The emergence in language development in young children usually depicts a pattern from the first noises children make when he or she is born to the words they learn to use to communicate with others. Understanding the process of language development in child with autism and the factors that affect the outcome is a big concept to comprehend. After writing a literature review on the cognitive aspect of children with autism I decided it would be interesting to understand the language development in children with autism as well. In this literature review, I will be discussing the research of scholarly articles I found to better understand the phases of language development, the differences between autistic children and typical developing children, the affect of early language intervention on children with autism, and also explaining a study done to prove a hidden predictor of language development in children with autism spectrum disorders.

The definition of autism is a neuro-developmental disorder that is characterized by impairments in the areas of social contact, behavior problems, and communication/language development which I will be discussing throughout this paper. These behaviors are affected by the development of the child and sometimes can be recurring and stereo-typed (Tager-Flusberg, Rogers, Cooper, Landa, Lord, Paul, Rice, Stoel-Gammon, Wetherby, Yoder, 2009).

To understand that language delay is a sign of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) we must look at the differences between children with ASD and children with typical development. It is important to differentiate between the two so that child can gain the best intervention as early as possible (Mitchell, Cardy, Zwaigenbaum, 2011). Studies have shown that the loss of language is an extremely common among children with autism and many children are diagnosed particularly from language screenings (Pickles, Simonoff, Conti-Ramsden, Milena Falcaro, Simkin, Charman, Chandler, Loucas, Baird, 2009). Studies have also made known that
communication is not the easiest way to distinguish between children with possible autism and those who are typically developing but have a slight delay (Mitchell et al., 2011). Typical developing infants can also have developmental delays that set them back that aren’t autistic. To take a closer look at the communication aspect in children during the first year of their lives we find that children with autism could be separated from typical developing infants just on the expressive language of pointing comprehension and direct vocalizing such as crying (Mitchell et al., 2011). Most often crying is the first sign of communication. They recognize their mothers’ voice by identifying the phonemes or speech sounds. Most research studies that I have found state by six months most children with typical language development recognize their native language. In a scholarly journal I was reading I found an explanation of five key phases of typical expressive language. They include preverbal communication, first words, word combinations, sentences, and complex language (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009).

The preverbal communication phase is referred to as babble. Most children that are typically developing go through this stage at 6-12 months. In the first words phase use single words symbolically to communicate about objects and events and this phase usually occurs in the age range between 12-18 months. The word combinations phase usually includes the use of nouns, verbs, and descriptors. Two to three word combinations are used frequently to describe certain things. This phase usually occurs in the age range of 18-30 months. The sentence phase is when children start to combine words into sentences using more prepositions or plural usages. This phase usually occurs during the age range of two and a half to four years of age. Phase five is determined by the end of the preschool year and is the complex language stage where typically developing children have large vocabularies which help them communicate to peers and adults efficiently (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009). These phases are used for as benchmarks to evaluate
whether a child meets the requirements for a typically developing child or an atypically developing child (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009). These phases contain benchmarks used to screen children to see if they meet specific criteria for achieving language intervention because each phase explains where a typically developing child should be. If he or she is not meeting the criteria at that language level than further action must be taken to correctly diagnose the child for autism (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009).

Now that we have covered the stages of typically developing children let’s take a deeper look into how children with a disorder such as autism develop language. Autistic children are not born with language acquisition that occurs in the first few days of life (Mitchell et al., 2011). Infants that are diagnosed with the Autism Spectrum Disorder are found to be less likely to respond to their name in the receptive part of language and they have a difficulty in pointing comprehension (Mitchell et al., 2011). These are developmental milestones that occur in most children, but are lacking in children with autism. They also have a less recurrent direction to their own name. In other words they won’t respond to their name every time they are prompted to (Matson, Sipes, 2010). Infants with autism had a definite lack of informative pointing, used fewer communicative signals overall, and paid less attention at objects that were physically shown to them (Mitchell et al., 2011). All of these aspects can occur definitely at infancy, but the term autistic regression is also something for parents, interventionists, and early educators need to take into consideration when a child is developing. Developmental regression has been researched and occurs when normal development is followed by a loss of language or failure to use existing language and social skills built by cognition (Pickles et al., 2009). Statistics prove that developmental regression commonly occurs in the second year of a child’s life (Pickles et al., 2009).
There are three domains of the diagnosis in the autism spectrum disorder. Communication is one of these three domains because language is usually impaired. Children with autism have variations in their language abilities because there are connections between other domains that occur in the disorder (Hurdry, Leadbitter, Temple, Slonims, McConachie, Aldred, Howlin, Charman, 2010). To look how language develops in atypical children such as autism we can look further into a study that has proven why lack of language is a large factor in the autism spectrum disorder. The study I researched was a study to examine the affect of problem behaviors in children with autism as a predictor of language development (Bopp, Mirenda, Zumbo, 2009). The five behavior problems studied were acting-out behaviors, repetitive sensory motor behaviors, insistence on sameness behavior, socially unresponsive behavior, and inattentiveness.

The results of the test specify a connection between problem behaviors and language development in children with autism over a two year span (Bopp, 2009). For example, the test on inattentive behavior such as not paying attention to things going on around them, being distracted by noises or not listening to instructions showed that autistic children with more advanced inattentive behaviors had drastically delayed language comprehension in two years than autistic students without behavior problems (Bopp, 2009). The quantity of socially unresponsive behaviors such as rare smiles, avoiding face-to-face contact and eye contact, and not responding to one’s own name when called also made an impact on language development in the two year developmental span (Bopp, 2009). Children with these specific behavior problems also made less progress over the two year span in vocabulary, language, and production comprehension. Insistence-on-sameness behavior, repetitive sensory-motor behavior, and acting-out behaviors were found to have no major connection between language comprehension and
their behavior problem. The study noted that this was unexpected, but these were all said to actually have some form of communicative language involved with their behavior problem (Bopp, 2009).

I found this article of this study extremely interesting because there are so many factors and variables that can determine if a child with autism is going to progress or weaken during the development of language. It was stated in the article that this type of study has never been performed to compare the consistency of the two. The predictive relationships between behaviors and language/communicative comprehension in children with autism can help aide professionals, families, and educators on how to maximize the effectiveness of early intervention to help improve language development in children with autism (Bopp, 2009).

Early intervention and early assessment have been shown to be the most effective when trying to preserve the complications of language development in children with autism (Matson, Sipes, 2010). Without intensive intervention the problems that occur in their cognition could become seemingly worse for the individual with autism (Matson, Sipes, 2010). While the child starts to mature and develop physically the problems that deal with their expressive and receptive language development become more distinct (Matson, Sipes, 2010). Understanding the different warning signs and red-flags is a crucial thing for a professional, parent, and educator. Studies also show that knowing the developmental milestones and language benchmarks children should be meeting at a certain age can help aide a child in receiving the early intervention they need to someday build their language milestones to where they should be (Matson, Sipes, 2010).

As early childhood educators our goal is to provide a learning environment for every group of children, typical or atypical. We need information that provides us with different developmental milestones language development so we can meet goals set for our students
(Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009). The plainly defined milestones of language development in children with autism can help us educators, families, and other professionals provide growth for our students and children in developmental regions such language and communication comprehension (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2009). This literature review provided me with informative insight about the progression of language development in children with autism and also opened my eyes to the different predictors of language development in children with autism spectrum disorder.
References


