ABSTRACT

Background of Research

Verbal fluency tasks are used as a measure for understanding the complex process of retrieval of words from the brain. It involves rapid generation of words specific to a particular cue within a limited time span of sixty seconds. In the wake of limited knowledge on verbal fluency performance in children, the present study aimed at investigating the developmental changes in verbal fluency of Malayalam speaking children. To achieve this aim, the researcher investigated how variables such as age, gender and task variations influenced the verbal fluency performance in children. The study also probed in depth, the error pattern observed during the verbal fluency task.

Method

Using a cross sectional study design, verbal fluency performance was investigated in 1015 Malayalam speaking typically developing children between the ages of five to fifteen years (in both gender groups). The verbal fluency paradigm involved word generation on three tasks of Initial Letter Fluency (/p/ fluency, /n/ fluency, /k/ fluency) and three tasks of Semantic Category Fluency (animal fluency, food fluency, vehicle fluency). For each task employed, the outcome measures of total number of correct words, clustering parameters (number of clusters, mean cluster size), number of switches and error production were examined across the groups and gender.

Results

The results of the present study revealed a gradual increase in scores with increase in age on all the verbal fluency parameters excepting mean cluster size with no significant gender effects. The study results further indicated the positive influence of task with differential demands on phonemic and semantic search strategies. Study findings also
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revealed that children were prone to producing errors with error patterns specific to Malayalam language.

Summary
Overall, the study outcomes depicted a distinct pattern of organizational strategies in typically developing Malayalam speaking children influenced by age and task variations. The research findings are of significance in understanding the developmental changes in the mechanism of word retrieval during verbal fluency task. The findings of the present study indicate that verbal fluency as a task has a great potential within developmental context which is highly language and culture based.

Key words: Verbal Fluency, Malayalam, Typically developing children