

Boys with autism show certain grammar skills in study

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They were able to form some past tense verbs faster than boys without the disorder.

(HealthDay)—Boys with high-functioning autism are stronger in a certain grammar skill than those without autism, according to a small study.

Researchers compared 20 boys, ages 7 to 13, with high-functioning [autism](#) and 25 boys without autism. They found that those with autism were much faster at producing past tenses for regular verbs.

"We had not expected this interesting finding. It makes us wonder whether some children with autism might also show related strengths, as yet unrecognized," study senior author Michael Ullman, director of the brain and language laboratory at Georgetown University Medical Center,

said in a university news release.

The findings appear in the November issue of the journal *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

The boys with autism were faster at creating regular past tense words that end in "-ed"—such as work and worked or step and stepped. However, they weren't faster when it came to irregular past tenses, such as sing and sang, the study's authors said.

"Processing regular past tenses reflects our grammatical abilities that are critical for understanding and producing sentences, while irregular forms are simply stored in our mental dictionary alongside words like cat. The results suggest that children with high-functioning autism may show speeded processing of grammar, while this pattern might not hold for at least some stored words," Ullman explained.

"These grammatical abilities appear to depend on the procedural memory system—implicit memory that we use to learn and perform cognitive and motor skills such as playing video games and driving," Ullman said.

"We don't know if the increased speed we saw in processing regular past tenses in children with high-functioning autism affects other aspects of procedural memory, but we are excited to explore that possibility," he said.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke has more about [autism](#).

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