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Verbal Communication Difficulties in Children with Autism: A Psychological Perspective

صعوبات التواصل اللفظي لدى الأطفال ذوي التوحد: منظور نفسي

Benini Asma ¹, Aiouadj Sonia ²

¹ PHD student , faculty of humanities and social sciences. Department of Psychology, Educational Sciences and Speech-Language Pathology batna 1 University (Algeria) Repository of Psychological, Educational and Vocational Assessments, benini.asma@univ-batna.dz

² Professor, faculty of humanities and social sciences. Department of Psychology, Educational Sciences and Speech-Language Pathology batna 1 University (Algeria) Repository of Psychological, Educational and Vocational Assessments, sonia.aiouadj@univ-batna.dz

بنيني أسماء¹، عيواج صونيا²

¹ طالبة دكتوراه، جامعة باتنة 1، كلية العلوم الاجتماعية والانسانية قسم علم النفس وعلوم التربية والارطفونيا،
مخبر بنك الاختبارات النفسية والمهنية والمدرسية ، benini.asma@univ-batna.dz

² استاذة دكتوراه ، جامعة باتنة 1، كلية العلوم الاجتماعية والانسانية قسم علم النفس وعلوم التربية والارطفونيا،
مخبر بنك الاختبارات النفسية والمهنية والمدرسية ، sonia.aiouadj@univ-batna.dz

Corresponding author: Benini Asma

benini.asma@univ-batna.dz

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Abstract:

This study examines verbal communication difficulties in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder from a psychological perspective. It aims to identify the nature and manifestations of these difficulties and analyze their impact on social interaction, emotional expression and behavioral adjustment. A descriptive analytical approach was adopted, drawing on psychological theories and previous empirical studies. Findings indicate that verbal communication difficulties are closely linked to cognitive, sensory and emotional factors, significantly affecting adaptive functioning and social participation. The study underscores the importance of early psychological interventions to support communication development. Recommendations are provided to enhance assessment and intervention strategies for children with autism.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Verbal Communication; Psychological Study; Language Difficulties.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة صعوبات التواصل اللفظي لدى الأطفال المصابين باضطراب طيف التوحد من منظور نفسي. وتهدف إلى التعرف على طبيعة هذه الصعوبات وتجلياتها، تحليل تأثيرها على التفاعل الاجتماعي، التعبير العاطفي والتكيف السلوكي. تم اعتماد منهج وصفي تحليلي، بالاستناد إلى النظريات النفسية والدراسات التجريبية السابقة. أظهرت النتائج أن صعوبات التواصل اللفظي ترتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالعوامل المعرفية والحسية والعاطفية، مما يؤثر بشكل كبير على الأداء التكيفي والمشاركة الاجتماعية. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية التدخلات النفسية المبكرة لدعم تنمية مهارات التواصل وتقديم توصيات لتعزيز استراتيجيات التقييم والتدخل لدى الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اضطراب طيف التوحد؛ التواصل اللفظي؛ دراسة نفسية؛ صعوبات اللغة.

1. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a multifaceted neurodevelopmental disorder that is manifested through impairment in social communication, repetitive behaviors and restricted interests. Among the core symptoms, the difficulty in verbal communication is the most significant to the child's social life since it directly affects the child's ability to communicate needs, share feelings and interact with others. Children with autism may have delayed or non-existent speech, small amount of words, imitate what is said to them, have irregular tone and rhythm of speech or even lack good social language skills, which can all slow down their academic development and everyday life.

Verbal communication is a key element of human interaction and its main functions are not only to convey information but also to

regulate emotions, build bonds and stimulate cognitive development. Therefore, these functions in children with autism may get impaired very frequently and this makes it hard for them to perceive and respond to social cues, take part in peer interactions and adjust to daily routines. In a psychological way, these difficulties cannot be understood separately. Cognitive factors, sensory integration, emotional regulation and social learning are all parts that interact with each other to determine the communicative abilities of the child.

Even though there has been an increasing amount of research done on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), most of the studies have pointed out behavioral or educational interventions and at the same time have not taken into consideration the underlying psychological factors that contribute to communication difficulties. A

psychological perspective is a core requirement for therapist to set up comprehensive intervention strategies that attend to language acquisition plus cognitive, sensory and emotional factors.

In light of this, the present research intends to investigate the verbal communication difficulties that children with Autism Spectrum Disorder experience from a psychologist's viewpoint. Among other things, it aims to find out the nature and the symptoms of these difficulties, to probe into their psychological roots and to assess the influence they have on social interaction, emotional expression, and behavioral adjustment. So, by tackling these issues, the research not only helps build up the knowledge pool in psychology but also provides directions for deploying successful intervention tactics.

Though the growing interest in Autism Spectrum Disorder has been considerable, the study of verbal communication challenges in children with ASD is still quite narrow when considering the psychological perspective to be the case. A majority of the studies point their spotlight on behavioral or educational interventions and thus the training of speech and social skills is the prime focus, while the cognitive processing, sensory integration and emotional regulation that are the psychological grounds for communication difficulties receive very little attention or none at all. Such a gap in the research works is a primary cause of the ineffectiveness of intervention programs and of children's social interaction, emotional expression and adaptive functioning being left with persistent difficulties.

Therefore, this study addresses the following central research problem:

What are the psychological characteristics and manifestations of verbal communication difficulties in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

This main question leads to the following sub-questions:

What are the most common forms of verbal communication difficulties observed in children with ASD?

What psychological factors contribute to the emergence of these difficulties?

How do verbal communication difficulties affect social interaction, emotional expression and behavioral adjustment in children with autism?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research problem and questions, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder exhibit significant verbal communication difficulties compared to typically developing children, manifesting as delayed speech, limited vocabulary, echolalia and pragmatic language deficits.

Verbal communication difficulties in children with autism are associated with psychological factors, including cognitive deficits, sensory processing difficulties and challenges in emotional regulation.

Verbal communication difficulties negatively affect social interaction, emotional expression and psychological adjustment in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder leading to potential social withdrawal, behavioral challenges and reduced adaptive functioning.

Theories such as these suggest a model for examining the psychological aspects of misunderstandings and for directing the interpretation of results with respect to children's growth and treatment methods.

2. Verbal Communication and Autism spectrum Disorder

Verbal communication is an essential psychological process that allows people to articulate their ideas, feelings and even needs through language that is structured and socially accepted (Bruner, 1983).

From a standpoint of developmental psychology, verbal communication is not simply the transfer of words but rather a complicated system that unites cognitive, social and emotional functions (Vygotsky, 1978). The effective verbal communication is the product of the simultaneous operation of the following components:

Phonology: The term phonology refers to the language's inventory of sounds and how

they are put together. The development of phonological awareness is an important factor in making and hearing speech that can be easily understood (Bowen & Gathercole, 2019).

Syntax: The term syntax refers to rules that govern the structure of sentences and the use of grammar. It allows children to join together words in a meaningful way and thus, express even very complicated ideas (Pinkham, 2018).

Semantics: The term semantics relates to the meaning of words and sentences. It is through semantics that children can express their thoughts, classify their experiences and understand what others are trying to express (Owens, 2020).

Pragmatics: The development of pragmatic skills allows for the social usage of language which includes the ability to take turns in conversation, to know the context, to use gestures or intonation correctly and to understand indirect meanings (Tager-Flusberg, 2006).

Prosody: The term prosody refers to the rhythm, stress and intonation patterns of speech that portray feelings and more importantly, the speaker's perspective (Paul et al., 2005).

The functional communication skills are developed by these components that are interrelated and interconnected. To illustrate, the understanding of implicit social meanings relies on the knowledge of semantics and the cues of prosody, which respectively constitute and support pragmatic competence.

Among the various functions of verbal communication in a child's development, the most important are the following:

Expression of needs and intentions: By means of language, children can assert their needs by hiring, cancelling or negotiating them at the same time, thereby minimizing the chances of getting frustrated or having behavioral problems (Vygotsky, 1978).

Emotional regulation: By articulating their feelings through verbal expression, children can gradually learn the development of coping mechanisms and thus get better at

psychological adjustment (Cole et al., 2004).

Social interaction: Communication is a prerequisite for forming friendships, taking part in children's games and receiving classes by means of Coor (Bruner, 1983).

Cognitive development: The acquisition of language has a direct payoff in being able to use it in higher-order cognitive activities like problem-solving, reasoning, remembering and thinking abstractly (Tager-Flusberg, 2006).

Role in child development:

Verbal communication is the basis for adaptive functioning and academic achievement. The early acquisition of language skills is a predictor of later social competence, emotional wellness and cognitive development (Paul et al., 2005). Verbal communication delays or difficulties can slow down self-expression, peer acceptance and academic integration, thus, the need for the view of language development through the lens of psychology.

Relevance to Autism Spectrum Disorder:

The factors and functions of verbal communication are sometimes completely out of whack in the case of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The speech of such kids is usually delayed, their vocabulary high or low, their prosody very strange, and their language pragmatics are usually quite poor (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2005). These things not only make communication ineffective but also very come out in social involvement, emotional sharing and adaptive behavior. Thus, a complete understanding of verbal communication conceptual framework becomes a must for analyzing the difficulties and for the development of psychological interventions.

3. Verbal communication difficulties in children with autism

One of the characteristic symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the verbal communication impairment, which is very likely to be detected by parents or teachers as the first sign (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2005). The difficulties in speaking are complex and can influence different areas of

language acquisition, for example sound uttering, vocabulary, pragmatic abilities and the social aspect of language use.

Delayed Speech Development

A good number of children with ASD do not start speaking at the usual age. Some kids may not say any words at all when they should be pronouncing their first words while others may take a very long time to learn a vocabulary and to form sentences (Eigsti et al., 2011). Not speaking might limit the child to only communicating his or her basic needs, thus leading to the child's being frustrated and having behavior problems.

Limited Expressive Language

When the child starts to talk at last, he or she usually has a small expressive vocabulary. The children may use very few words and speak in a way similar to that of a baby or they may just use one word instead of saying a full grammatical sentence (Paul et al., 2005). A small expressive vocabulary reduces one's capacity for self-expression and interaction in social life.

Echolalia

Echolalia, the repetition of words or phrases spoken by others, is frequently observed in children with ASD. It can be immediate, occurring right after hearing a phrase or delayed, repeated after hours, days or even weeks (Prizant & Rydell, 1993). While often perceived as non-functional, echolalia may serve communicative purposes such as practicing speech, self-soothing or attempting to participate in conversation.

Deficits in Pragmatic Language

Pragmatic language skills are those that allow a person to use language appropriately in social contexts and such skills are very often impaired in children with ASD. They might find it hard to take turns in a conversation, maintain the topic, understand metaphors or ask for something indirectly (Tager-Flusberg, 2006). As a result, they would have a hard time making friends, getting involved in teamwork or abiding by the rules of social behavior.

Nonnatural Prosody and Speech Patterns

A big number of children with autism have a very odd prosody, which includes monotonic speaking, abnormal pitch as well as erratic stress (McCann & Peppe, 2003). The aforementioned nonnatural speech traits can make the communication less clear and also influence the social judgment of the persons around the children, either the peers or the adults.

Variability and Individual Differences

In the case of ASD, it is always to be pointed out that verbal communication problems are very diverse and result from a multitude of factors. High-functioning kids may have very lively speech, yet find it difficult to do with pragmatics, on the other hand, the nonverbal little ones can be self-reliant, using alternative communication means like sign language, symbols or computerized devices (Eigsti et al., 2011). Moreover, the presence of conditions like intellectual impairment or sensory processing disorder along with language problems can make the situation even worse.

Developmental Implication

The problems with the spoken communication of autistic children do not only impact their language learning but also their cognitive, social and emotional development. Besides, the impact might be social withdrawal, fearfulness and challenging behavior, thus showing very clearly the importance of early diagnosis and treatment that would cover both the language and the psychological aspects (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2005).

4. Psychological factors associated with verbal communication difficulties

In children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, difficulties in verbal communication are by no means merely linguistic; they are intimately connected to psychological factors below the surface. If one wants to help explain the different paths of language development and devise proper interventions, then one would have to take these factors into account. The main psychological factors can be broken down into three groups: cognitive, sensory and

emotional ones.

Cognitive Factors

The child's cognitive development is the most important aspect in the whole language acquisition and use process. Children with ASD very often fall behind in: **Executive functions:** Essentially, people with ASD will lose out on being able to plan, by not being able to use working memory and cognitive flexibility, thus making it impossible for them to formulate and organize coherent verbal messages (Hill, 2004).

Theory of Mind (ToM): The inability to understand that other people have different thoughts, feelings or intentions will result in the person being unaware of pragmatics, indirect speech and conversational nuances (Baron-Cohen et al., 2000).

Attention and information processing: unavailability of focusing attention for a prolonged period or selecting important information can negatively influence the receptive language skills as well as the ability to react suitably in social situations (Courchesne et al., 2003).

Sensory Factors

Sensory abnormalities in processing are very often found in children with ASD and one of the most clear manifestations is the influence on verbal communication:

Auditory processing problems: Being either hypersensitive or hyposensitive to sounds may lead to missing vocal signals or not being able to stand a noisy place. (Tomchek & Koenig, 2016)

Sensory integration difficulties: Problems fusing together sounds, sights, and feelings can not only make it hard to detect speech but also delay the respond verbally in time with the social .(Ayres, 2005)

Emotional Factors

Emotional modulation and affective measures are closely tied to verbal communication:

Tension and anger: Inability to express needs verbally may add to stress and lead to withdrawal or disruptive behaviors. (White et al., 2009)

Desire and proximity: Limited interest in

social interaction can cut down the chances to practice and improve one's language skills. (Mundy et al., 1990)

Interplay of Psychological Factors

These cognitive, sensory and emotional factors interact dynamically. For example, a child with auditory hypersensitivity (sensory factor) may avoid verbal interactions, leading to limited practice and slower language acquisition (cognitive factor) which can increase frustration and anxiety (emotional factor). This interaction underscores the importance of viewing verbal communication difficulties in ASD through an integrated psychological lens.

Implications for Intervention

Understanding the psychological underpinnings of verbal communication difficulties informs more comprehensive interventions. Programs that address executive function, sensory processing and emotional regulation alongside speech therapy can enhance communicative competence and overall adaptive functioning (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2005)

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Verbal communication difficulties in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are multifaceted and best understood through an integrated perspective that combines conceptual, psychological and social dimensions. Synthesizing previous sections highlights how language impairments in ASD are not isolated deficits but interact dynamically with cognitive, sensory and emotional factors.

The interaction of cognitive, sensory and emotional factors

The cognitive disabilities like executive function issues and impairments in Theory of Mind, greatly affect one's ability to plan, organize and even interpret verbal communication (Hill, 2004; Baron-Cohen et al., 2000). Moreover, sensory processing problems, mainly in auditory integration can make it hard to both hear and speak (Tomchek & Koenig, 2016). Emotional regulation issues such as anxiety or frustration due to lack of understanding,

will further limit the child's chances to practice and gain verbal skills (White et al., 2009). All these factors together have created a never-ending and ever-increasing cycle in which the poor communication skills add to the social and emotional difficulties and the latter in turn slow down language acquisition.

Conceptual and social integration

Considering the developmental aspect it can be said that while communication verbally, it serves both a cognitive and a social function (Vygotsky, 1978). The impairments in expressive language, pragmatics and prosody not only slow down the process of cognitive-linguistic development but also affect social interaction, peer relationships and appropriate behavior. Children with ASD may have difficulties expressing their needs, taking part in discussions at schools or having conversations with others which leads to both social isolation and hindered mental health (Paul et al., 2005; Tager-Flusberg et al., 2005).

Implications of the Integrative Perspective

The integrative approach to understanding verbal communication difficulties highlights very clearly the need for holistic interventions. If intervention is limited to one dimension like speech or social skills and the cognitive, sensory and emotional factors are ignored only small improvements can be expected. The use of an integrated approach guarantees that the interventions aimed at language acquisition, psychological support and social functioning are all done at the same time thus, more effective outcomes and better overall development will result.

Verbal communication difficulties in ASD result from complex interconnections between linguistic, cognitive, sensory and emotional systems. The recognition of these interconnections is fundamental for the interventions design, the research direction and the clinical practice guidance. Moreover, it offers a base for the variability in communication abilities among

individuals with ASD, stressing the need for personalized and multidimensional support strategies.

The findings of this study have significant implications for educators, psychologists and therapists working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Verbal communication difficulties in these children extend beyond language deficits, encompassing cognitive, sensory and emotional dimensions that influence social and adaptive functioning. Effective practice requires a multidimensional, individualized approach.

For Educators

Communication development is heavily dependent on teachers, and educators should make the following considerations:

Use visual aids, simplified language and structured routines which help the students and the whole class (Dettmer et al., 2000).

Integrate social communication opportunities to the daily activities, thus promoting peer interaction and collaborative learning.

Each therapist will supervise the progress of the individual child and instruct the main educator on the ways of reinforcing the particular language acquisition strategies through the daily interaction.

For Psychologists

Psychologists are able to deal with the cognitive, emotional and social factors that have a negative influence on verbal communication in a holistic way:

The language and pragmatic skills will be improved if the interventions targeting executive function, theory of mind and social cognition are applied (Hill, 2004; Baron-Cohen et al., 2000).

Offering strategies for emotional regulation and support for the behavior of the child can lead to a reduction in the anxiety or frustration reactions associated with his/her communication difficulties.

Regular assessments will be done to customize the interventions and assess the progress of the child in social and emotional

functioning, which are the domains where intervention is conducted.

For Speech-Language Therapists

The speech-language therapy sessions should emphasize on personalized, scientific-based methods:

Work on expressive and receptive language skills which cover syntax, semantics, phonology and prosody (Paul et al., 2005).

Use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems when verbal output is restricted; thus, making sure communication takes place in day-to-day contexts.

Families and teachers should be involved in the therapy process to support the objectives set in therapy, thereby making it easier to transfer the skills learned.

Integrated Practice Approach

An interdisciplinary approach involving close collaboration of teachers, therapists and psychologists is a must. The combination of professional knowledge in the areas of language, cognition, emotion and social development leads to:

Holistic intervention plans that fit the individual profiles precisely .

Communication strategies being consistently reinforced across home, school and therapeutic settings .

•Improved social participation, emotional well-being and adaptive functioning.

6. CONCLUSION

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often have problems with verbal communication that are very complicated, having many aspects, and very much connected to cognitive, sensory and emotional processes. The findings of this study have shown that the difficulties in verbal communication are not only due to the deficits in language but also in social, emotional and adaptive areas which together have a profound impact on the functioning of the child and the mental health of the child.

Looking from the integrative perspective, it is evident that the

intervention considered to be effective should not only include speech and language but also the psychological factors that influence communication. The factors such as early diagnosis, personalized treatment and teamwork between the teachers, psychologists and therapists would be the main contributors to the development of verbal skills, social communication and emotional control.

Furthermore, the acknowledgment of the diversity within the ASD population and the impact of cultural and contextual factors calls for adaptable and personalized approaches. Although there are still some difficulties, especially regarding longitudinal studies and cross-cultural research, the results point out the necessity of a holistic and psychologically-based method for support of children with ASD in acquiring functional and meaningful verbal communication in general.

Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in tracing the development of verbal communication and associated psychological factors through the ages.

Integration of speech-language therapy, psychological support and social skills training in one program would be wise to evaluate the efficacy of such programs.

Technology-assisted interventions, such as apps and AAC tools are worth exploring in terms of making accessibility and engagement better.

Cross-cultural differences should be studied in order to create contextually sensitive interventions.

If the stated limitations are overcome, future research will be able to provide a clearer understanding, more effective interventions and better outcomes for the children with ASD.

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