

## Steps to the Sociology of Stuttering

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The aim of my research is to look at the phenomenon of stuttering from sociological viewpoint. In sociological research on stuttering, the subject of research, that is, 'society' is defined as the reactions of others, which cause stuttering. One famous study is the three-dimensional model by Wendell Johnson. Johnson's model draws a graph with the stuttering symptoms on the X-axis, the reaction of the listener on the Y-axis, and the reaction of the speaker on the Z-axis; he regards the problem of stuttering as the size of the resulting box. Books on stuttering by Johnson and Van Riper were translated into Japanese in the late 1960s and resulted in establishment of Japan Stuttering Genyukai Association by and for stutterers (*Stuttering and What You Can Do About It* by Wendell Johnson, translated by Hiroshi Uchisugawa, Nihon Bunka Kagakusha, and *The Treatment of Stuttering* by Charles Van Riper, translated by Tsuneo Taguchi, Shinshokan were both published in 1967 and became well known among the stutterers)

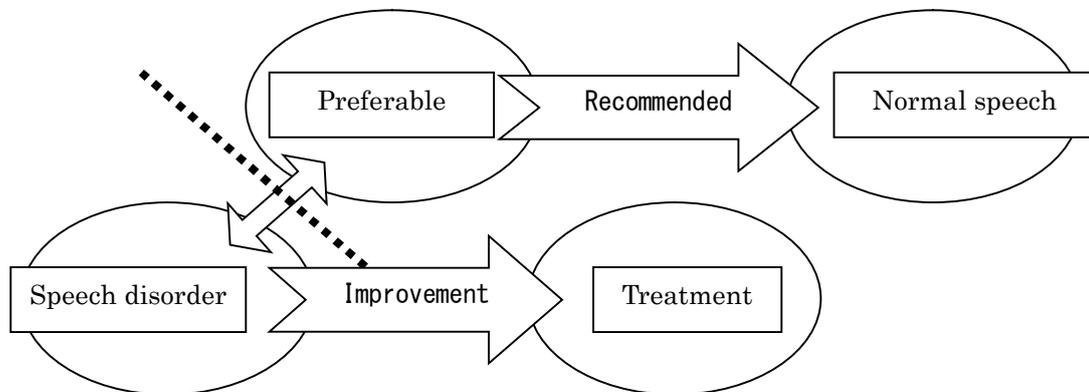
Although this research is highly important, I think that its view of stuttering is problematic in the sense that its perception of society is too narrow. 'Society' as it is perceived in this research is comprised of only the concrete people surrounding the stutterer such as his or her family, classmates, or coworkers, who, through their responses, influence the self-perception of the stutterer, they way he/she defines herself.

However, we need to understand that the very classification of a certain utterance as either a stutter or not is possible only because the stutterer is embedded in a certain 'society'. To better envisage this point, it might be a good idea to conduct the following thought experiment. Let us take up an extreme case by supposing there is only one person in the whole world. If there is just one person, there is only one way to speak, so the phenomenon of "stuttering" just cannot appear there. What about if there are two people? Then what we will have is simply a difference between the two of them, and there will be nothing to be treated as a 'disability', nothing to 'cure'. A certain utterance may be perceived as something that needs to be cured only when there are more than three people, with, let us say, two of them speaking 'normally', and one 'abnormally'. We may even go further and say that if there are two stutterers and one non-stutterer, the "non-stutterer" may well be regarded by the other two as having a 'disability'.

In fact, Johnson and Van Riper have also had a similar idea and conducted research in this vein based on a cultural comparison. They had a hypothesis that in every culture

there is a different perception of stuttering, and utterances perceived as stuttering in one culture may not be perceived as such in another, which may well affect the relative frequency of stuttering. It is well known that this research has been later taken up by anthropologists and sociologists. In my research, I would like to take over this hypothesis and continue where they left off.

And in taking over this hypothesis, I make the following rearrangement of the terms used. I perceive the 'society' we live in as one, which <divides> speech into 'preferable' and 'unpreferable', and based on this division carries out medical and other acts (Fig. 1).



What makes stuttering a truly special case is the fact the criteria for such division are ambiguous. For example, someone without a stammer even in a regular daily conversation may stutter when nervous. In this case, even though the speech has stuttering symptoms, others may interpret these as resulting from the person's nervousness and continue the conversation as if nothing had happened. Moreover, among close friends, stuttering condition may not cause any interruptions of the conversation. One problem I would like to address in my research on stuttering and the society is the problem of our society, which creates the division in the first place. One way to do it would be cross-national comparison, another historical analysis. This is the basis, upon which I would like to conduct my research on stuttering and society.