

Patterns of Pragmatic Verbal Abilities in Subjects with First Episode Psychosis and Matched Healthy Controls

C. Perlini¹, A. Tavano², V. Marinelli³, O. Danzi³, M. Bellani³, G. Rambaldelli³, N. Dusi³, A. Lasalvia⁴, G. De Girolamo⁵, A. Fioritti⁶, P. Santonastaso⁷, G. Neri⁸, D. Ghigi⁹, M. Miceli¹⁰, S. Scarone¹¹, A. Cocchi¹², S. Torresani¹³, M. Ruggeri¹⁴, **P. Brambilla**¹⁵, And the GET UP GROUP¹⁶

¹Section of Clinical Psychology Dept of Public Health and Community Medicine ICBN, University of Verona, Verona, Italy ; ²Institute of Psychology, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany ; ³Section of Psychiatry Dept of Public Health and Community Medicine ICBN, University of Verona, Verona, Italy ; ⁴Section of Psychiatry Dept of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Verona and Azienda Ospedaliera Integrata Verona, Verona, Italy ; ⁵IRCCS, Centro S. Giovanni di Dio Fatebenefratelli, Brescia, Italy ; ⁶Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS, Bologna, Italy ; ⁷Dept of Psychiatry, University of Padova, Padova, Italy ; ⁸Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS, Modena, Italy ; ⁹Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS, Rimini, Italy ; ¹⁰Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS, Firenze, Italy ; ¹¹Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS S.Paolo, Milano, Italy ; ¹²Dept of Mental Health, Azienda Ospedaliera Ospedale Niguarda Ca' Granda Programma 2000, Milano, Italy ; ¹³Dept of Mental Health, Azienda ULSS, Bolzano, Italy ; ¹⁴Section of Psychiatry, University of Verona and Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Verona, Verona, Italy ; ¹⁵DISM, University of Udine ICBN, Udine, Italy ; ¹⁶GET UP GROUP, .., Italy

Introduction: Pragmatic abilities play a crucial role in daily functioning and have been suggested to be impaired in schizophrenia. Nevertheless, patterns of such deficits at the onset of the illness still needs to be elucidated.

Objectives: To outline pragmatic abilities in the first episode of psychosis (FEP).

Aims: To evaluate pragmatic verbal performance and its relationship with pre-frontal abilities in FEP subjects recruited in a large randomized multi-center controlled study (GET UP).

Methods: 58 FEP (mean age±SD:34±9 years; 46% males) and 58 1:1 matched healthy controls (HC) were assessed on the metaphor and idiom comprehension subtask of the MEC Protocol and with WCST. A PAF Analysis with Promax rotation of open (=spontaneous explanations) and closed (=multiple choice) metaphors/idioms and WCST variables was conducted.

Results: A 3-factor latent structure emerged in both groups but partially different patterns emerged. As for FEP, open metaphor/idiom explanations loaded into Factor 1 (Self-generated inferences); Factor 2 (Feedback-generated inferences) was loaded by WCST perseverative errors and by closed metaphor explanations. Finally, closed metaphors/idioms loaded into Factor 3 (Inhibition). As for HC, Factor 1 was similarly loaded but explained less variance; Factor 2 was qualitatively different (Reasoning, self+feedback-generated inferences), being loaded by the WCST number of categories and by open metaphors/idioms. Factor 3 was loaded by closed metaphors.

Conclusions: Findings suggest a shared underlying cognitive construct in self-generating perceptual inferences both for verbal pragmatics and pre-frontal skills in HC and patients, while a failure to integrate different sources of perceptual evidence is found only in FEP.