Mean Length of Utterance and Syntactic Complexity in the Speech of the Cerebral Plasied

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The present study was aimed at describing the mean length of utterance and syntactic complexity in the cerebral palsied children, a group of children with neuromuscular involvement due to CNS dysfunction. 20 normal children and 10 cerebral palsied children were considered in the age range of 4-11 years. All the children had average or above average intelligence and normal hearing. They came from a middle socio-economic background. In the cerebral palsy group, 8 spastics and 2 atheoid were studied A language sample consisting of spontaneous and narrative/elicited utterances was recorded from each of these 30 children. 100 such utterances were transcribed with broad IPA transciption and analysed for mean lenght of utterance and syntactic complexity. Mean length of utterance was calculated for both words and morphemes-syntactic complexity was assessed by considering the order and frequency of different lexical categories, arrangements of these lexical cattegories in the utterances and the number of single and multiple word utterances.

The following conclusios were arrived at from the results :-

1. MLU proved to be useful as a gross indicator of the language disordered group (cerebral palsy) as compared to normals. It was specially useful when supplemented with information regarding syntactic description in both normals and cerebral palsied.
2. MLU for words and morphemes was significantly reduced in the cerebral palsied population when compared to normals.
3. Syntactic complexity in the cerebral palsied population showed a quantitative and qualitative change as compared to a normal group.
4. There appeared to be differences between the two types of cerebral palsied - Spastic and athetoid as is evidenced from comparison in the 10-11 years age group.
5. Severity of the cerebral palsy could have a detrimental influence on language skills of the cerebral palsied children.
6. Age does not emerge as a definite variable for the language skills in the cerebral palsied population. In other words there is no improvement observed in language skills with increasing age.