Spontaneous Language and Communication

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Goals of this Talk

• Define spontaneous communication
• Identify empirical evidence for intervention
• Discuss reasons for limited efficacy in intervention
• Identify assessment tools for spontaneous communication
• Identify treatment strategies for spontaneous communication

What is Spontaneous Communication?

- Expressive verbal and nonverbal language that occurs in the absence of prompts, instructions, and other verbal cues.
Spontaneous vs. Elicited

- Initiated
- Creative
- Flexible
- Conventional
- Directed
- Functional
- Contextual
- Social
- In Response
- Instructed
- Modeled
- Imitated
- Physically guided
- Cued
- Non-contextual
- Compliant

Core Feature

- Individuals with autism engage in fewer reciprocal and spontaneous interactions than typical peers AND peers with language disorders.

- Atypical characteristics in social interactions:
  - **frequency**: rate of social initiation and response
  - **type**: initiation, response, verbal, nonverbal
  - **quality**: duration, proximity, reciprocity

WHY??

- Social cognition
- Theory of mind
- Processing skills
- Expressive language skills and speech skills
- Cognitive skills
- Distraction
- Repetitive and/or stereotyped behavior
- Motivation
How strong is the empirical evidence that social irregularities in individuals with autism is amenable to intervention?

\textbf{weak}

Why is it so difficult to study communication intervention in autism?

- Too many single-subject studies
- Variation in diagnostic procedures, thus low specificity
- Late diagnosis, resulting in lost time studying early social development in individuals with autism
- Variation of ecological conditions

Assessing Spontaneous Communication

\textbf{Standardized Measures:}

- *OSEL
- ADOS-2
- Functional Communication Profile-Revised
- Renfrew Bus Story
- SCQ
- Functional Assessment of Communication Skills
- PLSI
- Pragmatic Communication Skills Profile

For more information: \url{www.asha.org/assessments}
More Assessment

• SRS-2
• SEE
• SSIS
• The Manual of AAC Assessment
• CSBS

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Intervention Modalities

• Behavioral Analysis
• Structured teaching
• Play Therapy
• Speech-language therapy
• Social groups

• AAC
• Collateral skills therapy
• Milieu Teaching
• Peer-mediated intervention

Intervention Methodologies

• Script-fading
• Time Delay
• AISI
• ESDM
• Social Thinking

• PEERS
• PECS
• Total Communication
• The Hanen Program
• PRT
The Paradox of Intervention

more intervention \rightarrow less spontaneous language

more cues \rightarrow more dependence

Motivation and Function

Individuals with autism are more likely to interact when:

• Engaging in activities they prefer
• Activities and materials are predictable
• Distractions are reduced
• The environment is structured to encourage cooperation and collaboration with age peers

Think “Full Life” Social Skills

Bridge real life skills to clinical, educational, home, and community practice.