

Abstract

Stuttering is a disorder that can be defined in terms of speech characteristics, physical concomitants, emotions, perceptions, and quality of life (Bennett, 2006). The current literature focuses on describing bilingual stuttering in terms of bilingualism being a cause; linguistic characteristics; and manifestations across languages. While standardized measures of these factors allow for generalization across studies (Roberts, 2011), they do not provide a holistic picture of the bilingual stuttering experience. This study investigates ways individuals linguistically construct their experience as bilinguals who stutter (BWS) through the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theory of language use described by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). Under this paradigm, language is conceptualized as a resource for creating meaning by the selections speakers make within the grammar to construct their messages and thus, has given rise to the systematic analysis of authentic language use in the context of social interaction. It is through the analysis of the talk of BWS that the current study provides insight on the affective and cognitive aspects of the bilingual stuttering experience.

A qualitative research design was used to answer the primary research question: “How do BWS linguistically construct their stuttering experience?” as well as the sub-questions: (a) “What perceptions do BWS have about stuttering in each language?” and (b) “How do these BWS position themselves relative to their stuttering?”

The data collected for this study was audio recorded during intra-dyad conversations between the BWS and their family member(s) and individual ethnographic interviews. Transcripts of the audio recordings, which ranged from 90-120 minutes per participant, were analyzed with SFL-based analytic tools to reveal ways participants linguistically constructed their experiences as BWS. In particular, the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions of speech described by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) were examined. The analysis of experiential meanings revealed how BWS linguistically construed themselves, others, and the phenomena related to stuttering as participants and processes in clauses,

which yielded data that give insight into perceived patterns of control and experience. Analysis of the interpersonal metafunction was conducted through the examination of the systems of appraisal and modality. Investigation of the appraisal system allowed the researcher to examine how BWS conveyed attitude and graded these components through the meanings of specific, charged words and even whole clauses when talking about their personal experiences with stuttering (Eggins & Slade, 1997). The modality system was examined to reveal the polarity of clauses. Under this system, positive and negative polarity is expressed in terms of probability, usuality, potential, inclination, and obligation.

Results revealed cultural issues including beliefs about etiology, access to resources, and stigma. Additionally, the participants' therapy experiences brought to light issues with lack of transfer of skills across languages and speaking contexts. The outcomes of this study have research implications for the use of SFL-based analytic tools in the clinical setting. The results also provide a better understanding of the bilingual stuttering experience and also serve as a foundation for the development of appropriate, meaningful, and effective fluency intervention strategies for the 'whole' BWS.

References

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