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Missouri's educational
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Autism Spectrum Disorder and Language Samples: Tips for the Speech Language Pathologist

Part of most every assessment performed by Speech-Language Pathologists includes a Language Sample. Typically, we look at the results of a language sample for information including Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), use of syntax and vocabulary. Have you considered using Language Samples for information related to determining eligibility for Autism and as a basis for IEP goals? Well, you can. Here are just a few ideas and resources to get you started.

Language Sample Questions Specific to Autism

- Did the student's vocabulary seem appropriate for his age level? Decreased? Increased?
- Did the student's language seem pedantic or little-professor like?
- Did you notice echolalia, perseverative speech or repetitive questions? Describe.
- Did you notice difficulty with figurative language, sarcasm, interpreting humor, interpreting idioms?
- Comment on the inflection, pitch and prosody of the student's voice. Were those appropriate to age and topic?
- Did the student talk about a wide range of topics, or did he talk mostly about a special interest area?
- Could he transition easily from one topic to the next?
- Was the student able to use language for a variety of functions? Could he initiate, comment, ask and answer questions, sequence events?
- Did the student seem to know many facts about a particular subject?

Part of answering the questions above rests on the quality of the Sample. For example, you will want to ask open-ended questions, maybe use wordless picture books and/or sequence cards. Retelling a story might give usable information. If you know the student has a specific area of interest, you might use that to evoke conversation. Playing out scenarios such as going to the store, eating out, and more may be helpful. Be sure you vary your questions and activities to document as wide a Sample as possible.

A couple of internet resources of interest follow:

<https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/the-how-and-why-of-collecting-a-language-sample/full/>

<file:///C:/Users/tec296/Downloads/Assessment-of-Fictional-Narratives.pdf> This resource provides developmental indicators for overall organization of a story; an intelligibility rating; a checklist for semantics morphology, and syntax; and a checklist for social/pragmatics.

<https://blog.slpnow.com/language-sample/> This resource provides the following research for use of Language Samples

- Language samples, and particularly narrative language samples, may offer a **valid complement or even alternative to norm-referenced testing** (Ebert & Scott, 2014).
- Language Samples address many of the weaknesses of norm-referenced testing.
- They provide rich, in-depth information about a child's use of language in real-world situations (Costanza-Smith, 2010; Hewitt, Hammer, Yont, & Tomblin, 2005), resulting in strong **ecological validity** and the **ability to derive language treatment targets**.
- They place very **few behavioral requirements** on examinees, allowing for flexible use across children of diverse ages and types of impairment (Costanza-Smith, 2010).
- They have been shown to be a **valid assessment for diverse populations**, including bilingual children (Restrepo, 1998) and speakers of nonstandard dialects (Stockman, 1996).
- Access the source listed above to find the research listed.

Your Language Sample may be one of your most valuable tools in assessment of students on the spectrum.

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