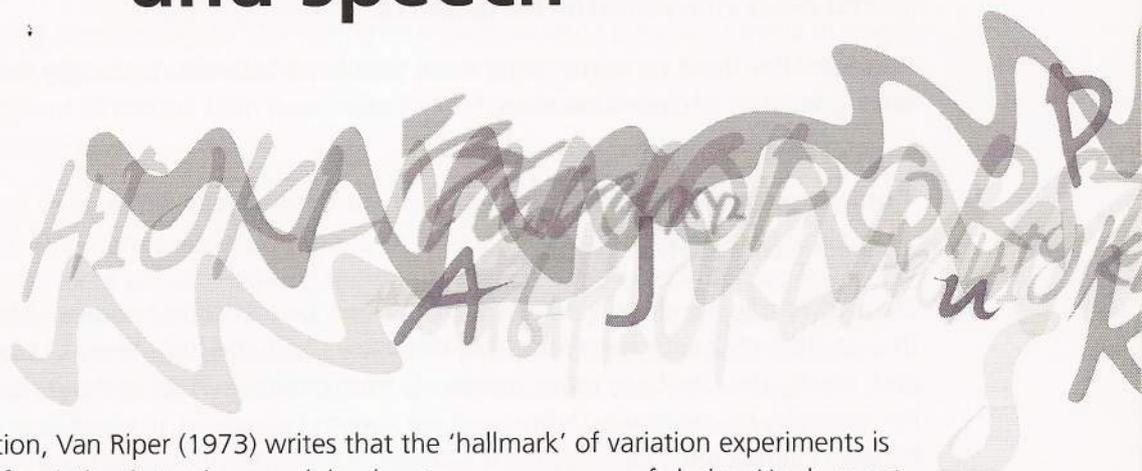


4 | Variation: non-speech and speech



In discussing variation, Van Riper (1973) writes that the 'hallmark' of variation experiments is change. The aim of variation is to give an adult who stammers a sense of choice. He does not have to behave in the way he behaves, nor indeed stammer in the manner he does, but can choose another pattern of behaviour. It may be that he has progressively reduced the choices he has in his life until he is at the point when he sees no other options but the routine types of behaviour in which he is currently engaged. Many adults we have met talk vehemently about not being able to fulfil their potential and having choice taken away from them because of their speech difficulties. In fact, many have 'imprisoned' themselves as a way of hiding from and concealing their stammer. This does not have to be so. As Kelly (1991) says, individuals do not have to be a product of their own biography. Variation is a process that can enable adults who stammer to realise this.

The foundation of recent work on variation, in the UK at least, owes much to the influence of personal construct psychology.

When to use

Variation activities are best used at the beginning of therapy:

- before work on fluency techniques
- alongside work on identification.

How to use

In this approach, which we described earlier (see Chapter 1), a client is encouraged to 'loosen' his system of construing by experimenting with:

- different ways of behaving
- different ways of feeling
- different ways of thinking.

The person can choose subsequently to accept, reject or modify these options, but the experiment will have illustrated that he has a choice. Change is introduced in as unthreatening a way as possible.

Stage 1. An individual is asked to change some aspect of his life that he sees as relatively unimportant to him (for example, related to his appearance or any routines he may have). Following the experiment the client reports back specifically on how the change was made, whether it was easy or difficult to implement, how he felt making it and whether other people noticed and/or commented on the difference.

Stage 2. After these experiments on more peripheral behaviours, therapy moves slowly into varying features of communication, for example:

- use of gestures
- facial expression
- initiating conversation.

Stage 3. Finally, the client is asked to change specific speech behaviours. (Moving to the variation of speech behaviours has direct links with the first stages of block modification and, ideally, the client can move seamlessly from one to another without realising it. For example, he can move on from varying speech behaviours to identifying and changing his own stammering.) Once again, it is suggested that the individual begins in a less threatening way, by experimenting with speech changes that are unrelated to the way he stammers, for example:

- tone of voice
- volume
- intonation.

Later, work on stammering behaviours is introduced. Van Riper (1973) recommends targeting what he calls 'anticipatory' behaviours, such as postponement and avoidance, as he has found these are more easily varied and more under the person's control. Through applying principles from behavioural psychology, the stereotypical, habitual pattern of stammering is disrupted. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- adding to the stammering by inserting another type of behaviour
- changing (the behaviour itself or the order in which it occurs)
- diminishing it or removing it altogether
- contrasting it with another behaviour.

Examples of these changes can be found in the activities section that follows.

In our experience we have noted that change at this point can be quite dramatic, with clients reporting, for example, a marked increase in their fluency and feelings of control when experimenting with reducing 'backtracking'.

Common problems

Resistance. As clinicians we can observe those 'important' aspects in our clients and become more aware perhaps of those individuals who are resistant to even minor change and find it very difficult to implement. In situations where change is more difficult the implications are clear for the therapist and the client himself: how will he react to change which is much more fundamental, that is, change to his speech, which has been a part of him and his self-image for several decades? Also, therapy will have to take into account the client's need to feel in control and to feel that he can make his own decisions.

Significant others. Sometimes difficulties arise from significant others in clients' lives. A wife or girlfriend may dislike fundamental changes in her partner's role that impact on their relationship. In these instances we need to engage important others and help them understand the processes the client is engaged in if change is to be achieved.

Problems with varying stammering. In attempting to reduce some of the more covert strategies used to hide stammering, some clients lose the little fluency they enjoy and feel that their speech is even more out of control than previously. (This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 'Desensitisation'.)

Timing. A final point to be made here is about the insight that variation experiments can give to the clinician. They can reveal much about how easy or difficult an individual finds change. Undoubtedly, there are some clients for whom change of any sort is very stressful, but they have reached a point in their lives when they have had enough of limited choices and restricted life styles. For these individuals, variation remains threatening, but the option of holding on to the status quo is much less attractive and therefore they will attempt the change. For others, the threat that change brings is too great and staying the same is safer. We recommend that for these clients variation is taken at a much slower pace and for a longer time. If the client remains resistant, then perhaps consideration should be given to whether or not therapy at this time is appropriate (see the section 'The stages of change' in Chapter 1 'Principles of therapy'). Proceeding with speech modification in the absence of loosening and/or variation is foolhardy and cannot be justified. For some individuals, it may just not be the right time to change and variation experiments can help determine this.

Activities for non-speech variation

Talking about change

The following discussion topics are useful preparatory activities that can be carried out in a group or individual therapy setting.

Decision making

Each client talks about decisions that he:

- might have made
- wishes he had made
- is glad were not made.

Significant life-turning events

Each client discusses his history in terms of significant points in his life. The clinician(s) and/or group members should be encouraged to pinpoint why these events were significant and what influenced the change in direction in thinking, attitude and/or behaviour.

How changes are made

Each client recounts an event or situation in which he was required to make a choice, for example, applying for a job, getting married, moving house. The discussion should centre on how the decision to change was brought about, how the individual made a decision and what factors affected the final choice.

Experiments that create choice ⓘ ⚙️ ¹

In the first instance, an individual is asked to change some peripheral aspect of his life. This might be related to:

- appearance (for example, wearing/not wearing jewellery, growing/shaving off a beard or moustache)
- routines (for example, the route taken to work, the daily newspaper which is bought or the types of sandwiches/food eaten for lunch)
- life style (for example, trying different exercise regimes, slowing down the pace of life, getting up/going to bed at different times or becoming involved in household chores not previously carried out).

Applying guidelines ⓘ ⚙️

Handout 22 'Guidelines for experimenting with change' can be discussed with an individual client or presented to a group for discussion. Alternatively, clinicians may use it as an example on which to base their own version.

Evaluation after experimentation ⓘ ⚙️

The following questions could be used as the basis of a discussion with the client(s) after the experiment:

- What exactly was the experiment?
- Were other people informed?
- How did you tell them? or
- Why did you choose not to tell them?
- What do you think about your decision to tell/not to tell others now?
- What did you predict would happen?
- What did you predict you would feel?
- What did you predict you would think?
- Did you believe the experiment was achievable?
- What aspects of the experiment were achieved?
- How did you feel before, during and after the experiment?
- What did you think before, during and after the experiment?
- How did other people respond?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What did you learn?
- Is the experiment worth continuing?
- If you were to do it again, what would you keep the same?
- If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?

¹ These experiments can be carried out as part of an individual therapy programme, but the best results are often achieved in a group setting. In this context a client is encouraged to make changes by fellow clients, rather than by 'fluent' therapists, he receives much encouragement for his efforts and is often motivated by the steps taken by others. In addition, pressure can be brought to bear by peers rather than therapists, and this can be a major factor for change.

Activities for communication and speech variation

Communication

As in non-speech variation, the client is encouraged to experiment first with changing aspects of his general communication skills that pose less of a threat. Some examples are given below; however, clinicians should discuss the options with the client and encourage him to make the choice.

Gesture

Increase the amount of hand/arm gesturing during one conversation a day.

Reduce/eliminate hand movements whenever you describe an event, situation or task.

Make a note of another person's use of gesture and (if appropriate) imitate one of their typical gestures.

Facial expression

For 10 minutes every day try to show others what you are feeling by increasing your facial expression.

Smile more.

Keep looking at people when they talk to you.

Encourage people when they speak to you by using facial expression.

Observe the faces of 10 people you talk to every day.

Eye contact

Maintain eye contact with everyone who talks to you:

Work on keeping eye contact during your biggest stammers. Start by focusing on this for one particular hour each day.

Find out when your partner loses eye contact with you when they are:

- talking
- listening to you talk.

Find out when you look away from other people who are talking to you.

Find out when you look away from other people when you are talking to them.

Pausing

Insert a short (two-second) pause before you answer other people's questions.

Insert a 'thinking pause' into seven conversations each day.

Observe how long you can wait before answering someone's question.

Observe which of your friends uses the most pauses in their speech.

Try pausing at the end of sentences (that is, where you would expect to see a full stop if the sentence was written down) before proceeding on to the next sentence. Use this in a conversation where you have lots to say.

Pragmatics

Ask as many questions as you can of your colleagues while at work.

Talk to one new person each day (for example, say 'hello' to the cleaner or caretaker, talk to someone at the bus stop or on the train, greet someone in the lift and say something about the weather).

Say an extra sentence when buying your regular newspaper, lunchtime sandwich or bus ticket.

At the beginning of the day find out how other people have spent their evenings or weekends.

Make a point of having lunch with a colleague each working day and engaging them in conversation.

Tell one other person one thing about yourself each day.

Ask one other person one thing about themselves each day.

Speech variation ⓘ ⚙️²

Experiment first with varying features of speech which are not directly associated with stammering behaviours. The following are examples of tasks that could be used. (See also Handout 23 'Experimenting with your speech'.)

Volume

Try slightly increasing the volume of your voice when talking to people at work. (The increased volume must be slight but noticeable.)

Use a louder voice for the first hour in the morning and a quieter voice at the end of the day.

Concentrate on not allowing the volume of your voice to fade at the end of sentences or towards the end of what you have to say.

Use a quieter voice with (your) children and/or pets.

Be aware of varying the volume of your speech in the same conversation, to convey emotion (for example, excitement vs sadness or disappointment).

Speed

Increase the speed of your speech when you feel relaxed.

Gradually increase the speed of your speech towards the end of sentences or the end of an utterance.

Slow down your speech when you talk to your boss or someone you think of as important.

Experiment with varying the rate of your speech: have two 'faster' hours followed by two 'slower' hours.

Read to your children or partner using a faster and then a slower speed. Ask them which they prefer.

² Note that these tasks varying speech behaviours can flow easily from other more general variation experiments.

Intonation and stress

Experiment with giving the first word of a sentence more emphasis.

Try and make your voice more interesting (that is, where your voice would naturally rise, let it rise slightly more and, similarly, where your voice would naturally fall, let it fall a little further). Use this way of speaking when reading to your partner or children once a day.

Use a 'softer' approach by keeping the number of words you emphasise to a minimum.

For the first hour of the day use a flat voice, with little or no change in tone.

Varying stammering behaviour ⓘ ⚙

A client can change the way he stammers in a variety of ways. The principles of varying stammering behaviours are:

- 1 add
- 2 diminish/remove
- 3 change
- 4 contrast.

These can be applied to most stammering behaviours, as in the following examples.

- 1 Reduce backtracking using addition, such as 'It's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn now'. Whenever the client is aware of backtracking he must add another element of the backtracking to the utterance: 'It's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn, *it's my turn now*'.
- 2 Work on prolongations using diminishing, such as 'It's myyyyyyyyy turn now'. Whenever the client is aware (or reminded) that he is prolonging a vowel he has to shorten the prolongation: 'It's myyyyy turn now'.

Removing a behaviour can also be used in the context of fillers. For example, a client who uses 'You know' or 'You know what I mean' could be encouraged to try to cut this out of his speech for a week to see the effect it has. This can be quite difficult to do initially and may need lots of practice and small intermediate steps.

- 3 Repetitions may be varied by changing them into prolongations. For example, if a person repeats the first syllable of a word, he should be encouraged to extend one of the repetitions. Thus 'tu, tu, tu, turn' becomes 'tu, tu, tuuuurn'. This can be modelled by the clinician and shadowed (said simultaneously with him) as the client speaks. Similarly, 'ers' could be changed to 'ums' for an experimental period.
- 4 Eliminating accessory movements such as foot tapping can be achieved effectively by using a contrasting behaviour (for example, finger tapping.) So, whenever the client taps his foot, he must tap his finger too.

Further specific examples can be found in Chapter 7 'Desensitisation' and Chapter 9 'Avoidance reduction therapy'.

Guidelines for experimenting with change

The purpose of experimentation is to test out a hypothesis, for example, 'It is better for me to do x than y'. In an experiment you are choosing to do something differently in order to experience the difference and gather data. As a result of the experience you are able to validate or disprove your hypothesis for that particular event: 'Yes, it is better to do x' or 'No, y is better'.

- Choose something that will be noticed by others.
- Choose something that feels achievable, even in the short term.

Remember this is only an experiment; it does not have to be something that is irreversible. You can choose.

- Choose something that is about you and/or the way you live your life, but something that is not too important to you.
- Choose whether or not to tell other people what you are doing.

In some instances it may be better to prepare others in advance so that they will create the 'space' for you to experiment, for example, doing household chores normally carried out by your partner. In other cases it may be preferable not to inform other people so that you can observe their reactions to the change more objectively.

- Treat the variation as if it were an actual experiment. Work out a hypothesis, for example: 'I am going to get up early every day for a week to see if getting to work on time is easier and makes me more productive at work.' Predict what you think will happen, for example, 'I am not going to find this easy. I will be grumpy in the morning, miss the extra sleep and be more tired at the end of the day.'
- Carry out the experiment as specified and record what happens. For example, make a note of how you felt on day one when the alarm went off, what your feelings were and the reactions of others when you arrived early at work. Then at the end of the day record whether you felt more tired as you had predicted. Be sure to register your feelings as well as the actual results of the variation.

Experimenting with your speech

Having experimented with doing some things differently in your daily life, it is now time to experiment with your speech. Once again you are invited to consider testing a hypothesis, this time about talking. This experiment will help you develop different ways of thinking and feeling as well as different ways of talking.

Stage 1. Start with an aspect of your communication that is not too difficult to change. It is a good idea to discuss with your clinician which aspect of your communication might be most helpful for you to start experimenting with.

Volume of your speech

Here are some examples you could try out.

Try slightly increasing the volume of your voice when talking to people at work. (The increased volume must be slight but noticeable.)

Use a louder voice for the first hour in the morning and a quieter voice at the end of the day.

Concentrate on not allowing the volume of your voice to fade at the end of sentences or towards the end of what you have to say.

Use a quieter voice with (your) children and/or pets.

Be aware of varying the volume of your speech in the same conversation, to convey emotion (for example, excitement vs sadness or disappointment).

Tone and expression of your speech

Experiment with giving the first word of a sentence more emphasis.

Try and make your voice more interesting (that is, where your voice would naturally rise, let it rise slightly more and, similarly, where your voice would naturally fall, let it fall a little further). Use this way of speaking when reading to your partner or children once a day.

Use a 'softer' approach by keeping the number of words you emphasise to a minimum.

For the first hour of the day use a flat voice, with little or no change in tone.

Speed of your speech

Increase the speed of your speech when you feel relaxed.

Gradually increase the speed of your speech towards the end of sentences or at the end of an utterance.

Slow down your speech when you talk to your boss or someone you think of as important.

Experiment with varying the rate of your speech: have two 'faster' hours followed by two 'slower' hours.

Read to your children or partner using a faster and then a slower speed. Ask them which they prefer.

Stage 2. Now look at ways of varying your stammering. Choose from one of the following.

Add

If you use 'run-ins' or 'backtracking' an experiment could involve adding some of these types of speech. For example, 'It's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn now' would become 'It's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn, it's my turn, *it's my* turn now'. It is sometimes hard to be aware of these behaviours until after they have happened. Increasing the behaviour makes you more aware of it and, as a consequence, more likely to recognise sooner what is happening. In time, it will become easier to drop the behaviour completely.

Diminish

If you have stretches or prolongations as part of your stammer, try experimenting with shortening or reducing their length. For example, 'It's myyyyyyyyy turn now' would become 'It's myyyyy turn now'.

Remove

This is a useful technique to experiment with if you use lots of fillers such as 'you know' and 'actually'. For example, 'you know' or 'you know what I mean' could be targeted. If you count five in one conversation, try to reduce it to three or four in the next conversation, then one or two in the next.

Change

Types of stammering can also be varied. For example, if you repeat the first sound of a word, try to turn the last one into a stretched or prolonged sound. For example, 'tu, tu, tu, turn' becomes 'tu, tu, tuuuurn'. Similarly, 'ers' could be changed to 'ums' for the length of a conversation or for an hour during the day.

Contrast

Getting rid of extra movements such as foot tapping can be achieved effectively by using a contrasting movement such as tapping your finger. So, whenever you tap your foot, you must tap your finger at the same time.