

THE IMPACT OF AUTISM ON LANGUAGE INPUT:  
A COMPARISON OF THE ACOUSTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS' SPEECH  
TO TODDLERS WITH AUTISM AND TYPICALLY-DEVELOPING CONTROLS

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ABSTRACT

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of complex and increasingly common neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by deficits in language and social skills. One factor that could plausibly contribute to language deficits in children with ASDs is language input. Research suggests that the acoustic characteristics of child-directed speech promote language acquisition in typically-developing children, but there is a dearth of information regarding the use and impact of child-directed speech for children with ASDs. In this study, five mothers of children with ASDs and eight mothers of typically-developing toddlers were videotaped in their homes during interactions with their children and the researcher. Child-directed speech and adult-directed speech were transcribed for each mother using the Codes for Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) and then compared using Praat speech analysis software and ProsodyPro, a Praat script for prosody analysis. Our results suggest that mothers modify their speech in similar ways to both children with ASDs and typically-developing controls. These results contribute to our understanding of the language environment for children with ASDs and have implications for the role of child-directed speech in language development.