
Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Degree of “Doctorate” in Psycholinguistics

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Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a severe neurodevelopmental disorder, whose symptoms are usually identified early in childhood and remain present throughout one’s lifetime. One of the primary diagnostic symptoms of autism is a qualitative impairment in communication in general and pragmatic in particular. Social communication or the pragmatic of the language is the principal mechanism by means of which interpersonal relationships are achieved. Indeed, it is to social communication that all other functions of communication are ultimately subordinated. Given that impairments in pragmatic are a hallmark feature of ASD, children with autism spectrum disorder need to learn how to develop their pragmatic skills so as they could be integrated into their societies. In this respect, the main objective of this thesis is to investigate the development of pragmatic communicative skills in speaker children with autism in Algeria in relation to age, gender, Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) and level of education. For this purpose, a longitudinal case study was conducted as research fieldwork. The data collected from a combination of assessment tools: spontaneous language sampling, an elicitation procedure, a Speech Generative Device (SGD) and content analysis were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The main results obtained revealed that pragmatic impairment in children with autism is not a process linked to a specific language, this disorder is a result of a cognitive process rather than a cultural one. Besides, children who attend schools and care centers showed more control over the use of different pragmatic skill, as a result, their MLU was better than those who do not attend schools. Moreover, this study supports the use of Speech Generative Device (SGD) as an alternative means to promote pragmatic communicative skills.
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