The Influence of Parkinson’s Disease on Referential Cohesion
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Background
Motor speech disorders in individuals with diseases of the basal ganglia (BG) are well documented [1]. Recent studies of diseases of the BG suggest that the BG also play a critical role in expressive language production [2]. The BG are connected to the cerebral cortex via a family of cortical-BG-thalamic-cortical circuits that are distinguished by their unique function [3]. Extensive connections exist between most areas of the cerebral cortex particularly the frontal lobes, that are critical to expressive language production [4]. The BG and these same connections are susceptible to disease that negatively influences their role in successful performance for both expressive language and motor speech.

Successful expressive language production contains the linking of meaning across sentences or cohesion [5]. Cohesion occurs via the use of cohesive markers, which are words that direct the listener to information found outside individual sentences [5]. Disruption of cohesion has been observed in a variety of neurological disorders including: AD [6, 7], TBI [8-10], CVA [7, 11], and in normal young and elderly adults [7, 12]. An examination of the influences of BG disease on the cohesiveness of narrative discourse has not been reported in the current literature.

Purpose: To examine the effects of PD on the use of cohesion during discourse production.

Hypothesis: Individuals with PD will exhibit differences in total number of reference cohesive ties and percent complete reference cohesive ties (cohesive adequacy).

Methods
Participants: 12 subjects with idiopathic PD (Hoehn & Yahr Stage 2-3) and 12 age, education, ethnicity and gender matched neurologically intact controls.

Procedure:
Standardized Assessments: Mini-Mental Status Exam, Boston Naming Test, Wechsler Memory Scale-Logical Memory I.

Narrative Discourse Collection: Each subject was instructed to discuss three topics: a typical day, a memorable vacation, and their family, for a minimum of 3-minutes. Standardized verbal cues were provided to continue narratives when the 3-minute minimum was not achieved. All narratives were audio-taped.

Measures of Referential Cohesion: Total number of reference cohesive ties and percent complete reference cohesive ties (cohesive adequacy) were completed.

Results
No significant differences were observed on baseline cognitive and language measures (MMSE, WMS-LMI, BNT) (Table 1). No significant differences observed in the total number of reference cohesive ties produced for the three narratives (typical day, p=0.16; vacation, p=0.49; family, p=0.90) (Figure 1) or percent correct use of complete reference cohesive ties (cohesive adequacy) (typical day, p=0.17; vacation, p=0.15; family, p=0.25) (Figure 2).

Table 1. Demographic, Cognitive, and Language Comparisons for PD and Controls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>PD Subjects</th>
<th>Controls</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (yr)</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (yr)</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNT</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>0.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Age</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Education</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions
In this pilot study of individuals in relatively early disease states, we observed no significant differences in the use of reference cohesive ties. Disruption of cohesion is a feature of discourse production that has the potential to be masked in PD by more commonly observed and reported motor speech deficits. Since cohesion is believed to facilitate the continuity of meaning in narrative discourse, future studies are needed to measure cohesion in more advanced disease states. Disruptions in cohesion can indicate a more global disruption of language use that is traditionally believed to be preserved in PD.

References