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The relationship between anxiety and stuttering: a multidimensional approach

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Abstract

The relationship between anxiety and stuttering is equivocal from both clinical and empirical perspectives. This study examined the relationship within the framework of the multidimensional interaction model of anxiety that includes an approach to general anxiety in specific situations [J. Pers. Soc. Psychol. 60 (1991) 919]. Ninety-four males aged 18–43, half disfluent speakers and half fluent speakers completed two questionnaires: The Trait Anxiety Inventory [C.D. Spielberger, R.L. Gorsuch, R.E. Lushene, Manual for the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Self Evaluation Questionnaire), Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA, 1970] and the Speech Situation Checklist [G.J. Bruten, *Neurolinguistic Approaches to Stuttering*, Mouton, The Hague; G.J. Bruten, *Stuttering: A Second Symposium*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973; G.J. Bruten, P. Janssen, *Proceedings 18th Congress of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatriests*, Washington, DC, 1975; M. Vanryckeghem, *Proceedings of the XXIVth Congress of the International Association of Logopedists and Phoniatriests*, Nijmegen University Press, Nijmegen, 1981]. In addition, after performing speech and non-speech tasks, participants evaluated their level of anxiety on a subjective scale, labeled Task-Related Anxiety—TRA. The stuttering group also evaluated the level of severity of their stuttering. Findings indicate that trait anxiety is higher among people who stutter compared to fluent speakers, thus indicating that anxiety is a personality trait of people who stutter. State anxiety in social communication is higher among severe stutterers as compared to mild stutterers and fluent speakers. Thus, state anxiety is related to stuttering severity. The results are discussed in the frame of the multidimensional model of anxiety.

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Educational objectives: The reader will be able to: (1) describe the multidimensional anxiety model; (2) extend the model to the relations between stuttering and anxiety; (3) describe stuttering severity in relation to the levels of anxiety within the model.

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Anxiety is a complex psychological construct said to involve three components, namely verbal-cognitive, behavioral, and physiological (Lazarus & Opton, 1966). The reactions of anxiety to stressful situations and their determinants have received much attention during the last decade (e.g., Endler, Edwards, & Vitelli, 1991). Two types of anxiety have been recognized: Trait anxiety refers to a person's inherent level of anxiety and state anxiety, referring to a condition or situation-specific anxiety (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970). Spielberger (1979) suggests that the way a person perceives a threat determines his/her reaction. A situation will be non-stressful when the person does not perceive it as dangerous, or he has the capacity or experience to cope with this situation. The state-trait anxiety entails a consideration of both personality and situational factors in predicting changes in level anxiety. Each of these two major types of anxiety has been conceptualized as rather uniform in nature and as a single construct. This view can mask the possibility to see particular components of trait or state anxiety (Spielberger et al., 1970).

Contrary to the traditional approach, a model developed in the last decade holds that both state and trait anxiety are multidimensional (Endler, Edwards, et al., 1991; Endler, Parker, Bagby, & Cox, 1991). The model suggests four types of situationally determined trait anxiety: social evaluation, physical danger, ambiguity, and daily routines. These components are seen to be largely independent (Endler, Parker, et al., 1991). The multidimensionality of trait anxiety implies that individuals differ in their predisposition to experience anxiety. For example, individuals with a high disposition to experience trait anxiety in the social evaluation sphere will exhibit increased state anxiety when confronting social evaluation but not necessarily when confronting physical danger. Endler and his colleagues demonstrate the effectiveness of the multidimensional concept of trait anxiety in predicting increases in state anxiety. They show the complex interplay between person variables and situation variables. For example, individuals who were high on the physical danger type of situation-determined trait anxiety exhibited increased state anxiety when confronted with the missile attack during the 1991 Gulf War in Israel (Lobel, Gilat, & Endler, 1993).

Anxiety has been assigned various roles in theories of stuttering. Whereas some view anxiety as the main cause of the disorder (Sheehan, 1970; Wischner, 1952), others treat it as a mediating variable be it precipitating, perpetuating, or aggravating factors (Brutten & Shoemaker, 1967; Gregory, 1991; Van Riper, 1973). Others still, view anxiety as a by-product of stuttering (Perkins, 1979; Ryan, 1974). In addition, several researchers and clinicians who noted emotional reactions typical to people who stutter, view anxiety as a general stress trait (Barbara, 1960; Caruso, Chodzko-Zajko, Bidinger, & Sommers, 1994; Craig, 1990; Craig, Hancock, Tran, & Craig, 2003) while others regard it as a state condition related to

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