

ABSTRACT

Recent findings suggest that episodic recall is the most sensitive discriminator between patients with mild Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and the normal elderly while semantic memory tends best to differentiate between moderate and severe AD patients. The present study examined the episodic and semantic memory of AD patients with two paradigms, namely the Hong Kong List Learning Test and the Pictorial Conceptual Organization Test. The performance of 28 AD patients was compared to that of 30 normal controls. AD patients did significantly worse in terms of acquisition and retention and also benefitted significantly less from external organization cues. In the discriminant function analysis, the rate of forgetting in the first ten minutes was found to be one of the best predictors for differentiating between AD patients and controls with 83% of the cases classified. Together with the total retention score in the blocked condition, up to 91% of the cases could be correctly classified. On the other hand, in the differentiation between mild and moderate AD, semantic clustering in the blocked condition was found to be the best predictor with 79 % of the cases correctly classified.

In the Pictorial Conceptual Organization Test, AD patients as compared to the controls tended to use more perceptual cues rather than abstract conceptual knowledge. The tendency to use perceptual cues for classification was found to increase with the severity of dementia. Furthermore, performance on the thematic task differentiated the AD patients from the controls while that on the the taxonomic task differentiated the moderate from the mild AD patients. These results were discussed in the light of the hypothesis of the structural alteration of semantic networks in AD.