A Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Stuttering Character in *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam* Malayalam Movie

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Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Su_Su_Sudhi_Vathmeekam

Abstract

This research aims to find the types of stuttering and kinds of associated behaviours in the Malayalam movie *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam*. The character chosen to be analysed is the central character of the movie, Sudhi Vathmeekam. This research used Patricia M. Zarbrowski's (2003:453-458) theories on types of Speech Dysfluencies and analysed the

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associated behaviours of stuttering based on ASHA (2017). This research applied a descriptive qualitative method. The sources of data of this research are *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam* film and its script. The words, phrases, clauses and sentences uttered by Sudhi Vathmeekam in the film along with his gestures reflecting the phenomenon of stuttering were taken into consideration as data. After collecting the data, the researcher classified and analysed them into different categories based on psycholinguistic study. In the types of speech dysfluencies, through the findings of the study, the researcher couldn't find any Between-Word dysfluencies but found three Within-Word dysfluencies out of four and all the associated behaviours were found. Keywords: Psycholinguistics, Speech Disorders, Stuttering, Associated Behaviours, *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam* Malayalam film.

Keywords: Stuttering character, Malayalam movie, *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam.*

Introduction

Language is a medium of communication to convey thoughts, ideas, and emotions through spoken, written, or gestural means. In communication information is exchanged between individuals or groups using various forms of language and nonverbal cues such as body language and facial expressions. In order to foster understanding, unity and relationships among people effective communication is necessary.

Linguistics is the study of language. Language is studied at various levels such as phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse. The branches of linguistics are Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Computational linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Stylistics Historical Linguistics and Comparative Linguistics. (Torres Kettunen, F.) Psycholinguistics is a subfield of linguistics that emphases on psychological and cognitive aspects of language. It examines how a language is acquired, produced, comprehended and stored by the humans thereby contributing to the mental processes underlying language abilities and communication.

Theoretical Background

In language production, one of the areas psycholinguistics focuses is Speech Disorders which are Dysphasia, Aphasia, Stuttering, Cerebral Palsy and Dysgraphia. Lanier (2010: 9-14) states that there are three categorizations of speech disorders; they are fluency disorders,

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articulation disorders, and voice disorders. Fluency disorders are related to the smoothness or rhythm of speech and are especially common among young children. The inability to produce sounds correctly in speech is referred to as an articulation disorder. Voice disorder is a condition in speech that affects the quality of voice such as pitch, volume, tone.

Stuttering

Stuttering is a fluency disorder which disrupts the normal flow of speech by repetitions and prolongations in syllables, sounds, words and phrases. Speech disorders can be developmental (i.e. present from early childhood) or they can be acquired as the results of a surgery, stroke, an accident or old age stuttering. Patricia M. Zebrowski (2003: 453-458) categorizes speech dysfluencies into two: i) Between-Word Dysfluencies ii) Within-Word Dysfluencies. Zebrowski further classifies Between-Word Dysfluencies into three; they are a) Interjections, b) Phrase Repetitions c) Revisions. Also, Within-Word Dysfluencies are divided into three subtypes a) Repetitions of Individual Sounds or Syllables, b) Prolongations of Sounds, c) Blocks (Silent Pause)

Moreover, Conture (1990:45) categorized stuttering movements into the two broad subclasses of Within-Word and Between-Word Dysfluencies. He classified one of the categories of Between-Word Dysfluencies i.e. Multisyllabic Whole-Word Repetition which is not stated by Zebrowski. He also classified one of the categories of Within-Word Dysfluencies i.e. Monosyllabic Whole-Word Repetition which is not stated by Zebrowski.

Types of Speech Dysfluencies

i) Between-Word Dysfluencies: Interruptions in the flow of speech when a person tries to link words together. There are four types of Between-Word Dysfluencies:

  a) Interjections: Erica Weir and Sonya Bianchet (2004:1790) says Interjections are extra sounds, syllables or words that add no meaning to the message. Common interjections include are uh, um, well, like, you know, actually, etc. For example, "I um (interjects the sound um) need to go home".

  b) Phrase Repetitions: In phrase repetitions, the speaker may repeat the entire phrase or part of a sentence which doesn't make any change in the meaning of the sentence. For example, "I like – I like ice cream."

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c) Revisions: The speaker may revise what he/ she has said and the change maybe in the grammatical structure of the sentence or content or pronunciation of a word. For example, "I had–I lost my tooth."

d) Multisyllabic Whole-Word Repetition: The speaker repeats a whole word which contains more than a syllable. For example, "You you are pretty".

ii) Within-Word Dysfluencies: They include sound and syllable repetitions, sound prolongations, and dysrhythmic phonation and tense pauses within the words.

a) Repetitions of Individual Sounds or Syllables: The speaker may repeat the individual sounds of a language. For example, "W-why is she here?". Furthermore, the speaker may repeat an individual syllable and this usually happens on the first syllable of a word. You'll repeat the sound or syllable until you can say the whole word and then resume speaking. For example, "be-be-be-because I'm hungry"

b) Prolongations of words: The speaker holds out a sound for too long, to where the speech sounds abnormal. For example, "Wwwwwwhere are you?"

c) Blocks: Blocks are silent intervals between or within words when a person is unable to move their mouth and use their voice to continue speaking. For example, "I am………………so tired."

d) Monosyllabic Whole-Word Repetition: The speaker repeats a word which consists of a single syllable. For example, "I-I-I-I want to go out".

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017) speaks about the signs and symptoms of stuttering. Stuttering is much more than these dysfluencies. Apart from the fluency disorders, a person who stutters may be accompanied by the following symptoms: i) negative reactions to speaking ii) avoidance behaviours iii) escape behaviours, such as secondary mannerisms iv) physical tension
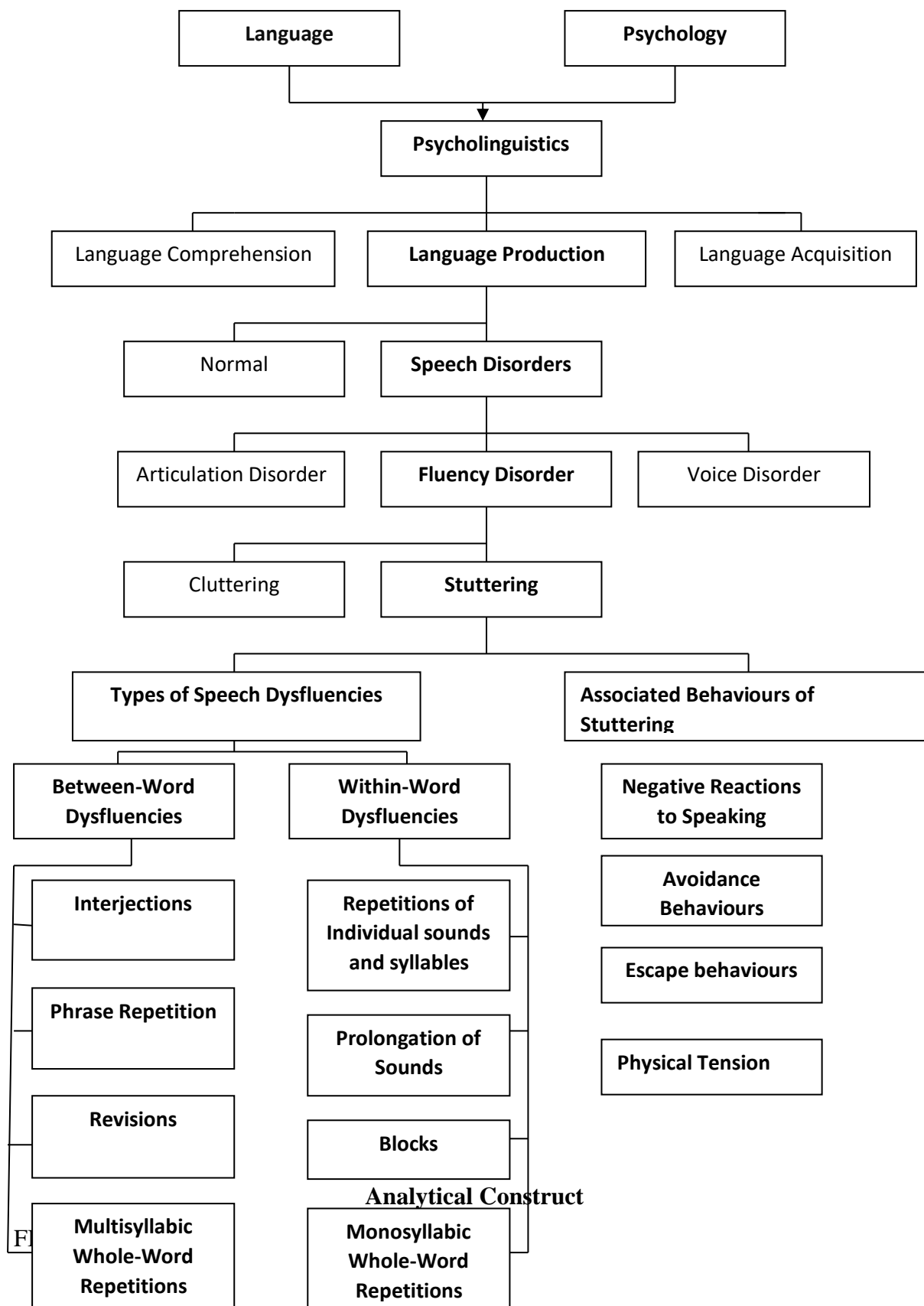
Types of Associated Behaviours

i) Negative reactions to speaking: A person who stutters are perceived negatively by non-stammering peers even from their primary school itself. As they are more susceptible to mocking, the speaker might feel frustrated or have negative feelings about himself/ herself from very young. They even find it difficult to establish friendship and become a victim of bullying. Stuttering may cause a person to be embarrassed and make them feel anxious about

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talking. A person who stutters may also stutter more if others tease them or bring attention to their speech.

ii) Avoidance behaviours (i.e., avoidance of sounds, words, people, or situations that involve speaking): Stuttering may include tension and negative feelings about talking so this may get in the way of how you talk to others. The person who stutters may want to hide stuttering as he/she will be a victim of bullying. So, they may avoid certain words or situations which they are not comfortable with. They may not want to talk on the phone if that makes them stutter more or avoid meeting a new person or a particular situation that involve speaking. They may also avoid using certain words or use different words which is easy for them to pronounce just to hide their speech disorder.

iii) Escape behaviours, such as secondary mannerisms: Zabrowski (2003: 453-458) says about the different types accompanied behaviours or secondary behaviours that can be seen in a stuttering person. Sometimes people who stutter use these behaviours to stop or hide stuttering. They are: -

a) Head, Torso, and Limb Movement

b) Audible Inhalations and Exhalations (gulping, holding the breath, and nostril flaring)

c) Visible Muscle Tension in the Orofacial Tension (jaw jerks)

d) Eye Behaviours (blinking, squeezing the eyes shut during moments of stuttering, side to-side movements of the eyes, and consistent loss of eye contact)

iv) Physical tension: People who stutter often experience physical tension and struggle in their speech muscles while they talk. The physical tension level of the speakers is evaluated by specialists while treating them. They evaluate the tensions in the larynx, jaw, tongue, lip recognized in the faces and the abnormal tensions of the muscles in other parts of their body. It is observed that the speaker's experience of tension changes over time and these changes may be related to speaker's acceptance of stuttering.

As children who stammer grow into adulthood the negative experiences, they face will develop in them avoidance behaviour and shyness, which may limit their opportunities for psychological and educational development. But if proper treatment is given, individuals can experience significant improvements in their confidence and speech fluency which in turn positively effects their overall quality of life. Treatment involves therapy sessions with a speech-language pathologist and can be effective at any age.

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Language **Psychology**

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Psycholinguistics

Language Comprehension | **Language Production** | Language Acquisition

Normal | **Speech Disorders**

Articulation Disorder | **Fluency Disorder** | Voice Disorder

Cluttering | **Stuttering**

Types of Speech Dysfluencies | **Associated Behaviours of Stuttering**

Between-Word Dysfluencies | **Within-Word Dysfluencies** | **Negative Reactions to Speaking**

Interjections | **Repetitions of Individual sounds and syllables** | **Avoidance Behaviours**

Phrase Repetition | **Prolongation of Sounds** | **Escape behaviours**

Revisions | **Blocks** | **Physical Tension**

Analytical Construct

F| **Multisyllabic Whole-Word Repetitions** | **Monosyllabic Whole-Word Repetitions**

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The movie *Su-Su-Sudhi Vathmeekam* is a Malayalam film (2015) directed by Ranjith Sankar. As the title of the movie suggests, it portrays the character of Sudhi Valmeekam who is suffering developmental stuttering - a fluency disorder categorised under speech disorders and is inspired by the real-life story of Sudheendran Avittathur. It is revealed from the movie through the scenes of his childhood that he suffered from developmental stuttering/childhood onset fluency disorder from his early school days and has dealt with its consequences for a very long time throughout his life. Sudhi initially meets a holistic doctor whose unscientific and baseless treatments not only fail to address Sudhi's stammering but also put him in uncomfortable or ridiculous situations, highlighting the inefficiency and absurdity of such treatments. But we can see massive improvement in his speech once he gets proper treatment and is able to have an enhanced standard of living.

Dysfluencies: Within-Word Dysfluency

a) Repetition of individual sound or syllable

Data 1

Actor Mukesh: "Well. What is your name?"

Sudhi: "Su-Su-Sudhi Vathmeekam"

Mukesh: "Is Su Su, - your surname?"

This conversation takes place between actor Mukesh and Sudhi Vathmeekam when they meet for the first time. When Sudhi says his name, he repeats the syllable /su:/ because of his Stammering condition. Meanwhile Mukesh mistakes it for his surname trying to add comic element to the movie. We can see repetition of individual syllable /su:/ whenever Sudhi tries to say his name and hence the movie is titled so.

b) Blocks

Data 2

Sheela's friend: "What qualities do you like the best in her?"

Sudhi: "Her quality…"

Friend: "Doesn't she have any quality?"

Sudhi: "It's not like that. Sheela's (pause) f-f- first quality is s-s-sincerity (pause) then (pause) music, d-d- down to earth!"

This conversation takes place between Sheela's (Sudhi's fiancé) friend and Sudhi on the day of engagement. Sheela's friends ask Sudhi to say a few words about Sheela as they

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want to record it and make a YouTube video of it for the memory of the day. Sudhi gets tensed and tries to avoid the situation twice but finally had to speak. He begins to speak "Her quality" but pauses after that and one of Sheela's friends makes fun of him asking him whether she doesn't own any such quality. Hearing this Sudhi became even more tensed and pauses in between words unable to speak. This pause is a Within-Word dysfluency called block and Sudhi undergoes blocks for three times in that sentence.

    c)   Mono-syllabic whole word repetition

    Data 3

    Receptionist: "Yes, Sir"

    Sudhi: "I-I have an int-interview here."This conversation happens towards the end of the movie when Sudhi goes to attend an interview. Receptionist sees Sudhi and asks what does he want. He says that he has an interview there and repeats the monosyllabic word 'I' in the sentence.

Associated Behaviours

    a)   Negative feelings to speaking

    Data 4

    Sudhi: "Su-Su-Su…"

    Teacher: "Tell me your name, son."

    Student: He has a stammering problem, teacher.

   The above conversation takes place between Sudhi and a teacher at his school. The teacher asked the name of the students of the class and each of them were telling aloud their names. We can see tension in Sudhi's face as he was waiting for his turn. Finally, he stammers while saying his name and repeats the syllable 'su-su'. The teacher, confused, asked once again to tell his name. To that question, one of the students answers by saying that Sudhi has a stammering issue, and other students starts laughing. Later in another scene we see his classmates avoid him while playing because of his stammering problem and is seen alone. We see Sudhi being bullied by students of his school calling him 'stammerer'. Sudhi also asks his father whether he will have this problem all through his life. Even from early childhood a stutterer is treated as an 'other' by the non-stuttering community and this in turn results in having negative feeling about oneself. They are scared to talk in front of others as they fear

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being mocked at. These negative experiences may lead to frustration, lack of self-confidence, limited opportunities for their development, social avoidance behaviour etc.

b) Avoidance behaviours (i.e., avoidance of sounds, words, people, or situations that involve speaking):

Data 5

Bus Conductor: "Hey! You. Where do you like to go?"

Sudhi: "Tha-tha…"

Conductor: "What?"

Sudhi: "Thatha-thatha…"

Conductor: "Thatha? This bus doesn't ply to such a place. What?"

Sudhi: "Erimayur!"

Conductor: "Just to say this you struggled so much. Some creatures will pop in to disturb!!"

Sudhi goes to his work in the same bus for last three and half years and had a good rapport with the bus conductor but once he had to get into another bus and it so happened as he feared. When the bus conductor asked him where he would like to go, he repeated the +syllable 'tha' (/ðə/) instead of the place name Thathamangalam and other passengers in the bus started making fun of him. The bus conductor mockingly told him that this bus doesn't ply to such a place and when asked once again Sudhi says a different place name (Erimayur) which is easy for him to say. Here we see that Sudhi travels in the same bus for years as he wants to avoid situations and people, he is unaccustomed with, for the fear of being mocked at for his speech disability. He also avoids certain sounds and words which is difficult for him to articulate and use a different word instead of that. They do all these to hide their disorder and not to become a victim of others' mockery.

c) Escape behaviours, such as secondary mannerisms:

Data 6

Sheela's Uncle: "Which school are you working?"

Sudhi: (pause) "Close! very close by!"

This conversation happens on the day of engagement of Sudhi and Sheela. Sheela's uncle whom Sudhi sees for the first time, all of a sudden roughly asks him in which school is

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he working. Sudhi got tensed as he didn't expect that question and was unable to speak for some time (block). Then he answers by saying that it's a school nearby instead of saying the name of the school which is difficult for him. While saying so we see 'rapid eye blinking', 'jaw jerking', 'nostril flaring' and Sudhi 'nodding and bowing' his head while answering which are secondary mannerisms associated with stuttering. These mannerisms often develop as coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges of stuttering by the speaker.

d) Physical tension:

Data 7

Shopkeeper: "You have been standing here for a long time. What do you need?"

Sudhi: "Ko-Ko-Ko…"

Shopkeeper: "Kovakka (Ivy Gourd)?"

Sudhi: "Ko-Ko-Ko…"

Shopkeeper: "Cabbage?"

Sudhi: "Ko-Ko…"

Shopkeeper: "Tell me quickly. I am running short of time."

Sudhi: "Ko-Ko…"

Shopkeeper: "oh! Cauliflower. Can't you just say that."

Sudhi is in grocery shop and wanted to buy /kɔːʒɪmʊtə/ (chicken egg) but didn't ask for it for a long time as there were a lot of people in the shop. Later, the shopkeeper asks him what does he want and Sudhi repeats the syllable 'ko' (/kɔː/) without being able to say /kɔːʒɪmʊtə/. Shopkeeper hurriedly asks him whether its 'kovakka' or 'cabbage' to which Sudhi responds negatively. Sudhi repeated the syllable 'ko' (/kɔː/) and shopkeeper thought he is asking for Cauliflower and gives him that. People in the shop were laughing at Sudhi and so he wasn't ready to argue further with the shopkeeper. In this scene physical tension is visible in Sudhi's face. It is displayed as facial grimaces, clenched jaws, strained vocalizations and tightened throat muscles during moments of stuttering.

Discussion

After conducting the research on Sudhi Vathmeekam's stuttering in *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam* Malayalam film using a psycholinguistics approach in terms of the types of stuttering and the types of associated behaviours, the researcher aims to point out several

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things. The researcher found none of the Between-Word dysfluencies which are interjections, phrase repetitions, revisions and multisyllabic whole-word repetition but three out of four Within-Word dysfluencies were found in Sudhi's stuttering throughout the film, which are repetitions of individual sounds or syllables, block and monosyllabic whole-word repetition. Repetition of sounds or syllables of words is most frequently experienced by Sudhi because, Sudhi stuttered usually at the beginning of his utterances or when he started to speak, which led to the repetition of initial sounds or syllables of the words, especially when he felt stressed, nervous, self-conscious etc. He doesn't experience sound prolongation which is also a Within-Word dysfluency.

Moreover, the researcher also found all the types of associated behaviours that accompanied Sudhi's stuttering in the film. They are i) negative reactions to speaking ii) avoidance behaviours iii) escape behaviours, such as secondary mannerisms iv) physical tension. Avoidance behaviours was most frequently found in the movie as Sudhi was victim of bullying from very young and was afraid to talk. So, he tried to avoid certain sounds, words, people or situations which he is uncomfortable with.

Conclusion

Sudhi's speech disorder in the film *Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam* is analysed using Zebrowski's theory of types of stuttering (2003: 453-458) and associated behaviours stated by ASHA (2017). The researcher found none of the Between-Word dysfluencies but three out of four Within-Word dysfluencies and all the types of associated behaviours in Sudhi's speech as depicted in the film. He had only some of the characteristics based on these theories hence, we understand individuals with this speech disorder exhibit different speaking traits. With the help of a skilled speech therapist, Sudhi is able to control it to a large extent after having accepted the fact that he has stuttering. Towards the end of the movie Sudhi is portrayed as a confident individual who has succeeded in professional as well as personal life. After reading this research readers get an idea of the types of speech dysfluencies, kinds of associated behaviours of stuttering and various communication barriers they often face in the society.

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