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Communication disorders workbook, by L. Cummings, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 233 pp., £22.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-107-63341-4

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BOOK REVIEW

Communication disorders workbook, by L. Cummings, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 233 pp., £22.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-107-63341-4

The Communication Disorders Workbook is a useful manual to prepare students for the identification and description of the speech and language disorders that are encountered nowadays in the everyday clinical practice. In the course of its more than 200 pages, it highlights the importance of the acquisition of different practical aspects of linguistics and medical sciences useful for an adequate treatment. Through nine content chapters, Cummings covers all sorts of communication disorders, including genetic, developmental, acquired, and degenerative deficits of diverse aetiology, and also typical concomitant deficits such as voice or hearing disorders. Not only neural disruptions are discussed, but mental disorders are also taken into consideration. When relevant, speech and language disorders are dealt with separately for infants and adults.

This workbook, conceived for students of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT), highlights clinical caseloads, transforming the reading into an entirely interactive activity. As early as opening the book, a detailed listing of the content is given. This includes figures for the number of question-answer sections ($n = 330$), and traditional exercises of data analysis ($n = 60$), which are listed at the beginning of the workbook. These two headings, questions and exercises, constitute the backbone around which chapters are articulated. Every new discussion opens with a couple of introductory paragraphs, which delimit the topic of discussion and provide brief definitions and (broad linguistic) characterisations of the main deficits to be discussed. Then, the most relevant aspects of each of the nine chapters are brought to the reader's attention by means of a carefully selected set of questions. Clinical scenarios or data analysis exercises, which are presented together with a summary of their objectives, follow immediately. Fill in the gap, multiple choice, true or false, and short answer are among the most common exercises. Each chapter closes with suggestions for further reading. Additionally, the workbook includes a section answering the different questions and exercises raised in the first 155 pages. The didactic nature of the workbook is augmented by an additional glossary of medical terms which closes the edition.

Regarding the contents, after a brief introduction in Chapter 1, "Introduction to communication disorders," dealing with basic notions of human communication and its breakdown, and the disciplines relevant to its study, the volume starts with a catalogue of deficits detectable during childhood. Chapters 2 and 3 include developmental/genetic disorders. Chapter 2, "Developmental speech disorders," focuses on cases of cleft palate (and lip), developmental dysarthria, and developmental verbal dyspraxia. Chapter 3, "Developmental language disorders," groups together syndromes of very diverse aetiology such as developmental phonological disorder, developmental dyslexia, specific language impairment, autism spectrum disorder, Landau-Kleffner syndrome, intellectual disability, and childhood traumatic brain injury.

Mental disorders are discussed in Chapter 4, "Communication disorders in mental illness." The topic includes emotional and behavioural disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

As in the case of childhood disorders, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to acquired/degenerative speech and language disorders in adults. Chapter 5, “Acquired speech disorders,” is built around glossectomy, acquired dysarthria, and apraxia of speech. In Chapter 6, “Acquired language disorders,” very dissimilar deficits are grouped together. The discussion includes cases of acquired aphasia, right-hemisphere language disorders, traumatic brain injury, and dementia.

Voice, fluency, and hearing disorders, which may affect children and adults, are the topics of discussion in Chapters 7–9. Chapter 7, “Disorders of voice,” deals with organic and functional voice disorders, as well as cases of laryngectomy, and gender dysphoria. Chapter 8, “Disorders of fluency,” includes the description of both developmental and acquired stuttering and cluttering. The last chapter, Chapter 9, includes a discussion of “Hearing disorders.” Cases of conductive and sensorineural hearing loss and cases of cochlear implantation are the topics of discussion in this final chapter.

Although Cummings claims that this workbook “aims to give SLT students extensive practice in identifying and characterizing the full range of communication disorders” (p. ix), its interactive nature, and the inclusion of medical, psychological, and linguistic factors, makes it interesting to students of a wider range of disciplines involved in the analysis of clinical data, and those mentors looking for practical resources. It also constitutes a good auto-evaluation of the basics of speech and language evaluation for more advanced readers. More importantly, this contribution provides a novel and updated guide to the everyday needs of clinical practice. This is exemplified by the inclusion of rare practices and syndromes (e.g., glossectomy or Landay–Kleffner syndrome, discussed in Chapters 5 and 3, respectively), and the attention to users’ needs, as in cases of gender dysphoria (Chapter 7). Consequently, Cummings’ (2014) workbook constitutes a useful tool for clinical and academic settings, both in order to train students and in order to prepare practical sessions. As Bastiaanse, Knight, and Whitworth highlight in the back cover, an excellent instance of an “attractive,” “innovative,” and “illustrative” handbook.

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