

Obituary: Claudio Luzzatti

Claudio Luzzatti unexpectedly passed away on June 8th, 2025, at the age of 74. A long-standing member of the Academy of Aphasia, he served on the Board of Governors and on other committees and was a frequent attendee of the conference.

Claudio was a medical doctor, a neurologist, who first worked at the University of Milano, then at la Sapienza University in Rome, and finally at University of Milano-Bicocca, where he first became full professor.

In his early years as a researcher, he – together with his mentor Edoardo Bisiach – described a peculiar phenomenon affecting people with left visual neglect. When asked to picture themselves standing in Piazza Duomo (the city square featuring the gothic cathedral) in Milan, and to describe the square first facing and then turning their back to the cathedral, participants with left visual neglect were unable to provide details about their left side in each perspective. The findings from this study were published in a seminal paper (Bisiach & Luzzatti, 1978), which provided the first evidence that visual neglect also affected mental imagery and also became Claudio’s most cited publication.

Later, Claudio developed a keen interest in aphasia. Unlike many medically-trained neuropsychologists, he had a solid foundation in formal linguistics and psycholinguistics that shaped his original thinking by leading to several outstanding contributions to the field of aphasiology. Inspired by his experience at the Department of Neurology of the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule in Aachen and in collaboration with Drs. Ria de Bleser and Walter Huber, he led and contributed to several groundbreaking investigations of lexical and morpho-syntactic processing. Of note are his major contributions to the evaluation of reading and writing disorders (Luzzatti et al., 2003; Ripamonti et al., 2014) and to the investigation of nouns and verbs in the brain (Crepaldi et al., 2006; Luzzatti et al., 2002), including compound words, for which he provided evidence in favor of dual-route (i.e., decompositional and whole-word) models of word processing (Marelli et al., 2014; Marelli & Luzzatti, 2012). He also investigated the rare phenomenon of optic aphasia, proposing a model in which the clinical syndrome is caused by a disconnection of right-hemisphere visual semantics from left-hemisphere verbal semantics (Luzzatti et al., 1998; Veronelli et al., 2024). Within this framework, visual semantics is bilaterally and symmetrically represented in the brain, whereas verbal semantics is predominantly left-lateralized. In addition, he provided several significant contributions to the characterization of language deficits in neurodegenerative disease, including early descriptions of Primary Progressive Aphasia (Luzzatti & Poeck, 1991; Poeck & Luzzatti, 1988).

Claudio was a man of exceptionally high ethical standards and feelings. Alongside his several investigations of theoretically-motivated research questions, he always felt the urge to develop and refine tools for the assessment and rehabilitation of language and neuropsychological disorders as a way to “give back” to the numerous research participants he interacted with. Among his several contributions on this topic are the development of the Italian version of the Aachen Aphasia Test (Luzzatti et al., 2024), as well as of several assessment tools for the detection of lexical and morpho-syntactic deficits (Aiello et al., 2022; Barbieri et al., 2024; Luzzatti et al., 2020; Veronelli et al., 2020).

In addition, Claudio authored several historical papers in which he re-analyzed early aphasia case reports as well as early studies of body representation in the brain (Luzzatti, 2002; Luzzatti & Whitaker, 2021).

Claudio was a passionate mentor and an invaluable collaborator to many academics. Students and colleagues will always remember his meticulousness and dedication to perfection, which led to long, sometimes painful but always fruitful, discussions on how each manuscript could be improved.

Claudio was an intellectual, a genuinely curious individual, an avid reader and a passionate traveler. A non-practicing Jew, very critical of the state of Israel in his early years, he had recently developed a greater interest in his own cultural background. Albeit devastated by the recent turn of events, he had taken a more articulate and cautionary position and aimed at a deeper understanding of the situation. Like many intellectuals of his generation, he was genuinely and deeply devoted to the causes he supported. Unlike many, however, he was tolerant and understanding of diverging opinions and often provided unexpected answers to people he interacted with.

All these qualities, together with his intellectual brightness, helped attract students and mentees. Claudio was a mentor and collaborator of many, who will always acknowledge his influence on their own work and their own lives.

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