

Preface

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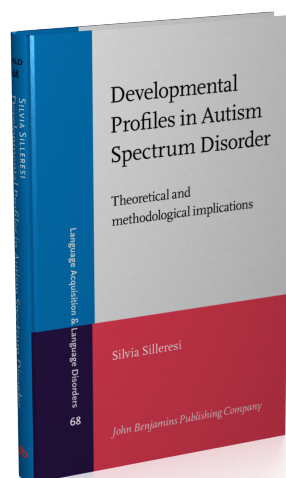
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**Developmental Profiles in Autism Spectrum Disorder:
Theoretical and methodological implications**

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[*Language Acquisition and Language Disorders*, 68]

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Preface

My goal in writing this book was to present the current state of knowledge and recent advances on three main topics in the research on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): the (debated) existence of profiles of abilities, the role of bilingualism and the impact of the use of interactive technologies in assessing and training linguistic abilities in this condition. In choosing these three subjects, I focused on some of the issues that, for different reasons, are among the most relevant in autism research nowadays.

Concerning the existence of profiles of abilities, over the past three decades efforts have been made to identify subtypes in order to better understand the heterogeneity of ASD. In this *mare magnum* of literature, this book tries to address (theoretically and methodologically) the question of the existence and the identification of linguistic and cognitive profiles and how to deal with them when conducting empirical research in this field.

Regarding bilingualism, to date very little is known about how learning more than one language can potentially impact individuals on the autism spectrum. This lack of knowledge is very troubling when one considers that bilingual children are increasingly more and more frequent in clinical settings. The present work tries to address this understudied topic giving an overview of the limited literature currently available and focusing on the identification of underlying profiles in bilingual children with autism.

Finally, this book addresses a very recent field of research: the use of interactive technology with individuals on the autism spectrum. Recent advances in Human Computer Interaction (the field that investigates the interface between people – users – and technology) seem to offer new means to support children with ASD and to facilitate the assessment and training of co-occurring factors in this condition. Our goal is to show how interactive technologies can be effectively introduced into research and clinical settings to easily perform basic and applied research.

In presenting these three main topics, I have adopted frameworks, concepts and definitions thereby assuming that the reader has some familiarity with ASD and the relevant literature. However, in the introduction and at the beginning of each chapter, I have also tried to summarize basic information and fundamental notions that should ensure a common background with the reader.

Beyond the introduction (Chapter 1), this book includes six chapters that cover: a literature review on the current knowledge of structural language abilities (phonology and morphosyntax) in monolingual and bilingual children with ASD (Chapters 2 and 3); current state of the art on cognitive abilities in autism, with a focus on psychometric tests used to evaluate nonverbal abilities in monolingual and bilingual children (Chapter 4); a focus on autism traits and co-occurring factors and how they can impact linguistic and cognitive abilities in ASD (Chapter 5); a chapter devoted to an experimental study that aims, through the application of the theoretical and methodological considerations derived from the previous chapters, to identify linguistic and cognitive profiles in children with autism (Chapter 6); current advances on the use of interactive technologies with children with ASD (Chapter 7). Conclusions are dedicated to the discussion of the main topics and results of this work.

In addition, some of the chapters may be read and used individually as reviews of specific subjects in the ASD literature. In the last decades several researchers have started investigating formal language abilities in individuals on the autism spectrum, but, as far as we know, there is no existing work which covers – via a scoping literature review – the current knowledge on this topic. Chapters 2 and 3 give an overview of the current state of the art on this matter. Similar considerations can be drawn for the relation between language and non-verbal intelligence in autism (Chapter 4) and language and autism traits (Chapter 5). I think that all these chapters can be particularly useful for researchers, scholars and clinicians who are interested in a systematic description of what has been shown so far in the literature. From a clinical perspective, I believe that the chapter on interactive technologies (Chapter 7) can give new insights on how combining the physical and digital worlds through technology-based activities, can provide support for persons on the autism spectrum. Moreover, this chapter could be useful to identify and develop therapies tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of individuals on this condition.

Finally, given the high degree of interest in ASD in the past decades, this book could be useful to anyone interested in the acquisition of language in persons on the autism spectrum. This work allows for multiple comparisons across research contexts, which provides the reader with valuable insights into the nature of language abilities in ASD.