Neurodiversity and Autistic Semiosis: A Focus on Repetition

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Aim of Presentation

- To affirm autisitc neurodiversity, by unpacking one of the most salient features of autism.

A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.

B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by at least two of the following, currently or by history (examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; see text):

1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypies, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).

2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviors.

3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus.

4. Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment.

DSM-5

Repetitive Patterns of Behavior

- **In mainstream autism research:**
  - automatic responses
  - hindrance to, or disruptive of social interaction
  - no or minimal communicative function

- **The neurodiversity perspective:**
  - semiotic phenomena
  - meaningful sensory explorations
  - forms of self expression

Aim of Presentation

- To affirm autisitc neurodiversity, by unpacking one of the most salient features of autism.
- To deconstruct further repetitive repetitive verbal behavior in autism (Local & Wootton, 1995; Wootton, 1999; Sterponi & Shankey, 2014).
- To articulate further the notion of autistic semiosis (Nolan & McBride, 2015).

Corpus & Method

- Videorecordings of spontaneous interactions of young (3-6 years old) children with autism.
- The videorecorded interactions were transcribed and analyzed according to Discourse Analysis conventions.
- Four video segments are examined.

The Extracts

Extract 1 and 2 (Florina, 6-year-old)

- Delayed echolalia
- Even the most functionally opaque and seemingly autonomic form of echolalia is highly synchronized with surrounding talk
- Echoes are marked metacommunicatively

Extract 3 (Matt, 4;6-year-old)

- Formulaic language strip
- Rather than being monological strings uttered all at once by the autistic child, they are developed conjointly.

The Extracts

Extract 4 (Benjamin, 6-year-old)

- Repetitive speech
- Repetition affords linguistic structures of engagement (DuBois, 2014)
- Repetition reveals and enacts the experiential potential of language as such (Ochs, 2012)

Extract 1

1	(M)Friend		you gotta ask.
2			*((laughs))*
3	Dad		*((smiles))*
4	(M)Friend		she's ↑no:: please: can I not ask? (.)
5			just for a little while >can I not ask< [please?=
6	(F)Friend		[m-hm.
7	(M)Friend		=sure enough (.) she asks him,
8			*((chops hand on table))*
9	Florina	→	| *((dental click))*
10	(M)Friend		he's against abor[tion *((chopping hand on table and laughs))*
11	Florina	→	[|
12		→	WHAT'S THAT. *((pointing straight in front))*
13			[(.)( ) TEE YEE E E YAH *((shaking head))*
14	(M)Friend		[(she's got a dumpling) *((laughing))*
15	Dad		*((laughs))*
16	(M)Friend		she's heart-broken (now)
17	(F)Friend		mh.
18	(2.0)		*((Florina drinks her soda))*
19	(M)Friend		hi *((to waitress))*
20	Waitress		hey:. [here's your salad.
21	Dad		[hey
22	(M)Friend		oh thank [you.
23	Dad		[thank you.
24	Waitress		(and your coffee)
25	Florina	→	|*((shakes head))* |
26		→	WHAT'S THAT. (.) ( ) TEE YEE E E YAH
27	(F)Friend		uh-huh. do you wanna eat some salad? *((to Florina))*
28	Dad		she'll have some bread. she doesn't like salad=
29	(F)Friend		oh she doesn't like- o:kay.

Extract 2

1	(F)Friend		↑Florina (.) is it- (.)↓oh:: she's taking off the mushrooms.
2	Dad		yeah she does not like mushrooms
3	(F)Friend		mhm we [should have (asked for)
4	Florina		[n-huh *((shakes head))*
5		→	(it's just) set to go: *((moving forearm sideways))*
6	Dad		y:eah.
7	Florina	→	eh (eh there. [it's just) set to go *((moving forearm sideways))*
8	Dad		[((bends toward Florina))
9	(3.0)		
10	(F)Friend		↑hmm.
11	Florina	→	*((turns toward (F)Friend))*eh (I said) it's set to go: ye- *((moving forearm sideways))*
12	(F)Friend		oh okay.

Extract 3

1	Matt		˚lu:: ˚
2	Mom		oh: ↑last car. *((holds car in hand in front of Matt))*
3	(1.8)		
4	Mom		okay? last car?
5	Matt		oyah. *((takes car from mom and puts it on structure))*
6	Mom	→	*((uses hand to block car))* ready?
7	Matt	→	le-go.
8	Mom	→	se:t,
9	Matt	→	go.
10	(1.0)		
11	Mom	→	˚go.˚ *((removes hand from track))*
12	Matt	→	= ˚ye::h yah*((makes the car go up and down the track without releasing it))*
13	Mom	→	[↑GO
14	Matt	→	[ye::h yah:::::: yeh-
15	Mom		*((tries to take Matt's hand but he withdraws it))*
16		→	rea:dy::, *((bringing Matt's hand with car on track))*
17	Matt		mh.
18	Mom	→	se:::t, =
19	Matt	→	=go. *((bows head and leaves car on track without pushing it down))*
20	Mom	→	>ready set< ↑and? *((bringing Matt's hand with car on track))*
21	Matt	→	go.
22	Mom	→	*((releases Matt's hand and releases the car))* go:.
23	Matt		luh lu:::h. luh.

Extract 4

1	Mom		where do you wanna go first.
2	Ben		I wanna go first. (1.5) I wan-
3			when I am a teenager I'll go (.) to the Netherlands.
4	Mom		yeah. that's a good place for teenagers.
5	Ben		really?
6	Mom		yeah. I was there when I was a teenager.
7	Ben		I wan- I wanna go there when I am a teenager.
8	Mom		°yeah°
9	Ben		people go to Canada when they are twenty-o- twenty-one.
10	Mom		they do?
11	Ben		yeah.
12	(2.5)		
13	Ben	→	people that are in (.) Poland go to- (.)
14		→	go to- go to- go to Sweden.
15		→	and people that are in Sweden go to Denmark.
16		→	and people that are in Denmark go to Norway.
17	(1.5)		
18	Ben		[so-
19	Mom		[it's a lot of moving around. so they s- keep switching?
20	Ben	→	An- yes. an- an- and and people in Norway go to the United Kingdom.
21		→	an- and people in the United Kingdom go to Northern Ireland.
22		→	and people in Ireland go to Ni- Ireland.
23		→	an- and people in I- Northern Ireland go to- (.) go to France.
24		→	and people in France go to Spain.
25		→	and people in (.) in- in Spain go to Portugal.
26		→	and people in Portugal go to hh. (2.0) go to Union of Soviet Socialist Re[publics.
27	Mom		[*((laughs))* well this's a o:ld book.

Conclusions

- A close analysis of the composition of autistic utterances and their position in sequential context has brought to light the complexity and interactional significance of autistic repetitive speech.

- Repetitive verbal behavior as a form of autistic semiosis communicates and metacommunicates, thereby providing scope for intersubjectivity and interconnectedness.