

DIFFICULTIES IN VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN AUTISM

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***Abstract.** The ability to establish contact with other people and communicate with them influences the child's further development. Having the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally plays an important role in life of every person and is decisive in the process of building social relationships with other people.*

Disorders in the field of communication, speech development and the formation of the language system are one of the main symptoms of autism. In children with autistic disorders speech development is very diverse, even if they can speak, they have huge problems with understanding of the meaning of communication and establishing relationships.

The aim of this article is to present the difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication in autism, which are based on so-called triad of autistic disorders.

***Keywords:** autism, communication, triad of autistic disorders.*

Introduction

The ability to communicate with other people plays a huge role in the life of every human being. In social relations, the individual satisfies many needs, which are focused on the communication process. This is the basic plane of interpersonal interaction, without which no social activity can occur (Różalska et al., 2001).

Factors determining the development of communication skills

Everyone develops at their own individual pace. One of the basic tools for communicating with the environment is speech. Its development depends on various factors occurring at a given moment and it lasts for years, from the first moments of life. According to Leon Kaczmarek, four stages can be distinguished in the child's speech development:

- the period of the melody - 0 - 1 year old.
- the period of expression - 1 - 2 years of age.
- the period of sentence - 2 - 3 years old.
- the period of specific child's speech (specific linguistic forms) - 3-7 years of age.

During the melody stage, the child establishes the first contact - psychological and social with the environment, during which he uses shouting, crying and articulating voices. It is accompanied by vivid gestures and facial expressions. The modulation of voice, that is, the use of different tones (melody) is characteristic for this period. In the period between the first and the second year of life, the development of speech in a child goes from the stage of the melody to the more complex form - the period of expression. The signals spoken by the child consist of a part of the word, the whole word or many words without the use of grammatical structures. During the next period grammatical categories appear and the child's dictionary is enriched. However, between 3 and 7 years of age, the child can speak freely, uses extended sentences, but the speech develops and is fixed all the time. A child up to the age of seven should master the technique of speaking in terms of grammar, phonetic and articulation, while maintaining the appropriate melody and rhythm (Kaczmarek, 1977).

Language features can be considered in four areas, concerning the ability to use speech sounds (phonology), grammatical skills (syntax), ability to understand and create meanings (semantics) and the ability to communicate (pragmatic language function) (Frith, 2008).

An important factor in the development of communication is not only the use of speech, but also its understanding and understanding of the meaning of speech. Speech is understood as a process of communication between people using a communication system that is built of two components: words and rules defining how to use them. Speech development is related to the preceding non-verbal stages of communication with the environment, which affect the readiness to communicate. Thus, communication with the environment is carried out first using non-verbal behaviors and then words (Matczak, 1988).

In addition to the development of speech, there are genetic features that determine the ability of the child to acquire communication skills. The basis of them is the ability to create emotional ties with people from the environment and to exchange information. This wordless exchange emphasizes the child's satisfaction and striving for further contacts with him. Thanks to it, the first symbolic patterns are formed and perpetuated, the expression of the voice develops, while finding the meaning of the spoken words (Gałkowski, 2014).

Children who develop well, can use different forms of communication during the first year of their life, using behaviors that are the manifestation of the so-called tied attention. It is expressed, *inter alia*, by pointing out items, or showing them to others. In addition, in the proper development of communication one can observe the use of gestures used to express emotions, facial expressions and eye contact (Baron – Cohen & Bolten, 1999).

Triad of disorders in autism

Symptoms of autism can be divided into three basic areas in which characteristic irregularities manifest themselves. These areas are called the autistic triad and concern problems in the sphere of:

- social interaction,
- behavioral disorders,
- difficulties in communicating (Pisula, 2010).

Irregularities in terms of social development and social interactions are one of the most characteristic symptoms in the triad of autistic disorders. Their symptoms may be observed in early childhood. The child does not seem to be interested in dealing with loved ones, he prefers long hours of solitary confinement. The baby does not seek contact with his mother and does not show dissatisfaction when mother moves away. It can also be noticed in some cases that the child not only avoids making contacts but also defends himself against them; he does not like to be taken into arms, hugged and touched (Bobrowicz-Lenartowska, 2010).

One of the main problems that are present in the lives of people with autism is the inability to adapt to others. The severity of this phenomenon varies depending on the level of development or age. Pre-school children may, for example, be among other people and not notice them, or even fall into them. They do not respond to the call and their name. Often, they also avoid looking at people who are trying to make contact with them. Lack of social skills may in the future become an obstacle in adaptation to adulthood (Winczura, 2016).

The ability to make contact and create close relationships is a process that is considered to be continuous and dynamic. It is now noted that there is a large diversity of social and emotional relationships in children with autism. A large part of children participate in social life in various forms, while the profile of their shortages remains diversified. The ability to enter into relationships with other people has a significant impact on the ability to cope with social situations (Winczura, 2017). The quality of making contacts by autistic children stems from the fact that it is often instrumentally involved in this process. It means that the child gets involved when he wants something and is more interested in what he wants to get rather than who he wants the thing from. (Winczura, 2016).

Some children are able to initiate contact or respond to other people's attempts to establish relations, but they avoid eye contact and do not associate with other people's activities. There are also situations that children with autism cannot keep distance from other people (Pisula, 2010).

In the behavior of children with autism, one can notice the reluctance to change, attachment to patterns and rituals. An expression of this can be strict adherence to the plan of the day or the manner of performing specific activities,

adherence to strict order of conduct in specific situations or motor stereotypes. Template ability in functioning may also reveal itself through unusual interests, often with a very narrow scope. These interests are extremely absorbing and intense for people with autism (Pisula, 2010). These behaviors significantly impede the proper functioning in society, and reduce the child's adaptation skills necessary to act in specific situations.

Repeated interests significantly limit ingenuity and experiments in the field of play, which is an important element shaping the proper development of the child. Fun stimulates learning processes, develops imagination, the ability to empathize with other people, which in children with autistic disorders is a huge problem. In children with autism, the lack of presence or very rare occurrence of the so-called pretend play may be observed (eg. pretending that the bucket is a cap and putting it on the head) (Baron – Cohen & Bolten, 1999).

Cognitive development of people with autism is not harmonious. There are cases of children who cannot cope with simple tasks, but are able to solve complex problems (Pisula, 2010). It is worth noting that in autism, apart from limited interests, there may also be interests in the so-called rash (unidirectional), which are characterized by a very high level of knowledge on a given topic (Błeszyński, 2011). Often, the ability of rash in children with autism is greater than their properly developing peers. Among the examples of such islands of abilities one can include drawing, music, calculating the calendar. Other skills described by scientists are also mechanical memory, finding shapes in patterns or prematurely developed reading skills, so-called hyperlexia (Baron - Cohen & Bolten, 1999).

In proper development of a child and the dynamics of the process of fun in his life, the ability to establish interpersonal contacts and maintain them is very important. Research on the play activity of children with autism, indicate the importance of the child's ability to interact socially, which is reflected in the lack of spontaneous fun with the partner and sharing a common sphere with him (Minczakiewicz, 2001).

Human communication development and speech are closely related to human social development. It is not enough, however, for the child to be able to speak, but it is important to understand the meaning of the individual spoken words.

The development of communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, on the one hand influences later functioning in the child's social life, on the other hand, it depends on social skills shaped at the beginning of life. The proper development of communication skills requires holistic strengthening during social exercises. Researchers are looking for an answer to the question which of these two areas - social development, or the development of communication skills - is distorted initially and consequently causes autistic disorders. Different theories

arise on this subject and disputes regarding the causes of these disorders are still ongoing (Winczura, 2016).

Difficulties in the communication of people with autism are very extensive. In people with autism, there are difficulties in understanding what communication and lack of it or limited competence in terms of skills needed to communicate with other people is. Obstacles in proper communication are also manifested in non-verbal communication. These people rarely use gestures or vocalization, they do not communicate with the help of glances or facial expressions. The problem in communication may also be caused by difficulty in understanding facial expressions or reading emotions (Pisula, 2010). Limitations of the ability to participate in interaction with another person may be manifested in the inability to establish friendly relationships with peers. In children with autism, you can often perceive the objective treatment of other people. In some people with autism it can be observed that despite understanding the question posed by another person, they are not able to conduct a dialog, but they answer laconically, briefly cutting the conversation. This condition is related to the inability to read and understand the emotions of other people (Winczura, 2016).

The autistic triad shows how many common features have disruptions in different spheres, how they affect each other and how they are dependent on each other. The table below presents the main symptoms of autism in the field of social interaction disorders, behavioral problems and difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication that contribute to the triad of disorders.

How do children with autistic disorders communicate?

Disorders in the field of communication, speech development and the formation of the language system are one of the main symptoms of autism. By communicating with another person, one becomes a member of a social group and interacts with others. In children with autistic disorders speech development is very diverse, even if they can speak, they have huge problems with understanding of the meaning of communication and establishing relationships. Lack of social communication with the environment often causes exclusion from the community (Cieszyńska, 2010).

In behaviors of people with autism, one can see limitations in establishing interpersonal relations already at the earliest stage of development. In studies on autism, it was found that in children affected by autistic disorders, there is a significantly reduced ability to read the moods or intentions. Sharing a common field with other person is necessary in the child's ability to communicate. The lack or limited ability to empathize with the emotions and intentions of other people makes it much harder to establish and maintain relationships (Gałkowski, 2014). Even with the correct development of speech, these children do not attempt to

communicate with other people, and they cannot use the speech according to the social situation (Bobkowicz-Lewartowska, 2010). Children with autism-related disorders also have problems with reading facial expressions. It is known that already three-month-old babies react to various emotional states visible on the faces of relatives, while their peers with autism do not understand the meaning of emotional signals and pay little attention to them. This condition causes consequences in their further development (Pisula, 2010).

Speech development in children concerns such areas as speech understanding, vocabulary, the grammatical structures of sentences, and the rhythm and melody of speech. Among the views related to the study of speech development in people with autism, two approaches can be distinguished. The first approach maintains that speech disorders are of primary character and the symptoms of autism are their consequences (Jaklewicz, 1993). Proponents of this concept believe that disorder in the scope of verbal and non-verbal communication is the main manifestation of autism that disrupts and impairs the establishment of social contacts, which results in gradual social and emotional isolation of the child (Winczura, 2016).

The second view emphasizes the existence of disorders and regression as a consequence in the proper development of speech. Researchers believe that the development of speech in people with autism initially occurs in a correct manner, and then there is regression in this area (Jaklewicz, 1993).

The disturbed process of verbal and non-verbal communication includes both the understanding of speech and expression. Children who have not developed the ability to use speech, or their speech is disturbed, show considerable problems in expressing emotions, while those who have developed speech abilities have problems with conducting dialogues, and the situations they understand do not include recognizing feelings. (Winczura, 2017).

Speech development in people with autism occurs with considerable delay. Developmental deficits in communication can be noticed before the age of 12 months. Reflex babbling and vocalization are very poorly expressed or absent (Bobkowicz-Lewartowska, 2017). The first forms of verbal communication, which are spoken with understanding, appear around 4-5 years of age, whereas simple sentences of two words are pronounced at the age of 6-7. However, these spoken messages are not used for interpersonal communication, because these children have limited ability to initiate and maintain contacts with other people (Pisula, 2010).

The speech of an autistic child is characterized by monotony and lack of fluidity. Its form is sometimes impersonal and quite complicated in the syntax; Strangely used words are used with colloquial formulations. You can also observe abnormal accent use, uneven pace, inhibited expansion of the breath as well as unstable voice scale. Melody and intonation seem to be artificial. There is also a

distorted grammatical structure, confusion grammatical forms, neologisms and word clusters. The scope of practical vocabulary is poor and the construction of sentences is at a low level. Children with autistic disorders ask few questions and practically do not express spontaneous comments (Wilczura, 2017).

A characteristic feature of speech disorders is the tendency to reverse pronouns, which consists in the fact that children say about themselves: you, he, or use their name instead of using the pronoun "I" (Bobkowicz - Lenartowska, 2010). Other phenomena that characterize the speech of a child with autism is the occurrence of linguistic stereotypes (repeated patterns of words or phrases or questions) and echolalia, consisting in repeating words or sentences spoken by another person immediately, or in the so-called postponement (Pisula, 2010). This repetition is involuntary and meaningless, it consists in copying the pattern - a replica, where there is no preserved thought process. Echolalia can be divided into three categories due to time and conditions of occurrence:

- immediate echolalia (repeating the phrase heard directly, words or questions, keeping the grammatical structure),
- delayed echolalia (quoting statements, opinions or advertisements that were heard much earlier, even a few days or even months, without the ability to apply them in a proper way)
- mild echolalia (words related to the child's situations or interests that occur in speech) (Winczura, 2016).

However, it should be remembered that in correctly developing children there are also some symptoms described in autism. J. Błeszyński says after Piaget that the occurrence of echolalia at some stage in the development of children is a phenomenon that does not cause anxiety, because over time their number decreases and disappears completely (Błeszyński, 2011). In children with autism, this is often the main way of speaking, because they cannot build statements themselves. It is not known what communication function is performed by echolalia, and their interpretation is extremely difficult (Pisula, 2010).

Non-verbal communication, which consists of expression and understanding of the message expressed through body language, gestures and facial expressions, in people with autism proceeds incorrectly. We can observe the lack of gestures, and those that occur are simple and instrumental. Children with autistic disorders often display behaviors associated with unusual movements; shaking your head, moving their jaws, gnashing their teeth whining or moaning. Often, unnatural shoulder movements and increased muscle tone are also observed. Facial expressions are the manifestations of negative emotions, while states of pleasure are revealed in increased physical activity or behaviors such as clapping or swinging (Bobkowicz - Lenartowska, 2010).

Non-verbal communication is an important element of communication, it gives context in which the analysis and interpretation of the message is made. Without its understanding, the exchange of information between two people cannot take place fully. People who have a non-verbal communication disorder are not aware of the meaning of language as something more than just words (Winczura, 2016).

The ability to establish contact with other people and communicate with them influences the child's further development. Having the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally plays an important role in the life of every person and is decisive in the process of building social relationships with other people.

Conclusions

The degree of development of communication skills in children with autistic disorders is dependent on many factors, including the level of cognitive development of the child. One of the main goals of supporting autistic people is to strengthen them in acquiring verbal and non-verbal communication skills. This is possible only by holistic treatment of a given person through stimulation of disturbed areas in which difficulties arise. It is impossible to separate individual elements of the autism spectrum triad, because they have many common features, influence each other and are dependent on each other. Support for people with autism in communication is closely related to stimulating the development of the social interaction sphere and supporting activity on cognitive popping (Pisula, 2010).

The manifestations of autism are of a broad nature, therefore the support of each person must be appropriately adapted to individual disorders. Difficulties for individual people are varied and may be accompanied by various problems, which makes autism different in every person. Therefore, individual programs are created for each child and work methods are applied that best suit their needs. The basis for developing such a program is to determine the skills of a given child. Working with a person with autistic disorders should include supporting verbal and non-verbal communication, social skills and support in the field of modification and shaping in the field of behavior. Therefore, the therapy should cover all elements of the autistic disorders triad occurring in a given child.

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