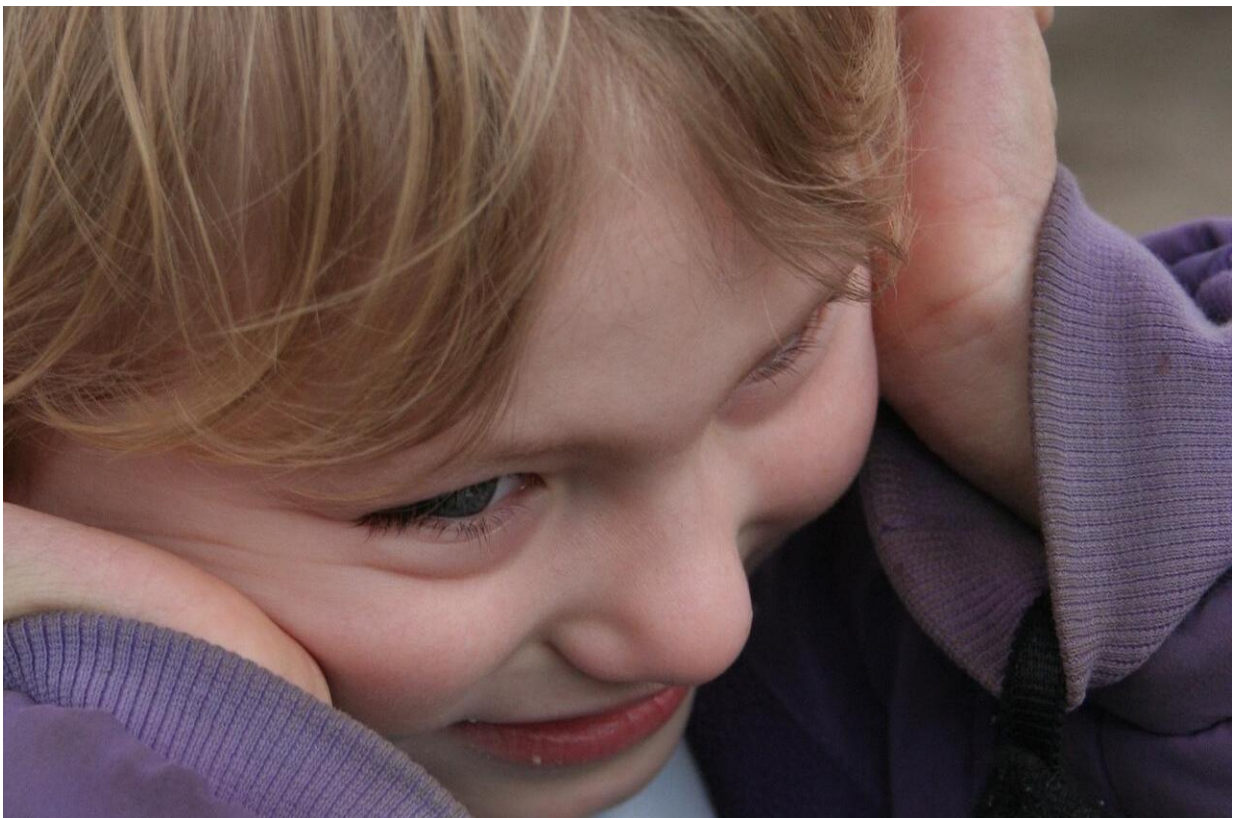


# Children shape their learning environment—the case of language acquisition in children with ASD

January 25 2019, by Anne-Mette Pedersen

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A close collaboration between University of Connecticut and Interacting Minds at Aarhus University researchers is exploring how parents and

children influence each other when they interact, and the longer term impact this has on language acquisition.

We often take for granted that children with ASD have difficulties with language and communication, generally learn to speak later and do not use language in fully appropriate ways. However, language use among children with ASD is incredibly diverse, ranging from age-appropriate language use to being completely non-verbal. These differences between children and their learning trajectories are not well understood yet.

"We initially looked into naturalistic parent-child play sessions following about 70 children (half with ASD) from 2 to 5 years of age," says Ethan Weed and continues: "We were interested in how the child's [language development](#) was affected by individual differences in cognitive abilities and in linguistic environment, that is, the quantity and structure of the language used by their parents when interacting with them."

## **Extends previous findings**

This study was published in *Cognition* with the title "Hearing me, hearing you." The study replicates and extends previous findings.

- Language development in ASD is modulated by the child's cognitive abilities in a continuous fashion (from much lower to higher than typically developing children).
- Even if they might show less engagement, children with ASD learn from their linguistic environment to the same extent as their typically developing counterparts. In particular, all children benefit from complex parental input, e.g. sentences with an articulated syntax and the use of many different words.

"Further" explains Riccardo Fusaroli: "We highlighted the reciprocal influence between child and parent. Children learn from the parental

language, but they also influence it, since parents adjust their language to their children's engagement and linguistic production."

## Diversity of language development in children with ASD

The study "Hearing me, Hearing you" highlights the great diversity of language development in children with ASD. It showcases the importance of children's [cognitive abilities](#) and of the linguistic environment they are immersed in. Crucially, it emphasizes the active role [children](#) have in shaping their [linguistic environment](#) and long term impact this has on their [language](#) development.

**More information:** Riccardo Fusaroli et al, Hearing me hearing you: Reciprocal effects between child and parent language in autism and typical development, *Cognition* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cognition.2018.10.022](#)

Provided by Aarhus University

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