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Survey of Students'Identification of Cluttering and Stuttering

Paul Blanchet[a]*, Lindsey Farrell[b], Gabrielle Ambrosino[c], Kristen Paler[b]

[a]Baylor University, One Bear Place #97332, Waco, TX 76798-7332, USA
[b]State University of New York at Fredonia, Room W123 Thompson Hall, Fredonia, NY 14063, USA
[c]State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Sibley Hall 226, 101 Broad Street, Plattsburgh, NY 12901, USA

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure students' abilities to identify known persons with fluency disorders. One group read written definitions of stuttering and cluttering; the other group read the definitions and also viewed a video segment on cluttering. Results yielded no significant differences in the numbers of persons with fluency disorders identified by the two groups. However, participants who received written definitions only identified more people who clutter than those who also viewed the video. This may suggest that people provided with only a written definition of cluttering may be overestimating the number of individuals they know who clutter.

Keywords: cluttering; stuttering; prevalence; survey; students.

1. Introduction

Cluttering is a fluency disorder wherein a person "clutters" his or her speech, speaking at a fast rate, and often speaking unintelligibly. The person who clutters (PWC) may collapse words, omit syllables,or slur sounds (Guitar, 2014). However, the individual's speech is not necessarily continuously rapid; many PWC produce short bursts of rapid speech filled with misarticulations and disfluencies. These disfluencies differ from those typically heard in stuttering (e.g., interjections, incomplete phrases, phrase repetitions and revisions). In addition, cluttered disfluencies are usually produced without the physical tension often observed in stuttering (Guitar, 2014).

* Corresponding author:
E-mail address: Paul_Blanchet@baylor.edu

To a greater degree than people who stutter (PWS), PWC often become more fluent, slower, and more intelligible when they make an effort to control their speech. However, also in contrast to stuttering, most PWC are not aware that they are cluttering unless a listener brings it to their attention (Guitar, 2014). In addition to speech production deficits, cluttering often presents with concomitant problems, including auditory processing deficits (Ward & Scaler Scott, 2011). To complicate matters further, cluttering is often accompanied by stuttering (Guitar, 2014), making differential diagnosis particularly challenging. Due to these and other issues, obtaining accurate prevalence rates of cluttering is difficult.

Previous research has examined individuals' abilities to identify persons who clutter, as an indirect method of estimating prevalence. For example, St. Louis et al. (2010) presented respondents with written definitions of cluttering and stuttering. In general, findings suggested a "high rate" of identification of people who clutter and/or stutter in four countries. This suggests that when given definitions of cluttering and stuttering, many people can identify others with these fluency disorders. However, there is currently no research examining students' identification of cluttering when provided with a video demonstration of cluttering. Anecdotally, clinicians and educators often find that individuals in the public (e.g., university students) are much less familiar with cluttering than they are with stuttering. However, when given a brief demonstration of cluttered speech, rather than merely a verbal description, many people are suddenly able to refer to at least one individual they know who clutters. To date, however, the effects of such a demonstration on individuals' abilities to identify known persons who clutter have not been tested, empirically. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to measure university students' abilities to identify persons they know who clutter (PWC), persons who stutter (PWS), or persons who clutter and stutter (PWCAS). One group of participants (n = 51) were provided with written definitions of stuttering and cluttering, whereas the other group (n = 51) received the definitions and also viewed a brief segment of an educational DVD with audio and video examples of cluttered speech. A video of cluttering only (as opposed to videos depicting cluttering and stuttering) was chosen because of the presumed limited public awareness of cluttering, as well as the paucity of accurate prevalence estimates of cluttering (St. Louis et al., 2010). All participants completed a brief survey assessing the number of people they could identify as PWS, PWC, or PWCAS. We hypothesized that students who viewed the video segment would identify significantly more PWC and PWCAS than the students who merely read a written definition of cluttering and stuttering.

2. Method

Several university classes were selected to receive either the definition condition (DC) or definition/video condition (DVC). Prior to initiation of the study, a consent form was read aloud and students were asked to complete it in order to participate. Participants in both conditions were then provided with a questionnaire that included written definitions of cluttering and stuttering (see Appendix A). Before completing the survey, participants listened as the examiner read the definitions aloud. Students in the DC group were instructed to complete the survey after the examiner read the definitions. For the DVC, the participants viewed a 5-minute DVD segment, listened to definitions presented verbally, and then completed the survey (see *Materials* for a detailed description of the DVD). Upon completion of the study, the questionnaires were collected and placed in a separate folder from the consent forms. The study was conducted at the end of the class period; participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. The course instructors were not present during data collection. All students present for class participated and a total of 102 survey forms were collected (i.e., 100% return rate).

2.1. Participants

Participants were university students enrolled in several undergraduate-level courses. A total of 102 surveys were included in the data analysis. This included surveys completed by 55 females and 47 males. None of the 102 students were communication disorders and sciences (CDS) majors. Five (4.9%) of the students were freshman, 16 (15.7%) were sophomores, 18 (17.6%) were juniors, and 63 (61.8%) were seniors.