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Gestalt Language Development

The Power of Word Clusters in Learning to Speak

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Agenda

- Analytic vs. Gestalt Language Processing
- GLP and Autism
- The Stages: A Closer Look
- Resources and Supports for Parents
- Questions

Analytic Language Development

- Language starts with single words
- Stages:
 - Use of single words
 - Combination of words and original two-word phrases
 - Generation of first sentences
 - Generation of more complex sentences

Gestalt Language Development

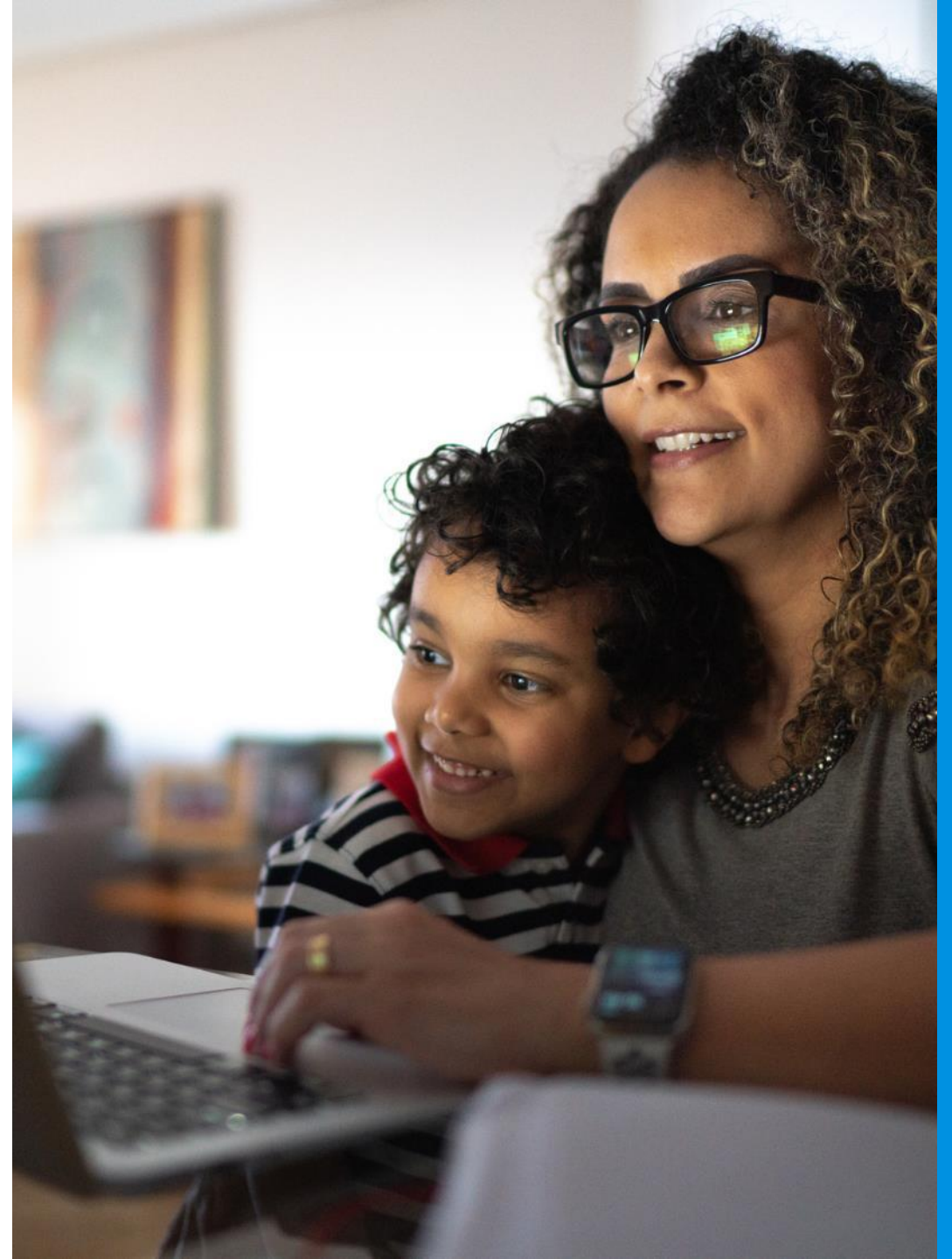
- Language may start with words, phrases, and/or complete sentences
- Stages:
 - Echolalia
 - Mitigated echolalia
 - Single words and two-word phrases
 - Self-generated language

Gestalt Language Development & Autism

- Many autistic children are gestalt processors- researchers estimate from 75-90%
- Gestalt processors have always been around
- “Rigidity” in terms of behavioral patterns and language use
 - This may mean that your child has assigned you gestalts that they expect in specific settings
- Situational gestalts- terms and phrases are often associated with different aspects of a specific situation, such as the sights, sounds, smells, sensations, and feelings
 - Example: “He shoots... He scores!”
- The flow between stages of gestalt development may be impacted by:
 - The age your child begins the process
 - The kinds of supports that are available
 - The types of communication modalities used
 - Co-occurring diagnoses
 - Cultural and/or linguistic background

The Stages: A Closer Look

- Stage 1: Communicative use of language gestalts
- Stage 2: Mitigation into chunks and recombining
- Stage 3: Isolation of single words and generation of 2-word phrases
- Stages 4–6: Generation of more complex sentences



Stage 1: Communicative use of language gestalts

- A child in this stage is taking in sounds as chunks and assigning meaning - We need to start where they are.
 - Example: A child who loves Finding Nemo may say, “Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming”
 - Sometimes these chunks may be difficult to understand when your kid is young.
- What can you do?
 - Recognize that echolalia is foundational and functional
 - Determine the intent and meaning of your child’s utterances; Acknowledge their gestalts
 - Model new language in times where your child is enjoying the activity/event – comment and narrate
- What to avoid?
 - Avoid asking questions
 - Stay away from “you” and “I” pronouns, as well as “I want”

Stage 1: Video example

- “Ready, set, go” is a common gestalt because it usually occurs during fun activities and is said frequently across contexts.
- A duck says, “quack, quack.”
 - Uncertain meaning
 - May be related to the yellow in the car.
 - May be a request.

Stage 2: Mitigation into chunks and recombining

- The gestalts are beginning to be broken down as they are recognizing meanings of specific parts of the script.
 - Example: A child used to script “Just keep swimming”, and “Let’s jump!” now says “Just keep jumping!”
- What can you do?
 - Provide many examples of target mix-and-match language- modeling a word in a couple ways in a couple different situations
 - Provide a wide variety of easy-to-mitigate gestalts, with lots of redundancy
 - Good models: Let’s + ____, It’s + ____, I’m + ____, We’re + ____, What’s + ____, Look at + ____, How about + ____, Where’s + ____, Don’t + ____.
 - Increase opportunities for your kid to communicate with other people now that intelligibility is better

Stage 2: Video example

- Structures of his mitigated gestalts:
 - “It’s a number _____”
 - “I found _____”
 - “I see _____”
- Some emerging stage 3 phrases:
 - “Five”
 - “Six”
 - “Number 10”
- Things adult did to facilitate language:
 - “I” approach

Stage 3: Isolation of single word and generation of 2-word phrases

- They have broken down a large chunk of language and assigned meaning to its respective parts. The meanings of words are getting more specific!
 - Example: A child now states “Swimming!” or “Swimming pool!”
- What can you do?
 - Celebrate! They are now in self-generated language
 - Provide a wide variety of single- and two-word phrases to mix and match – avoid modeling gestalts
 - Not yet focusing on grammar, so move word around (“yellow house” and “house big”)
 - Pause between words to help with recognizing where each word begins and ends
 - Build from their single words with qualities you can point to

Stage 3: Video example

- Counting is a very common script, which is why we see many kids love the alphabet and numbers.
- Stage 3 gestalts:
 - “An apple”
 - “The juice”
 - “Blueberries”
- Something to be cautious of:
 - Continually asking, “what’s this?”. Instead, try setting up a phrase, “Hmmm... I wonder what this is.”

Stage 4: Generation of more complex sentences

- They have built on those two-word phrases and are beginning to self-generate more complex sentences
 - Example: “She is swimming in a pool!”
- What can you do?
 - Model a wide variety and many examples for different grammatical structures
 - Similar to what you would do for an analytic language processor

Stage 4: Generation of more complex sentences

- Co-occurring disorders- This child also has apraxia, and some stuttering as well.
- Some other stages in the beginning.
 - “Get out, train” stage 2
- Stage 4 phrase: “I stuck.”

Stages 5 & 6: Adding Complexity to the Original Sentences

- Stage 5: More complex grammar
 - i.e., “The girl is putting her bathing suit on so that she can go swimming!”
- Stage 6: Using a Complete Grammar system.
 - i.e., “How come the girl isn’t swimming, since she usually swims every day?”

Determining Stages

- Use a language sample of at least 50 utterances.
- A general rule is that over 50% of your child's language is in that stage.

Gestalt
bye bye mr. ant
bye bye its the end
bye bye see you next time
see you next time
bye bye sharks
bye bye goat
bye bye ipad
bye bye days of the week
lets go
lets go outside
lets go upstairs
oh abasement
one two three
oh look
oh look a couch

Resources and Supports for Parents

- Recognize that gestalt language processing is a **valid** and **rule-governed** approach to language learning, just like analytic language processing. It's different, not wrong.
- Provide your kids with **appropriate sensorimotor supports** and then with the right language models.
- Focus on **regulation**, while still modeling words and feelings when they are dysregulated
- Pay attention to the **inventory of your child's language contexts** and then provide planned language experiences your child can echo and use meaningfully
- **Model language when your kid is LOVING what you are doing**- whatever that thing is that makes your kid tick, that'll be your best tool
- Provide language that shows the **gray area** (not just yes/no)

Resources and Supports for Parents

- Advocate for **proper services**
 - Follow your kids lead
 - Take an at-home language sample
 - Look for speech pathologists who are familiar with GLP
- Facebook groups
 - Natural Language Acquisition Study Group, led by Marge Blanc
 - Search “Gestalt Language Processing” and/or “Natural Language Acquisition” on Facebook to see what groups are available and which best pertain to you
- Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism, by Barry Prizant

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Questions??

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