

## “Topic shifts in the spontaneous interaction of schizophrenia”

Merav Badash, Kibbutzim College of Education

The psychiatric category of disorganized speech in schizophrenia may be manifested in language across (derailment) or within (incoherence) clauses through unexpected topic shifts. Three patients diagnosed with schizophrenia conversed individually with a psychiatrist who elicited information on various topics, e.g. background information, hobbies, likes and dislikes, etc. Conversations were transcribed and coded for consistency of field (Martin, 1992), reference, turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974), and thematic structures (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Findings were compared to patients with non-psychotic psychiatric disorders matched for age and gender.

Topic shifting among patients was marked by (1) moving fields with atypical reference ("the" for presenting and "a" for presuming references), (2) short and intertwining referential chains, and (3) unclear reference. Speakers with schizophrenia created discontinuous participant chains across Themes and used incomplete clauses. In the turn-taking system (1) patients repeated the interviewer's opening without adding information, (2) used lengthy turns with unclear references, and (3) used textual Themes as topic shift devices. In thematic structures, most references in topical Themes were exophoric, and interpersonal Themes were rarely used. Speakers also departed from the main thematic sequences of linear progression and Theme iteration. Their unclear utterances did not make use of linguistic features simultaneously to initiate topics.