, she need not engage in repair, which, just as we suspected earlier, turns out not to be a very helpful strategy for Bernardina. Furthermore, she need not continuously reframe stretches of her retelling, by means of laughter, changed voice, or explicit comment.

To understand how Bernardina manages to mobilize her resources in such a benign way in the second retelling, we must take a closer look at the story she is retelling, in particular, the passages where Bernardina gets into trouble.

The story

“A Severe Fall,” repeated in example 15, is a popular story in Swedish speech therapy. One can wonder, though, whether anyone has ever reflected on its semantic struc-
ture and its suitability for use with people having language problems. The story actually has a fairly complicated structure.

Example 15 Ett svårt fall
1a. En pojke kom en dag inspringande på en bondgård
1b. och frågade om han kunde få läna en spade.
2a. När bonden undrade vad han skulle ha den till
2b. svarade pojken att hans bro brude ramlat i ett träsk
2c. och att han måste gräva upp honom.
3. Hur djupt han ramlat i frågade bonden.
4. Upp till vristerna, blev svaret.
5b. då behöver du väl ingen spade.
6a. Pojken såg förvirrad ut och sa:
6b. Ja, men ni förstår han ramlade med huvudet först

(A Severe Fall / A Tough Case

1a. A boy came one day running into a farm
1b. and asked if he could borrow a shovel.
2a. When the farmer wondered what he would use it for
2b. the boy replied that his brother had fallen into a swamp
2c. and that he had to dig him up.
3. How deep has he fallen into [the swamp], the farmer asked.
4. Up to the ankles, was the answer.
5a. But then he surely can walk away from there without your help;
5b. then you'll need no shovel.
6a. The boy looked unhappy and said:
6b. Yes, but you see he fell with his head first.

At one level, the story reflects a straightforward sequence of past events, a scene-setting event (1a) followed by a dialogue consisting of seven turns, all but one glossed by a speech act term: the boy asked (1b)—the farmer wondered (2a)—the boy replied (2b, 2c)—the farmer asked (3)—[the boy] answered (4)—[the farmer] (5)—the boy said (6).

However, the structure of the dialogue is not entirely straightforward. The initial request for a shovel in 1 does not get a direct answer. Instead, the farmer questions the request by asking two successive questions (in 2 and 3) and using the boy’s answers (in 2 and 4) to conclude that the boy does not really need a shovel, a conclusion challenged by the boy’s final turn (6).

At the level of what the boy and the farmer talk about, the story is even more complicated. After the dialogue situation has been introduced in 1, the farmer’s question in 2a introduces yet another situation, a future, projected event, where the boy uses the borrowed shovel. In 2b and 2c, then, this question in 2 is answered by a
combination of a flashback to a past event, the boy’s brother falling into a swamp, and a further specification of the projected event, the boy digging up his brother.

Sentences 3 and 4, question and answer, constitute another flashback, adding to the past event line, by specifying further details of the brother’s fall.

Then, in 5, a further complication is introduced. The farmer proposes an alternative projected line of events, where the brother walks away from the swamp on his own accord, and the farmer does not have to lend his precious shovel to the boy.

In 6, the story reverts to the dialogue situation, zooming in on the look and emotional state of the boy, before proceeding to the climax, another flashback, where the farmer’s alternative line of events is completely demolished by the boy’s further specification of the past event line.

In summary, the story moves between the four situations involved, as shown in table 8.2.

Trouble spots

Given the analysis of “A Severe Fall” in example 16, we see that Bernardino gets into trouble when she attempts to integrate two temporally distinct episodes within one syntactic unit, when she attempts to cover a radical temporal shift within the confines of one syntactic unit.

In the first retelling, the entire sequence from the fourth line of 111 to the first line of 117 is spent on an attempted retelling of 2b and 2c, which, however, never comes out right. Bernardino’s narrative strategy here differs from that of the original story, in that Bernardino skips 2a and joins 2c directly to 1b, leaving 2b to be appended to 2c as a relative clause modifying “brodet” (as in the first line of 117). This makes the story less jumpy time-wise, but still Bernardino does not manage to retell 2 correctly. The first time Bernardino attempts to move from 1b to 2c, she is unable to finish the syntactic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past event</th>
<th>Dialogue situation</th>
<th>Boy’s version</th>
<th>Farmer’s version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td>2c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>6a</td>
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unit she has started. The second time she attempts this move, she completes the unit but ends it with a paraphasia marked by a changed voice. The third time, after heavy soliciting from Marianne, Bernardina gets 2c right and manages to move on to 2b, which she ends with a paraphasia that she, however, lets go.

Then—in the second line of 117—Bernardina attempts a move from 4 to 5, something along the lines of “yes but if he just loosens his heels, then [he can walk away by himself],” and is again unable to finish the syntactic unit she has started.

In the second retelling, just as in the first retelling, Bernardina is unable to finish the syntactic unit she has started when she attempts to move on from 1b to 2c, in the seventh line of II.19. However, as we have already seen, this time she simply gives up the attempt to retell 2 and moves on to 3 and 4, in the eighth and ninth lines of II.19. Both her version of 3 and her version of 4 contain paraphasias, but they are passed over without reframing of any kind. After that, she skips 5, and moves directly to 6, in II.21.

At this point, Bernardina gets into trouble again, in trying to move from 6a to 6b. There is a paraphasia in the counterpart of 6a, and when she moves into 6b, she is unable to finish the unit she has started.

After having explicitly acknowledged this trouble, Bernardina reconnects to 4 in II.23, elaborating on the last two lines of II.19 (and keeping the same paraphasia), and then she moves on again, this time skipping 6a. Instead, she brings in a version of the headline, with a paraphasia that is passed over, in the second line of II.23, and then finally moves on to 6b, in the last line of II.23.

Bernardina’s progress

In the first retelling Marianne and Bernardina aim at bi-fl quality, a faithful reproduction of the written story. This is quite evident from the questions Marianne asks:

Example 16 Bernardina 1

14. Marianne: ska vi se om du kan berätta re där mer
18. Marianne: (laughs)
va vare de handlade om

14. Marianne: va skulle han få upp
16. Marianne: va vare han skulle få upp för nånting va skulle han gräva upp

18. Marianne: hur gick de på slutet där

(14. Marianne: let’s see if you can tell that now


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...  
18. Marianne: (laughs))  
what was it it was about  
...  
114. Marianne: what would he get up  
...  
116. Marianne: what was it he would get up for something  
what would he dig up  
...  
118. Marianne: how did it end then?  

First, when Marianne asks Bernardina to retell the story, Marianne explicitly raises the issue of competence ("see if you can"). In the subsequent questions, Marianne focuses on specific points of the written story. Moreover, the past tense of these questions suggests that these points have already been intersubjectively established, that they are old information. Finally, two of these questions—18 and 116 first line—use a very specific Swedish construction, the cleft WH construction, which implies that the person who asks the question actually knows the answer but has temporarily forgotten it. However, in classrooms and in speech therapy, where the knowledge of the teacher/speech therapist is not at issue, such questions have the force of reminding students/patients of things they actually know—or at least (should) have learned. Thus, Marianne’s questions in the first retelling is very much directed toward making Bernardina reproduce something she has already done, and it is evident from the way Bernardina constructs a contrast between her ability before and her inability now in 113 that this is also the way she understands the task at hand.  

This kind of situation, where hi-fi reproduction is demanded, is actually about the worst kind of situation for an aphasic of Bernardina’s type. First, it requires of the aphasic both a cognitively complex organization of the topic at hand and a specific vocabulary to express it, both extremely difficult tasks for speakers of this category. Second, the context is such that the issue of the aphasic’s competence is raised at every step of the interaction, necessitating extensive competence work, in addition to the already demanding reproductive tasks.  

In the second retelling, in contrast, Marianne demands less of Bernardina, just asking her to try and tell the story, to “try and tell what it was it was about” (notice again the cleft WH construction, which, however, in this case is radically softened by the “try”), and when Bernardina gets into an impasse, Marianne just encourages her to go on, without demanding anything specific of her. In general, the atmosphere in the second retelling is much more relaxed. Marianne even seems slightly absent-minded. There is a rather long pause after 112 before Marianne acknowledges (realizes?) that Bernardina has just produced the last line of the story.  

This kind of situation gives Bernardina room to construct a story she can actually tell. As we have seen, in the second retelling Bernardina picks bits and pieces of the written story, skipping those she cannot manage, keeping the others, and making
a story out of them that ends on the right line. In this way, she can minimize the
cognitive complexity of the topic at hand, but still produce a story.

Bernadina is free to manipulate not only pieces of the story but also the vocabulary
used to narrate it. As noted in the previous section, Bernardina lets a number of
paraphasias in the second retelling go unattended with. These are listed in example 17.

Example 17

många skadad
sedera
djupa skadad
en ban en ball otäck skola

To understand the nature of these expressions, we must first note that Bernardina’s
access to content words is actually topic-sensitive. While she has grave problems
mobilizing content words to narrate the past and projected event lines of the story,
she has almost no problems narrating what is happening in the dialogue situation of
the story and few problems in talking about her immediate situation together with
Marianne and the activities that go on there.11

It might not be far-fetched, then, to think that the expressions in example 17 are
actually recruited from the immediate situation of Bernardina or based on expres-
sions recruited from that situation. Obvious candidates for such recruited items are
“stälcke” (nasty), “skada” (injury), and “skola” (school).12 The words stälcke and skada
are, of course, immediately relevant to Bernardina’s current situation, particularly
since the story ends on a line talking about the head, precisely where Bernardina’s
injury is. The words stälcke and skada are also likely to have been triggered by the
words “svår” (severe) and “spade” (shovel) in the written story. The word skola may
seem surprising in this context, but as Ing-Mari Tallberg has shown (Tallberg, 2001),
speech therapy patients, with a wide variety of handicaps, typically associate the
speech therapy situation with a situation more well-known to them, the questions
and answers pattern of primary school classrooms.

Once this part of the analysis is established, we realize, somewhat startled, that
the story Bernardina tells in the second retelling session actually makes sense, not
as a retelling of the written story in example 2, but as a semi-personal story in its
own right, as a story about how one person tells another, sympathetic person about
the head injury of a third person. In other words, in the second retelling session,
Bernadina constructs a story that is both tellable and meaningful in the current
situation, from bits and pieces of the written story and the cognitive and linguistic
resources available to her in her immediate situation.

Notes

The material in this chapter was presented at a conference on Order and Disorder in Talk in
London, June 1997, at seminars at the University of Stockholm in 1998 and 1999, and at a
meeting with members of the Swedish Psychoanalytical Society in May 2000. I thank the audiences at these occasions for valuable comments and suggestions. In particular, I am indebted to Lars Fant for useful discussion. I have discussed the material several times with Paivi Juvonen, whose help and comments I gratefully acknowledge. A special thanks to Ing-Mori Tallberg, who made the material available to me, and to Chuck Goodwin, but for whose patience and encouragement ever since we first came to discuss aphasia, over lunch a hot day in Albuquerque in the summer of 1995, this chapter would never have seen the light of day. Moreover, Chuck’s perceptive and constructive comments on the antepenultimate version of the chapter made it significantly better.

I wish to dedicate this chapter to the memory of Gunnar Källgren, dear colleague and Swedish pioneer in the study of aphasia and interaction (see Källgren, 1985).

1. See the references under “poetry” in the index to volume 1 and the references under “poetics” of ordinary talk” in the index to volume 2 of Sacks (1992).

2. Transcription conventions follow the system of Gail Jefferson, as modified by Ochs (1979). Overlaps are within [ ]. An underlined vowel indicates primary stress (sentence accent). A period (.) indicates a terminal fall. (p) indicates a pause, %X% indicates that X is spoken in a different voice.

Swedish vowels are long before at most a single consonant, short otherwise. The quality of the vowels can be glimpsed by the following rough correspondences: a is pronounced as the vowel in park (long), but (short), å as in long, ä as in well (except in the hesitation words arb, am, where it is pronounced as the vowel in ear), e as in well, i as in seen or sing, o as in cool, and ö as in bird. The vowel y has no English equivalent, but corresponds roughly to German ö. The vowel u in Swedish is a central, high, rounded vowel, with few equivalents outside of Scandinavia. Swedish consonants are fairly straightforward. The combination of r and a consonant is, however, pronounced as a retroflex version of the consonant following r.

3. The vowel in “just” is not lengthened, but reduplicated.

4. For more extended discussion of the use of deictics to produce a description or narrative by pointing to a body part, see Wilkinson, Beeke, and Maxim (chap. 3).

5. For an extensive study of self-repair in Wernicke aphasics, see Laukso (1997).

6. Which might be more often than is sometimes thought; see again Laukso (1997).

7. There are two paraphasias in the third line of 113: “lance” (a nonce-word) instead of “fan” (borrow) and “spader” (spades) instead of “spade” (shovel).

8. This response might even be interpreted as resistance, in the psychoanalytic sense. See Green (2000:1) for a similar example.

9. As Chuck Goodwin suggests (personal communication), the entire story can be analyzed as an initial request followed by an extended insertion sequence.

10. As well as for other speakers with various types of language handicaps. See Tallberg (2001).

11. Of the 19 paraphasias on content words (excluding proper names) produced by Bernardine in the two retellings, 12 (63%) occurred in units recounting past or projected events of the story. In contrast, of the 84 content words (again excluding proper names) in the two retellings, only 35 (42%) were located in units recounting past or projected events of the story.

12. Note that even in the first retelling, the very first content words that Bernardine uses seem to be based on these words.


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