

# Neuropsychological rehabilitation of intellectual activity

## in a patient with right brain injury


### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Traditionally, since the onset of neuropsychology, the right hemisphere (HD) has been considered as non-dominant or minor, because lesions in it, do not produce alterations in cognitive functioning (language, writing, reading, etc.). But, recent studies have shown that HD plays an active role in a number of higher psychological processes, such as the special global analysis, recognition and evocation of auditory patterns, motor sequence, recognition of faces and emotions, etc., but there are not considered for rehabilitation. **Objective:** Carry out a qualitative analysis of the neuropsychological alterations presented in a male patient with damage in the right frontotemporal region due to an automobile accident and describes the effects of a neuropsychological rehabilitation program. The neuropsychological evaluation and the rehabilitation program were carried out under the theoretical methodological principles of the Luria proposal and the Cultural Historical paradigm. **Material and methods:** A pretest-posttest research design was used. The neuropsychological evaluation was carried out through the protocols: Neuropsychological evaluation for adults (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2013), Assessment of the Sphere of Affects and Emotions in patients with brain damage (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017a) and Assessment of Intellectual Activity in patients with brain damage (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017b), as well as neurological and electroencephalographic evaluation **Results:** Final assessment pointed out positive changes in the process of intellectual activity on perceptive and verbal levels. The patient managed to return to university studies. **Conclusions:** Our results show that it is possible to define the mechanisms, which underline the clinical syndrome of the patient could be described as loss of involuntary regulation and mild difficulties with global perception of information on perceptive and verbal level. These difficulties were reflected in all kind of intellectual activity, but did not affected simple operations

30 such as reproduction, repetition, direct naming, copying, simple arithmetic operations  
31 and so on.

32 **Key words:** neuropsychological rehabilitation, brain injury, right hemisphere,  
33 intellectual activity, qualitative neuropsychology.

## 34 **Introduction**

35 It is known that the syndromes of dysfunction of right hemisphere caused by brain  
36 damage are related to acalculia, dysgraphia, pragmatic difficulties, impaired  
37 visuospatial and emotional functioning and behavioral disorders as well. Among  
38 them interpersonal difficulties and ASD  symptoms could be mentioned (Alonso  
39 & Fuentes, 2001; Artigas-Pallares, 2002; Bausela, 2005; Benson, 1988; Brown,  
40 2002; Colome, Sans, Lopez-Sala & Boix, 2009).

41 Other descriptions have been made only in specific and isolated processes such as  
42 language, indicating deficits in prosody, lexical-semantic processing of words and /  
43 or discourse and pragmatic skills and the relationship between language and context  
44 (Barroso & Nieto, 1996; Joannette, et al., 2008). No relation between such  
45 disturbances or common explanation of their appearance has been done.

46 It is also known that brain injuries, in dependence of type of lesion and location, can  
47 affect the understanding not only of the meaning, but also the sense of the  
48 information. Such difficulties can be referred in cases of both left and right damages.  
49 Alterations in the decoding (in alexia syndromes) are frequently assessed by tasks  
50 included in the batteries designed for aphasic patients (Cuetos & Gonzalez-Nosti,  
51 2009; Goodglas & Kaplan, 1996). However, the changes in the understanding of  
52 texts, despite their greater frequency and ecological importance, have received less  
53 attention and few tools of assessment (Garcia & Lopez, 2011; Sampedro, et al.,  
54 2013). It is important to stress that it is precisely through the evaluation of intellectual  
55 activity, which include text comprehension together with other complex tasks, which  
56 has opened new possibilities for understanding of various neuropsychological  
57 syndromes (Quintanar & Solovieva, 2000; Solovieva, Chavez & Quintanar, 2001;  
58 Tsvetkova, 1977; Tsvetkova, 1985). Neuropsychological assessment of intellectual

59 activity has not be limited by texting of isolated psychological functions, such as  
60 memory, attention, sepach, perception and so on.

61 Specific modern term of “executive functions” can not be easily related to  
62 assessment of ~~intelectual~~ activity, because ~~soppositely~~ executive functions regulate  
63 intelectual activity itself. So, as executive functions are determined in literature as  
64 cognitive skills of the prefrontal cortex (CPF) that allow set goals, design plans,  
65 follow sequences, selecting the appropriate behaviors and initiating activities, as well  
66 as to self-regulate the behavior, monitor tasks, select behavior, and have flexibility in  
67 the cognitive work and the organization of the task proposal in time and space (Gil,  
68 Romero, Berrio, Hernández, & Lopera, 2103; Luria, 1988; Tirapu-Ustárroz, Cordero-  
69 Andrés, Luna-Lario & Hernáez-Goñi, 2017), it seems that they do not confirm  
70 intelectual activity, but take a part in it. Another point is that executive functions are  
71 related to frontal orbital lobes functioning, but intelectual activity can not be related  
72 nor located just in one brain zone. At least from the point of view of Luria’s  
73 nueropsychology it would be better to refer that intelectual activity at level of brain  
74 functioning includes a complex structure of psychophysiological mechanisms and the  
75 deficit of intelectual activity could be related to some of this mechanisms or  
76 components of functional system (Solovieva, 2014).

77 Our study was carried out on the basis of neuropsychological conception developed  
78 by Luria (1988) and cultural historical paradigm. According to Luria (2005),  
79 neuropsychological diagnosis should be based on identification of predominant  
80 mechanism (or mechanisms), which underline the clinic picture as a total unity. Such  
81 mechanisms can affect different levels: neuroanatomic, psychophysiological,  
82 psychological, verbal and linguistic (Quintanar, Solovieva & León-Carrión, 2011). All  
83 kinds of different symphoms and difficulties should be resumed into the same clinic  
84 picture. According to this conception, neuropsychological rehabilitation should  
85 represent harmonious continuation of assessment, which can ~~pricese~~ and analyse  
86 the syndrome (Quintanar, 2002; Tsvetkova, 1988).

87 According to traditional or cognitive perspective, the ~~sindrom~~ is a constalation of  
88 symphoms or difficulties with no common base between them. According to Luria’s  
89 perspective, neuropsychological syndrome is disturbance of some cognitive

processes with preservation of the others. Altered processes include same specific brain mechanism, which might be understood as neuropsychological cause of the defects. Preserved processes don't include this neuropsychological mechanism or factor. The classical syndrome in Luria's theory is aphasia as a complex alteration of verbal actions caused by brain damage. The clinical picture might be studied from neuroanatomical, psychophysiological, psychological and linguistic levels.

Luria himself and his colleagues and pupils have fulfilled precise analyses of neuropsychological syndromes caused by damage in left brain hemisphere (Akhutina, 1989; Glozman, 2004; Luria, 1979). The precise analysis of types of syndromes caused by right hemisphere damage is still missing.

The analysis of the structure of intellectual activity permits to detect conserved and disturbed elements of such operations. According to activity theory, such elements are: object of activity, goal of activity, orientation base and executive operations (Leontiev, 1981; Leontiev, 1983). For example, it is possible that in some cases of brain damage, the object of activity or motive suffers. In other cases it is possible to detect alteration of orientation base of action or of executive functional part of action (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017b).

It is quite often that in cases of brain injury orientation base of action suffers, but on basis of diverse mechanisms in different lesions. In our previous study with rehabilitation of a patient with semantic aphasia (left posterior cortical brain damage) specific alteration of orientation and execution of all operations, which include spatial analysis and synthesis was observed (Vargas, Solovieva, Sánchez, González & Rojas, 2011). External orientation proposed by a therapist could help the patient to reorganize gradually appropriate execution of intellectual actions on perceptive and verbal level inclusion spatial analysis and synthesis (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017a).

The goal of neuropsychological assessment is to facilitate functional analysis of brain mechanisms within functional systems of psychological actions. The goal of psychological analysis of structure of intellectual activity is to precise the components of intellectual activity in order to propose correct tasks and orientation during neuropsychological rehabilitation.

In cases of adult patients with local brain damage the success of rehabilitation depends on adequate detection of conserved and disturbed structural components of intellectual activity and of specific brain mechanisms, which guarantee fulfillment of such activity. We stress again that such mechanisms are known for lesions of left hemisphere thankful to studies of Luria's neuropsychological school. In case of right hemisphere such mechanisms have to be concretized.

The aim of the present study is to show the effects of implementation of program for rehabilitation of intellectual activity in case of right brain damage. The rehabilitation is based on previous neuropsychological assessment according to Luria's methodology of syndromic analysis and on analyses of structure of intellectual activity following proposals of main representatives of activity theory such as Leontiev (1983), Galperin (2000), Talizina (2009). Their proposals were adapted to clinic procedures of assessment and rehabilitation in our previous publications (Solovieva, Chávez & Quintanar, 2001).

## Method

The participant of our study was a young male patient, 23 years old, university student of third semester of Law Faculty, who suffered traumatic brain injury as a result of car accident. The aunt of the patient refers to the fact that before his accident her nephew was too serious and even angry sometimes. After the accident, the patient started to show more affective and communicative behavior. At the same time, the patient became more emotionally vulnerable.

Neurological analysis detected adequate functioning of motor, visual and kinesthetic primary and secondary zones. Tomography showed hypodensity in the fronto-temporal region of the right cerebral hemisphere. EEG data obtained by bipolar and monopolar montage and visual qualitative analyses has shown local abnormal patterns of groups of theta oscillations (4-7 Hz) in frontal, central and temporal sectors of the right hemisphere, indicating dysfunctional stage of cortical zone of right hemisphere (Morán-Paz, Solovieva, Quintanar & Machinskaya, 2013). Neuropsychological assessment was performed with the help of qualitative tests (Tables 1, 2 and 3). The tables 1, 2 and 3 show types of errors detected during the initial evaluation.

**Table 1. Tasks of the neuropsychological evaluation for adults  
(Quintanar and Solovieva, 2013)**

Neuropsychological mechanism	Task	Type of error
<b>Kinesthetic integration</b>	Reproduction of finger positions.	No difficulties.
	Object recognition.	No difficulties.
	Reproduction of articulator phone positions.	No difficulties.
	Repetition of syllables with similar sounds per point or mode.	No difficulties.
	Determination of the number of sounds in words.	No difficulties.
<b>Kinetic melody</b>	Motor coordination test.	No difficulties
	Copy and sequence continuation.	No difficulties
	Repeat word pairs.	No difficulties
<b>Phonemic integration.</b>	Repetition of syllables.	No difficulties
	Identification of phonemes.	No difficulties
	Identification of sounds in words	No difficulties
<b>Retention of information.</b>	Playing finger positions in opposite hands.	No difficulties
	Involuntary audio-verbal retention.	Contaminations. Changes of order of words.
	Voluntary audio-verbal retention.	No difficulties.
<b>Spatial integration</b>	Spatial visuomotor retention	Changes of order.
	Audio-verbal retention with heterogeneous interference	Distortions and difficulties with proportions of the elements.
	Copy of a house	No difficulties
	Understanding of orders.	No difficulties
	Body scheme.	No difficulties
	Comprehension of sentences.	No difficulties
	Perception of numbers and letters	No difficulties
<b>Object images</b>	Drawing of an animal.	Omission of essential features in the drawings.
	Drawing of a cat.	
	Drawing of a mouse.	

**Table 2. Tasks of the Protocol of Assessment of the Sphere of Affects and Emotions in patients with brain damage (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017 a)**

Task	Types of error
Recognition of emotions in artistic paintings.	Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations.
	Difficulties in the representation of emotions.

Evocation of emotions in own facial and corporal expressions	Difficulties of finding for appropriate title according to the picture.
Choice of a title for artistic painting.	Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations
Identification of emotions in verses.	Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations.
Identification of emotions in texts written in prose.	Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations.

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**Table 3. Tasks of the Protocol of Assessment of Intellectual Activity in patients with brain damage (Solovieva & Quintanar, 2017).**

Task	Types of error
Identification of emotional expressions in artistic drawing by comparison of similitudes and differences.	Difficulty in understanding of the meaning and poor analysis of visual information. Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations.
Identification of meaning in texts	Impossibility
Elaboration of the plan (scheme) for the text.	Problems with exact meaning and collateral associations.
Production of text title	Difficulty in understanding of the meaning and poor analysis of verbal information.
Identification of emotions of the characters of the text.	Impossibility. Pathological inertia and verification difficulties. Collateral associations.
Written composition according to selected topic, according to previously created own plan.	Impossibility.
Understanding of proverbs	Pathological inertia and verification difficulties

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153 Analysis of results of neuropsychological assessment concluded conservation  
 154 of phonemic integration, kinesthetic integration, perceptive visual images and kinetic  
 155 melody. Analysis of the results of neuropsychological assessment together with  
 156 assessment of intellectual activity pointed out severe disturbance of global  
 157 perception and involuntary retention of diverse types of information. Mild difficulties  
 158 with regulation and direction of actions to objectives with conservation of selective  
 159 control of activity were identified. The patient was always critical and orientated in  
 160 time and person. He understood that had committed mistakes, but was unable to  
 161 correct them independently.

## Program of rehabilitation

The patient was included into the program of neuropsychological rehabilitation divided into two periods. The duration of the first period was of 4 months. Each individual session dured one hour, the frecuency was three sessions per weak. The sessions of the period of rehabilitation were divided in three stages (Table 4).

**Table 4. First period of neuropsychological rehabilitation  
(Juárez, Solovieva & Machinskaya, 2013)**

Stage	Preliminary stage	First stage	Second stage
<b>Number of Sessions</b>	2	13	21
<b>Goals of stages</b>	Establishment of contact with the patient and explication of goals of rehabilitation, necessity of independence and variety of activities at home	Strengthening of organization and planning of intellectual activity.  Introduction of strategies for organization of remembering.	Work with written production.
<b>Tasks</b>	Introduction of rules for table games.	Complex table games with rules  Verbal description of artistic pictures with observation and analysis of features, actions and characters  Work with strategies for understanding of read texts.  Solving of arithmetic problems with one operation.  Creation of words using external letters.	Retention of series of images and artistic pictures.  Elaboration of plans for artistic texts.  Solving arithmetic problems with multiple operations.  Work with grammar structures in written sentences.

After the first period of rehabilitation the patient has a ~~brake~~ of six months. Afterwards, the second period of rehabilitation of the same duration took place.

The sessions of the second block of rehabilitation were divided in two parts: intellectual activity at perceptual level and intellectual activity at logic-verbal level (Table 5).



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**Table 5. Second period of neuropsychological rehabilitation.**

Stage	Perceptual stage	Logic-verbal stage
Sessions	15.	16.
<b>Objective</b>	To guarantee analysis and synthesis relationships of cause-consequence between elements of texts and artistic drawings in order to achieve understanding of the profound meaning of complex information.	To optimize identification of essential verbal elements according to their meaning. Identification and differentiation of essential elements of verbal information and facilitating of access to the understanding of the whole meaning of the text.
<b>Tasks</b>	<p>Observation of paintings and oral comments of all details.</p> <p>Analysis of all actions and characters and writing of correspondent sentences.</p> <p>Writing of short texts according of the content of paintings.</p>	<p>Reading of text orally.</p> <p>Elaboration of plans using key phrases.</p> <p>Writing of plans for texts; elaboration of scheme for texts.</p>
<b>Instruments and materials</b>	<p>Therapist Instructions.</p> <p>Orientation cards with the order for analysis of paintings.</p> <p>Artistic paintings.</p>	<p>Therapist Instructions.</p> <p>Orientation cards with key words for texts.</p> <p>Descriptive, narrative and artistic texts.</p>

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178 Some examples of orientation cards for the order of analysis of paintings are shown  
 179 below. The patient had to observe the picture, comment all features, characters,  
 180 colors, actions and so on. Examples of questions used during orientation in tasks of  
 181 analysis of pictures:

- 182 1) Find the character of the picture.
- 183 2) What are they doing (what is happening to them)?
- 184 3) Where are they?
- 185 4) What is the whole situation?
- 186 5) Which are the elements (objects) of the painting?

187 After the work with the orientation card and answering to all questions, the patient  
188 had to identify the general meaning of the whole situation represented in the  
189 painting.

190 The external orientation consisted in directed questions, which helped the patient to  
191 detect the features of the images. Examples of questions were used during  
192 orientation for identification of the meaning of pictures:

193 1) What do you think is represented in the picture?

194 2) What is it he whole meaning?

195 3) What did the author draw this painting?

196 Finally, the patient was encouraged to try to realize independent drawing of the most  
197 important details or impressions of the painting. The Figures 1 and 2 show examples  
198 of the paintings and the drawings of the patient.

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218 **Figure 1. Examples of artistic paintings used during rehabilitation by Goya, Turner, Constable, Ingres,**  
 219 **and Delacroix.**



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**Figure 2. Examples of the executions of the patient.**

During the work with the reading and understanding of the texts, orientation card was used in order to achieve elaboration of the written plan for the texts.

Example of the questions used for orientation card:

- 1) Divide the text into parts according to their meaning.
- 2) Identify the first part according to its meaning.
- 3) Think a subtitle for this part of the text.
- 5) Write the first subtitle.
- 6) Check if you like this subtitle.
- 7) Identify the second part of the text and so on.
- 8) Write down the whole plan for the text.
- 9) Write sentences explaining each point of the plan.
- 10) Review the sentences and try to obtain the complete text.

During rehabilitation the texts by Myriam Laurini, Rolo Diez, Tomás Borges, Alfonso Lara, Nicolas Machiavelli, Edgar Allan Poe were used together with didactic texts on different topics.

The Figure 3 shows examples of executions of the patient.

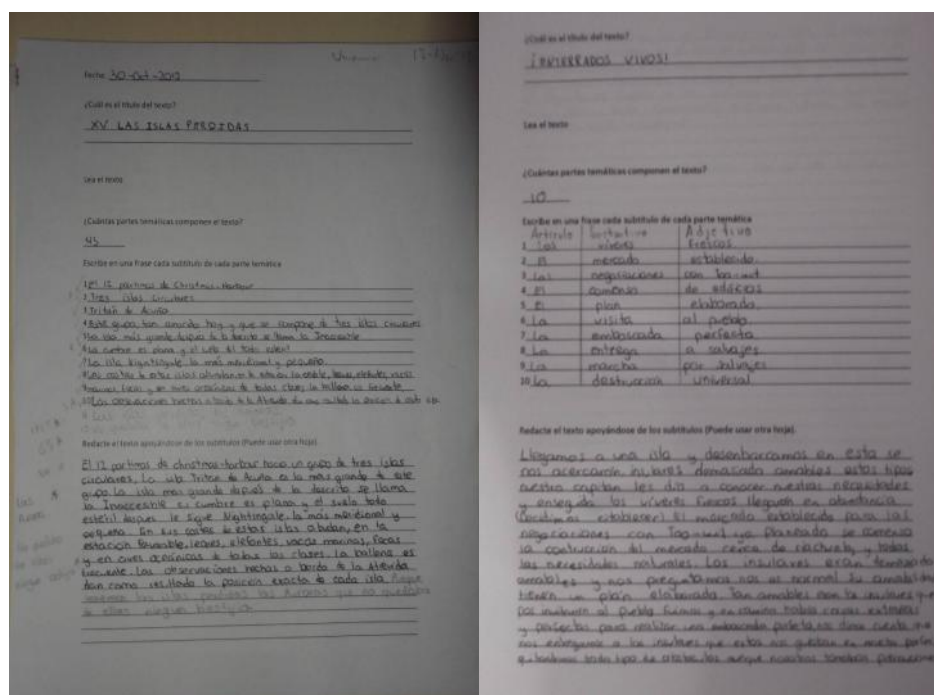


Figure 3. Examples of a plan for the text created by the patient.

## Results of rehabilitation

After the work with two period of rehabilitation, final neuropsychological assessment was carried out. The second assessment have showed the disappearance of systematic errors such as impulsivity, lack of order, difficulties with verification, disinhibiting, collateral associations, pathological inertia, omission of essential features of perceptive and verbal information. During the final evaluation, mechanisms of involuntary regulation and global perception of information showed better functioning, which was reflected in significant improvement in tasks of intellectual activity.

The table 6 shows important changes observed after applying of the second period of the program of rehabilitation of intellectual activity.

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**Table 6. Improvements in intellectual activity as result of rehabilitation.**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Before the second rehabilitation cycle</b>	<b>After the second rehabilitation cycle</b>
1. Copy of the house.	Distortion of the elements of the house.	Correct fulfillment, no distortions in the elements.
2. Drawings by of objects by instructions.	Luck of essential features in the drawings.	Presence of essential features in the drawings.
3. Reproduction and evocation of figures.	Difficulties with reproduction of proper order, distortions, omissions and contaminations.	Correct execution.
4. Elaboration of a plan for the text.	Presence of pathological inertia. Omission of essential details.	Elaboration of the coherent plan.
5. Interpretation of emotions in artistic drawings.	Difficulties and impossibility of identification of general sense, difficulties to identify similitudes and differences.	No difficulties in identification of emotional expression in paintings.
6. Representation of emotional expressions by the patients.	Difficulties of expressions.	No difficulties in identification of emotional expression.
7. Reading and understanding of poems.	Total impossibility and confusion.	Better understanding of the sense of poems.
8. Identification of emotion in texts.	Difficulties of understanding.	No difficulties in understanding.
9. Problems solution.	Difficulty in understanding of the meaning of the text of the problems and confusion with operations. Impulsive answers with no reflection.	Proper understanding and verification of mistakes during solution.
10. Oral expressions.	Presence of elements unrelated to the situation.	Disappearance of elements collateral associations. Adequate conversation.

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258 Examples of executions of the tasks with improvement achieved after the second  
 259 period of neuropsychological rehabilitation are presented below. Figure 4 shows  
 260 adequate representation of details and proportions in the task of the copy of the  
 261 house after rehabilitation. The perspective isn't clearly expressed in the copy before  
 262 rehabilitation.



263 Figure 4. The task of the copy of the house before and after rehabilitation.

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**Before**

**After**



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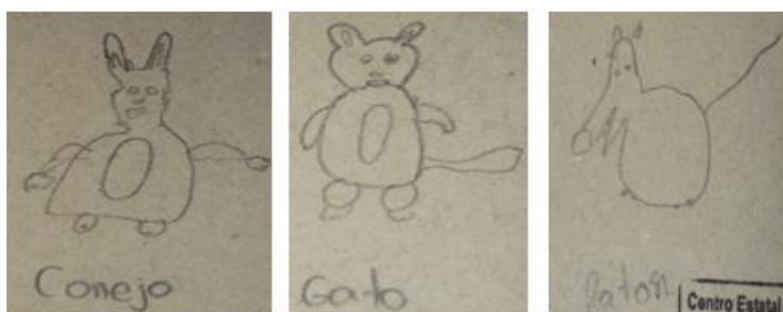
**Figure 4. Back home**

267 The figure 5 shows examples of independent drawing of objects by instruction before  
 268 and after rehabilitation. It is possible to notice the presence of essential features of  
 269 the drawn animals in the examples after rehabilitation in the contrast with the  
 270 drawing made before rehabilitation. In the drawings after rehabilitation it is possible  
 271 to recognize the dog, the cat and the mouse. The animals drawn before rehabilitation  
 272 aren't clear and are difficult to identify.

273 Figure 5. The task of drawing of the animals before and after rehabilitation.

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**Before**



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**After**





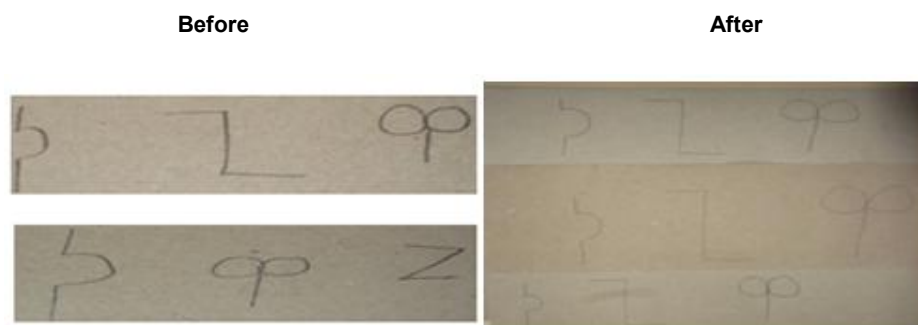
Figure 5. Drawing of a dog, a cat and a mouse before and after rehabilitation.

The Figure 6 shows the task of copying, evocation and posterior reproduction of figures before and after the second period of rehabilitation. There are no mistakes in conditions of heterogeneous interference were detected after rehabilitation.

Figure 6. The task of copy and evocation of figures before and after rehabilitation.



First series of images.



Second series of images.

Figure 6. Task of copying, evocation and reproduction of two series of figures before and after rehabilitation.

293 Positive results were also noticed in day-to-day life of the patient after the  
294 second period of rehabilitation. The general organization of intellectual activity  
295 improved considerably, the patient became able to complete his homework  
296 independently as well as other tasks of academic and domestic life.

297 All cognitive actions of the patient improved considerably thanks to the  
298 development of his planning, and in addition, his voluntary memory strategies were  
299 also favorably improved. As for personal behavior in general, it is important to  
300 mention that no irrelevant comments and collateral associations were noticed as  
301 important result of neuropsychological rehabilitation. The patient became able to tell  
302 stories and to express correctly events with more extensive and more coherent  
303 content. The patient managed to express emotions and emotional behavior of  
304 characters of stories he read at the sessions. The relatives have reported  
305 improvements in emotional control in their interpersonal relationships. The  
306 achievements, which are reflected in the final assessment, represent the possibility  
307 of rehabilitating intellectual activity at the high levels of complexity of perceptual and  
308 verbal intellectual tasks. In addition, the achievements have allowed the subject to  
309 establish better communication in his family and friends. The patient became able to  
310 drive and supervise his own automobile, activity of high personal significance for a  
311 young adult.

312 Finally, it should be mentioned that the patient, who was 24 years of age at  
313 the end of the program, was able to return to successfully to his university studies in  
314 law.

## 315 **Discussion and conclusions**

316 A classic approach to cases of brain damage in frontal region of right  
317 hemisphere is frequently focused on isolated functions of memory, spatial deficits  
318 and difficulties in the relationship between language and context or impossibility to  
319 automatize new actions (Barroso & Nieto, 1996; Maestú, Martín, Sola & Ortiz, 1999;  
320 Xomskaya, 2002). Some authors relate such difficulties to deficits in executive  
321 functions (Schoenemann, Seehan & Glotzer, 2005; Thoma & Daum, 2006). In our  
322 opinion executive functions cannot be understood as synonym of intellectual activity.  
323 The integrative analysis of intellectual activity of patients with right brain damage

324 according to Luria's neuropsychological approach is still missing in modern  
325 neuropsychology.

326 Our results show that it is possible to define the mechanisms, which underline  
327 the clinical syndrome of the patient could be described as loss of involuntary  
328 regulation (Xomskaya, 1987) and mild difficulties with global perception of  
329 information on perceptive and verbal level. These difficulties were reflected in all kind  
330 of intellectual activity, but did not affected simple operations such as reproduction,  
331 repetition, direct naming, copying, simple arithmetic operations and so on. We had  
332 already similar experience with other patients with right brain damage who presented  
333 similar difficulties (Solovieva, Pelayo, & Quintanar, 2002). We also stress that the  
334 methods of neuropsychological rehabilitation of young adults of high educational  
335 level should include creative intellectual tasks with consideration of the interests and  
336 cognition of the patients.

337 Our results could be summarized as follows:

- 338 • Neuropsychological mechanisms (factors) of frontal cortical subcortical  
339 damage could be expressed with terms of lack of involuntary regulation and  
340 global perception.
- 341 • Both mechanisms were significantly improved after 2 blocks of  
342 neuropsychological rehabilitation.
- 343 • Neuropsychological assessment and syndrome diagnosis according to Luria's  
344 approach is useful in cases of right brain damage.
- 345 • Qualitative analyses of neuropsychological syndrome and psychological  
346 structure of activity are essential methodological elements for elaboration and  
347 application of programs of rehabilitation in adult patients.

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