

Language decline in subjective cognitive impairment: Early detection of dementia

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Ethical review	Approved WMO
Status	Pending
Health condition type	Other condition
Study type	Observational non invasive

Summary

ID

NL-OMON57339

Source

ToetsingOnline

Brief title

Early detection of dementia

Condition

- Other condition

Synonym

cognitive impairment, dementia, language decline, MCI, SCD

Health condition

Cognitive impairment related to ageing

Research involving

Human

Sponsors and support

Primary sponsor: Universitair Medisch Centrum Groningen

Source(s) of monetary or material Support: Ministerie van OC&W

Intervention

Keyword: Functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy (fNIRS), Language and cognition, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), Subjective Cognitive Decline (SCD)

Outcome measures

Primary outcome

N-back task is a popular measure of working memory involving an activation of the FPN (Mencarelli et al., 2019). A metanalysis showed age-related decline in n-back performance where accuracy decreases and response time increases as the load increases (Bopp & Verhaeghen, 2018). In this study, we will use three different load factors (i.e., 0, 1, and 2) in order to explore the difference in performance as well as related neuroimaging and eye-tracking measures between healthy, SCD, and MCI groups.

Three language tasks will be employed: action and object naming, comprehension of passive and active reversible and irreversible sentences, as well as elicited imitation of complex sentences. Since an impairment in action naming due to reduced lexical access to verbs has been described (Macoir et al., 2019), the naming test will be administered consisting of 48 object and 48 action pictures. Sung et al. (2020) found a sentence comprehension deficit in the MCI stage when the syntactic complexity was increased (passive sentences). This is why we will test the comprehension of passive and active sentences, including 128 sentences, matched for frequency, age of acquisition,

concreteness, word length, and valence. The last language task administered will be the Elicited imitation (Lust, Flynn and Foley 1996) of complex sentences used in the Sherman et al. (2013) study, including coordinated clauses and relative clauses, varied according to syntactic and semantic factors. The participants will be asked to repeat the sentences they hear.

fNIRS + EEG

The fNIRS cap will be placed on the participants* head. Concentration changes of oxygenated (oxyHb) and deoxygenated (Hb) haemoglobin will be recorded using NIRS. Sources and detectors will be distributed on the Broca*s and Wernicke*s area.

Main parameters/outcomes:

- Differences in HBO levels during all four tasks (F test; GLM; analysed using NIRS Toolbox), group comparisons
- Change in fronto-parietal EEG synchronisation: n-back, and linguistic tasks (Fieldtrip EEG Toolbox, non-parametric statistical analyses).
- Topographical EEG power changes (resting state EEG) and ERP effects during linguistic tasks.
- D-prime (signal detection) analysis - N-back task.
- Accuracy and/or RTs - linguistic tasks.

Secondary outcome

1. Correlation of verbal fluency and language performance.
2. Correlation between executive functions and language performance.
3. Correlation of pupil dilation measures and performance during cognitive and

linguistic tasks.

Study description

Background summary

Subjective cognitive decline (SCD) is a form of self-reported cognitive impairment and one of the early predictors of Alzheimer's disease, preceding objective mild cognitive impairment (MCI) (Jessen et al., 2020). In recent years, SCD has been put into focus due to its importance for early detection of Alzheimer's disease (AD), as well as the current neuropsychological tools' lack of sensitivity to SCD. While it is often possible to detect early AD using biomarkers, lumbar puncture, PET, and MRI (Jack et al., 2010), these tests are considered to be highly invasive, extremely expensive, and not widely available (Johnson et al., 2012). This is why it is important to find and design more affordable, accessible non-invasive methods for early detection of dementia. Subjective complaints do not always correlate with objective cognitive performance (Jungwirth et al., 2004). People with SCD seem to perform similarly on the n-back task as those without subjective complaints, but they do show distinct hemodynamic response (Zhang et al., 2021). Neuroimaging studies have shown some promise in documenting potential markers of SCD (Parker et al., 2022). For instance, Kawagoe et al (2019) reported a positive correlation between complaint severity and parieto-occipital connectivity. However, more research is needed to confirm this evidence. Additionally, Marandi and Gazerani (2019) argued that eye tracking is a promising tool to provide objective biomarkers of aging and neurodegeneration. In particular, pupil dilation has been shown to be related to prefrontal activation during a working memory task (Yeung et al., 2021).

Language deficits have been reported for AD and aMCI. They include impaired lexical access, impaired semantic fluency (Belleville et al., 2017) and sentence level complexity (López-Higes et al., 2014; Sung et al., 2020), reduced discourse cohesion, 'empty speech', and paraphasias. However, when it comes to SCD, studies focusing only on language impairments are not numerous and they focus mostly on verbal fluency. Authors have used lexical access tasks to compare participants with SCD to healthy aging elderly and participants with MCI and AD (Benito-Leon et al., 2010; Ostberg et al., 2005).

Study objective

Our project aims to investigate cognitive and linguistic deficits in people with SCD, focusing on working memory impairments, deficits of lexical access, and deficits brought on by syntactic complexity. We will integrate clinical linguistic findings with brain activation measured by fNIRS and EEG, and pupil dilation measured by eye-tracking. This will be a longitudinal study with a

1-year follow-up. In this way, we plan to create a neurolinguistic profile of SCD using neuropsychological and neuroimaging data.

In this study, we hypothesize that:

1. Older adults with SCD will perform better on n-back task as compared to those with MCI, but similarly to healthy controls (HC).
2. Older adults with SCD will show greater connectivity of the frontoparietal network (FPN) connectivity than HC and people with MCI, indicating a compensatory cognitive effort (Si et al., 2020).
3. Similarly, older adults with SCD will also show greater pupil dilatation changes than HC and people with MCI.
4. Action naming will cause bigger lexical access difficulties in individuals with SCD and MCI than HC, due to greater reliance on executive functions and attentional control (Macoir et al., 2019). Prediction: $HC < SCD < MCI$.
5. Linguistically more challenging structures (passives and relative clauses) will be more sensitive to cognitive decline. We predict that the SCD group will demonstrate more difficulties with complex sentence processing than HC, but less difficulties than the MCI group.

Study design

This will be a longitudinal observational study of brain activation while doing cognitive and linguistic tasks using fNIRS and EEG measurements, as well as pupillometry. Cognitive screening and language assessments will be separated and administered in two days to the three groups participating in the study. Groups needed for this study are: healthy elderly (healthy controls), elderly with subjective cognitive decline (SCD), and elderly with mild cognitive impairment (MCI). The same procedure will be used in the follow-up, a year later.

On day 1, the participants will be given all the information on the study and cognitive screening will be administered. This usually takes around 60 minutes.

The cognitive screening will include:

- o Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE)
- o 15-Word Test (15WT)
- o Trail-Making Test (TMT)
- o Stroop Color-Word Test (SCWT)
- o WAIS Digit Span
- o WAIS Symbol Digit Modalities Test (SDMT)

As well as:

- o Geriatric Depression Scale-30 (GDS-30)
- o Apathy Evaluation Scale (AES)

On day 2 cognitive and linguistic tasks will be administered. Since a more sensitive way to measure language processing is required, functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) and electroencephalography (EEG), which allow for real-time measurement of neural activity, and eye-tracking (pupillometry) will be used to support the study and capture subtle changes.

Before the four tasks are administered, the spontaneous speech test and the resting state EEG will be done. Resting state EEG includes three rounds of *1-minute eyes closed/1-minute eyes open* protocol, lasting 6 minutes in total.

Tasks

In the current study, one cognitive and four linguistic tasks will be administered:

- (I) Spontaneous speech
- (II) N-back task
- (III) Object and action naming,
- (IV) Elicited imitation of complex sentences,
- (V) Comprehension of reversible and irreversible active and passive sentences.

Study burden and risks

The study will consist of two sessions: the first for explaining the study to the participant and neuropsychological testing - screening whether all inclusion criteria are met (and no exclusion criteria). This will usually take no longer than 60min. The second session concerns the spontaneous speech test (5 minutes), resting state and cognitive and linguistic testing using fNIRS, EEG, and eye-tracking measurements, with a total duration of 90 min. After a year, Session 1 and Session 2 will be repeated (YFUs1 and YFUs2).

The experiment will not involve more than minimal risks for the participants. NIRS, EEG, and pupillometry are standard non-invasive brain activation measuring techniques with no known negative effects on health. The study is not intended to benefit the participants directly. Participants will receive compensation/a present for their contribution.

Contacts

Public

Universitair Medisch Centrum Groningen

Antonius Deusinglaan 2
Groningen 9713 AW
NL

Scientific

Universitair Medisch Centrum Groningen

Antonius Deusinglaan 2
Groningen 9713 AW
NL

Trial sites

Listed location countries

Netherlands

Eligibility criteria

Age

Adults (18-64 years)

Elderly (65 years and older)

Inclusion criteria

Age ≥ 50 years

Right-handedness

Diagnosis of aMCI based on neurologist evaluation or subjective cognitive complaints with no official diagnosis.

aMCI will be defined as having a verbal memory score 1.5 standard deviations below the normative control values on both sub-scales.

Signed written informed consent.

Exclusion criteria

1. History of psychiatric or neurological illness other than MCI (exception is for depression in MCI group as it is co-morbid with MCI)
2. Excessive intake of alcohol (>2 units per day)
3. Drug abuse
4. Severe scalp skin lesions
5. Color blindness

Study design

Design

Study type: Observational non invasive

Intervention model: Other

Allocation:	Non-randomized controlled trial
Masking:	Open (masking not used)
Control:	Active
Primary purpose:	Other

Recruitment

NL	
Recruitment status:	Pending
Start date (anticipated):	01-07-2024
Enrollment:	120
Type:	Anticipated

Ethics review

Approved WMO	
Date:	04-03-2025
Application type:	First submission
Review commission:	METC Universitair Medisch Centrum Groningen (Groningen)

Study registrations

Followed up by the following (possibly more current) registration

No registrations found.

Other (possibly less up-to-date) registrations in this register

No registrations found.

In other registers

Register	ID
CCMO	NL86354.042.24