Communication Strategies for Optimal Success

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Learning Objectives

How communication changes in aging and Parkinson’s disease impact everyday conversations.

Recognize signals of conversation breakdowns and how to apply strategies to prevent or resolve those breakdowns.

Understand the relationships among conversation difficulties and social, emotional, and physical burdens in caregiving and quality of life.
• Interaction between two or more people
• Means by which we create and maintain relationships
• Uniquely human
• Governed by a set of rules
• When impaired…

↓ Quality of Life
↑ Burden
↑ Difficulty completing everyday activities
↑ Social Isolation and Loneliness
“I just can’t follow what he is saying. Conversations don’t flow the same. I feel…alone” (Caregiver, 2010)

“By the time I put together what I want to say the conversation moved on so I just choose to not engage as much.” (J.V., 2009)

Conversation problems are common in Parkinson’s

Branson et al., 2019; Griffiths et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2017
Communication in Real-Life Contexts in PD

Roberts et al., 2014; 2016; Roberts et al., 2017; Roberts & Post, 2018
Roberts et al., in prep

ADAM sensor US patent pending
Communication Changes in PD

- ↓ voice volume
- Produce fewer words per minute
- Pause more frequently and in ambiguous places
- ↑ grammar errors
- Produce less information, omit key ideas
- ↑ in disfluent speech (revising words, repeating sounds)
- Difficulty modulating voice and facial expression to convey emotion and emphasis
- ↓ understanding facial expressions and emotions of others

E.g., Grossman, 2001; Garcia et al., 2018; Roberts et al., Murray, 200; 2017; Gutierrez et al., 2018; Gutierrez et al., 2017; Roberts & Post, 2018; Pell et al., 2014; Monetta et al., 2008
Let’s go to the art show on Saturday.

Why would we go to the cat show??
Conversations break down for reasons unrelated to speech sound clarity and voice loudness in PD

Trouble Sources

Branson, Rinne, Roberts, 2019

Mean Percentage

0.00 0.10 0.20 0.30 0.40 0.50

Motoric  Language Form and Content  Discourse (Topic and Turn Management)  Environmental Factors  Unattributed

DYAD
Both the person with PD and their family partner contribute to conversation breakdowns and do so in different ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS (Morphological-Syntactic)</th>
<th>PD-S: He’s told bend not down quite.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RI (Non-specific term)</td>
<td>CP: Hm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP (Elaboration)</td>
<td>PD-S: The screw he was told he could bend and make the screws will come out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS2 (Morphological-Syntactic)</td>
<td>RI (Possible Understanding) CP: (2.0) They’re gonna take ‘em out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RP (Elaboration) PD-S: No, they could come out if you put too much weight on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CP: Mhm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CP: Oh yeah, they’ll fail.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Branson, Rinne, & Roberts, 2019
Causes of Conversation Breakdowns in PD Dyads

66% of breakdowns unrelated to speech clarity and voice issues
(Roberts et al., in prep; Griffiths, 2014; Branson et al., in prep; Rinne et al., in prep)

- Abnormally long pauses that create confusion in conversation turn-taking
- Unclear topic or topic shifts that are too quick or topic not consistent with the current context
- Unclear non-verbal signals for turn taking
- Slowed processing of information
- Delays in initiating speaking turn or in responding to partner
- Use of incorrect or ambiguous words that cause confusion for conversation partners
- Talking over/interrupting the person with PD
Universal Rule: When a breakdown occurs, speakers attempt to repair it.
Conversation Repair Cycles

I’m sorry, I said let’s go to the **art show** on Saturday not the cat show

Why would we go to the **cat show**??

Repair

Other Initiated Repairs

Signal difficulty/misunderstanding
Conversation Repair Cycles in PD Dyads

**Missed opportunities for repair**
- Less sensitive to signals of breakdown
- More than 1/3 of conversation breakdowns remain unrepaired

**PD Care partners are more likely to abandon repair attempts**
- Compared to partners of individuals with Alzheimer’s dementia.

**Repairs take multiple attempts (complex repairs)**
- More complex repairs than in Alzheimer’s dementia
- Less likely to be successful
- Lead to more misunderstandings

Griffiths, 2014; Branson, Rinne, Roberts, 2019
Improving Communication in PD: Speech and Voice Exercises

Early, targeted, and intensive voice training may potentially slow progression of voice impairments (Russell et al., 2010; Ciucci et al., 2015)

Intensive loudness training can change brain activity and muscle movement toward more normal patterns for voice/speech (Liotti et al., 2003; Narayana et al., 2009; Stathopoulos & Sapienza, 1997; Stathopoulos et al., 2014)
• Most researched program for voice treatment in PD
• High intensity voice exercise program – voice loudness
• Optimizes motor learning theories
  – Highly structured
  – Highly repetitive
  – Maximum effort
• 4 days (50 minute sessions)/week 4 weeks (16 sessions)
• Re-trains individuals in producing their maximum effort during speech
• ‘Think’ and ‘Be’ loud

(e.g., Sapir et al., 2011)
SpeechVive™

Facilitates improvements in respiratory and speech muscles

Device optimizes automatic reflex to increase voice loudness in noisy environments

Practice occurs within everyday communication contexts

Wear at home during normal communication activities. Settings adjusted based on client needs by SLP

In some individuals it may reduce cognitive effort required to maintain voice loudness

Increase loudness - automatic vs. focused effort

Jessica Huber – Purdue University and SpeechVive. Image used with permission. Do not reproduce.
Voice Amplifiers

- ChatterVox
- FM Systems
- Spokeman
- Voicette

- ADvox
- SoniVox

Andreeta & Adams (2013)
Turning up the volume may not be enough
Restructuring Conversations™ Goals of Intervention (Roberts, 2019)

Goal: Reduce conversation breakdowns

What did you say??
Huh??
Goal: Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of repair cycles
Speech/Language-Centered

Message/words are clear
Body language, eye contact, gestures are clear
Topic/context is clear

Restructuring Conversations™ (Roberts, 2019)
Minimize Environment Distractions

• Turn off televisions, radios, running water and other sources of noise (visual and auditory)

• Reduce barriers by communicating face-to-face
  – Resist talking between rooms
  – Resist talking while walking away

• Provide alerting cues
Provide Additional Time

• Provide time to process information
• Present information in smaller ‘chunks’
• Provide additional time for person with PD to formulate responses
Topic Management

• Maintain one topic until it is finished
  • If changing topics is necessary, alert your partner
  • Return to the original topic when finished

• Avoid changing topics quickly. Give time for partner to adjust.

• Create context before introducing a new topic

Restructuring Conversations™ (Roberts, 2019)
Repairing Conversations: What to do

- **Monitor** for signals of conversation breakdowns
  - Quizzical facial expressions
  - Slowing of response time
  - Checking-out or not responding
  - Verbal feedback (huh, what, or mis-stating)

- **Verify** that you understood the message

- **Direct request** for help
  - I don’t think I understood you correctly
  - Please repeat that again
  - Did you mean to say
Repairing Conversations: What to do

• **Repeat** and simplify if needed

• **Rephrase** with added information

• Use gestures or **show** what you mean

• **Stay calm**. Avoid being critical.
Repairing Conversations: What not to do

• Raise your voice
• Provide non-specific clarifying prompts
  – What? , Huh? , Eh?
• Excessively reduce speech rate
• Give-up or abandon the chance to clarify your message/intent
  – If necessary come back when the time is optimal
Collaborating: Working as a team to build better conversations

**Revealing Competence**
- Acknowledge conversation difficulties and successes
- Acknowledge your partner’s expertise and perspective

**Validating**
- Validate the feelings of your conversation partner when failures occur
- Take responsibility for failures. Don’t blame

Restructuring Conversations™ (Roberts, 2019)
Collaborating: Working as a team to build better conversations

**Negotiating Preferences**

- Request permission to speak for or fill in information
- Discuss what you need openly
- Decide jointly what to share with others

**Facilitating Participation**

- Create room in the conversation
- Arrange for smaller groups
- Help the person with PD get into conversations

Restructuring Conversations™ (Roberts, 2019)

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Being attuned to self, partner, environment

Temporal

- Choose optimal times of day for conversations
  - Medication times
  - Fatigue

Emotional

- Check-in on your own emotions
- Monitor your partners’ emotions/withdrawing
- Monitor signals of difficulty and adjust the conversation (pace, repair strategies used)

Cognitive/Intent

- Conversation is for communicating, not testing
- Assess motivations that are driving the conversation
- Message does not have to be perfect in order to foster meaningful connections

Restructuring Conversations™ (Roberts, 2019)
• Conversations are the responsibility of both partners.

• Good conversation skills can be developed with practice.

• Meaningful and effective conversation require flexibility, empathy, and the ability to adjust over time.

• Preserving sense of self, emotional connections, and reducing burden of daily activities is worth it.
Research: We need your help!

- Individuals with Parkinson’s disease
- Adults without Parkinson’s disease

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Sign up for our newsletter!
Allied Team Training for Parkinson’s

Alumni of ATTP are added to our
National Helpline Referral List
of trained health professionals.
Building Stronger Caregiving Partnerships Through Better Communication

http://youtube.com/ParkinsonDotOrg

Available in Spanish

Call our helpline to order your DVD: 1-800-4PD-INFO(4636)
Resources

National Helpline
Our specialists answer calls about all aspects of Parkinson’s disease (PD) in addition to helping you locate your local PD trained allied health professional therapist.
1-800-4PD-INFO or Helpline@Parkinson.org
Mon- Friday 9 am to 8 pm ET

Podcast: Substantial Matters
New episodes every other Tuesday featuring Parkinson’s experts highlighting treatments, techniques and research.
Parkinson.org/Podcast

Fact Sheets and Publications
Get the resources and information you need to start living a better life with Parkinson’s.

Aware in Care Kit
Includes tools and information for people with PD to share with hospital staff during a planned or emergency hospital stay.
Parkinson.org/Awareincare