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Making people with aphasia speak for themselves in conversation: non-collaboration by significant others in the production of answers to test questions

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ABSTRACT

Background: Non-collaboration by significant others (SOs) in interactions with people with aphasia has been previously observed in the context of known-response activities. However, there is no evidence in these studies of an overtly negative stance or criticism by the SOs or interactional discord.

Aims: This study aims to explore a more extreme form of non-collaboration in test question activities. Specifically, we examine how SOs' practice in these testing activities relates to (1) the typically prolonged nature of the person with aphasia's (PWA) attempts; and (2) the negative stances by the SOs and the interactional discord that are regularly displayed in these conversations when this practice is employed. Second, we use these findings to provide an overview of the different practices employed by SOs in test question activities, comparing them in the form of a continuum of options (or interactional "styles") available to SOs, and we highlight the dilemmas faced by SOs in knowing what to do for the best when interacting with their family members with aphasia.

Methods: We use Conversation Analysis (CA) to analyze domestic conversations between two PWA-SO couples, focusing on the practice employed by SO in test question sequences when the PWA struggles to produce an adequate answer.

Conclusion: The practices employed by SOs indicate that they treat their partner with aphasia as someone who should be autonomous and "speak for themselves" in that they should produce a certain type of utterance in the conversation (here, an answer to a test question) by themselves and without any substantive assistance from the SO. When this practice is employed by the SOs, the activity ceases being solely about eliciting the correct answer; it regularly also becomes a locus of interactional discord.

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1. Introduction

A general rule or maxim of conversation, as described by Lerner (1996), is "speak for yourself". What this maxim captures is that in various ways within conversation a speaker has certain rights, but also certain responsibilities, in regard to producing their turn-at-talking in the appropriate way and displaying their autonomy as a speaker. Lerner's work built on that of Goffman who, in his work on "footing" (1981) distinguished different speakership roles and how they could be combined (or sometimes not combined). What is relevant to what we will discuss here is the distinction Goffman makes between the "author" and the "animator" of an utterance. The author is "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded" (Goffman, 1981, p. 144), while the animator is the "sounding box", involved in the phonetic act of producing speech by means of the vocal articulators. Commonly speakers combine these roles, meaning that the person who physically produces the words (the animator) is also the one who created the words or ideas (the author). However, in some cases, these roles can be distributed among two (or even more) participants. For example, a newsreader may speak words (i.e., animate them) that they did not author themselves. Combing the author and animator roles in conversation can be one way in which a speaker can be autonomous and "speak for themselves", i.e., that speaker has produced an idea and articulated it fully and understandably. This is what is expected of adults in society who do not have some condition which impacts on their cognitive, language or speech ability (and also, for example, are speaking their native language), while it might not be expected (at least in the same way) of young children or of adults who are speaking in a language they have just started to learn.

In this paper, we analyse conversations between people with aphasia and their significant others (in each case, a partner/spouse) where, we will suggest, the significant others (SOs) treat their partner with aphasia as someone who should be autonomous and "speak for themselves" in that they should produce a certain type of utterance in the conversation (here, an answer to a test question) by themselves and without any substantive assistance from the SO. While such an approach by the SOs can be seen as treating the person with aphasia (PWA) as competent and "normal" (in that they treat them in the same way a speaker without aphasia might be treated), there can be significant consequences to this approach as we will show. For example, since aphasia by definition impacts on the speaker's ability to produce spoken language, this will typically impact on their ability to produce talk within conversation in the same way that an adult without a condition such as aphasia would be able to do. In our examples, this SO stance therefore regularly leads to a prolonged series of attempts by the PWA to produce the answer as demanded and also displays of negative stances and emotions by the participants (e.g., anger or annoyance by the SO, upset by the PWA). While in conversation, SOs may often collaborate with the PWA and assist them in various ways to get out what they (the PWA) wants to say (Auer et al., 2020), non-collaboration is also sometimes seen in PWA-SO conversations (Auer, 2014). It is a rather extreme (as compared to previous research on how aphasia impacts on conversation) form of non-collaboration within a particular activity – that of test questions – that we will focus on here. The methodology used is conversation analysis (CA: Sidnell & Stivers, 2013)

1.1. Test questions in PWA-SO conversations

A test question (Searle, 1969), also known as "known answer question" (Schegloff, 2007), is a question produced by a speaker who already knows the answer. It is thus different from "real"/information-seeking questions (where a questioner has less/no knowledge about the information being asked in relation to the answerer (Heritage, 2012)).

While test questions are typically confined to institutional contexts (e.g., teachers in classrooms (Mehan, 1979; Schegloff, 2007) and speech and language therapists in clinical contexts (Merlino, 2018; Wilkinson, 2013)) where assessing or teaching is part of the institutional activity, they are not generally used in everyday conversations among neurotypical adults (except perhaps in special circumstances, such as when joking). However, a notable feature of conversations between people with aphasia and their SOs is that at least in some cases the SOs ask test questions to the people with aphasia (Barnes & Possemato, 2020; Bauer & Kulke, 2004; Beeke et al., 2013; Burch et al., 2002; Leaman, 2025) While we cannot be sure of the motivation of the SOs for doing this type activity, it seems that the SOs may be using them to make the PWA practise language (Auer, 2014; Bauer & Kulke, 2004). They can also be a way of getting the PWA to make a contribution to conversation (albeit one which is limited, often to one word: Beeke et al., 2013; Leaman, 2025).

Test question sequences display a particular sequential structure consisting primarily of three turns (Kevoe-Feldman & Robinson, 2012; Schegloff, 2007): (1) the test question itself produced by one participant; (2) an answer attempt by another participant, and (3) an evaluation of the answer attempt as adequate or not by the first participant. When an answer is judged adequate, this acceptance of the answer closes the sequence/activity (Schegloff, 2007) and the participants can move on to something else (e.g., a different test question, or a non-test question activity). When the answer is not judged as adequate (e.g., it is rejected as incorrect), this keeps the activity open, and makes another attempt by the answerer relevant and expectable. In principle, therefore, (and as we shall see in the data analysed below) the attempt to produce an acceptable answer can be prolonged if the answerer keeps producing answers which are judged inadequate.

Test question activities are one form of a wider category of known-response activities (Wilkinson, 2014) that have been shown to be engaged in within PWA-SO conversations. For example, participants can also engage in "correct production sequences" (Lock et al., 2001), where, for example, following some form of sound error, such as the production of a phonemic paraphasia, the SO elicits an attempt from the PWA to produce a word in the phonemically correct form, and evaluates that answer as adequate or not. A third form of known-response activity has been termed an "exam halt" (Aaltonen & Laakso, 2010). This is where, for example, a PWA requests assistance from the SO for an item, such as a word, they are having difficulty producing but the SO, despite knowing the target item, declines to provide it and instead encourages the PWA to produce it by themselves. Such a phenomenon has some similarities to the phenomenon we will be describing here, although here this treatment by the SO of the PWA as an autonomous speaker who should produce the target item themselves will be explored specifically within test question activities.

1.2. Two practices employed by significant others to collaborate in the production of an answer to a test question

Following the production of a test question by the SO, the PWA may display a problem with answering it. This problem will most commonly take the form of an error (i.e, the PWA produces an answer but it is incorrect), or a non-answer (Stivers & Robinson, 2006), such as "I don't know". Previous studies have primarily identified two distinct practices used by SOs in response to the PWA's problems in producing an adequate answer. Both involve collaboration by the SO in the production of the answer. In the first practice, the SO provides the answer themselves, soon after the PWA's first failed attempt. In the second practice, the SO provides cues for the PWA to assist the PWA to be the one to produce the answer.

Extract 1 (from Burch et al., 2002) presents the first type of practice. The extract

```
01  Sandra: where was it being set(.)wuh what's the name of the book
02          [ (1.9)
03     Jim: [((puts his hand to his face))
04          well I (1.2) I dunno.=
05  Sandra: =can- can you remember who wrote it
06     Jim: (1.2) uh yes I- I- I've got to think but yes I-
07  Sandra: and (.) well the name of the book (0.6) is A Passage to India
08     Jim: oh. (.) yeah.
```

Extract 1: 'what's the name of the book'.

is taken from a conversation at home between Jim, a man with aphasia, and his wife Sandra in the context of their discussion about an audio book Jim has been listening to. At this point in their conversation Sandra produces a test question, first asking Jim about where the book was set, then changing it to another question, enquiring about the name of the book (line 01). As will become evident, she already knows the answer to at least the first of these questions.

After Jim displays an inability to answer the test question (in the form of a non-answer, "well I dunno" in line 04) Sandra changes to a different question (line 05). Again, Jim is unable to provide an answer (line 06). At this point, (line 07) relatively early on in the test question activity she has initiated, Sandra provides the answer to her own question (from line 01). In Goffman's (1981) terms, Sandra here is clearly the author and the animator of the answer in that she has both accessed the word and physically produced it autonomously, i.e., with no assistance from anyone else (Auer, 2014).

Extract 2 (from Barnes & Possemato, 2020) illustrates a second, different, practice by which a SO may collaborate in the production of the answer to a test question. In this case however, rather than simply providing the answer themselves, the SO's involvement takes the form of providing cues to the PWA in order that the PWA may produce the answer. These cues can be either semantic, providing a clue to the meaning of the target, or phonemic, providing a clue to its phonological form. This is a relatively well-described pattern and appears to be commonly used across a range of institutional settings such as teaching (Mehan, 1979) and speech and

```
01  C: two of Taryn's gi:[rls ca]me,
02  D:                    [yeah, ]
03    (0.6)
04  C: d'you remember what their names are?
05    (0.9)
06  C: >what's the< youngest one;
07    (1.6)
08  D: .hh hh
09  C: ↑j'st take y'r time,=i'm sure you can get (it out)
10    (0.6)
11  C: Taryn's youngest daughter.
12     (0.5)
13  D: hhh (0.5)
14  C: she's blonde, long hair:,
15     (0.6)
16  D: yeah: i c'n see 'er,
17     (.)
18  D: but (.) (I j'st) can't get the words out.
19  C: A-
20     (0.9)
21  C: A(p)-
22     (0.7)
23  D: Ap- (0.4) .h A April.
24     (0.2)
25  C: April.
26  D: yeh.=
```

Extract 2: 'what's the youngest one?'.

language therapy (Wilkinson, 2013) as well as in domestic conversations between people with aphasia and their significant others (e.g., Barnes & Possemato, 2020; Beeke et al., 2013; Leaman, 2025). In Extract 2, Carmen is talking with her husband (David, a PWA), about their granddaughters and, starting in line 04 she engages in a test question activity, trying to elicit their names from David. When David is silent in response (line 05), Carmen focuses the test question on the name of the youngest granddaughter(line 06 and following).

Here, when David is not able to produce the answer, Carmen provides him with cues, first semantic (see line 14) then, when this does not elicit the answer (lines 15–18), phonemic (lines 19 and 21). While the first phonemic cue is not successful (line 20), the second one, providing more of the form of the target word, does succeed in facilitating David to produce the whole name (line 23). The name produced in line 23 is thus a collaborative and co-constructed achievement between Carmen and David. Unlike with the first practice, where the SO was the autonomous author and animator (Goffman, 1981) of the answer to their own question, with this practice the SO and PWA are co-authors and co-animators, albeit in a certain way; by producing the first phoneme(s) of the target word then stopping (i.e., a form of what in CA research is termed a "designedly incomplete utterance": Koshik, 2002), the SO scaffolds the PWA's production, such that it is the PWA who has the opportunity (here, successfully taken in line 23) of being the speaker who first animates the full target name, thus being able to get the credit as the speaker who produced it.

1.3. Focus and aims of the present study

In this study, we use data from the domestic conversations of two PWA-SO couples to analyse a third practice employed by SOs in test question sequences when the PWA is displaying a problem in producing an adequate answer. In this practice, rather than collaborating in the production of the answer by either producing it themselves or providing cues to assist the PWA to produce it, the SO withholds collaboration, providing little or no assistance to scaffold the PWA in producing the answer. As such, the SO in this context treats the PWA as the person who should be the author and animator (Goffman, 1981) of the target answer and should do so autonomously, i.e., without assistance from the SO. Of course, this can be difficult for the PWA due to their language difficulties. One consequence of this is that the attempts to produce the target answer can become prolonged, with the PWA recurrently failing to produce the answer over a series of attempts and after each failed attempt the SO providing no substantive assistance (e.g., in the form of cues) towards resolving this difficulty. Actually, as we shall see, in this context the SOs regularly take a negative stance (Lock et al., 2001) towards the PWA, being critical of them and displaying annoyance with their efforts. In response the PWA regularly also displays a negative stance, such as getting angry. As such, when this practice is employed by the SOs, the activity ceases being solely about eliciting the correct answer; it regularly also becomes a locus of interactional discord.

Non-collaboration by SOs of people with aphasia has been described previously in the context of known-response activities (e.g., Wilkinson, 2006; Aaltonen and Laakso, 2010; Auer, 2014) but in each case this non-collaboration appears quite different to the phenomenon described here. First, in each of these studies this SO non-collaboration has occurred in the context of an exam halt (Aaltonen & Laakso, 2010) rather than a test question. That is, typically the PWA displays a problem in producing a word within their ongoing talk, but the SO declines to help in the first instance despite knowing what the word is. Instead, the SO puts the onus back on the PWA, providing not semantic or phonological cues (which may provide substantive assistance to the PWA in producing the answer) but rather generalised encouragement to the PWA to persevere. This encouragement takes forms such as "come on say it now" (Aaltonen & Laakso, 2010), "think" (Auer, 2014) or "come on now, try and get it right, think of what you're saying" (Wilkinson, 2006). Second, while the SO takes a stance here of putting the onus on the PWA (with the consequence that these attempts by the PWA to produce the target item are often prolonged), unlike in the present study there is no evidence in these studies of an overtly negative stance or criticism by the SOs or interactional discord.

The current study thus has two aims. First, we aim to describe this hitherto unexplored practice employed by SOs in the context of the PWA having trouble in producing an answer in a test question activity. This will include looking at the relationship between this SO practice and: (1) the typically prolonged nature of these PWA attempts; and (2) the negative stances by the SOs and the interactional discord that are regularly displayed in these conversations when this practice is employed. Second, we use these findings to provide an overview of the different practices employed by SOs in test question activities, comparing them in the form of a continuum of options (or interactional "styles") available to SOs, and we highlight the dilemmas faced by SOs in knowing what to do for the best when interacting with their family members with aphasia. These issues include implications for intervention, which we will discuss.

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

The data used in this study are drawn from a larger dataset, which includes approximately 17.5 hours of video recordings of 30 Mandarin-speaking PWA and medical health professionals, as well as conversations between six of these 30 PWA and their family members. For this study, only the conversations between the six PWA and their family members were examined.

To obtain real-life conversational data, participants were asked to video-record at least 30 minutes of everyday conversation at home with a familiar member. Participants were either instructed to use the researchers' camera or given the option to use their own devices to conduct the recordings. The recordings typically captured conversations during or after dinner, as well as casual interactions with neighbours. Ethical approval was obtained from both the designated hospital ethics committee in China and the university ethics board in the UK. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant and their family members.

2.2. Participants

Within this dataset, two Mandarin speakers with aphasia (Table 1) were asked test questions, and in both of their conversations, interactional discord occurred in these test question sequences. This study focuses on the test question sequences between these two PWA and their spouses.

The participant we will refer to as 'Fang' experienced a stroke one year and four months before data collection, resulting in right-side hemiparesis but no additional medical conditions. A Western Aphasia Battery (WAB) assessment diagnosed him with anomic aphasia (Kertesz, 2006). Fang demonstrated good comprehension and sentence production but experienced word-finding difficulties. He could effectively initiate and engage in conversations.

The other participant ('Mao') experienced a traumatic brain injury from a high-altitude fall, leading to multiple brain haemorrhages and right-side paralysis. At the time of data collection (two years and two months post-injury), Mao had not received language therapy as his aphasia was deemed too severe. However, a research-administered WAB assessment confirmed global aphasia. Mao's comprehension was limited to basic instructions, and his speech was highly restricted, consisting primarily of a stereotypical phrase ("one is not ok") and a recurrent gesture (forming a circle with his thumb and index

Table 1. PWA profiles.

Participants	Age	Gender	Language	Lesion hemisphere	History of previous stroke	Months post-onset	Co-morbidities
Fang	53	male	Monolingual Mandarin	Left, haemorrhagic stroke	No	16	Right-sides hemiplegia
Mao	51	male	Monolingual Mandarin	Both, TBI	No	26	Right-sides hemiplegia; Loss of vision in the right eye

Table 2. WAB testing results.

Participants	AQ Score	Fluency	Comprehension	Repetition	Naming	Aphasia type
Fang	41.5	5.0	5.95	7.8	2.0	Anomic
Mao	21.0	0.0	3.9	6.6	0.0	Global

finger). He could produce swear words and repeat short phrases but struggled with sentence generation.

For both Fang and Mao, their spouses (who in each case have lived with them for more than 20 years) were their primary communication partners. Participants profiles are provided in Table 1. WAB scores of both participants, including fluency, comprehension, repetition, and naming abilities, are provided in Table 2.

2.3. Data transcription

The first author conducted transcriptions using the transcription system developed by Jefferson (2004). The transcriptions were then reviewed by co-authors during the data analysis to ensure accuracy and consistency. All person and place names were pseudonymized. Two lines of transcription are applied in this study. The first line is the original data indicated by *Pinyin*, the second line, which is provided in bold in the extracts, is the English translation of the data. Non-verbal practices such as gaze and gestures are also transcribed where relevant (Goodwin, 2003).

2.4. Data analysis

CA aims to identify recurring communicative patterns within interactions by collecting instances that share common features (Clift, 2016). Initial observations revealed that a person with aphasia in the dataset faced interactional challenges within test question sequences. To explore whether this was a broader pattern, the first author examined all six family recordings and found that two PWA were frequently asked test questions in their everyday conversation. In this study, test question sequences refer to any sequences initiated by test questions. It also includes "repeat-after-me activities" initiated by a test question where the CP asks the person with aphasia to repeat a word or phrase following their modelling. The activity typically continues until the CP assesses the response as correct. This differs from correct production sequences, where, in cases of articulatory errors, the CP provides phonemic cues to help the person with aphasia produce a more accurate sound (Lock et al., 2001). Based on this criterion, a total of 44 test question sequences from the conversations of the two couples were identified. The analysis was refined iteratively through discussions among co-authors. Through this process we excluded cases where the PWA provided the correct answer on the first attempt. The research team then repeatedly examined the video recordings alongside transcripts, focusing on the interactional practices used by spouses. We found only one instance involved one spouse (Hua) of an SO providing cues (e.g., semantic prompts) to help the PWAco-construct the correct answer. In the remaining cases, interactional practices used by spouses in pursuing answers did not include cues. Instead the relied on practices such as repeating the question, restating the PWA's error, issuing directives (e.g., "say it"), or using

open-class repair initiations (e.g., "huh?"). Additionally, negative stance displays, including tuts, sighs, reprimands, blamings, and swearing regularly co-occurred with these practices.

3. Analysis: non-collaboration by significant others in test question activities

To analyse this non-collaborative practice used by the two SOs within test question activities in our data we will examine four extracts, two from the Mao (PWA) – Hua (SO) conversations and two from the Fang (PWA) – Lan (SO) conversations. In each case, the two extracts provide representative samples of the style employed by each of the two SOs

01	Hua:	[zhe shi shenme]
		[what is this]
		[*((stirs steamed egg))*]
02	Mao:	°°yi ge buxing°° °°°°yi ge bu xing°°°°=
		°°one is not ok°° °°°°one is not ok°°°°=
03	Hua:	=zhe shi shenme ya
		=what is this
04		**(1.3)**
05		a?
		huh?
06	Mao:	°yi ge b:u xing°
		°one is no:t ok°
07	Hua: →	zhe °shi° >shen:me< ↑FA::N
		>wha:t< ↑MEA::L °is° it
008		**(0.6)**
009	Hua: →	ZI! WO WEN NI ZHE SHI SHA
		TUT! I AM ASKING YOU WHAT IS THIS
010	Mao:	**ONE IS NOT OK ONE IS NOT OK ONE IS NO:T OK ((IN LAZY VOICE))**
011	Hua:	<ji> <dan> <gao>
		<steamed> <egg>
012	Mao:	°o°
		°oh°
013	Hua:	Ai
		Yes

Extract 3: 'steamed eggs'.

across test question activities generally in their conversations. Following the analysis of these four extracts we will discuss general features of this interactional style adopted by both SOs within test question activities.

Extract 3 occurs during talk while Hua is preparing dinner for Mao. Starting in line 01 with "what is this?", Hua asks Mao what she is currently cooking, which is clearly a test question. The answer, it emerges (line 11) is steamed egg. However, Mao has great difficulty in providing the answer to this question and we shall focus here on how Hua contributes to the test question activity in the light of Mao's evident difficulties.

Mao responds to the question with his stereotyped phrase, "one is not ok" (line 02), which is clearly not the correct answer. At this sequential point in the activity (i.e., in the third turn in the sequence after the PWA has failed to provide an adequate answer to the test question), Hua has a number of options in how to proceed in response to this incorrect answer. One option would be to provide the answer herself (as Sandra did in Extract 1). Another would be to provide a cue to assist the PWA in producing the answer (as Carmen did in Extract 2), or alternatively to provide generalized encouragement as seen in some of the instances of exam halts reported in the literature (e.g., Aaltonen & Laakso, 2010). Instead, Hua does something else (line 03); she repeats the question (line 03). Among various things that can be noted about this option adopted by Hua, one important feature of it is that it does not assist Mao, and indeed appears to be designed to purposely not assist him; instead, it simply restates the question that Mao was already given in line 01. In this sense it is non-collaborative in that it is not collaborating with the PWA to assist in any substantive manner with the production of the answer. It is this type of non-collaborative response in the third position (Schegloff, 1992) in the sequence (i.e., following the PWA's inadequate answer attempt) that we see repeatedly in these test question activities in these two couples' conversations.

When Mao provides no response (line 04) to Hua's repeated question, Hua pursues an answer with *huh?*, again providing no further information to Mao about the answer. When Mao provides his stereotyped answer again (line 06), Hua slightly modifies the question but only minimally and not in a way that substantively assists Mao to produce the answer (line 07). Hua's loud emphasis on *meal* is hearable as embodying a negative stance (i.e., possibly indicating annoyance) towards Mao and his repeated lack of an adequate answer. This negative stance is then more clearly seen in line 09, when Hua tuts (i.e., a tut of annoyance) and loudly reprimands Hua, again repeating (in a modified form) the question from line 01. Again, this type of turn provides Mao with no further information about the answer.

Mao reciprocates this negative stance by also speaking loudly and this time producing his stereotyped phrase with a tone that can be described as both impatient and as displaying a kind of lazy attitude to providing the answer. As such, at this point there is clearly interactional discord between the couple, with each displaying a negative stance towards the other. In line 11, Hua provides the answer. This is the same outcome as Sandra in Extract 1, but it can be noted that the difference in the Mao-Hua extract is that the sequence has lasted across several more turns than the John-Susan extract before the SO provides the answer, and what Hua has produced prior to providing the answer has been non-collaborative and has resulted in interactional discord.

In terms of Goffman's (1981) footing roles, what Hua is doing here is implicitly displaying an insistence that Mao, the PWA, should be both the author and the animator of the answer. In other words, Hua is talking in a way which does not collaborate in the co-construction of the answer, but instead leaves it to Mao to produce it autonomously, i.e., without any

assistance (e.g., cues) from her. Again, it is this pattern we will see continuously across these two couples in their test question activities.

Having analysed Extract 3 at some length, we will now provide a briefer description of the other three extracts, highlighting how the features they exhibit are similar to those seen in Extract 3.

01 Hua: → [zhe shi sha ya]
[what is this ya]
[((*leans forward to take dates from table*))]

02 Mao: *((looks at dates and takes a date from the table))*

03 Hua: → [zhe shi sha ya]
[**what is this YA**]
[*((holds the dates))*]

04 Mao: *((turns and shows the dates to Das))*

05 Hua: →→ ni shuo zA:O
you say dA:TES

06 Mao: ai dui dui [dui ° dui dui °
yes right right [right °right right°

07 Hua: [ni shuo zA:O
[you say dA:TES

08 Mao: ai dui dui dui ° dui dui ° ° dui dui °° dui °
yes right right right °right right° °right right°°right °

09 Hua: →→ ni SHU:o ni shuo zA:O
you SA:y you say dA:TES

10 Mao: °°a: °° °bu xing yi ge bu xing°=
°°ah:°° °not ok one is not ok°=

11 Hua: =[a ba zhe ge zao gei dashu]
=[ok pass this date to uncle Das]
[*((puts the date in Mao's hand))*]

((*several lines omitted during which Hua and Mao offer dates to Das*))

21 Hua: → [ni shuo ZAO]
[**you say DATES**]
[*((gives the date to Mao))*]

22 **(1.7)**/*((Mao takes the date and looks at the date))*

23 Hua: chi: za:o
ea:t da:tes

24	Mao:		a yi ge bu x[ing
			ah one is not o[k
25	Hua:	→→	[ze! shuo ni shuo chi: za:o
			[tut! you say ea:t da:tes
			[*((pats Mao's knee))*
26	Mao:		°ai dui dui dui °
			°yes right right right°
27	Hua:		ni shuo ZAO
			you say DATES
28			**(1.0)***/((puts the date near mouth and pretends eating))*
29	Hua:	→→	ze! ni [SH:uo]
			tut! you [SA:y]
			[*((punches Mao's knee))*]
30	Mao:		**[ah ah ah]**
			[*((turns to Hua and vocalizes unintelligible speeches))*]
31	Hua:		ZA:O:
			DA:T:ES
32	Mao:		**(0.6) [yi ge bu xing yi ge]=**
			(0.6) [one is not ok one is]=
			[*((looks at dates))*]
33	Hua:		=ni shuo za:o
			=you say da:tes
34			**(0.8)/***((Mao whispers 'one is not ok'))*
35	Hua:	→	ni shu-Shu:o
			you sa-SA:y
36	Mao:		**(0.7)/***((looks fwd at table and whisper 'one is not ok'))*
37	Hua:		*((laughs and pats Mao's leg))*
38	Mao:		*((turns to wife))*
39	Hua:	→	ni shuo za:o
			you say da:tes
40	Mao:	→→	*((throws the dates away and swears))*
41			*((everybody laughs))*

Extract 4: 'say dates'.

In Extract 4, Hua, Mao and their neighbor Das are having a conversation during which Hua tests Mao on the word "dates" by asking "what is this ya?". The utterance-final particle "ya" carries no semantic meaning but simply marks the completion of the utterance in Mandarin and Cantonese (Luke, 1990). The dates are in front of the couple and this is clearly a test question. As with Extract 3, it will be seen in this extract that (1) Hua again provides non-collaborative responses following Mao's inability to provide an adequate answer, (2) the attempt becomes a prolonged one, and (3) the activity leads to both Hua and Mao displaying a negative stance.

Throughout this long test question activity, Mao is unable to produce an adequate answer, either providing no verbal attempt (e.g., line 04), providing a verbal response which is not in the form of an answer (e.g., *yes*, *right* etc, as in line 06), or producing his stereotyped phrase (e.g., line 10). In response, Hua first repeats the question (line 03). She then (line 05) modifies the activity by turning it into a "repeat after me" activity where she provides the word and Mao has to say it. While this is now no longer a test question activity, it is still a known response activity in that Hua clearly knows what the target word is, is attempting to elicit it from Mao, and is going to evaluate Mao's responses as adequate or not. In response to Mao's attempts, Hua recurrently repeats her directive to Mao to attempt to repeat the word (e.g., lines 07, 09, 21). Again, this is non-collaborative in that it does not provide any assistance to Mao to help him produce the target word (e.g., by breaking it down).

While there is not here the clear interactional discord that was evident in Extract 3, where a negative stance by Hua was reciprocated by Mao, each member of the couple does display a negative stance during the activity; Hua tuts in annoyance (lines 25 and 29) and produces parts of her talk more loudly (e.g., lines 5, 9 and 21), which in these instances appears also to indicate annoyance. Mao ends the sequence by swearing and throwing the dates across the room. While this elicits laughter from both Hua and Das, it does still appear to indicate genuine frustration on Mao's part.

Next, we examine two test question activities involving the other couple, Fang (PWA) and Lan (SO). Similarly to Hua in the previous two extracts, Lan treats Fang as an autonomous speaker (Auer, 2014) who is expected to produce the correct answer himself without any assistance from her. As such, throughout these sequences, Lan does not provide Fang with cues. The result of this situation (i.e., the PWA being unable to provide the answer, and the SO withholding any substantive assistance to help with the production of the answer) means that these test question activities are also prolonged. In addition, as with Hua, Lan also treats the PWA as accountable (Robinson, 2016) for failing to produce an adequate answer and responds to this situation in ways which display a negative stance towards him (e.g., criticism).

Extract 5 starts with Lan asking Fang which floor their apartment is on. The correct answer is "two" (which Lan eventually produces for Fang in line 36). Just prior to this extract, Lan and Fang have already discussed this information, and as such Lan appears to be testing here whether Fang has retained the information. Fang recurrently provides the wrong answer, saying either *three* (lines 04, 27) or *five* (lines 17). We will again focus the responses to these incorrect answers that the SO (Lan) produces.

One recurrent way in which Lan responds to Fang's incorrect answer is by repeating it back to him (with a tone of incredulity or anger) and also by commenting on it in some negative way. For example in line 05, she starts by repeating back Fang's incorrect answer

01 Lan: ni shi ji lou
which floor are you on

02 Fang: (0.4)san danyuan (0.8)(yi w↑u ling yi)
(0.4)flat three (0.8) (one fi↑ve zero one)

03 Lan: >ni °shi°< ji lou
which floor >°are° you on<

04 Fang: (1.0) san danyuan
(1.0) flat three

05 Lan: → SAN DANYUAN(0.5) [SHANG CHUANGHU WAITOU QU SHUIJIAO QU]
FLAT THREE (0.5) [GO SLEEP OUTSIDE OF THE WINDOW]
[*((points outside of the window))*]

06 Fang: **((*turns head away*)) °hmph°**

07 **(5.1)/***((Lan looks Fang, Fang looks forward, no mutual gaze))*
..F_____,,

08 Lan: → NI >ZHE °GE° LOU↑< NA °YOU° S↑AN DANYUAN = BU °SHI°
WHERE °COMES° FLAT TH↑REE >IN °YOUR° BUILDING↑< = °AREN'T°

09 YI GE-YI GE DANYUAN-YI GE-LIANG GE DANYUAN A (.)
THERE >ONE<-ONE FLAT->°one°<-TWO FLATS A (.)

10 → [yi danyuan ↓er danyuan ZAI ↑NA LI SAN DANYUAN↓
[flat one flat two↓ WHERE↑ COMES FLAT THREE↓
[*((Fang starts scratching head))*

11 **(5.0)/***((Fang brushes off something on his trousers))*

12 Lan: [A?
[HUH?
[((*Fang brushes off something on his trousers*))

13 **(1.9)**
..F_____

14 Lan: → WO W↑EN NI °LI° [NI SHUO↑ HUA °A°]
I AM A↑SKING [SAY↑ SOMETHING °A°]
[*((Fang turns to Lan))*]

15 Fang: >>(wo zhe bu shi<< shuo le ma)
>>(didn't I<< say)

16 Lan: ni shi ji danyuan a
which flat are you in?

17 Fang: (0.8)wu danyuan
(0.8) flat five

18 **(1.0)**

19 Lan: WU DANYUAN
FLAT FIVE

20 **(1.0)**

F _____,,

21 → [GUN WAITOU QU] WU DANYUAN
[GO THE HELL AWAY] FLAT FIVE!
[((*points outside*))]

22 Fang: **[°hmph° °hmph°]**
[*((Fang laughs bitterly and turns away))*]

23 **(.)**

..F_____

24 Lan: ni °shi° ji danyuan shuo
which flat °are° you in say

25 **(1.0)**

26 SHUO
SAY

27 Fang: °h san danyuan
°h flat three

28 Lan: a?
huh?

29 Fang: >°san°< danyuan
flat >°three°<

30 Lan: s↑an danyuan
flat th↑ree

31 Fang: **((*nods head*))**

F_____,,

32 Lan: → [gun chu qu hai shi]

[again go the hell away]

[*((points outside))*]

33 Fang: *((turns away))*

34 Lan:→ [jin wanshang ba ni nong chu qu ha, san danyuan]

[throw you out tonight flat three]

[*((Fang laughs bitterly))*]

35 **(2.9)**/ *((Fang scratches back))*

36 Lan:→ GANG SHUO GEI NI ER DANYUAN ER DANYUAN

I JUST TOLD YOU FLAT TWO FLAT TWO

37 Fang: [°er danyuan°]

[**°flat two°**]

38 Lan:→ [ZENME] [WEISHENME] SHI SAN DANHYUAN WU DANYUAN NE

[HOW] [WHY]IT'S FLAT THREE OR FLAT FIVE

[*((frowns))*]

Extract 5: 'which floor are you on?'.

and then says "go sleep outside of the window", which here can be heard as a kind of reprimand or telling off. All of this is produced with increased loudness, which adds to the sense of Lan being annoyed and angry. Her reprimanding of Fang continues with her presenting his incorrect answer back to him and asking him rhetorically where flat three is (line 10). When he doesn't respond, she angrily demands (again loudly) that he produce a response (line 14). Similarly, when Fang later produces the incorrect answer *flat five* (line 17), Lan repeats it back to him (line 19) and then goes on to say *go the hell away – flat five!* (line 21). Again, all of this is said loudly, indicating annoyance or anger.

Lan is clearly presenting a negative stance towards Fang and his incorrect answer throughout this episode. In response to this, Lan also at times displays a negative stance. For example, in line 34 he produces what can be described as bitter laughter. At other times, he responds more ambiguously by turning away after he has been criticised (e.g., line 06, 22). At these points there is therefore clearly interactional discord between the couple which has been generated by the test question activity and the way in which they are engaging in it.

In Extract 6, Lan asks Fang what colour her clothes are (line 01). The answer is black (line 20). When Fang is repeatedly unable to provide an adequate answer despite a number of

01 Lan: [wo zhe yifu shi shenme yanse]
[what colour are my clothes]
[*((points her sweater in arm))*]

02 Fang: ((*vocalizes a laughter syllable 'hah'*))

03 Lan: >°shenme°< yan↑se de
>°what°< co↑lour

04 **(2.0)**/((*Fang touches Lan's clothes*)) **°hh**

05 Lan: **huh?**

06 **(2.0)**

07 Lan: zhe [shenme (yans↓)]=
this [what (colo↓-)]=

08 Fang: [( )(BA)]
[( ) (BA)]

09 Lan: **=huh?**

10 Fang: (gebo)
(arm)

11 Lan: → >wo< ZHIDAO↑ GEBO zhe shi shenme YANSE de yifu,
>I< KNOW↑ ARM, what COLOUR are my clothes,

12 shenme [yanse de]
what [colour]

13 Fang: [nilong de]
[nylon]

14 Lan: **huh?**

15 Fang: (ninou)
(ninou)

16 **(1.0) ((*Lan and Fang gaze at each other*))**
..___,,

17 NILONG
NILONG

18 Lan: → [ZHE °shi° SHENME <YANSE> de↓]
[WHAT °is° the <COLOUR↓> ↓]
[*((points her sweater in the arm))*]

19	Fang:	Heise
		Black
20	Lan:	hei de
		Black
21	Fang:	en
		PRT
		emm
22	Lan→:	°a° hei de jiu °shi° hei de,
		PRT black AUX just be black AUX
		°ah° say BLACK if it °is° BLACK,
23	→	>ye bu neng shuo< nilong↑ de
		also N can say nylon AUX
		>you shouldn't say< nylon↑

Extract 6: 'what colour are my clothes'.

tries, Lan provides non-collaborative responses which do not assist him in producing the answer.

Lan repeatedly either simply repeats the question (lines 03, 07, 11, 18) or elicits a further attempt from Fang with a prompt such as *huh?* (lines 05, 09, 14). She also displays a negative stance towards Fang's attempts, for example by speaking more loudly (e.g., lines 11 and 18) or telling him off for his attempt (lines 22–23).

4. Discussion

In this paper, we have analysed a certain type of practice employed by the significant others of people with aphasia within a particular type of activity that some PWA-SO dyads engage in regularly, i.e., test question activities. In this type of practice the SOs act in a non-collaborative manner (Auer, 2014), treating the PWA as an autonomous speaker who should be able to author and animate the answer to the test question by themselves, without any substantive assistance from the PWA. As shown in both the couples analysed here, this practice regularly leads to prolonged attempts by the PWA to produce an adequate answer to the test question. Linked to this, there are regularly negative stances displayed by one, and often by both, participants in the conversation. As such in our data this SO practice for engaging in test question activities regularly leads to displays of interactional discord between the PWA and SO.

Putting together the practice we have described here with the other two practices (or options) available to SOs described in the introduction (and exemplified in Extracts 1 and 2) allows us to see that these practices exist on a form of continuum, where SOs can choose to prioritise one feature of conversation or another in a situation where (due to the aphasia) not all features can be achieved simultaneously. There are two main features of conversation that seem relevant here. One is the expectation, as

already touched on at the start of the paper, that speakers in conversation should be autonomous and be able to "speak for themselves" in the way expected of non-communication impaired adults speaking their first language. One form this can take is that a speaker can be expected to answer a question that is addressed to them, even if someone else might in principle be in a better position to answer it (Stivers & Robinson, 2006). A second feature is that of progressivity (Schegloff, 2007). Typically in conversation speakers prefer to speak in ways which keep the conversation progressing forward in the form that is expected at that point. In terms of sequences (Schegloff, 2007), for example, an appropriate and understandable answer to a question allows that question-answer sequence to progress and potentially be completed, while an answer which is not understandable, for example, may be followed by an other-initiation of repair (Schegloff, 2007), such as "pardon?" which means that the sequence is not yet completed and progress to a possible completion has not yet been achieved.

In the first practice (as seen in Extract 1) SOs can be seen to prioritise progressivity over any attempt to treat the PWA as an autonomous speaker. That is, when the PWA displays a difficulty in producing an adequate answer, the SO who employs this practice quite early on in the activity provides the answer themselves. When this practice is employed by SOs, the PWA does not have further tries given to them to try to produce the target item, and thus is not provided with a chance to show themselves as successful and autonomous in this regard. However, a positive feature of this practice from the participants' perspective is that the PWA's inability to provide the answer is not focused on over a long period of time, and the chances of negative stances and interactional discord being displayed are lessened.

Jumping to the third practice, which was the focus of our analysis here, the opposite choice can be seen to be made by the SO. That is, with this practice the autonomy of the PWA is insisted on by the SO (through the SO not collaborating in assisting with the production of the answer). One "cost" of this emphasis on PWA autonomy, however, is progressivity; the test question activity is regularly a prolonged one, with various failed attempts by the PWA. A second "cost" is that negative stances and emotions, and displays of interactional discord, seem common when this type of practice is employed, at least in our data. That is, SOs treatment of the PWA as an autonomous speaker can regularly extend to a kind of attitude being displayed by the SO when the PWA is not able to produce the answer; with this practice, the SOs (again, at least in our data) regularly treat the PWA as accountable and blameworthy for not producing an adequate answer. As such, rather than viewing the PWA's difficulty in providing the answer as simply a consequence of the aphasia, both SOs in our data display annoyance or even anger in relation to the PWA, and appear to be treating the lack of an answer as being at least partly due to something under the PWA's control (e.g., that the PWA is not trying hard enough). In response, the PWA may themselves display negative emotions, such as anger or upset.

In relation to these two options, the second practice (as seen in Extract 2) is a kind of "half way house". Deploying the practice of assisting the PWA (for example by the SO providing semantic or phonemic cues) means that the PWA can be at least partly autonomous in producing the answer. For example, the PWA may be the one who eventually produces the answer to the test question, but the production of this answer

will have been co-authored and/or co-animated by the SO in the form of cues. In terms of progressivity, the cues will mean that the activity may progress more quickly to completion (compared to if no cues were provided by the SO) but the activity will be more prolonged compared to the first practice where the SO provides the answer relatively early on.

It is not possible for us to say whether the cultural background of the participants in our data is relevant to the employment of this type of SO practice within test question activities. There is, however, a possibility that the participants' identity as Chinese speakers of Mandarin has a bearing on the types of practice seen in both of the couples in our data who engage in test question activities. Traditional Chinese cultural values, particularly those influenced by Confucianism and Taoism (Xu et al., 2005), may be relevant here. For example, prior research on Chinese parenting styles suggests that Chinese parents see themselves as active educators who use direct questioning, directives, and instructions to guide their children during shared reading (Huang et al., 2025). These communication practices reflect a broader cultural emphasis on hierarchical relationships, where authority figures (e.g., parents, teachers) are expected to provide guidance and instruction. In Confucian traditions, knowledge transmission is a central responsibility, and authority figures play a directive role in shaping behaviour (e.g., what is right/wrong; what should/should not be done) and ensuring adherence to societal norms. Applying this to the spouses in our dataset, it is possible that SOs adopt a similar authoritative role when communicating with their partners with aphasia. They may see themselves as responsible for "educating" their partners. Their entitlement to deontic authority (the right to judge and correct: Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012) may lead them to legitimize the use of test questions, adopt a less collaborative interaction style, and employ direct criticism when managing unsuccessful attempts by the PWA. Since test questions already create an asymmetrical power dynamic, the combination with culturally reinforced authoritative communication could result in the patterns within conversations seen here, leading to frustration and perceived harshness when answers are incorrect. Such a hypothesis is clearly in need of further research.

5. Limitations and future studies

One key limitation of this study is the small dataset, which includes only two families. While the findings contribute to the existing literature, the limited sample size constrains the generalizability of the results. Further research with a larger and more diverse dataset across various cultural backgrounds is necessary to better understand the role of testing activities in everyday family conversations involving people with aphasia and how this activity presents itself cross-culturally.

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Data availability statement

Data supporting this study cannot be made available due to confidentiality.

Ethics approval statement

Ethical approvals have been obtained from School of Allied Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery at University of Sheffield and The Second Hospital of Shandong University.

Patient consent statement

We confirm that written informed consent was obtained to publish participant details. For those unable to consent due to aphasia, consent was provided by a spouse or family member on their behalf. The article was shared with all consenting parties to ensure full awareness of its content before publication.

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