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Understanding the language characteristics of children who stutter to improve assessment and treatment approaches

Stuttering can significantly handicap a child, both socially and academically. Stuttering usually begins in the preschool years, at the same time as the child is developing language skills. We do not fully understand the relationship between language development and stuttering. However, a critical aspect in understanding this relationship is how language and stuttering develop together over time. Because the majority of young children grow out of their stuttering, studies of this type can enable examination of possible language factors that contribute to stuttering remission. The overall goals of this project are to examine the relationship between aspects of language and fluency in children who stutter and to identify language factors that suggest a child is more or less likely to recover from stuttering. This presentation focuses on a piece of the overall project: Over a four-month period, I analyzed the fluency and language performance of one child who stuttered. We charted the child's stuttering and several aspects of language, including measures of vocabulary and grammar, to examine changes over time. The data so far suggest that for this child, the length of his conversational turns increased as his fluency increased. We are continuing to monitor the language and fluency of this child. The next step, currently underway, is the comparison of the child's individual pattern of performance with the patterns of nine other young children who stutter. These comparisons should enhance our understanding of the ways in which language and stuttering impact each other in young children in the midst of language acquisition.