Narrative Abilities in Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder across Two Contexts

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**Introduction**

- Narrative microstructure impairments are commonly reported among individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- Narrating from storybooks, children with ASD are reported to use fewer utterances, fewer words, and fewer unique verbs than language matched TD children.

- Narrating personal experiences, Losh and Capps (2003) found that school-aged TD children and children with ASD produced more utterances than narrating a storybook.

- The current study compares TD adolescents and adolescents with ASD in both of these contexts to see how each may highlight different strengths and weaknesses in structural language abilities.

- These analyses focus on pronouns (1st and 3rd) and verb types (GAP vs content) both of which have shown to vary by group in different contexts.

- General all-purpose (GAP) verbs: come, do, get, go, have, make

- Content verbs: fly, eat, build

**Methods**

- **Storybook narratives** were elicited using the *Tuesday* wordless picture book as part of the ADOS-2.

- **Personal narratives** were elicited with the investigator prompting the teen to narrate specific events (e.g., “Can you tell me about a time you got jabbed by something?”)

- In total, 4 personal narratives collected

- Coding: Participant videos were transcribed and CLAN algorithms were used to extract MLU, utterance count, and noun, verb, and pronoun types and tokens.

**Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age (n = 7)</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
<th>Mean Age Equivalent Score</th>
<th>Mean Age Equivalent Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>14.82 (2.95)</td>
<td>4:3</td>
<td>&gt;21:5</td>
<td>16:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>16.60 (3.50)</td>
<td>5:1</td>
<td>10:4</td>
<td>9:5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All primary English speakers

**Results, continued**

- Greater 3rd person Pronoun Usage in Storybook Context: Both Groups

- Greater 1st Pronoun Usage in Personal Narrative: Both Groups

- TD children used more pronouns than children with ASD in both contexts

- The groups did not differ in their greater use of 3rd person in storybook and 1st person in personal narratives

**Discussion and Conclusion**

- As expected given their standardized language levels, TD teens’ narratives included more words and longer utterances than the teens with ASD’s, in both contexts.

- Nonetheless, similar context effects for pronoun usage by were seen in both groups (storybook → 3rd person, personal → 1st person)

- Both groups also produced a preponderance of GAP verbs during their personal narratives

- However, while TD teens produced more content verbs in storybook narratives, teens with ASD produced more content verbs in personal narratives. The storybook context led to more object labeling

- These preliminary findings support the need to collect both personal & storybook narratives to a complete picture of language use in ASD

- Data collection, suspended due to COVID-19, has recently recommenced. Future analyses will examine pronoun and verb usage in closer detail, and include all 4 personal narratives

**References**


