Memory fMRI predicts verbal memory decline after anterior temporal lobe resection

ABSTRACT

Objective: To develop a clinically applicable memory functional MRI (fMRI) method of predicting postsurgical memory outcome in individual patients.

Methods: In this prospective cohort study, 50 patients with temporal lobe epilepsy (23 left) and 26 controls underwent an fMRI memory encoding paradigm of words with a subsequent out-of-scanner recognition assessment. Neuropsychological assessment was performed preoperatively and 4 months after anterior temporal lobe resection, and at equal time intervals in controls. An event-related analysis was used to explore brain activations for words remembered and change in verbal memory scores 4 months after surgery was correlated with preoperative activations. Individual lateralization indices were calculated within a medial temporal and frontal region and compared with other clinical parameters (hippocampal volume, preoperative verbal memory, age at onset of epilepsy, and language lateralization) as a predictor of verbal memory outcome.

Results: In left temporal lobe epilepsy patients, left frontal and anterior medial temporal activations correlated significantly with greater verbal memory decline, while bilateral posterior hippocampal activation correlated with less verbal memory decline postoperatively. In a multivariate regression model, left lateralized memory lateralization index ($L_I \geq 0.5$) within a medial temporal and frontal mask was the best predictor of verbal memory outcome after surgery in the dominant hemisphere in individual patients. Neither clinical nor functional MRI parameters predicted verbal memory decline after nondominant temporal lobe resection.

Conclusion: We propose a clinically applicable memory fMRI paradigm to predict postoperative verbal memory decline after surgery in the language-dominant hemisphere in individual patients.

GLOSSARY

ATLR = anterior temporal lobe resection; CI = confidence interval; fMRI = functional MRI; FWE = family-wise error; LI = lateralization index; LTLE = left temporal lobe epilepsy; MTL = medial temporal lobe; PHG = parahippocampal gyrus; PPV = positive predictive value; RCI = reliable change index; RTLE = right temporal lobe epilepsy; TLE = temporal lobe epilepsy; WR = words remembered.

Anterior temporal lobe resection (ATLR) brings remission in 80% of patients with refractory temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE).1 Significant verbal memory loss occurs after 30% of speech dominant hemisphere ATLR2-5 and less commonly after nondominant ATLR.

Material specific memory encoding paradigms that predominantly activate the left (verbal) and right (visual) hemispheres have been investigated to predict memory decline after ATLR.6-8 During a verbal encoding task, greater left than right activation within the anterior medial temporal lobe (MTL) was a better predictor of verbal memory decline than preoperative list learning scores and functional MRI (fMRI) language lateralization index (LI).6 Several studies have investigated absolute activations rather than asymmetry images to predict postsurgical verbal memory decline using a LI within the MTL with mixed results.9,10 To date, lateralization of absolute activations to predict memory decline has only been investigated within the medial
temporal lobe.11–13 Using a verbal memory encoding paradigm, we showed that frontal and temporal activations were involved in successful verbal memory formation,14 suggesting that preoperative extratemporal activations may play a role in predicting postoperative verbal memory decline.

To develop a clinically applicable memory fMRI method for predicting postsurgical memory decline in individual patients, we performed the following:

1. Investigated which temporal and extratemporal brain activations were predictive of postsurgical verbal memory outcome after ATLR, using an event-related word encoding task
2. Devised a clinically applicable algorithm using objective fMRI LI parameters from an MTL and frontal region of interest to predict postsurgical verbal memory decline in individual patients
3. Compared memory fMRI to language fMRI and standard clinical parameters including age at onset of epilepsy, preoperative hippocampal volume, and preoperative memory score for predicting postsurgical memory outcome

METHODS Subjects. Fifty-seven patients (27 left) with medically refractory TLE undergoing epilepsy surgery at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London, UK, were prospectively studied. Prolonged interictal and ictal EEG-video telemetry confirmed ipsilateral seizure onset zones in all patients. Inclusion criteria included patients who underwent standard en bloc ATLR with resection of the hippocampus extending to mid brainstem level. Four patients (3 left TLE [LTLE]) were excluded as resection did not include the hippocampus. One right TLE (RTLE) patient was excluded as a previous lesionectomy included part of the anterior MTL. Two patients with IQ <70 (1 LTLE) were excluded. In total, 50 patients (23 LTLE) were included (table 1, table e-1 on the Neurology® Web site at Neurology.org).

All patients had structural MRI at 3T including hippocampal volume quantification (table 1). All patients received antiepileptic medication and spoke fluent English. Detailed neuropsychometry was performed before and 4 months after ATLR.

Twenty-six healthy native English-speaking controls were also studied (table 1). Handedness and language dominance were determined using a standardized questionnaire15 and language fMRI tasks.16 Asymmetry of expressive language activation was calculated within an inferior and middle frontal gyrus mask created using the WFU PickAtlas in SPM8.17 A bootstrap method was used to calculate language LI using SPM8. A LI of ±0.5 or ±0.5 was deemed strongly left or right lateralized, respectively. Forty-six patients (21 LTLE) were left lateralized, 2 bilateral (1 LTLE) and 2 (1 LTLE) right lateralized (table e-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Age, age at onset of epilepsy, and duration of epilepsy</th>
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<td>Age, y, median (IQR)</td>
<td>Age at onset, y, median (IQR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td>37 (24)</td>
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<td>LTLE</td>
<td>34 (17)</td>
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<td>RTLE</td>
<td>35 (22)</td>
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Abbreviations: HV = hippocampal volume; IQR = interquartile range; NART = National Adult Reading Test; RA = recognition accuracy; VL = verbal learning.

* Controls > patient group indicated, 2-tailed t test p < .005.
A button box was used to indicate if items were remembered, familiar, or novel. Words previously presented in the scanner were sorted as remembered, familiar, or forgotten. Recognition accuracy (%) was calculated as true positive − false positive.

**Data analysis.** Analysis used SPM8 (http://www.fil.ion.ucl.ac.uk/spm/). Imaging time series were realigned, normalized into standard anatomical space (using a scanner-specific template created from 30 controls, and 30 left and right hippocampal sclerosis patients), and smoothed with an 8-mm full-width at half maximum Gaussian kernel.

Event-related analysis. We compared the encoding-related responses for stimuli that were subsequently remembered with a 2-level event-related random-effects analysis.

**First level.** For each subject, delta functions of words remembered (WR) were convolved with the canonical hemodynamic response and its temporal derivative. The generated WR contrast image for each subject was used in the second-level analysis.

**Second level.** One-sample t tests were used to examine the group effect of each contrast. Differences between groups were explored with analysis of variance. We determined the relevance of fMRI memory activations using a simple regression model of WR activations with preoperative list learning scores.

Preoperative brain activations associated with greater/less postsurgical verbal memory decline were investigated using a simple regression model of change in list learning scores against WR activations. Language LIs were used as a covariate in second-level analyses.

Group activations were corrected for multiple comparisons family-wise error (FWE), p < 0.05. Group differences and correlations are reported at p < 0.001, uncorrected. All activations within the MTL are corrected for multiple comparisons FWE within a 12-mm diameter sphere unless otherwise stated.

**Individual patient memory LI calculation.** An anatomical mask incorporating frontal and medial temporal lobes (amygdala, parahippocampal gyrus [PHG], hippocampus, middle and inferior frontal gyri) was created using the WFU PickAtlas in SPM8. A bootstrap method was used to calculate LI within the frontotemporal mask in all patients using the SPM8 LI toolbox. LI of $0.5$ was deemed strongly left lateralized.

**Linear regression.** Linear regression was used to investigate the utility of memory LI, language LI, and predictive clinical variables (preoperative hippocampal volume, preoperative list learning, and age at onset of epilepsy) in predicting postoperative verbal memory decline.

Statistical analyses used PASW Statistics 18.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY).

**RESULTS Behavioral.** LTLE and RTLE patients performed worse than controls in the recognition test preoperatively and postoperatively (p < 0.005). LTLE patients showed a significant decline while RTLE patients showed a nonsignificant improvement in recognition accuracy (p > 0.1) (table 1).

**Neuropsychological performance and clinical parameters.** Both LTLE and RTLE patients had lower IQs and performed significantly less well than controls on the verbal learning task, preoperatively and postoperatively (2-tailed t test p < 0.005; table 1). LTLE and RTLE patients did not differ significantly in age, age at onset of epilepsy, epilepsy duration, or verbal learning (2-tailed t test p > 0.1; table 1).

Of the 23 LTLE patients assessed 4 months postoperatively, 14 showed verbal memory decline (8 significant), 1 showed no change, and 8 improved (3 significant). The mean change in verbal learning was $-3.7$ (SD 13.7) (range $-32$ to $+27$). Eighteen RTLE patients showed verbal memory decline (7 significant) and 9 improved (2 significant). Mean change in verbal learning was $-4.2$ (SD 9.4). One RTLE patient was right dominant for language and verbal memory declined significantly after right ATL resection (table e-1).

**Main effects and group comparisons.** Controls activated the left fusiform, precentral and postcentral, inferior frontal, and middle occipital gyri, orbitofrontal cortex, left hippocampus, and PHG. LTLE patients activated the left fusiform, inferior frontal, precentral, and inferior temporal gyri, inferior parietal lobe, hippocampus, and PHG. activations were seen in the right superior frontal gyrus, inferior parietal lobe, and hippocampus.

RTLE patients activated left hippocampus, precentral, inferior temporal, and inferior frontal gyri, orbitofrontal cortex, and supplementary motor area. LTLE patients showed significantly less activation in the left fusiform gyrus, anterior PHG, body of hippocampus, middle temporal gyrus, and medial frontal lobe, and greater right inferior frontal gyrus activation than controls. No quantitative activation differences were seen between RTLE patients and controls (figure 1, table e-2).

**Correlation of fMRI WR activations with list learning scores.** WR activations did not correlate with list learning in controls. In LTLE patients, left PHG, body and posterior hippocampus, amygdala (p = 0.01), right hippocampus (p = 0.009), left orbitofrontal cortex, and anterior cingulum activations correlated significantly with higher preoperative list learning scores. This implied that successful verbal memory formation was associated with activation of these structures preoperatively. In RTLE patients, no correlation between WR activations and preoperative list learning was seen (table e-3).

**Prediction of postoperative verbal memory.** Clinical parameters and verbal memory decline. LTLE Verbal memory decline correlated significantly with language lateralization ($R = 0.44$, p = 0.037), implying greater verbal memory decline with increasing left language LI. Preoperative verbal memory, age at onset of epilepsy, and hippocampal volumes did not correlate with postoperative memory change (p > 0.1).

**RTLE.** Preoperative verbal memory, age at onset of epilepsy, hippocampal volume, and language lateralization did not correlate with postoperative verbal memory change (p > 0.1).
Correlation of fMRI WR activations with postoperative change in list learning. In LTLE patients, predominantly left-sided WR activations within the amygdala, hippocampus, orbitofrontal cortex, inferior and middle frontal gyri, and anterior cingulate cortex correlated significantly with verbal memory decline after left ATL. In RTLE patients, left inferior frontal gyrus activations correlated with verbal memory decline after right ATL (figure 2, table e-4).

Less verbal memory decline after left ATL correlated with posterior MTL activations within the right
posterior hippocampus and PHG and less significantly with left posterior hippocampal activation ($p = 0.038$) (table e-4).

**Individual memory fMRI parameters predictive of verbal memory decline.** The activation LI associated with words remembered in the frontotemporal mask correlated significantly with change in memory scores, with greater left-sided activation predictive of greater verbal memory decline in LTLE patients ($R = 0.66, p = 0.001$) (figure 3). Memory LI did not correlate with verbal memory change in RTLE patients ($R = 0.14, p > 0.1$).

**Linear regression.** Linear regression showed that language and memory LI predicted postoperative verbal memory decline in LTLE patients. Memory LI was the best predictor of verbal memory outcome compared to other parameters in the multivariable adjusted analysis ($\beta$ coefficient $-16.1$, 95% CI $-28.4$ to $-3.9$, $p = 0.01$) (table e-5).

No parameter investigated (language LI, memory LI, age at onset of epilepsy, preoperative hippocampal volume, preoperative verbal learning) predicted verbal memory decline in RTLE patients ($p > 0.1$).

**Memory prediction for individual LTLE patients.** Greater left than right activation within the frontotemporal mask was the best independent predictor of verbal memory decline. For use as a predictive tool, an objective measure of LI of $\geq 0.5$ was chosen as a predictive threshold. Seven out of 8 significant decliners had a frontotemporal memory LI of $\geq 0.5$, conferring a test sensitivity of 87.5%. Specificity was 80% (figure 3, table 2). Left lateralized language LI $\geq 0.5$ had 100% sensitivity in predicting verbal memory decline in LTLE patients but specificity was low at 13.3% as 21 of the 23 LTLE patients had a language LI of $\geq 0.5$.

Using verbal memory fMRI alone, if a patient had a LI of $\geq 0.5$ there was 70% (7/10) risk of significant verbal memory decline after surgery. If LI was $<0.5$, the risk of significant memory decline was 7.7% (1/13) (table 2).

**DISCUSSION** Twenty-two (21 LTLE) patients had dominant and 28 (2 LTLE) patients had nondominant ATL resection. Although the mean change in memory postoperatively in LTLE and RTLE patients did not differ, more patients with dominant ATL ($9/22$) had significant verbal memory decline than did patients after nondominant resection ($6/28$), consistent with previous literature.$^{22,23}$

In the LTLE group, left lateralized activation within the medial temporal and frontal lobes was involved in successful memory formation and predicted significant postoperative verbal memory decline.

Retrospective studies showed earlier age at onset of epilepsy and better preoperative memory to predict postoperative verbal memory outcome.$^{5,20}$ We did not replicate this, likely due to small numbers. The crucial point is that in the current study, despite small numbers, frontotemporal memory LI $\geq 0.5$ indicating greater left than right activation correlated significantly with postoperative change in memory, and was the strongest independent predictor of postoperative verbal memory decline.

With an LI $\geq 0.5$ memory fMRI alone had a positive predictive value (PPV) of 70%, sensitivity of 87.5%, and 80% specificity for predicting significant memory decline after left ATL resection. Previous memory fMRI prediction algorithms using asymmetry image analysis reported...
Our study has several strengths. First, we used a sensitive verbal memory contrast (words remembered) that showed significant activations in the MTL and extratemporally in all patients, a crucial prerequisite for individual memory prediction paradigms. This contrast differed from the subtraction contrast we used previously (words remembered minus words familiar/forgotten). The latter contrast, while more specific for successful verbal memory encoding network, was less sensitive and not every patient had significant MTL activations. For the purpose of clinical prediction, a sensitive contrast was required. We acknowledge that the words remembered contrast is less specific and incorporates components of a language network. Second, we created a prediction algorithm based on an objective LI measure that was calculated within SPM and is applicable to a newly encountered patient. Third, medication was not changed in the interval between the assessments.

Our study has limitations. Although reliable change was calculated from our control population at equivalent intertest intervals to patients, it may have been better to calculate these data using TLE patients who did not have surgery, but this would add further variables such as medication changes.

Our algorithm was based on memory outcome 4 months postoperatively. Patients with significant memory decline at 4 months remain with this decline at 12 months follow-up. Further, 12 months after surgery, other factors such as medication and mood change may complicate interpretation.

Asymmetry of verbal memory fMRI activation was the strongest predictor of verbal memory outcome after dominant ATL resection, compared to language fMRI and clinical parameters. We demonstrate the contribution of extratemporal areas to memory prediction, and that greater preoperative activation of the memory encoding network that incorporates the to-be-resected hippocampus is inversely related to memory outcome.

This memory fMRI prediction algorithm is applicable to temporal lobe surgery and needs evaluation in larger patient groups and is applicable at centers that already utilize language fMRI in their presurgical protocol.
REFERENCES

Received February 26, 2014. Accepted in final form December 8, 2014.

DISCLOSURE

M. Sidhu, J. Sretton, G. Winston, M. Symms, and P. Thompson report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. M. Kepp served on a scientific advisory board for GE Healthcare and has received honoraria from UCB, Eisai Inc., and BIAl, and funding for travel from UCB, Pfizer Inc., and Desitin Pharmaceuticals GmbH. He serves on the editorial board of Epilepsy Research and receives research support from MRC, Wellcome Trust Foundation, and EU-Framework 7 programme. J. Duncan has received institutional grant support from Eisai, UCB Pharma, GSK, Janssen Cilag, Medtronic, and GE Healthcare. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

STUDY FUNDING

Supported by The Wellcome Trust (programme grant no 083148). The Epilepsy Society MRI scanner was supported by the Wellton Trust and Epilepsy Society. This work was undertaken at UCLH/UCL, which received a proportion of funding from the Department of Health’s NIHR Biomedical Research Centres funding scheme.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank the radiographers at the Epilepsy Society MRI Unit—Philippa Barlett, Jane Burdett, and Elaine Williams—who scanned the patients; A.W. McEvoy for neurosurgical skills; and the patients and controls for their participation.

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M. Sidhu, J. Sretton, G. Winston, M. Symms, and P. Thompson report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. M. Kepp served on a scientific advisory board for GE Healthcare and has received honoraria from UCB, Eisai Inc., and BIAl, and funding for travel from UCB, Pfizer Inc., and Desitin Pharmaceuticals GmbH. He serves on the editorial board of Epilepsy Research and receives research support from MRC, Wellcome Trust Foundation, and EU-Framework 7 programme. J. Duncan has received institutional grant support from Eisai, UCB Pharma, GSK, Janssen Cilag, Medtronic, and GE Healthcare. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

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REFERENCES


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Being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, her story and focus on life with the disease

This podcast begins and closes with Dr. Robert Gross, Editor-in-Chief, briefly discussing highlighted articles from the April 14, 2015 issue of Neurology. In the second segment, Dr. Ted Burns talks with Ms. Janice Dean about being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and how she has focused on living with the disease. Dr. Sarah Wesley then reads the e-Pearl of the week about spinobulbar muscular atrophy. In the next part of the podcast, Dr. Ted Burns focuses his interview with Drs. Radhika Dhamija and Christopher Klein on the reporting of sequence variants and how the interpretability of the data is rapidly changing and what the implications of this change may be.

Disclosures can be found at Neurology.org.

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Neurology 2015;84;1512-1519 Published Online before print March 13, 2015
DOI 10.1212/WNL.0000000000001461

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aspecific neurologic symptoms using Biophysical Semeiotics Tests (BSTs) with a mean follow-up of 6 years. Out of these patients, 3 developed a stroke. Interestingly, cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including stroke—was observed only in those patients whose BSTs were already abnormal during the preclinical stage (i.e., when the clinical examination or other instrumental investigations failed to reveal anything suspicious). In our experience, a BST that is abnormal at the preclinical stage is always associated with a congenital risk of developing that particular disorder for which the test is specific: this is called inherited real risk.

Given these premises, the results of Poidvin et al. should have been more specific in detailing that the CVD was observed only in those children treated with GH and with abnormal Biophysical Semeiotics CVD test (CVD inherited real risk).

Editorial Response: Rebecca N. Ichord, Philadelphia: Stagnaro et al. raised an interesting question regarding the study by Poidvin et al.1 My editorial also expanded on this study’s strengths and limitations. Stagnaro et al. considered whether a preexisting condition predisposed those individuals to develop a stroke after GH treatment in childhood. This is certainly possible. However, the comparison of the treated population to an untreated population in this study would have eliminated this effect if this predisposition was randomly distributed in the population.

Stagnaro et al. further suggested that the administration of a BST might disclose a predisposition to adult-onset stroke. While this is an intriguing idea, it is problematic as there is no described BST in this pediatric population, which is proven to be a valid predictor of adult-onset stroke. Moreover, the design of this study involved a retrospective analysis of the association of childhood GH treatment with adult-onset stroke. The suggested approach would have required a prospective design whereby children eligible for GH treatment would be evaluated prospectively for the existence of risk factors for adult-onset stroke. The design of their study precluded this approach. This limitation was acknowledged by the authors. This type of a test would be a welcome addition to the clinical science of childhood precursors of adult-onset cerebrovascular disease.

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