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The “MAP” survey: an international investigation of SLPs’ training and working practices to assess and treat plurilingual people with aphasia.

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Introduction and aim

Multilingualism in Speech-Language Pathology deserves particular attention as the number of plurilingual individuals requiring professional services for aphasia is growing (Goral & Conner, 2013; Ansaldo & Saidi, 2014; Centeno, 2020; Goral & Hejazi, 2021). A survey conducted by Centeno (2015) with 125 Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) in the US showed that there is a need for improvement of both professional training and clinical resources so that SLPs are better equipped to provide clinical services for plurilingual persons with aphasia (PPWA). Based on a survey study in Norway, Norvik et al. (2022) showed that Centeno’s conclusions can be extended to the European context. Our current understanding of worldwide clinical practices adapted for PPWA is limited since to date no comprehensive and international evaluation has been conducted to assess SLPs’ needs and the current state of affairs regarding aphasia assessment and treatment in plurilingual individuals. Given that many SLPs are providing clinical services to PPWA despite the lack of specific training and appropriate clinical tools to assess and treat aphasia in more than one language, the current study aims:

- to assess the degree of awareness of professional SLPs about multilingualism in their clinical practice;
- to determine the frequency of their clinical practice with PPWA and their perceptions of readiness for the assessment and treatment of this population;
- to identify their common clinical practices and perceived challenges when providing clinical services to PPWA.

The “Multilingual Aphasia Practices” (MAP) survey is an international and comprehensive survey available in multiple languages spoken across the globe that was designed with the aim of reaching a representative sample of SLPs and providing a comprehensive picture of the current state of affairs in multilingual aphasia management worldwide.

Methods

A consensus group of experts on “Multilingual Aphasia Practices” (henceforth the MAP group) has been assembled within the Aphasia Assessment and Outcomes working group of the international Collaboration of Aphasia Trialists network (<https://www.aphasiatrials.org/>). The MAP group, comprising 18 experts representing 13 countries, aims to address issues regarding multilingual aphasia management following a committee approach and survey methods. The MAP survey was thus designed. It contains a total of 31 questions organized in four sections that include: (1) SLPs’ demographic information, (2) Education background and training related to multilingualism and PPWA, (3) Clinical services provided to PPWA, and (4) Assessment tools used with PPWA. All questions were extensively discussed and reviewed between February 2021 and April 2022, with agreement reached based on group consensus and taking into account the different multilingualism situations across continents for inclusivity. The survey was initially designed in English, and there are plans to translate it into Arabic, Basque, French, Galician, Greek, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Spanish, and Turkish. Survey respondents can choose to respond in the language that they feel most comfortable in. The project has been approved by the ethics committee of the University of Groningen.

Results

Online data collection is currently underway using Qualtrics. The estimated target population is 377 SLPs.

Discussion

In line with previous country-specific survey studies, it is expected that SLPs will highlight the lack of available training opportunities and clinical resources for clinical practice with PPWA. However, we anticipate important differences depending on respondents’ demographic profile (years of professional experience, country of training/profession) and language background (i.e. whether SLPs are themselves plurilingual or not). The data will constitute an unprecedented international dataset on training and clinical practices adapted for PPWA assessment and treatment.

The information obtained has several important potential applications. By identifying the lack of specific guidelines targeting clinical assessment and interventions for PPWA from linguistically diverse backgrounds, the results will inform training plans for clinicians working with PPWA and may encourage the development of standardized tools designed for assessing and treating PPWA. The responses should stimulate discussion on a potential set of international best practice guidelines for multilingual aphasia assessment and rehabilitation. The outcomes of this survey are expected to have a direct impact on clinical practice and advance the current state of multilingual aphasia management.

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