



**Dzihni: journal on Arabic Education,
Linguistics, and Literary Studies**

Vol. 4, No. 02, 2026

ISSN: 2987-8268

<https://ejournal.idia.ac.id/index.php/dzihni/index>

An Integrative Review Of Physiological and Psychological Determinants Of Deviant Language Behavior

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Abstract

Language deviance refers to speech or communication patterns that deviate significantly from established phonological, syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic norms due to physiological and psychological causes. Despite the growing prevalence of language disorders globally, scholarly literature continues to grapple with the intersection of neurobiological dysfunction and psychosocial determinants in producing deviant language behavior. This research addresses the gap between biomedical and psycholinguistic perspectives by offering an integrated analysis of how physiological impairments—such as damage to Broca's area and Wernicke's area, dysarthria, and cleft palate—and psychological conditions—including schizophrenia, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and major depressive disorder—manifest in deviant language use. The primary objective of this study is to systematically examine the etiological factors that produce deviant language behavior and to describe the linguistic characteristics associated with each condition. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach, drawing from peer-reviewed journals, clinical studies, neurological reports, and foundational theories in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. Findings reveal that physiological factors lead to structural and motor-phonetic language impairments, while psychological factors predominantly affect semantic coherence, pragmatic appropriateness, and social communication. The study concludes that deviant language behavior is a multi-causal phenomenon requiring interdisciplinary intervention from linguists, clinicians, and educators to ensure accurate diagnosis and effective rehabilitation.

Keywords: Deviant Language, Physiological Factors, Psychological Factors, Neurolinguistics, Psycholinguistics

Introduction

Language is a complex communication system and the defining characteristic that distinguishes humans from other living creatures. Through language, humans not only express thoughts and feelings but also build social relationships, transmit culture, and construct knowledge. Nevertheless, human linguistic capacity is not an absolute faculty immune to disruption. Various conditions, whether biological or psychological in nature, can affect the

way a person produces, comprehends, or uses language in ways that deviate from the communicative norms prevalent in society.

Deviant language behavior refers to patterns of language use that differ significantly from the conventional linguistic usage within a given speech community. This phenomenon encompasses a wide spectrum of disorders, ranging from dysphasia and aphasia caused by brain damage, stuttering resulting from motor speech impairment, to incoherent and non-communicative language use in individuals with schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders. The study of deviant language behavior involves cross-disciplinary inquiry encompassing linguistics, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurology, and psychiatry.

Empirical data underscore the scale and urgency of this phenomenon. The U.S. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (2024) reports that voice, speech, or language disorders are most prevalent among children aged 3–6 (10.8%) and that 5% of children aged 3–17 experience a speech disorder lasting a week or longer within a given year. Among the specific etiologies examined in this review, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2025) recently reported that autism spectrum disorder is now identified in 1 of every 31 eight-year-old children in the United States, a marked increase from 1 in 150 in the year 2000, while the World Health Organization (2025) estimates that schizophrenia affects approximately 23 million people worldwide (1 in 345 individuals) and is associated with a life expectancy nearly nine years below that of the general population. On the physiological side, the National Aphasia Association (2025) reports that between 2 and 4 million people in the United States are currently living with aphasia, a condition that results from an estimated 25% to 50% of all strokes. These figures indicate that deviant language behavior, whether physiologically or psychologically rooted, is not a marginal clinical curiosity but a substantial and, in several categories, growing public health concern.

Left unaddressed, these conditions carry considerable costs. Communication disorders are consistently linked to delayed literacy, academic underachievement, social isolation, reduced employment prospects, and diminished quality of life for affected individuals and their families; in adults, undiagnosed or unmanaged aphasia and dysarthria are associated with longer hospital stays, slower functional recovery, and higher rates of post-stroke depression. Despite this burden, most existing scholarship treats physiological disorders (e.g., aphasia, dysarthria) and psychological disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, ASD) as separate research traditions, situated respectively within clinical neurolinguistics and clinical psycholinguistics, so that their etiological mechanisms and linguistic manifestations are rarely compared within

a single analytical frame. This fragmentation constitutes the central research gap that the present study addresses.

In the academic context, the study of deviant language behavior holds considerable relevance. From a theoretical perspective, understanding how physiological and psychological factors influence language can provide deep insights into the nature of language itself as a human cognitive capacity. From an applied perspective, this understanding can serve as the foundation for developing more effective diagnostic methods, speech therapy, and clinical intervention. This study aims to identify and analyze the physiological and psychological factors that produce deviant language behavior, as well as to explore their theoretical and practical implications.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach: rather than examining physiological and psychological determinants of deviant language behavior as isolated domains, this review synthesizes findings across both traditions within a single analytical framework that allows their similarities, differences, and points of interaction to be systematically identified. In doing so, the study contributes not merely a descriptive inventory of disorders but a comparative account of how physiological and psychological etiologies differentially affect the phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels of language, an account that remains largely absent from the existing literature.

Method

This study employs a qualitative literature review method, also known as a library research approach. This approach was selected because the primary objective of the study is to synthesize, analyze, and interpret findings from existing studies in the fields of linguistics, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurology, and psychiatry relating to deviant language behavior.

Data sources in this study include peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, research reports, and other academic sources relevant to the topic of deviant language behavior from physiological and psychological perspectives. Literature searches were conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR, and various institutional repositories. Search terms used include: deviant language behavior, language disorder, aphasia, dysphasia, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and other related terms. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques applied to the collected literature, with a focus on identifying patterns, themes, and synthesizing relevant findings.

Result and Discussion

1. Physiological Factors Contributing to Deviant Language Behavior

Physiological factors encompass a range of conditions related to the biological structure and function of the body, particularly the central nervous system and the organs involved in language production. A review of the literature reveals several major categories of physiological impairment that produce deviant language behavior.

a. Neurological Damage: Aphasia

Aphasia is the most extensively studied language disorder in neurolinguistic literature. It occurs as a result of damage to the brain areas responsible for language processing and production, typically caused by stroke, traumatic brain injury, or brain tumors. Geschwind (1979), in his seminal research, identified a two-area model of language processing in the brain: Broca's area in the left inferior frontal gyrus and Wernicke's area in the left superior temporal gyrus.

Broca's aphasia, caused by damage to Broca's area (Brodmann areas 44 and 45), is characterized by non-fluent, telegraphic, and effortful language production. Individuals with Broca's aphasia are able to comprehend the speech of others reasonably well, but experience great difficulty producing grammatically complete sentences. The typical linguistic characteristics of Broca's aphasia include agrammatism (omission of grammatical elements such as prepositions and articles), anomia (difficulty retrieving words), and the use of very short and simple sentences (Damasio, 2001). A characteristic utterance of a Broca's aphasia patient might be: "Want... eat... rice... can't" (instead of "I want to eat rice but I cannot").

In contrast, Wernicke's aphasia, caused by damage to Wernicke's area, presents a markedly different profile. Individuals with Wernicke's aphasia produce language that is fluent and melodically prosodic, but whose semantic content is severely impaired. They frequently employ phonemic paraphasias (phoneme substitutions: "chur" for "chair"), semantic paraphasias (word substitutions based on semantic category: "table" for "chair"), and neologisms (creation of new words absent from the language: "blurtak"). Language comprehension in individuals with Wernicke's aphasia is severely impaired (Damasio & Damasio, 1992).

b. Dysarthria

Dysarthria is a motor speech disorder caused by damage to the neuromotor system that controls the muscles involved in speech production. Unlike aphasia, which constitutes a

language disorder at the linguistic level, dysarthria is a disorder at the phonetic-motor level. Darley, Aronson, and Brown (1975) classified dysarthria into several subtypes based on the site of neurological damage: spastic dysarthria (upper motor neuron damage), flaccid dysarthria (lower motor neuron damage), ataxic dysarthria (cerebellar damage), and hyper/hypokinetic dysarthria (basal ganglia damage).

The typical linguistic characteristics of dysarthria include imprecise consonant articulation, abnormal voice quality (harsh, breathy, or strained-strangled), disturbed speech rhythm (excess and equal stress; scanning speech in ataxic dysarthria), hypernasality due to velopharyngeal insufficiency, and severely reduced speech rate. It is important to note that in dysarthria, the language system itself (lexicon, grammar, semantics) remains principally intact — the impairment is confined to the motor mechanisms of speech production (Duffy, 2019).

c. Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate: Structural Vocal Anomalies

Congenital anomalies of the speech production organs, such as cleft lip and cleft palate, can result in significant deviant language behavior at the phonological level. Cleft lip impairs the ability to produce bilabial phonemes (/p/, /b/, /m/) accurately, while cleft palate causes hypernasality because air escapes through the nasal cavity rather than the oral cavity during the production of oral sounds.

Peterson-Falzone et al. (2010), in their longitudinal study, found that children with surgically uncorrected cleft palate tend to develop atypical articulatory compensations, such as glottal stops to replace oral plosive consonants, and pharyngeal fricatives as substitutes for alveolar or palatal fricatives. These articulatory compensations represent a form of physiological adaptation that produces phonological patterns deviating from established language norms.

d. Deafness and Hearing Impairment

Human language ability is heavily dependent on auditory input, particularly during the critical periods of language acquisition in children. Children with congenital deafness or significant early-onset hearing loss (prelingual deafness) who do not receive adequate audiological intervention display characteristic deviant language behaviors, including final consonant deletion, vowel substitution, suprasegmental disturbances (unnatural prosody), and limitations in vocabulary and syntactic competence (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996).

Neurologically, deprivation of auditory input during critical developmental periods causes reorganization of the primary and secondary auditory cortex, which in turn affects how the brain processes linguistic information. Neuroimaging research indicates that in congenitally

deaf signers using sign language, both Broca's area and Wernicke's area remain active during sign language processing, demonstrating that these areas are multimodal in nature and not exclusively dedicated to spoken language (Hickok, Bellugi, & Klima, 1998).

2. Psychological Factors Contributing to Deviant Language Behavior

In addition to physiological factors, various psychological and psychiatric conditions can also produce language behavior that deviates from established norms. Psychological factors are not always accompanied by clear structural neurological damage, yet they influence the way the brain organizes and produces language through complex cognitive and affective mechanisms.

a. Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a severe psychiatric disorder characterized by positive symptoms (hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking) and negative symptoms (blunted affect, alogia, avolition). Language disturbances in schizophrenia represent one of the most prominent manifestations of the thought disorganization that is the hallmark of this condition. Covington et al. (2005) identified various forms of language disturbance in schizophrenia that can be grouped into several categories.

First, speech productivity disturbances, including poverty of speech (greatly reduced verbal spontaneity) and poverty of content of speech (lengthy utterances that convey minimal information, often termed "empty speech"). Second, speech coherence disturbances, including tangentiality (answering questions in a loosely related manner), derailment or loosening of associations (discourse that shifts from one topic to another without clear logical connection), incoherence (speech that is wholly incomprehensible, sometimes termed "word salad"), and neologisms. Third, specific disturbances such as echolalia (repetition of recently heard words or phrases) and perseveration (excessive repetition of words or phrases).

Linguistically, language disturbances in schizophrenia operate primarily at the semantic and pragmatic levels. Discourse analysis of individuals with schizophrenia reveals impairments in building textual coherence: they frequently fail to maintain topic continuity, employ ambiguous or unclear referencing, and violate Grice's (1975) conversational cooperation principles. The syntactic and morphological levels are relatively better preserved, although sentence length and complexity are frequently disrupted (Docherty et al., 1996).

b. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in social communication and interaction, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior. Language behavior in individuals with ASD exhibits a very wide range of variation consistent with the spectrum of the condition, from the complete absence of verbal language (nonverbal autism) to seemingly structurally normal language ability but with significant pragmatic deficits.

Several characteristic linguistic features of ASD frequently documented in the literature include: echolalia (both immediate and delayed), pronominal reversal (using “you” instead of “I” to refer to oneself), atypical prosody (monotone intonation or pragmatically inappropriate intonation), difficulty comprehending and using figurative language (metaphor, irony, humor), limitations in initiating and sustaining conversation, and a tendency to discourse at length on preferred topics without attending to the interlocutor’s interests (Tager-Flusberg, 2000).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, pragmatic deficits in ASD are frequently linked to impairments in theory of mind — the capacity to understand and predict the mental states of others. Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith (1985), in their seminal study using false-belief tasks, demonstrated that children with autism exhibit deficits in theory of mind, which has subsequently been connected to difficulties in using language pragmatically and empathically in communication.

c. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops after an individual experiences or witnesses a traumatic event that threatens life or physical integrity. Although PTSD is primarily known as an anxiety disorder, research indicates that it can also significantly affect language behavior through several mechanisms.

Language disturbances in PTSD are generally pragmatic and discourse-level in nature. Individuals with PTSD frequently exhibit avoidance when speaking about trauma-related topics, which may manifest as avoidance of certain words, excessive use of euphemism, or abrupt topic changes when trauma is triggered. Conversely, when triggered, individuals with PTSD may display linguistic flashbacks — the repetition of phrases or narratives associated with the traumatic experience (van der Kolk, 2014).

Neuroimaging research indicates that PTSD is associated with amygdala hypersensitivity and prefrontal cortex hypoactivity, which together produce excessive emotional responses and reduced capacity for cognitive regulation. This condition affects

language use because linguistic expression is heavily dependent on the capacity for emotional regulation and cognitive control (Shin & Liberzon, 2010).

d. Major Depressive Disorder

Major depressive disorder is a mood disorder characterized by severely depressed mood, loss of interest and pleasure, disturbances in sleep and appetite, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness, and, in severe cases, thoughts of death or suicide. Linguistic and computational research on language in depression has identified characteristic language features in individuals with this condition.

Mohammed (2016), in his study on emotional prosody in depression, found that individuals with major depressive disorder display significant changes in speech prosody parameters: reduced F0 (pitch) variation, decreased intensity, slower speech rate, and increased pause duration. At the lexical level, analyses of the texts and utterances of individuals with depression reveal higher usage of negatively valenced words, elevated use of first-person singular pronouns (“I”, “me”) as an indicator of self-focused attention, and greater usage of absolutist words (words such as “always”, “never”, “all”) (Al-Mosaiwi & Johnstone, 2018).

3. Interaction Between Physiological and Psychological Factors

The findings of this literature review indicate that in clinical practice, the distinction between language disorders caused by physiological factors and those caused by psychological factors is not always dichotomous. Many conditions involve complex interactions between the two. For instance, prolonged depression can produce measurable neurobiological changes in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, which in turn affect language processing. Conversely, aphasia caused by stroke is frequently followed by post-stroke depression, which can further exacerbate pre-existing communication impairments.

The following table summarizes the differences and similarities in linguistic characteristics between language disorders caused by physiological and psychological factors:

Disorder	Category	Primary Level(s) Affected	Distinctive Linguistic Features
Broca’s aphasia	Physiological	Morphosyntactic; phonetic-motor	Agrammatism, anomia, non-fluent telegraphic speech
Wernicke’s aphasia	Physiological	Semantic-lexical	Fluent but empty speech, paraphasias, neologisms, impaired comprehension
Dysarthria	Physiological	Phonetic-articulatory	Imprecise articulation, abnormal voice quality, reduced rate; language system intact
Cleft lip/palate	Physiological	Phonological	Hypernasality, compensatory articulations (glottal stops, pharyngeal fricatives)
Congenital deafness	Physiological	Phonological; prosodic; lexical	Final-consonant deletion, vowel substitution, atypical prosody, limited vocabulary

Schizophrenia	Psychological	Semantic-pragmatic; discourse	Incoherence, tangentiality, poverty of speech/content, neologisms
Autism spectrum disorder	Psychological	Pragmatic	Echolalia, pronominal reversal, atypical prosody, figurative-language deficits
PTSD	Psychological	Pragmatic; discourse	Topic avoidance, euphemism, trauma-triggered linguistic flashbacks
Major depressive disorder	Psychological	Prosodic; lexical	Reduced pitch variation, slower rate, negatively valenced and absolutist lexical bias

Table 1. Summary of physiological and psychological determinants of deviant language behavior and their primary linguistic manifestations

Disorders originating from physiological factors (such as aphasia and dysarthria) tend to exhibit more specific and localized deficits at particular levels of the language system (phonological in dysarthria, morphosyntactic in Broca’s aphasia, semantic-lexical in Wernicke’s aphasia). Meanwhile, disorders originating from psychological factors (such as schizophrenia, ASD, PTSD, and depression) tend to show more pronounced deficits at the pragmatic and discourse levels — that is, in the dimension of language use within social and communicative contexts.

This distinction carries important implications for diagnosis and intervention. Language disorders with a clearly physiological profile require a medical-neurological approach involving neurologists and speech therapists, while language disorders with a predominantly psychological profile require a psychiatric and psychological approach involving psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and language therapists trained in the pragmatic aspects of communication.

A comparison of this study’s findings with previous research reveals a high degree of consistency. Covington et al. (2005) similarly found that language disturbances in schizophrenia operate primarily at the semantic-pragmatic level rather than the syntactic level. Baron-Cohen et al. (1985) confirmed the theory of mind deficit in autism and its implications for linguistic pragmatics. Damasio and Damasio (1992) confirmed the differential aphasia profiles based on the location of brain damage. The present study extends and integrates these findings within a more comprehensive analytical framework.

Taken together, the findings synthesized in Table 1 point to a consistent pattern rather than a coincidental one: physiological disorders converge on structural and motor levels of language (phonology, morphosyntax), whereas psychological disorders converge on the pragmatic and discourse levels. This convergence is a conceptual contribution in its own right, since the studies reviewed here (e.g., Damasio, 2001; Duffy, 2019, on physiological disorders; Covington et al., 2005; Tager-Flusberg, 2000, on psychological disorders) were largely

conducted within separate disciplinary traditions and rarely juxtaposed against one another. By reading them together, the present review is able to show that the physiological–psychological distinction functions less as a strict etiological boundary and more as a gradient of linguistic locus, with comorbid cases such as post-stroke depression occupying the middle of that gradient. At the same time, this synthesis exposes a limitation shared by much of the reviewed literature: comorbidity between physiological and psychological determinants is acknowledged in principle but is seldom investigated empirically within a single study design, which restricts the field's capacity to determine whether the two categories of factors interact additively or interactively in shaping linguistic outcomes. Addressing this limitation through mixed-method or longitudinal clinical designs represents a concrete direction in which the integrative framework proposed here could be empirically tested.

Conclusion

This study has successfully identified and analyzed the physiological and psychological factors that produce deviant language behavior, as well as described the distinctive linguistic characteristics associated with each disorder condition.

Physiologically, damage to Broca's and Wernicke's areas produces aphasia profiles that differ by lesion site, dysarthria disrupts the phonetic-motor level while sparing the language system itself, cleft palate generates compensatory phonological patterns, and untreated congenital deafness reshapes phonological and prosodic development. Psychologically, schizophrenia and ASD primarily disrupt the semantic-pragmatic and pragmatic levels respectively, PTSD constrains language through avoidance and trauma-triggered discourse, and major depressive disorder alters prosody and lexical choice. Across both domains, the consistent pattern is that physiological factors localize to the structural levels of language, whereas psychological factors localize to its pragmatic and discourse-level use.

The principal scientific contribution of this study is the integrated analytical framework itself: by systematically comparing physiological and psychological determinants side by side, it demonstrates that their linguistic effects are not randomly distributed but instead map onto a structural-to-pragmatic gradient, a pattern that has not been articulated explicitly in prior, discipline-bound accounts of clinical linguistics, neurolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. Practically, this gradient offers a diagnostic heuristic: clinicians observing a predominantly structural or motor-level disruption have grounds to prioritize a neurological work-up, whereas a predominantly pragmatic or discourse-level disruption points toward psychiatric or psychological evaluation. More broadly, the findings reinforce the importance of an

interdisciplinary approach to the diagnosis and management of language disorders, involving collaboration among linguists, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and speech therapists.

Further research is recommended to examine more deeply the interaction between physiological and psychological factors in the context of comorbidity, and to develop linguistic diagnostic instruments that can be employed in clinical settings. Moreover, research employing longitudinal designs and directly involving native speakers as participants would be highly valuable for validating and extending the findings of this study.

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