Cluttering: Functional Strategies for Management

Cluttering, a fluency disorder characterized by a speaking rate that is perceived to be abnormally rapid, irregular, or both, can be difficult to distinguish from stuttering. This program examines cluttering in children and young adults aged 8–21 years, exploring symptoms, assessment, and approaches to intervention with attention to the possible negative effects of cluttering on children’s academic performance.

Learning Outcomes
You will be able to:
• define cluttering
• list three areas to examine when assessing cluttering
• list three treatment strategies for clients with cluttering, and two practical strategies for goal carryover
• discuss considerations for treating cluttering with concomitant communication disorders

Faculty
Kathleen Scaler Scott, PhD, CCC-SLP, is an assistant professor in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology at Misericordia University and a Board Recognized Fluency Specialist. She has been a practicing clinician for over 16 years in hospital, school, and private practice settings.

Dr. Scaler Scott has authored and co-authored several articles and book chapters in fluency disorders, and is co-editor of the forthcoming textbook, Cluttering: A Handbook of Research, Intervention, and Education with Dr. David Ward. Dr. Scaler Scott was editor of a special issue of Perspectives on Fluency and Fluency Disorders (July 2009) focused specifically on cluttering. Her current research projects include analysis of cluttering characteristics, examination of working memory in cluttering, and exploration of fluency patterns in autism spectrum disorders. She has presented numerous papers nationally and internationally in the areas of fluency disorders and social communication disorders. A certified special education and elementary school teacher, Dr. Scaler Scott is also coordinator of the International Cluttering Association.

Moderator
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Jack Coursen, Educational Program Manager, ASHA

This course is offered for 0.2 ASHA CEUs (Intermediate level, Professional area).
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Three things I learned from this program (required for credit):
1. ____________________________________________________________________________________
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In adherence to the ASHA Code of Ethics, I affirm that I listened to the program in its entirety.

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4. Additional Handout 2: Addressing Cluttering Throughout the School Day
Cluttering: Functional Strategies for Management

Cluttering

Functional Strategies for Management

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Goals

- Simplify the definition of cluttering
- Simplify the identification, diagnosis, and treatment of cluttering
- Understand ways cluttering can impede other areas of communication
Goals

- Understand how to separate cluttering from other diagnoses
- Understand how to treat cluttering alone and in combination with other disorders
- Design treatment plans that take generalization and carryover into account at the outset of therapy

Evolving Definition

- **Weis (1964):** “Central language imbalance”
- **APA for DSM (1987):** included lack of awareness; removed from DSM in 1994; included with stuttering in new revisions
- **WHO (1992):** rate, phrasing, disfluency
- **ASHA Special Interest Committee (1999):** associated phonological, language, attention symptoms
Evolving Definition

- Daly and Burnett (1999): “The cluttering umbrella”
- St. Louis et al. (1992; 2003; 2007): “Lowest common denominator” (LCD)
- St. Louis & Schulte (in press): current LCD

Current Definition

Cluttering is a fluency disorder wherein segments of conversation\(^1\) in the speaker’s native language\(^2\) typically are perceived as too fast overall\(^3\), too irregular\(^4\), or both. The segments of rapid and/or irregular speech rate must further be accompanied by one or more of the following: (a) excessive “normal” disfluencies\(^5\); (b) excessive collapsing\(^6\) or deletion of syllables; and/or (c) abnormal pauses, syllable stress, or speech rhythm.

St. Louis and Schulte (In press)
Current Definition

1 Cluttering must occur in naturalistic conversation, but it need not occur even a majority of the time. Clear but isolated examples that exceed those observed in normal speakers are sufficient for a diagnosis.

2 This may also apply to the speaker’s mastered and habitual non-native language, especially in multilingual living environments.

3 This may be true even though syllable rates may not exceed those of normal speakers.

4 Synonyms for irregular rate include “jerky,” or “spurty.”

5 These disfluencies are often observed in smaller numbers in normal speakers and are typically not observed in stuttering.

6 Collapsing includes, but is not limited to, excessive shortening, “telescoping,” or “over-coarticulating” various syllables, especially in multisyllabic words.
Accurate Diagnosis

- Cluttered speech vs. cluttering
- Avoid the “broad net” and its pitfalls

Such practice also provides answers to the age-old questions:
- Does cluttering really exist, anyway?
- Isn’t it really just a language disorder?
- Isn’t it really just an articulation disorder? Maybe hypokinetic dysarthria?

Questions and Answers

To ask a question:

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Assessment Strategies

• Gather the information

• Be sure that your speech samples include
  • Rote tasks (counting: fast, regular, slow)
  • Reading
  • Conversation
  • Expository discourse
Assessment Strategies

• What are you looking for?
  • Rapid and/or irregular rate
  • Fluency

Assessment Strategies

• What are you looking for?
  • Intelligibility
  • Phrasing/prosody

May want a writing sample (though this is NOT part of definition)
Assessment Strategies

- Determining educational impact
  - Academics and learning
    - Class participation
    - Reading aloud
    - Group/partner projects
    - Written language

- Social-Emotional Functioning
  - Socialization: The spectrum
    - From Ignore/exclude
      - When does this begin?
      - Where does this lead?
    - To Tease/bully
Assessment Strategies

- Determining educational impact
  - Independent Functioning
    - Consider what may lie beneath outward behaviors/impressions
    - Social and academic responses to a communication difficulty
    - Impact of these responses on overall academic and social performance over time

- Communication
  - Remember that if you can’t communicate well, this will have negative impact upon your ability to use communication to navigate through your school day
Assessment Strategies

- Other questions
  (NOT specifically part of the current working definition)
  - What is the level of **awareness**?
  - What is their ability to **self-monitor**, **self-regulate** in other aspects of their life?
  - What is their motivation to change?

Assessment Interpretation

- Differential diagnosis
  - **Rate**
    - Remember rapid
    - **OR** irregular qualifies
  - How fast is too fast? Does rate have a functional impact?
Assessment Interpretation

- Differential diagnosis
- Fluency
  - How do the NSLDs compare to the SLDs?
  - Is it cluttering alone? Concomitant stuttering? Covert stuttering?
    - Follow up: SSI-4, interview, checklists for attitudes and feelings
    - Formulation vs. habit vs. stuttering avoidance: analyze patterns around the NSLDs

Assessment Interpretation

- Differential diagnosis
- Intelligibility
  - Consider all speaking situations and reports of all listeners (variability)
  - Production of individual sounds vs. collapsing of syllables
- Prosody
  - The grey area
Assessment Interpretation

- Others
  - Is language also disorganized?
    - Follow up: writing sample
  - Multicultural considerations (St. Louis & Schulte, In press; Shipley, 2009)
    - Patterns of second language acquisition
    - Interpersonal vs. cognitive/academic language proficiency

Assessment Interpretation

- Impact of concomitant problems on cluttering
  - e.g., attention’s impact on independent strategy use
  - Consider referrals for other evaluations as needed
Questions and Answers

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Principles of Treatment

- Client must buy in to rationale for treatment
- Strategies must be functional and offer naturalistic reinforcement
- Treatment should remind that we are all on a spectrum of intelligibility to help normalize strategy use
- Treatment should focus on recognizing client’s strengths and the desire to hear about these in oral communication (“I have good things to say.”)
Treatment Activities

• Building rationale
  • The whats and hows of speech
  • Brainstorm: reasons people might not understand someone when they are speaking

Treatment Activities

• How I say it
  • Family quizzes
  • The science experiment
  • Great things I have to say
Treatment Activities

• **How** I say it
  • Exercises for
    • Smooth vs. choppy
    • Clear vs. mushy
    • Loud vs. soft
    • “Regular rate” vs. fast

Treatment Activities

• **How** I say it
  • Number lines for
    • Volume on last word
    • Choppy vs. smooth
    • Mushy vs. clear
    • Slow vs. fast
  • Activities: war, crazy eights, go fish
Treatment Activities

- Building rationale
  - The whats and hows of speech
    - Brainstorm: reasons people might have a miscommunication

Treatment Activities

- **What** I say
  - Family quizzes
  - What requests for clarification really mean
Treatment Activities

• **What I say**
  - Problem-solve to try to figure out why my listener is confused
    - Too much information?
    - Not enough background information?
    - Out of sequence?
    - Non-specific pronouns?
  - Multicultural considerations for this approach

Treatment Activities

• Putting it all together
  - Looking for listener feedback: how and what flowcharts…
    - Reading aloud
    - Who’s Doing What? with books
    - Telling jokes with eye contact and pausing
    - Would you rather? with eye contact and pausing
Treatment Activities

- Putting it all together
  - Poetry for self-regulation:
    - Self-regulation: getting to understand how it feels and sounds to have a communication breakdown

Carryover

- What works
  - Pausing
  - Looking for feedback
  - Problem solving how or what I said
  - Self-regulating activities

- What doesn’t
  - Tell child slow down
  - Delayed/altered auditory feedback
  - Verbal reminders
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Carryover

- **What works**
  - Providing the rationale

- **Synergistic approach** (Myers and Bradley, 1992)

- **What doesn’t**
  - Providing activities w/o rationale and/or not monitoring comprehension of rationale

  - Treating individual symptoms

Home Practice

- Carryover Bingo boards
- Watch for examples of communication breakdowns and adjustments in others (TV, movies, real life)
- Functional phrases
- Play natural reinforcers!
- Keep it up: it’s got to be a focus until it comes naturally
- Multicultural considerations
Concomitant Disorders

- ADHD
  - Considering monitoring and self-regulation

- Autism Spectrum Disorders
  - Principles of engagement

- Low cognitive levels
  - Keeping it simple and natural

- Resistant to change
  - Meeting them where they are

Summary

- Keep it clean and simple
- Look at the whole picture and how communication is impacted
- Analyze patterns over time to gain information
- Make it functional and naturalistic so that buy in and carryover are ensured
- More resources and info to come…keep your eyes and ears open!
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Kathleen Scaler Scott, PhD, CCC-SLP

Live Broadcast May 20, 2010, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. Eastern time


Assessment Tools for Cluttering

Rate
- Language Sample
- Stopwatch

Fluency
- Stuttering Severity Instrument-4
- Disfluency counts (Stuttering-like vs. Non-stuttering-like)

Intelligibility
- Articulation tests if warranted
- Oral mechanism exam
- Multisyllabic words in isolation and in context

Prosody
- Subjective rating scales for speech naturalness*
- Interview feedback on function
  - SLP
  - Teacher(s)
  - Caregivers

Severity Ratings
**Cluttering Assessment Program


Developed by Kathleen Scaler Scott, Ph.D. April 2010 for ASHA Cluttering Web/Telephone Seminar
Addressing Cluttering Throughout the School Day

- Individual/small group sessions
  - “How” Strategies: pausing, word ending focus, all syllable focus
  - “What” Strategies: background information, relevant details only
    - Practice “how” and “what” strategies with curricular materials
      - Reading
      - Expository discourse
    - Look for others’ feedback
      - Reading
      - Conversation
    - Focus on curricular area readings and discussions
    - Visitors to session or visits to other sessions
    - Train peers in each others’ goals and reinforcement

- Coordinating with classroom teachers
  - Read alouds
  - The secret signal
  - Being a detective in class
  - Fostering independent problem solving

Developed by Kathleen Scaler Scott, Ph.D. April 2010 for ASHA Cluttering Web/Telephone Seminar