


Chapter 19

Bilingualism in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly multilingual society, numerous families raise their children in a bilingual context. This trend is also evident among children with atypical developmental profiles, such as those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Historically, clinicians and educators have expressed concerns about whether bilingual exposure exacerbates the existing difficulties in language development and communication in children with ASD. However, recent research has challenged this previously accepted claim, suggesting that bilingualism does not impair language development in children with ASD and may offer cognitive, language, and even social advantages. This chapter explores the intersection of bilingualism and ASD by addressing language development, cognitive outcomes, and practical considerations for families and practitioners.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-1752-6.ch019

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly multilingual society, numerous families raise their children in a bilingual context. This trend is also evident among children with atypical developmental profiles, such as those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Historically, clinicians and educators have expressed concerns about whether bilingual exposure exacerbates the existing difficulties in language development and communication in children with ASD. However, recent research has challenged this previously accepted claim, suggesting that bilingualism does not impair language development in children with ASD and may offer cognitive, language, and even social advantages. This chapter explores the intersection of bilingualism and ASD by addressing language development, cognitive outcomes, and practical considerations for families and practitioners.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This chapter addresses the following questions.

1. What are the linguistic and cognitive profiles of children with ASD?
2. What is bilingualism, and how does it influence language development in children with ASD?
3. What are the linguistic, cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism for children with ASD?
4. What are the parental perspectives of bilingualism for children with ASD?
5. What practical considerations should families and clinicians consider when supporting bilingual children with ASD?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that influences various aspects of an individual's life. Its manifestations are often evident from birth, affecting primarily linguistic and motor skills (Thibaut, 2017). Individuals with ASD, especially children with high-functioning ASD (Liss et al., 2001), typically exhibit notable challenges in social communication and interaction across diverse contexts, accompanied by restricted and repetitive behavioral patterns (Barton et al., 2013; Gibbs et al., 2012), as well as hypersensitivity to sensory overload (Yorke et al., 2025).

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