**NEUROLOGY IN LITERATURE**

**Some speech disorders**

I have found three descriptions of dysphasia in the books of Dickens. Cleopatra Skewton is probably diarrheic, and perhaps there is a suggestion that her motor disability is bilateral, but she clearly makes dysphasic errors in speech and there is one suggestion that her limb disability has been right sided. Sir Leicester Dedlock suffers a hemiparesis (the side is not referred to), after a transient ischaemic attack. Both he and Cleopatra Skewton (a typical example of Dickens' sometimes grotesque humour) fare rather better when writing suggesting that Dickens, at least in the case of Sir Leicester, assumed that the written speech of dysphasic subjects would be free of errors. If Dickens was describing the occurrence of dysphasia in association with a right hemiparesis, he anticipated Broca's description, though not that of Dax.1

Sinclair Lewis inadvertently provides the sentence commonly used for assessing repetition in aphasic patients and Joyce and Wodehouse give examples of phrases commonly used, at least by earlier generations of neurologists, for the assessment of dysarthria. I have not found the original source for such phrases as West Register Street, Irish Constabulary, and British Constitution although all are mentioned in Monrad-Krohn.2

The unfortunate Mr Hodgkins, as described by Richard Gough's somewhat idiosyncratic spelling, would seem to have developed a permanent cerebellar dysarthria as the consequence of alcoholism, as perhaps may be the fate of Webster.

**Richard Gough, 1834, The History of Myddle**

This Mr Hodgkins made it his practice to goe to the alehouse dayluye, and when hee came home drunke hee could goe as well as when hee was sober; but hee could not speake as others might understand him and att last hee had got an habit of mashing att all times, soe that when hee was sober a man could hardly understand him.

**Charles Dickens, 1843–4, Martin Chuzzlewit**

He spoke to them in something of his own voice too, but sharpened and made hollow, like a dead man's face. What he would have said, God knows. He seemed to utter words, but they were such as man had never heard. And this was the most fearful circumstance of all, to see him standing there, gabbling in an unearthly tongue.

**Charles Dickens, 1846–8, Dombey and Son**

Powerful remedies were resorted to; opinions given that she would rally from this shock, but would not survive another; and there she lay speechless, and star-


At length she began to recover consciousness, and in some degree the power of motion, though not yet of speech. One day the use of her right hand returned; and showing it to her maid who was in attendance on her, and appearing very uneasy in her mind, she made signs for a pencil and some paper. . . . After much painful scrawling and erasing, and putting in of wrong characters, which seemed to tumble out of the pencil of their own accord, the old woman produced this document: "Rose-coloured curtains."

"Now, my dearest Grangeby," said Mrs Skewton, "You must positively prom," she cut some of her words short, and cut out others altogether, "come down very soon." . . . "Serious wretch, who's he?" lisped Cleopatra. . . . "My dearest Edith—Grangeby—it's most trordniny thing," said Cleopatra, pettishly. . . . "I won't have vistors—really don't want vistors," she said; "Little repose—and all that sort of thing—is what I quire. No obious brutes must proach me till I've shaken off this numbness;" . . .

**Charles Dickens, 1853, Bleak House**

Something frozen and fixed is upon his manner, over and above its usual shell of hautiness, and Mr Bucket soon detects an unusual slowness in his speech, with now and then a curious trouble in beginning, which occasions him to utter inarticulate sounds. . . . But now he can only whisper, and what he whispers sounds like what it is—mere jumble and jargon. . . . After vainly trying to make himself understood in speech, he makes signs for a pencil. So inexpressively that they cannot at first understand him. . . . The slate comes into again, but the word he wants to write he cannot remember. . . .

Sir Leicester, lying in his bed, can speak a little, though with difficulty and indistinctness.

"No. In addition to my older malady, I have had a sudden and bad attack. Something that deadens, making an endeavour to pass one hand down one side, "and confuses," touching his lips. . . .

**Arnold Bennett, 1907, The ghost**

At the age of three, just as I was beginning to talk easily, I became, for a period, subject to fits; and in one of these I lost the power of speech. . . . I could hear and understand, but I could not speak. (He regains his speech when he finds his father's hanging body.)

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Marcel Proust, 1913, Remembrance of things past. Vol 1 Swann's way. Moreover, the name Swann, with which I had for so long been familiar, had now become for me (as happens with certain aphasics in the case of the most ordinary words) a new name.

James Joyce, 1922, Ulysses Your attention! We’re nay that fou. The Leith Police dismiss us.

Sinclair Lewis, 1923, Babbitt

"And there’s no if, and or but about it!

Marcel Proust, 1927, Time regained, Vol 3 Of the two, one, the intellectual one, passed his time in complaining that he suffered from progressive aphasia, that he constantly pronounced one word, one letter by mistake for another.

PG Wodehouse, undated, The story of Webster, from Mr Mulliner’s relations

Webster, like the Stag at Eve, had now drunk his fill. He had left the pool of alcohol and was walking round in slow, meditative circles. From time to time he mewed tentatively, as if he were trying to say "British Constitution." His failure to articulate the syllables appeared to tickle him. . . .

G D PERKIN
Regional Neurosciences Centre, Charter Court Hospital, London W6 8RF, UK

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G D Perkin

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