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Stuttering and pragmatics in 'once upon a time in hollywood' movie

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Abstract---The present study aims to explore the experiences of an adult person who stutters with the unpredictable and variable nature of stuttering across various contexts. Through analyzing some utterances chosen from 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood' movie uttered by 'Rick Dalton', the main character in the movie, who stutters in his daily life and speaks fluently in specific situations, this investigation facilitate a qualitative exploration of the contextual variability of stuttering to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomena. This study is conducted by means of Searl's Speech Acts Theory, and Demands and Capacities Theory to analyze the data. The results produced proved the correlation between stuttering and pragmatics which sheds light on the significance of focusing on context in the programs of stuttering treatment.

Keywords---hollywood, pragmatics, demands, capacities theory, searl's speech, acts theory.

Introduction

Stuttering is a neurologically based speech impairment often defined by its overt characteristics which do not involve contextual variability encountered by people who stutter, but it remains largely under-researched. More recently, some investigators have begun to address how the language and fluency of stutterers are influenced in different communicative settings.

The Problem

The relation between stuttering and pragmatic skills should be investigated since some stutterers might be successful persons in communicating with others, not a comic, shy, and losers as they used to be portrayed by the traditional stereotyped image of stutterers.

Aim of the Study

The main goal of the current research is to investigate the linguistic ability in general, and pragmatic ability in particular, in using indirect speech acts in *Rick's* speech, the hero of '*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*' movie, in both his fluent and stuttered speech, and its relation to his various states of stuttering.

Questions of the Study

The need to put forward investigating the indirectness in *Rick Dalton's* speech, the hero of '*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*' movie, arises the following questions:

- What are the utterances that are spoken fluently, and what are those that are stuttered by *Rick Dalton*?
- What is the aspect of Demands and Capacities theory that lead to occurring stuttering?
- What are the direct and indirect speech acts in both *Rick's* stuttered and fluent utterances?
- Is there any correlation between speaking indirectly and stuttering? If the answer is yes:
- Could indirect speech overcome stuttering or the reverse is true?

The Value of the Study

Investigating a successful adult's stuttering and its relation to the pragmatic impairment through contextual variability marks this study distinctively since the core of most previous researches is children's' stuttering. Additionally, a vision for the stutterer's linguistic future could be delivered in this study since the focus is on an adult stutterer. Moreover, investigating stuttering in a movie might be time and effort saving; it is a move to see the stutterer's various pragmatic skills in his language repertoire, and its nexus to stuttering in various social contexts in a way that might be difficult when examining real stutterers on the ground.

The Limits of the Study

Investigating stuttering in an imaginative character in a movie might be trapped in credibility deficit. However, the chosen movie '*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*', with its significant movie stars, might not attract the pathologists' and psychologists' voices of protest easily by declining to the level of presenting stuttering in an unsystematic and irresponsible manner. The study is limited to investigating and analyzing the indirectness in *Rick Dalton's* utterances in '*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*' movie. Most of the discussion focuses on the

stutterer's pragmatic ability in producing indirect speech and whether it is affected by stuttering or the reverse is true.

Procedures of the Study

To achieve an effective analysis, the adopted procedures are as follows:

- To identify the significance of the topic to psychology and pragmatics, the literature is viewed. Investigating stuttering is not new, but investigating a stutterer's varied states of stuttering via studying a character in a movie pragmatically and psychologically is new topic to be deal with. Therefore, there is paucity in related studies to this field.
- Stuttering is known for the vagueness in its causes. Treatment for an adult person who stutters lacks an adequate theory. Thus, the researchers believe that stuttering has a pragmatic along with the psychological motives. Thus, to find sources and to achieve the aim of the study, the researchers have linked stuttering topic, as psychological field, with pragmatics. Hence, the model of analysis is an eclectic model combined Searl's Speech Act Theory with Demands and Capacities Model.
- The data is some chosen utterances uttered by *Rick Dalton*, the hero of 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood' movie in his conversation with different characters in different contexts. *Rick Dalton* is a stutterer but there is a clear cut fluctuation in his stuttering states that he stutters in some situations and is fluent in another.

Literature Review

Stuttering

Fluency is speaking with the least amount of effort despite the combination of various features such as syllable /word stress, rate of speech, intonation, and pauses between words (Robb, 2014; Starkweather, 1987; Yairi & Seery, 2014). When there is a change in one or more of these features, the consequence will be stuttering (Guitar 2006; Robb, 2014). Therefore, stuttering is defined, according to The World Health Organization (WHO) as the speaker's inability to speak and address an already known message fluently because of prolongation, involuntary repeating words, or blocking of sounds which are the primary symptoms of stuttering (WHO, 1977). other symptoms of stuttering, which are categorized as secondary ones, involve psychological behavior such as stop speaking or words substitution (Bloodstein & Bernstein Ratner, 2008) other psychological symptoms involve frustration, embarrassment or fear (Guitar, 2014), sadness, anger and unusual temperament (Robb, 2014). Some movements of the body such as sudden exhalation of air, clenching of fists, closed eyes or jerked hands (Robb, 2014; Yairi & Seery, 2014). Stuttering may occur at the age of 2 and 5 either suddenly or gradually (Bloodstein & Bernstein Ratner, 2008). However, some injuries in head, a stroke, or neurological problems might lead to stuttering for adults with some difference from stuttering resulted from some stages of developments (Robb, 2014).

Etiology

The actual cause of stuttering is poorly understood. Some theories attributed stuttering in some people to their low emotional threshold and limited neurological makeup (Reddy et al.2010). While others clarify that the unique nature of the symptoms of stuttering support the theory that the etiology of stuttering as a combination of genetic predisposition along with physiological, psychological, neurological, learned behavioral, and environmental aspects (Kalman & Wheeler, 2015). Moreover, some theories link loss of hearing to stuttering (Shields, 2018). As for explaining the underlying cause of stuttering or the cause of individual moments of stuttering, Bloodstein and Ranter(2008) averred that the Demands and capacities theory address both.

The Demands and Capacities Model (DCM)

The Demands and Capacities model is an influential multifactorial model entrenched in 1990 by Woodruff Starkweather targeting the internal cause of stuttering and the cause of individual moments of stuttering. When the demands for fluency such as the rapid or the continuity of speech are greater than the speaker's capacities to produce them, then interaction between intrinsic and environmental factors comes to occur which result in stuttering. Hence, this theory does not present the general cause of stuttering, rather, it introduces answers to the cause of individual moments of stuttering. According to this theory, there are four criteria upon which the onset and development of stuttering is based as follows:

- **Motoric.** time pressure could be deemed as the most important motoric demand which includes examples such as the production of utterance with complexity, clarifying an idea by repeating words and phrases, answering the phone, saying the addresser's name, speaking in a situation when the listeners are in a hurry, and waiting for response while continuing speaking.
- **Linguistic.** All aspects of language use is included; the semantic, syntactic, phonological, and pragmatic aspects. Disfluency of speech may be strengthened by linguistic difficulties such as words-retrieval, complexity in making phonological combination, formulating sentences, and the failure in communicating socially.
- **Socio-emotional.** Excitement and anxiety are the main factors in increasing stuttering by increasing the motor muscle activity.
- **Cognitive.** when metalinguistic skills ,such as formulating the individual's thoughts and the processing of thoughts to convey a message, have not developed yet, stuttering might occur (Starkweather et al., 1990; Starkweather & Franken, 1991; Starkweather & Givens-Ackerman,1997; Riley & Riley, 1999; Conture, 2003)

Stuttering and Pragmatics

Huang (2014:1) clarified that "*pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of language use*". to get at the realities behind this definition, Roth and Spekman (1984a,1984b) turn their attention to the significance of context by averring that pragmatics studies deploys on the use of language and the relation

of analyzing utterances and getting their hidden meaning when uttered in specific context. Concerning stuttering, Starkweather (1990) introduced pragmatic difficulty to be one of the linguistic factors in developing stuttering. One of the pragmatics theories chosen by the researchers for analyzing the stutterer's speech will be Searle's Speech Acts Theory.

Searle's Typology of Speech Acts

In the context of pragmatics, an utterance is characterized as an active mechanism possessing meaning beyond the scope of linguistic research. The study of speech acts, which is a mode of communication in daily life, is a branch of linguistics and a subfield of pragmatics. Austin (1962) put the basis on the speech act theory by averring that the performance of acts could be done by producing utterances in contexts. Searle, Austin's student, introduced five types of speech acts, which he called 'illocutionary speech acts' that focus on the intended meaning as follows (Levinson, 1983: 240):

- Representatives include the truthful expressions such as presenting conclusions or assertions.
- Directives involve requests, orders, questioning and all the acts that impose obligation on the addressee.
- Commissives as is indicated by their names mean the responsibilities and some plans in the future such as promises and threats.
- Expressive is the speaker's declaration of his /her feelings and other psychological senses such as apologizing or thanking.
- A declaration is restricted to authoritative institutions due to the inclusion of announcing serious changes such as marriage and war.

Searle's essay 'Indirect Speech Acts' included illustration of the possibility of finding out two kinds of illocutionary act in one speech act. The first kind is called primary and encompasses utterances with meanings different from the literal meaning of the speech acts, which is the characteristic of the indirect speech. As for the second kind, which is the direct one, the meanings of their utterances are the same of their speech acts (Cole and Morgan, 1975:61).

Previous Studies

Hassan, et al (2017) in their study "*Correlation between Stuttering Severity and Pragmatic Development in Egyptian Children who stutter*" the core of the study is assessing the development of pragmatic language in children who stutter and its relation to the severity of stuttering. For the assessment, the standardized Egyptian Arabic Pragmatic Language Test has been utilized. Consequently, the results showed that, in all children under study, pragmatic language was not affected except in the paralinguistic aspects which extend the views of finding the appropriate treatment. As regards the current study, the stutterer is a successful adult person, and treatment for an adult person lacks an adequate theory. Thus, the aim is finding out the motive of stuttering pragmatically and psychologically to provide some solutions for tackling such motives from the childhood.

Results and Discussions

The sudden worsening of stuttering is the result of some psychological effects on speakers who stutter (Peter & Guitar, 1991; Starkweather, 1987). On the other hand, a person who stutters might have moments of fluency in specific contexts such as talking alone or imitating a particular accent (Bloodstein, 1993; Guitar, 2014; Anber and Jameel, 2020). In this research, the data is from various conversations in *'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood'* movie released in (2019). *'Rick Dalton'*, the hero of the movie, is the only character that his utterances are chosen under study. In a qualitative research technique, the data will be analyzed first by the aspect of Demands and Capacities Theory, then by the speech acts that are direct or indirect, then by explaining the effect of the two theories on the development of stuttering.

1. ***"I hope the, uh, Rick Dalton double feature... wasn't too painful for you and the... and the missus"***

In response to the producer's praise, Rick used *expressive speech acts* directly, but in fact he, indirectly, wanted to emphasize and show off his talent. Thus, the pragmatic side is perfect. As for stuttering, one of the Demands and Capacities Aspects is imbalanced, which is the linguistic aspect, is especially in the semantic side due to the difficulty in finding out the appropriate meaning.

2. ***"Yeah. Yeah. I'm doing a pilot for CBS right now. It's called... It's called Lancer"***

Embarrassed by the producer's criticism about his lowdown acting in some movies, Rick's stuttering resulted from imbalance in the motoric aspect as it is obvious from the repeated words. As for his ability in producing skillful pragmatic utterance, it seems that the context is not ripe for producing adequate indirect answer. Time is limited and the addressee is a stranger on him, so Rick puts his hope in regaining his place as a brilliant actor. Therefore, his sentence was direct inadequate answer.

3. ***"If coming face-to-face with the failure that is your career ain't worth crying about... then I don't know what the f*ck is"***

There is no stuttering in this sentence. Rick is confessing his failure to his close friend Cliff with indirect metaphorical sentence. Directly, Rick used representative speech acts, but indirectly it is in fact an expressive one. Is it the complete despair or the closeness of his friend that declined the stuttering and strengthened the linguistic ability?

4. ***"Oh, well, thank you, Sam. I... I appreciate it. It's a good part"***

The existence of embarrassment and stress when meeting Sam Wanamaker, the man who will cast Rick, created stuttering. Thus, the pragmatic ability is declined. Both direct and indirect speech acts in the sentence are expressive.

5. ***"You... You... You want me to look like a hippie?"***

When Sam wanted to make Rick's look like hippies, Rick's protests were accompanied by clear stuttering resulted from imbalance in the motoric aspect. As regards his ability to speak indirectly, Rick, despite his stuttering, implied his rejection indirectly by this directive sentence which is indirectly expressive.

6. “Sam. Sam... if you got me covered up in all this... this junk, how’s the audience gonna know it’s me?”

Due to Rick’s disapproval in front of a stranger with some hope to change his mind, stuttering appeared superior to any pragmatic ability in uttering a sentence which is indirectly and directly directive sentence.

7. “Would it bother you if... I sat next to you and read my book too?”

Through meeting a strange little girl during his rest time, Rick was too depressed that his stuttered sentence is directive directly and indirectly. Thus, in this scene stuttering overcomes indirectness.

8. “Well... it’s about this guy who’s a bronco buster. It’s the story of his life. Guy’s name is Tom Breezy, but everyone always calls him Easy Breezy. Now, when Easy Breezy was in his 20s... and young and good-looking, he could break any horse that you could throw at him. Back then, he just had a way”.)

Memories of the past blend with these utterances to create a power of optimism. Thus, there is declined stuttering and strengthened pragmatic ability. With some representative sentences, Rick expressed his own opinion of this imaginative character which, in fact, represents himself at his beginnings. The sentences are directly representative, but indirectly they are expressive introducing Rick’s hidden feelings.

9. “Now he’s into his... late 30s and he takes a bad fall, and it messes up his hip. He’s not... He’s not... He’s not crippled or anything like that, but... but he’s got spine problems... he never had before, and he spends... more of his days in pain than he ever did before”.

Here stuttering emerged by the imbalance in the aspect of motor to make a struggle between pragmatic ability and stuttering. The acts in sentences are representative but indirectly they are directive asking for some kind of help to get through all these stressed feelings.

10. “About 15 years, you’ll be living it”.

In this direct representative sentence, the pragmatic ability overcomes stuttering when he warned the girl indirectly of fame; that this sentence is indirectly directive.

11. “Forgot your lines, embarrassed yourself like that in front of all those goddamn people”!

Talking to himself, Rick did not stutter in this representative direct sentence, and he was able to express his frustration with speech acts indirectly with representative illocutionary force.

12. “I think we’ve.....we’ve reached the end of the trail, Cliff”.

Facing his friend of the need to break up created a struggle between his pragmatic ability to choose the appropriate expressions, and between his motor aspects that is imbalanced clearly. However, stuttering did not curb his pragmatic skill that he used this direct representative sentence, which was an indirect directive sentence to ask his friend to break up.

13. “Next time you want to try that, fix your muffler. Look, chief. You don’t belong here. Now take this mechanical and get it off my street! Drive it, and drive it now”!

Facing a group of strange hippies breaking in his neighborhood created a sense of aggressiveness and defeat which leads to no stuttering at all. *Rick* uttered the directive sentence directly to imply a hidden threat indirectly. Thus the indirect speech act is commissive.

14. “Hey. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. What hospital you going to, Cliff? I’ll meet you there, huh?”

Rick was anxious about his friend *Cliff* after the latter had been attacked by the hippies. *Rick*’s anxiety did not result in any stuttering. Additionally, he was able to imply his anxiety by using speech acts with commissive illocutionary force directly with an indirect expressive act.

- Starting with the Demands and Capacities Theory, motoric aspect is the most imbalanced one among the four aspects on which stuttering is developed in *Rick*.
- Socio-emotional aspect is balanced as it is obvious from *Rick*’s fluent utterances in the midst of excitement. This made him a star.
- Cognitive aspect is perfect as it is clarified by *Rick*’s acceptable thoughts and reactions.
- As for the linguistic aspect, it is illustrated that it is only the semantic side that is imbalanced sometimes. With some difficulty in finding the appropriate meaning to some words. The stutterer’s linguistic substance is acceptable, but the difference is only in surface.
- Since motoric and linguistic are imbalanced there is a fluctuation in the states of stuttering. Because socio and cognitive are perfect, *Rick* was a fluent actor and a stutterer in his daily life activities.
- Backed by science, it is common that persons who stutter will stutter more in a situation that requires more communication demands, such as answering questions, talking to an unfamiliar person or speaking on the telephone (Guitar, 2006; Robb, 2014; Yairi & Seery, 2014). Thus, pragmatically, *Rick* suffers from some failure in answering or arguing in some situations. Thus, stuttering might have some role in such failure. The more pragmatic demands on a stutterer are increased, the more vulnerable the ability to maintain fluency will be.
- There is stuttering but when the pragmatic ability comes to existence it may lead to declining stuttering to some noticeable extent. So, the linguistic and motoric is imbalanced is taken care of in the childhood, the stuttering could be declined.

Conclusion

There is a positive relation between negative feelings and stuttering (Weidner et al. 2017). There is a correspondence between this theory and this study, but what is comprehended in *Rick*’s state is that the existence of negative feelings along with indifference about the consequences creates a negative relation to stuttering. Accordingly, even if the source of stuttering is genetic, it is fed on fear and agony which are, hence, specific components of context. As a result, pragmatics, in

which context is an essential part, might have great effect on the existence or curbing stuttering.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare Data availability statement The dataset for the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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