Dear Editor:

Randall and Larner1 are right to draw attention to the fact that the syndromes of primary progressive aphasia (PPA) remain unfamiliar to some clinicians. One reason is the ‘Black Magic fallacy’ – the assumption that understanding a disorder requires a highly specialised skill set. The cases presented highlight three others: the omission from standard clinical assessment of a simple test of motor speech (the ‘pataka test’); failure to appreciate the significance of subtle radiological changes such as asymmetric widening of the sylvian fissure; and the assumption that a speech/language disorder is a sign of vascular pathology. We agree that a structured clinical approach to the suspected involvement of language in a patient presenting with cognitive change could help both in overcoming barriers to the thorough assessment of patients presenting to memory clinics and in improving clinicians’ awareness of this group of disorders.

In this context we were pleased to see reference to the preparation of ‘a mini linguistic state examination (MLSE)’. We have recently completed a thorough validation of this instrument in a cohort of 54 patients meeting the accepted criteria for the three main variants of PPA (authors’ Table 1).2  Although scoring of the test - which relies on the recognition of error types rather than a simple summation of correct responses - may at first seem unfamiliar, administration of the MLSE is not much more time consuming than an MMSE or MoCA, and should be able to be accommodated within a standard clinic assessment.

A paper reporting the diagnostic properties of the test is currently under review, with a preprint available at <https://www.medrxiv.org/search/MLSE>. Our results suggest that the application of a few rules to classify errors across a series of simple linguistic assays (which include the ‘pataka’ test) can support rapid and confident diagnoses of svPPA, nfvPPA and lvPPA. Moreover, patients who do not fall neatly into one of these categories (‘mixed’ PPA)3 can be described, rather than omitted because the nature of their deficit is not cleanly captured by the ‘paradigm syndromes’ heuristic.

The MLSE has been validated not only in English (including a cultural adaptation suitable for use in North America) but also in Italian and Spanish. Work on the more challenging modifications required to achieve equivalence in languages outside the Indo-European family is shortly to commence. The MLSE is free to use for clinical purposes, and the test can be downloaded from [http://mlsexam.com](http://mlsexam.com/) on completion of a series of brief introductory tutorials.

We hope that incorporation of the test in memory clinic assessments will lead to wider recognition of this group of disorders, encouraging and enabling the development of cohort-based research that will be essential to the evaluation of future therapeutic interventions.

**References**

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**Declaration of interest**

No conflicts of interest.

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