

Linguistic dysfluencies in story-retellings of Cypriot Greek children with Language Impairment

Elena Theodorou and Maria Constanta

Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, Cyprus University of Technology

Fluency has been associated with the ability of producing speech quickly and easily. This ability develops and matures as children get older. Further, literature strongly states that language production and language fluency are two highly interrelated processes. The term linguistic dysfluencies determines the whole set of pauses and self-repairs found in oral speech. In fact, linguistic dysfluencies are part of normal speech production and they serve the function of self-correction instead of making mistakes during speech. In particular, they have been characterized as strategies of speakers to resolve failures of speech production. As for children with language impairment, though the research is highly inconsistent, it is suggested that they produce linguistic dysfluencies that differ from those found to be produced by typically developing children in terms of types and quantity.

The study reported here examines and compares the types and frequency of dysfluencies that appear in narrations of four groups of bilingual Cypriot-Greek children: typically language developing children, preschool and school aged, and language impaired children, preschool and school aged. This study is a part of an extended one that aims in evaluating the morphosyntactic abilities of children in a re-telling context. Narrative samples were obtained using Bus Story Test and were recorded for all participants. Transcription and analysis of the samples followed focusing on dysfluencies. Classification of linguistic dysfluencies was based on a system that has been proposed recently by Balčiūnienė and Kornev (2016), and includes: hesitations, repetitions, revisions, false starts, and incomplete utterances.

Our findings suggest that preschool children with language impairment use the same types and amount of linguistic dysfluencies as typically developing children do. Significant differences were yielded when older school aged children with language impairment were compared with their typically developing peers. Specifically, children with language impairment produce more hesitations, repetitions (grammatical) and incomplete utterances than typically developing children.

No difference observed between preschool children might be related to the language acquisition process that happens rapidly at this age. On the other hand, linguistic dysfluencies produced by children with language impairment might provide to both researchers and clinicians who support the particular group of children insight that is related to language mastering level. Further, linguistic dysfluencies can inform the identification procedure of children who experience language impairment especially in dialectal situation.

Concluding, this study represents the very first study examining the dysfluencies produced by Greek speaking children (in this case Cypriot-Greek), and it could be characterized as exploratory. Further studies need to follow aiming to more comprehensive results.