LANGUAGE DISORDER AUSTRALIA

Gestalt Language Processing

When talking about children's language development, a **gestalt** refers to a "chunk" of multiple words, that a child will hear (e.g., from a TV show, movie, or parent/caregiver). These chunks are stored and may be used as a whole group of words, prior to the child developing an awareness of the gestalt's internal structure (single words).

If a child uses these gestalts as their initial units of their spoken communication, it may be an indicator that they follow a *Gestalt Language Processing* model of language acquisition. The child will then break down these larger chunks into smaller words and phrases later in order to then generate novel utterances.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the way children learn and use new words. The current research has found there are two key types of language acquisition: *analytic* and *gestalt*. Unlike gestalt language processing, analytic language processing starts at the single-word level and builds to phrases and sentences.

Gestalt language acquisition:

Echolalia
e.g. *"London Bridge is falling down"*

Mitigated echolalia
e.g. "Blocks + bridge is falling down"

Isolated words nd beginning word combinations
e.g. "Blocks + falling"

Grammar
e.g. "The red blocks are falling off the table"

Analytic language acquisition:

Single words
e.g. *"Ball"*

Two-word combinations
e.g. "*Green ball*"

Phrase
e.g. "*Roll green ball*"

Sentence
e.g. "*Roll the green ball to me*"

Language Disorder Australia

Gestalt Language Processing and Autism

It is theorised that most individuals will use a combination of analytic and gestalt language acquisition.

Both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals can be gestalt language processors to various degrees, however, this language acquisition model is most often discussed in reference to autistic children as they may predominantly rely on gestalt language. For gestalt language processors, echolalia is the first step in that child's natural development of language.

When working with a child you believe is a gestalt language processor use the following therapeutic principles:

Child-led play to increase connection:

Build an authentic connection with the child by following their interests and preferences.

Honour their communication:

Be observant of communication attempts made by the child. Honour their communication and consider the underlying purposes.

Build on current language skills:

Introduce individualised and meaningful language targets to build the child's language skills.

Include caregivers:

Collaborate with the child's primary caregiver(s) to tap into their expertise of the child's current language use and functions.

Regulation and sensory needs:

Always include sensory supports and strategies for the individual to support their regulation.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or **hello@languagedisorder.org.au**

Website: **languagedisorder.org.au**

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