

Some Linguistic Aspects of Stuttering in Kannada*

GEETHA, Y. V.

Studies on the linguistic variables of stuttering are not available in the Indian languages. The present study is an attempt to find some of these linguistic variables of stuttering in Kannada languages.

The study investigated the spontaneous speech and reading samples of 15 stutters (1 female and 14 males) ranging in age from 5 years to 20 years. There were 4 children (5 years to 8 years) and 11 adults (11 years to 20 years) stutters. The speech samples were collected using some of the C.A.T. and T.A.T. cards, one reading passage taken from the Kannada articulation test. The speech samples were recorded, transcribed and analysed on the following linguistic variables :

- (1) Content (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) vs. function words (pronouns, articles, determiners, conjunctions, etc.).
- (2) Phoneme characteristics.
- (3) Word position in a sentence.
- (4) Syllable position in a word.
- (5) Repetitions of various linguistic units (syllables, part words, words, phrases and sentences).

* Master's Dissertation, University of Mysore, 1979.

The following null hypotheses were made in the study to test the above variables :

- (1) There would be no difference among the stutters in terms of their difficulty with respect to content and function words.
- (2) There would not be any relationship between the phonemic characteristics and stuttering, *i.e.*, consonants are stuttered as often as vowels and that there is no rank order of difficulty with regard to sounds on which stuttering occurs.
- (3) (a) There would be no relation between word position in a sentence and stuttering.
(b) There would be no relation between syllable position in a word and stuttering.
- (4) There would be no difference between the adult and child stutters in terms of their repetition characteristics.

Conclusions

The analysis of the data yielded the following conclusions :

- (1) (a) The content words are stuttered more often than the function words.

The mean difference obtained between the content and function word stuttering was shown to be highly significant.

- (b) That we can establish a hierarchy among the content and function word categories with regard to the amount of stuttering. The hierarchy obtained in the study was : Nouns, Verbs, Pronouns, Adverbs, Adjectives, Determiners, Conjunctions and finally the post-positional aspect in Kannada. Thus, except for the pronouns, all other content word categories rank the highest with regard to the frequency of stuttering. This is in agreement with the literature on stuttering that content words in general are stuttered more and contradicts the view of Bloodstein and others who report that the earliest phase of stuttering is characterized by more stuttering on function words.

- (2) (a) In the present study consonants in general were stuttered more often than vowels. However, stuttering was found on vowels also and in a minority of cases vowel stuttering was more than the consonant stuttering.

- (b) For the group as a whole, the vowel [a] got the highest frequency of stuttering when it was the first sound. Other sounds getting more frequent stuttering in order of merit

include [ka], [ma], [na], [ha], [ba]. The individuals vary widely in terms of their difficulty with any particular sound. When the weighted scores were used to assign hierarchy the following sounds get the highest weightages in the order [a], [k], [m], [b] and [h] in the first position and [n], [r], [v], [t], [o] and [m] in the second position.

- (3) Word position in a sentence did have an influence on stuttering. In all cases, though the stuttering was noticed even in word positions beyond the 10th, the stuttering was more concentrated near the first few word positions. There was in general a gradual decrease in the frequency of stuttering with increasing word position.
- (4) The syllable position in a word is significantly related to the frequency of stuttering over it, *i.e.*, in most cases, the first sound or syllable position of a word is the determiner of stuttering than the medial or final syllables. Hence, the hypothesis 3 (b) should be rejected.
- (5) The fourth null hypothesis that there is no difference between the adult and child stutterers in terms of their repetition characteristics was accepted, *i.e.*, the children do not differ from adults with regard to the various linguistic units as syllable, word, part word, phrase and sentence repetitions. This contradicts the suggestion of Bloodstein's recent tension and fragmentation hypothesis

- (6) With respect to the syllable structure, maximum stuttering was observed on C.V. syllables ($M = 37$) and the next in the order was V syllable ($M = 18.87$).
- (7) In the group, the syllable repetition occurred most often ($M = 58.27$) followed by the repetitions of words, phrases, part words. Sentences were rarely repeated.

From the present study, it appears that the linguistic factors are important determiners of stuttering though other factors may also influence it. As suggested by Van Riper, in each individual and in each instance of stuttering, any one or more of these linguistic factors may be operating. In the present investigation these aspects are not dealt completely and satisfactorily due to shortage of time and lack of adequate sample.

Recommendations for Further Study

- (1) These and the other linguistic variables known to influence stuttering may be

studied on a larger population. Additional factors that may be studied are : word length, suprasegmental features of the stuttered word or syllables (*i.e.*, stress, accent, intonational aspects), sentence length, propositionality, word frequency, rate of speaking or reading and others.

- (2) The linguistic factors may be studied in case of normal disfluency, the early phase of stuttering and the successive phases so that if there is any relation between the stages and the linguistic factors may be established.
- (3) The variables of sex and age may be studied with regard to the linguistic factors in stuttering.
- (4) Linguistic variables and stuttering may also be explored in relation to the language development, bilingualism and multilingualism.
- (5) The influence of socio-cultural factors with regard to the linguistic variables of stuttering may be studied.