Adaptation of the Overall Assessment of the Speaker's Experience of Stuttering for People who Clutter (OASEC)

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1. Introduction and Purpose

Cluttering is a communication disorder that involves disruptions in speech fluency and intelligibility associated with a perceived rapid rate of speech and other speech disruptions (St. Louis & Schulte, 2011). The majority of research on cluttering has focused on developing definitions of the condition and identifying observable features that can aid in diagnosis. Such work is necessary, and there is much that the field can continue to learn about the nature of cluttered speech.

In the past, it was believed that those who clutter were unaware of speech difficulties and therefore could not experience negative life impact. As our knowledge about cluttering has progressed, and as adults who clutter have shared their stories, the field has come to realize that negative life impact is a reality for some people who clutter. For example, adults who clutter have shared stories illustrating how their cognitive abilities and employment skills have been underestimated due to their communication difficulties. People who clutter have shared experiences of anxiety surrounding speaking in educational, work-related, and social settings (Dewey, 2005; Exum, Absalon, Smith, & Reichel, 2010; Kissagizlis, 2010; Scaler Scott & St. Louis, 2011).These experiences can have an adverse impact on quality of life.

There has been a recent surge in discussions about the impact of cluttering. Discussions are often initiated via social media groups such as the Cluttering Speech Facebook group. Additionally, people with cluttering have been publishing their personal experiences of cluttering via websites (https://www.toofastforwords.com), autobiographical publications (Wilhelm, 2020), and a YouTube series (Dewey, 2020). Conversations between people who clutter and researchers have highlighted the unique issues those who clutter may experience. The discussions have also shown how the experiences of those who clutter might be different from the experiences of those who stutter (Meza & Scaler Scott, 2022).

It would be beneficial for people who clutter, as well as for speech-language pathologists who seek to help them, to have a means for measuring the adverse impact experienced by those who clutter. A tool for measuring the adverse impact of cluttering would contribute both to research on the experience of cluttering as well as clinical work dedicated to minimizing that adverse impact.

A similar need has previously been shown for research and intervention in stuttering, and several tools have been developed to meet the need. One such tool, the *Overall Assessment of the Speaker's Experience of* Stuttering (OASES; Yaruss & Quesal, 2006, 2016), is a self-report measure for evaluating the adverse impact of stuttering on the lives of people who stutter. Anecdotal reports of clinicians trying to adapt the OASES to clients who clutter illustrate the need for a tool that has been specifically developed to formally assess the life impact of cluttering. The overarching purpose of this line of research is to better understand the impact of cluttering on people's lives through a standardized assessment, namely the OASES specifically designed for cluttering.

2. Method

To begin this project, the authors prepared an initial set of adaptations of the OASES to address the unique needs and experiences of people who clutter. In this study, items from the OASES were evaluated to determine whether they could be modified to the experiences of people who clutter. Items that were judged to be not relevant to the experience of people who clutter (based on clinical experience and research evidence) were removed. New items were added to address unique aspects of cluttering that may not be common for people who stutter.

Draft versions of the OASES for cluttering (OASEC) were distributed to cluttering experts for initial review and feedback, and a qualitative content analysis of their responses was conducted. Experts included four researchers/clinicians who have published extensively in the area of cluttering and one adult who clutters.

3. Results

A major theme that emerged from initial feedback was that the concerns of people who clutter are *unique* and *different* when compared to the concerns of people who stutter. The uniqueness is a reflection of differences inherent to the fluency disorder cluttering. For example, due to multiple definitions used by experts in the field, the term cluttering may mean different things to different individuals. Although most people who stutter already know about stuttering, many people who clutter may find the term "cluttering" (and the diagnosis itself) to be new or unfamiliar. Therefore, assessing reactions to cluttering by using the term cluttering may raise concerns with validity. However, even those who are unaware of the term and/or their symptoms may experience negative listener reactions which can affect quality of life.

Revisions in response to feedback. Revisions to the OASEC have been made in response to expert feedback. For example, an initial checklist was added that includes potential symptoms of cluttering based on multiple definitions (St. Louis & Schulte, 2011; Myers et al., 2018) as well as listener reactions. Inclusion of specific symptoms and listener reactions highlights a unique difference that can occur between the experiences of those who stutter vs. those who clutter. That is, while many who stutter may experience a sensation of "loss of control" (e.g., Tichenor & Yaruss, 2021), as well as emotional reactions related to the experience of that moment of stuttering (e.g., embarrassment, frustration), many who clutter may be unaware of the issue in the moment. As a result, many of their emotional reactions are related more to listener responses (e.g., asking to slow down, speak clearly, get to the point, etc.) than to their own perceptions while speaking. The initial checklist in cluttering allows the speaker to rate their negative experiences, when, for those with awareness in the moment, these experiences have occurred during the moment of cluttering (e.g., frustration in not being able to get a thought across clearly) and/or when in response to listener reactions. Clarifying the unique experience with this initial checklist helps to set the foundation for assessing the impact of the experience throughout the rest of the OASEC. Within the rest of the OASEC, some changes have been made to reflect these unique differences. For example, the OASES assesses the speaker's emotional reactions associated with stuttering, while the OASEC assesses the speaker's emotional reactions associated with cluttering and adds an additional section to assess the speaker's emotional reactions associated with others' reactions to their cluttering. These changes have been made with the intention to help the clinician gather an accurate account of the speaker's experience with cluttering.

In this new format, after a speaker reports on communication challenges from their perspective, they are then asked to rate life impact based upon these specific challenges. Throughout the OASEC, the term cluttering has often been replaced with specific terms relating to those symptoms, such as speaking quickly or with reduced intelligibility. Given that some adults who clutter report limited awareness of their symptoms but increased awareness among their communication partners (Wilhelm, 2020), a partner checklist has also been included to obtain information from significant others. This partner checklist also has the potential to provide a baseline for assessing the need for family education.

4. Conclusions and future directions

As of the time of the presentation described in this extended abstract, development of the OASEC is ongoing. In the future, revised drafts of the OASEC will be pilot tested and revised in an iterative fashion, following procedures used in the creation of the original OASES Response Forms (Yaruss & Quesal, 2006). The process will improve the psychometric properties of the tool while supporting ongoing research on the experience of cluttering.

Disclosures

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