Book review

Murdoch, B., & Theodoros, D. (Eds.) (2000). *Speech and language disorders in multiple sclerosis*. London: Whurr Publishers. ii + 262 pp. £25.00 (pbk).

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is one of the more common neurologic disorders and it frequently results in a communication impairment that includes dysarthria and perhaps language disorder as well. This book consists of 10 chapters written by six authors who have experience with this disease and its effects on communication. In a brief first chapter, Bruce E. Murdoch lays down basic information on the neuropathophysiological basis of communication disorders associated with MS. The remaining chapters address motor speech disorders (Part 1 with five chapters) and language disorders (Part 2 with four chapters).

The chapters in Part 1 address the following: perceptual features of dysarthria (Deborah G. Theodoros, Murdoch, Elizabeth C. Ward), acoustic features of dysarthria (Lena Hartelius), articulatory and velopharyngeal dysfunction (Murdoch, Theodoros, and Ward), laryngeal and respiratory dysfunction (Theodoros, Murdoch, and Ward), and treatment of motor speech disorders (Theodoros and Ward). These chapters summarise a number of studies on speech impairment in MS, many of which were conducted by the authors of these chapters. Readers who expect a systematic discussion of the speech impairment will not be disappointed. The information in these chapters provides both an effective overview and important perspectives. A particularly valuable feature of these six chapters is the complementary view that they offer on the dysarthria associated with MS. Through this sequence of contributions, the reader gains an increasingly deep understanding of the dimensions of the speech disorder. The chapter on perceptual features reaches the conclusion that the mixed dysarthria (typically ataxic-spastic) that is found in about half of individuals with this disease affects virtually all aspects of speech production. The chapter on acoustic features emphasises temporal dysregulation and concludes that this impairment has two, ostensibly contradictory aspects—temporal equalisation and temporal variability. The contribution on articulatory and velopharyngeal dysfunction concludes that tongue function is more impaired than labial function and probably accounts for most of the dysarthria. This chapter also suggests that velopharyngeal dysfunction is not a frequent problem in individuals with MS, except perhaps in severe forms of the disease. The chapter on laryngeal and respiratory function provides evidence that both of these functions are impaired, but especially the latter. The chapter on treatment reviews a variety of interventions described in published reports, ranging from behavioural to physiologic. The authors recommend early intervention and flexible ongoing therapy ‘to reduce the impact of disease progression and maintain an adequate level of communication’ (p. 105). They also point to evidence of preclinical abnormalities that may be helpful in understanding the natural his-
tory of the disease and in developing procedures to alert clinicians to the likelihood of an eventual speech disorder.

Typically, each chapter in Part 1 concludes by pointing to the need for the kind of information presented in the succeeding chapter. Although this device lends coherence to Part 1, it does not completely satisfy the need for an integrative chapter, even a brief one, that draws on the major conclusions in the six chapters to offer a summary perspective of the dysarthria in MS. Such a chapter could serve a further purpose, that of pointing to lacunae in the current understanding of the speech disturbances associated with this disease. But even without such a summary chapter, Part 1 succeeds admirably in its description of speech disturbances through several different lenses—perceptual, acoustic, and physiologic.

Part 2 consists of chapters on language disorders (Murdoch and Jennifer B. Lethlean), high-level language, naming and discourse abilities (Murdoch and Lethlean), subgroups of patients based on language dysfunction (Lethlean and Murdoch), and treatment (Fiona J. Hinchliffe, Murdoch, and Theodoros). The first chapter in this section points to the presence of at least mild language impairment in many individuals with MS. The impairment is most evident in high-level language tasks such as naming, verbal reasoning, and linguistic problem solving. The following chapter provides additional evidence for high-level language difficulties, including those that emerge in discourse. The chapter on subgroups portrays the range in language performance that is observed in both group studies and case studies of individuals with MS. The authors also consider these language impairments with respect to models of subcortical language processing, suggesting that the high-level language deficits may reflect “compromised attentional and self-monitoring functions of the subcortical structures which influence the frontal lobes” (p. 190). Although language impairment is not a pervasive feature in MS, it appears with sufficient frequency that clinical attention to this possibility is definitely warranted. The final chapter considers interventions for language and cognitive impairments and includes suggested therapies for particular dimensions of impairment. The four chapters in Part 2 comprise a much-needed appraisal of language impairment in individuals with MS.

This book is a valuable compendium of information on the communication disorders in individuals with MS. A particularly important feature is the wide view that the authors give to these problems. Not only do they provide comprehensive reviews of the various communicative impairments, but they also relate this information to neuropathology and implications for improved clinical services. The text is richly supported with literature citations (and a 25-page reference list), a number of well-conceived summary tables, and detailed case studies. MS, like many other neurologic diseases, is not monolithic in its effects on communication. These authors have demonstrated the importance of a wide-angled perspective that includes a detailed examination of both speech and language in their various component processes.

Certainly, this volume is essential to anyone concerned with clinical and research issues related to MS, but it also serves as a template for a comprehensive view of communicative impairments in other neurologic diseases, such as Parkinson’s disease, stroke, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. This book is a welcome addition to the speech-language pathology literature, both for its intrinsic worth as a comprehensive clinical summary, and for its value as an example of scholarship that may well encourage similar efforts.

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