

Do children enrolled in treatment for stuttering using the Lidcombe Program achieve increased fluency by decreasing the complexity of their utterances?

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Summary

The Lidcombe Program for Early Stuttering Intervention enjoys widespread use as a clinical treatment for stuttering in children. This program uses an operant method, whereby parents are trained to systematically praise their children for fluent speech. Reports have supported the efficacy of this program. However, the mechanisms on which children participating in this program rely on (in order to reduce their rate of stuttering) are not well understood. This study hypothesized the existence of a trade-off effect, such that increased fluency might be achieved by a reduction in linguistic complexity. Four preschool children were followed over the course of a 13-week standard treatment with the Lidcombe program. The children's rate of stuttering as well as their MLU (mean length of utterance- an index of syntactic complexity), and vocabulary diversity were measured longitudinally before treatment, at 4 points during treatment and after the completion of the treatment. The results revealed that the children increased in fluency, but that this increase was not accompanied by decreases in MLU, and that, in fact, MLU increased considerably over time. It was noted that the vocabulary use of all four children was low compared to norms throughout the study. However, vocabulary diversity tended to increase rather than decrease over the course of treatment. Future studies should focus on the vocabulary use of children who stutter.

What families and practitioners should know

- The Lidcombe program is effective in reducing stuttering and gains in fluency are not the result of linguistic simplification (in terms of MLU)
- Due to the small sample size, the findings of this study should be viewed as preliminary
- Clinicians using the Lidcombe program should monitor the linguistic complexity of the children's speech, particularly with respect to vocabulary diversity

Reference

[Lattermann, C., Shenker, R. & Elin Thordardottir \(2005\). Progression of language complexity during treatment with the Lidcombe program for early stuttering intervention. American Journal of Speech Language Pathology, 14, 242-253.](#)