ECHOLALIA

A different type of communication
Presented by the Speech - Language Pathology Department
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What is echolalia?
Echolalia is the repetition of verbal messages either immediately or with a delay. It is typical of the language development of children with ASD who tend to learn chunks of language first and then break them down, rather than learning to say one word, then two, etc. It can be an early stage which they surpass or it can be their main mode of communication even into adulthood. Children with Asperger syndrome do not use echolalia. Neuro-typical children may go through a period of repetition of what you say to them but it is not echolalia.

Is echolalia functional ?
Echolalia used to be thought of as a non-communicative behaviour which needed to be "extinguished". The first behavioural treatments of children with ASD used a loud "NO" to stop the child from repeating.
In 1984, a speech-language pathologist, Barry Prizant, proposed that echolalia was actually a form of communication and categorized the uses of both immediate and functional echolalia. You can usually distinguish communicative from non-communicative echolalia by the non-verbal body language. Is the child looking at you or looking at you sideways or turned towards you, seeming to be wanting to communicate OR is the child pacing or tuned out and not socially engaged? Does the echolalia seem like self-stimulatory behaviour?
As children with ASD learn the meaning of individual words and start combining them into meaningful units, the echolalia becomes mixed with generative language (created by the child himself).

What is the echolalic child saying?

Immediate Echolalia

- **Saying YES**
The echolalic speaker is repeating the question to agree
Do you want juice?
Do you want juice? OR Want juice? OR Want juice yes? OR Yes you want juice please?

- **Turn taking and thinking**
The echolalic speaker is interacting just by taking a turn but no adding information. Could also be processing info.
Example:

Where did you go on Sunday?
Where did you go on Sunday? OR Go on Sunday?

- **Contributing information**
The echolalic speaker can echo the question but is starting to answer

Do you want juice?
Do you want coke?

Did you go to grandma's house?
Did you go to grandma's house no grandma's house?

Notice that even though we think the child is communicating something by saying "No grandma's house" we cannot be sure if it means "No I didn't" or "I don't want to go".

- **Rehearsal**
The echolalic speaker echoes a sentence to help regulate his own behaviour

Don't run in the hall way
Don't run in the hallway? Don't run? (stops running gradually)

Delayed Echolalia

How much of a delay? Anywhere between a few hours and years!

- **Commenting and requesting**
The echolalic speaker uses a phrase heard in another context to communicate in a similar context

Child flushes the toilet and says: Good boy!

Child hurts himself and comes to adult and says: Are you OK?

Child at intake is anxious and looks at you and says: Mommy's coming soon

Child does not want to be touched and says : Don't you dare!

Child is asked "What did you do on the weekend and says: Don't take your bathing suit off in the pool!

Child goes to adult and says: Do you want juice?   OR Ready! Touch your head, touch your feet!

Child goes to an educator visiting the school and says: Do you remember my name?

Child is asked "What do you want for lunch? and sings a jingle for a cereal

Child comes right up to you nodding his head and says "I'm not your mother, said the cow"

- Non-communicative

Child paces around the room repeating parts of a sports /weather broadcast, or any TV or DVD dialogue or song OR directions such as "Now go sit down!" (self-stimulatory behaviour, could be out of boredom or calming himself down or being "in his own world").

TIPS TO MAKE ECHOLALIC CHILDREN MORE GENERATIVE - USING THEIR OWN WORDS

SIMPLIFY YOUR LANGUAGE and use each word in several contexts so that the child becomes aware that individual words have meaning. "Time /for/gym/reading/music" "Gym/time!" "Go/to/gym" "Gym/is/fun . Pause between words, associate signs or gestures. Use short sentences with concrete words. Speak slowly.

RESPOND to the child's intention firs "Chlorine hurts your eyes?" "Oh nice you went swimming" (model) 'I went swimming".

DE-EMPHASIZE correct pronouns; they are very difficult to achieve

REDIRECT negative forms: "Don't you dare!" = "Please don't touch me"

AVOID FORMS which the child will imitate automatically such as "What's that?". Hold up the object or the picture and wait for response; if child does not respond, give the label. If you say "Say …" the child will repeat the "say" part too.

USE THE CHILD'S MEMORY to create functional scripts as long as there is comprehension. For example, it is difficult to get an echolalic child to say "I'm fine and how are you?" because it has no meaning to them. But they can easily learn to say "Can I have a X please?" if that is what you model.

WHEN TEACHING YES: ask the question in low volume and then without a pause say YES! more loudly.

IF THE CHILD CAN READ present the new scripts in written form without any other prompts.

WHEN GREETING a young echolalic child, call his name, then when he turns around JUST say Hi! And he will respond Hi. After a while you can point to yourself after he has said "Hi".

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