

Abstract

This study examines the use of logico-semantic relations and taxis relations in the topic transitions of subjects with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD), Asperger's Syndrome (AS), and the socially withdrawn. The study employs inter-judge reliability to determine where the topic transitions take place, for three subject groups with 10 subjects in each group. The subjects were chosen from a corpus of 95 subjects (Szatmari, Bartolucci & Bremner, 1989). The purpose of this research is to identify what makes the speech patterns of children and adolescents on the Autism spectrum stand out from their socially withdrawn peers by analyzing linguistic features of topic transitions in those with HFASD, Asperger's Syndrome, and a control group of socially withdrawn children and adolescents. The identification of topic transitions by lay judges provides an ecologically valid measure of where the subjects are and are not creating new topics and how subjects respond to topic transitions in the language of the interviewers.

Topic transitions were determined by the judges, and then linguistic and statistical analyses were employed to determine patterns of hypotaxis and parataxis, as well as expansion options, i.e. elaboration, extension, and enhancement, among and within the subject groups. There were no statistically significant differences among the three groups in terms of the linguistic factors analyzed. There were significant differences between hypotaxis and parataxis within the HFASD group and within the AS group, with more instances of parataxis. There were also statistically significant differences between the expansion options within each of the three groups, with significantly more instances of extension in each of the three groups, as compared with enhancement and elaboration.

The potential implications of these results are discussed. Limitations of the current study are presented and potential future studies are suggested.