ABSTRACT

Speech disturbances (SD) are a stable, pernicious symptom of schizophrenia that increase when negative emotion and/or arousal are elicited. While considerable research has examined SD in patients with schizophrenia, much less is known about individuals at risk for the disorder, who demonstrate schizophrenia-like, or schizotypic, traits. The present study examined SD and speech reactivity to stress, termed affective reactivity (AR), produced during a laboratory procedure in separate groups of controls and individuals with psychometrically identified schizotypy. This project had two primary aims: 1) to examine SD severity across schizotypy symptoms and 2) to examine how SD varies as a function of emotion/stress. We hypothesized that heightened schizotypic traits would be associated with more instances of SD and increased reactivity to emotionally evocative stimuli. In total, 105 participants (schizotypy= 83, control= 22) were examined here. We observed several interesting findings regarding SD and AR when comparing the schizotypy and control groups. On average, participants in the schizotypy group produced a trend level increase in SD across the pleasant and stressful conditions. When examining specific schizotypal symptoms in the stressful condition, disorganized symptoms were positively correlated with SD and negative schizotypy was inversely correlated with SD and AR. These findings indicate that negative and disorganized schizotypy symptoms may be correlated with SD; however, these correlations were only apparent when stress was induced. This study highlights the role of stress reactivity across the schizophrenia-spectrum. Moreover, the incongruous relationships between disorganized and negative symptoms and SD underscore the marked heterogeneity in disease process across schizotypy.