

## Disfluencies in Children (5-6 years)

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Fluency is "a barometer for the entire speech system... (with its limits... apparently set by adequacy of performance of the other dimensions of speech" (Perkins, 1977). It is a multidimensional behaviour, the dimensions of which encompass continuity, rate, effort and rhythm. An understanding of the multidimensionality of normal fluency will help the clinician in diagnosis and rehabilitation of cases with fluency disorders. Several attempts (Branscom, et al 1955; Haynes and Hood, 1977; Kowal, et al 1975) have been made in the past to describe the development of speech fluency in normal children. However, the differentiation of Normally nonfluent children and stuttering children remains a matter of controversy. In this regard, much is needed in the area of speech fluency in normal children. In this context, the present study was planned to explore the speech fluency of Kannada speaking normal children.

Disfluencies in 12 normal, Kannada speaking children in the age range of 5-6 years (the age group of 5-6 years was divided to six two-month intervals with two subjects in each age interval) belonging to middle socio-economic status were assessed in three different tasks:- conversation, picture description and story narration. The speech samples were audio recorded and were transcribed and analysed for the number of utterances, percent of disfluencies and percent of different types of disfluencies for position, task, age and grammatical categories. An utterance referred to a minimum linguistic meaningful unit. Nine categories of disfluencies:- filled pauses, unfilled pauses, repeats, parenthetical remarks, false starts, sound prolongation, part-question repetitions, audible inspirations and clusters :- and three positions :- initial, medial and final;- were considered. The grammatical categories included nouns, determiners, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, locatives, negatives, conjunctions and interjection.

The results revealed that overall, more number of utterances were elicited in conversation, followed by picture description and story narration tasks. The disfluencies occurred in the initial position atleast 90% of the time, followed by medial and final position. The disfluencies in the final position were minimal.

Unfilled pauses, filled pauses, parenthetical remarks and audible inspirations occurred most frequently and prolongation, part-question repetition, repeats and false starts occurred least. In repetition, part-word repetitions and word repetitions were the most frequently occurring sub-types of disfluencies. Among the false starts, precisions occurred most frequently in all the three tasks. The occurrence of false starts has been attributed to corrections, emphasis and negation which a child makes.

Parenthetical remarks increased from 5-5.4 years and declined from 5.8 years onwards and false starts increased between the age of 5.4-5.6 years. The grammatical categories on/before which the disfluencies occurred most were on nouns, in all the three tasks. In general, nouns, determiners, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions and interjections. Also, unfilled pauses or filled pauses occurred maximally. Relating these two aspects, this study supports that pauses (unfilled and filled) occur more on content words than on function words. The clusters observed in this study had audible inspirations occurring more in the initial part of the cluster.

A comparison of the results of this study has been made with two other studies for the picture description task in Kannada speaking normal children (Nagapoornima, [1990] in the age range 3-4 years and Indu [1990] in the age range 4-5 years). The comparison revealed that the filled pauses showed an increase from 3-5 years and then declined. The unfilled pauses declined from 3-5 years and increased beyond this. The repetitions also showed a similar pattern. Both parenthetical remark and false starts, increased from 3-6 years. While prolongations and audible inspirations were absent in 3-4 years, they were present in 4-5 years and 5-6 years

and exhibited an increment. Part-question repetitions were exhibited only in the age range 5-6 years.

On the basis of the results of this study a fluency test, using the picture description task has been proposed for the age range 5-6 years, and the cut-off scores and the range for each type of disfluency and overall disfluencies has been provided. The purpose of this test is to help identifying dysfluent children and apply required management techniques. It is suggested that this test be used with clinical population to make it an effective tool in diagnosis and rehabilitation of fluency disorders.