Immediate echolalia refers to utterances that are produced or echoed immediately after they are heard; the domain also includes those utterances that are echoed within a very short time, such as a few minutes. Many individuals with autism or pervasive developmental disorders may repeat utterances as a temporary step on their path to the development of generative or creative spoken language. Some individuals may not move beyond this step and may use it along with delayed echolalia and nonverbal communication. Others, although they have developed functional language skills, will return to the use of echolalia when they experience stress or anxiety. Extensive echolalia is still a classic sign of difficulty with verbal comprehension.

An article by Barry Prizant and Judith Duchan titled “The Functions of Immediate Echolalia in Autistic Children” (pp. 241–249) which appeared in the 1981 issue of the Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders is still the most comprehensive descriptor of the subject. The following is a simplified version of their description, with examples generated by this author but reviewed by Dr. Prizant. The goal of this article is to provide information regarding various purposeful and nonpurposeful uses of immediate echolalia. It is not intended to serve as a guide for clinical evaluation or classification of data. The original article and other more recent articles and book chapters on echolalia should be consulted when information is needed to guide evaluation practices. This article is a companion to another titled “Functional Categories of Delayed Echolalia.”

For purposes of clarity and brevity, the term “echolalic speaker” is used in the examples instead of the phrase “the person who uses echolalic speech.” No disrespect is intended by the use of non-people-first language.
**Functional Categories of Immediate Echolalia**
Interactive Scenarios (i.e., communication directed to another person)

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| Turn taking/interactive | Utterances used as turn fillers in an alternating verbal exchange. It can provide thinking/processing time. | Adult speaker: “Where did you go Sunday?”
Echolalic speaker: He says, “Where did you go Sunday?” and he gives a quick look to the adult.
Adult speaker: “Did you go to Grandma’s house?”
Echolalic speaker: He says, “Did you go to Grandma’s house?” And, he again gives a quick look at the speaker.
Looking at the speaker is not an essential part of the sequence but it adds clarity to the example. Staying with an interactive situation for at least two turns is a more critical factor. |
| Declarative/interactive | Utterances labeling objects, actions, or location (accompanied by demonstrative gestures). | Adult speaker: As he checks the nearly empty cookie jar, he says, “I better buy some cookies.”
Echolalic speaker: As he also touches the cookie jar, he says, “I better buy some cookies.”
No verbal response or action is required from the adult speaker. The child does not attempt to take a cookie out of the jar. |
| Yes answer/interactive  | Utterances used to indicate affirmation of prior utterance, usually a question. | Adult speaker: “Do you want some juice?”
Echolalic speaker: “Do you want some juice?”
He looks at the pitcher and continues to hold out his hand and wait for a glass of juice. |
| Request/interactive     | Utterances used to request objects or others’ actions. Usually involves mitigated echolalia. Nonmitigated responses are similar to Yes answer/interactive examples cited above. | A mitigated response (some changes in what was said):

**Example 1:**
Adult speaker: “Do you want to watch TV?”
Echolalic speaker: “Yes, you want to watch TV, please.”

**Example 2:**
Adult speaker: “Can you give it to me?”
Echolalic speaker: “Yes, Jason can give it to me.”

**Example 3:**
Adult speaker: “Do you want some crackers?”
Echolalic speaker: “Do you want some pretzels?” |
### Noninteractive Scenarios (i.e., messages for personal use)

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| Nonfocused/personal       | Utterances produced with no apparent intent and often in states of high arousal (e.g., fear, pain). | *Adult speaker:* “What’s wrong? Why are you screaming?”  
*Echolalic speaker:* He continues to walk and flap his hands; intermittently he screams and slaps his own face, and says to himself, “What’s wrong? Why are you screaming?” He repeats, “What’s wrong? Why are you screaming?” and slaps his face again. |
| Rehearsal/personal        | Utterances used as a processing aid, followed by utterance or action indicating comprehension of echoed utterance. | *Adult speaker:* “Give this to Jim.” (Hands over the notebook.)  
*Echolalic speaker:* He turns around, starts pacing, and softly says, “Give this to Jim” several times. The pacing stops and he walks over to Jim and gives the notebook to him. |
| Self-regulatory/personal  | Utterances which serve to regulate one’s own actions. Produced in synchrony with motor activity. | *Adult speaker:* “Don’t jump on the bed.”  
*Echolalic speaker:* He repeats, “Don’t jump on the bed” several times to himself as he gradually decreases the jumping, ceases the action, and finally gets off the bed. |

The Indiana Resource Center for Autism is grateful to Barry Prizant for his assistance in the preparation of this training paper.