

Types of Language

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WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will explore different types of language by defining and discussing the following:

1. Receptive Language
2. Expressive Language

1. Receptive Language

While many typically developing children acquire language skills without explicit intervention, language skills must be directly taught to many patients with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Historically, language was taught as either “receptive,” which involves understanding the language of others, or “expressive,” which involves using language to communicate. The term “listener responding” is also used in the field of ABA to describe receptive language.

In this first section, we will discuss **receptive language**, which is the ability to understand words and language.

One way a patient may demonstrate this is by following instructions and/or performing an action.

↪ **EXAMPLE** The behavior technician asks “Where is the banana?” and the patient points to the banana on the table.

↪ **EXAMPLE** The behavior technician says “Clean up,” and the patient begins picking up toys that are on the floor.

↪ **EXAMPLE** The behavior technician asks, “What do you smell with?” and the patient touches their nose.



THINK ABOUT IT

What other real-world examples of receptive language can you think of?

Suppose you are at a coffee shop placing an order. After the order is placed, the barista tells you to put your credit card in the chip reader. You respond by taking your credit card out of your wallet and putting your card into the chip reader. You demonstrate that you understood what the barista was asking by following the instruction.

To teach receptive language, the behavior technician might display three picture cards (e.g., chair, fork, and cookie) and instruct the patient to identify one on instruction, as in, “Touch cookie.” The patient demonstrated that they receptively understood the behavior technician if they touched the picture of the cookie instead of the chair or fork.

Video Transcription

Where's the brush? You found it. High five. That's good.

Casey, criss-cross applesauce.

Where's toothbrush? Oh my goodness, that is a toothbrush. Brush, brush, brush. That is so cool.

Brush, brush, brush.

Brush, brush, brush. That's right.

Where's soap? That's the soap. That's what we wash our hands with.



TERM TO KNOW

Receptive Language

The ability to understand words and language

2. Expressive Language

Expressive language involves using language as a form of communication rather than as a form of understanding as with receptive language. It is defined as how a person uses language to communicate.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Giving a spoken answer to a question or statement, or saying something that the individual sees or wants

This may also include communicating through gestures, exchanging a picture, or using an electronic device.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The behavior technician asks “What is this?” and the patient says “Apple.”

➞ **EXAMPLE** When hungry, the patient hands a picture of chips to the behavior technician to request a bag of chips.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The behavior technician asks “What do you want to play with?” and the patient answers, “Trains.”



THINK ABOUT IT

What other real-world examples of expressive language can you think of? What other examples of expressive language can you think of?

Going back to placing an order at the coffee shop, walking up and telling the barista that you would like a latte and a pastry would be an example of expressive language. You expressed your wants through vocal verbal communication.

The behavior technician would teach expressive language by holding up a picture of an item, such as a cookie, and asking, “What is it?” In this case, the patient was expected to use their expressive language by communicating “cookie” through whatever form of communication was appropriate for them (e.g., speech, sign language, communication device, etc.).

Video Transcription

SPEAKER 1: What is it?

CHILD: T-t-t, table.

[GASPING]

[CHEERING, APPLAUDING]

SPEAKER 2: Awesome job!

[OVERLAPPING CHEERS]

SPEAKER 3: [INAUDIBLE].

[LAUGHING]

IN CONTEXT

Let’s assume that Jonah has learned to pick up and hand us a cookie when he is asked to “Give me the cookie.” This is receptive language and understanding of the word “cookie.” Jonah has also learned to name a cookie when he is presented with one and asked, “What is it?” This is expressive language and identifying of the word “cookie.”

Many times, this is where instruction will end and a new word target will be introduced. But does this mean that Jonah will now be able to ask for a cookie when he is hungry? Or will he identify a cookie when asked, “What is something yummy to eat?”

From what we observe from many individuals with ASD, this is often not the case. In other words, we can’t assume that Jonah will ask for a cookie when he is hungry just because we have taught him to say “cookie” when we hold up a picture card of a cookie.

In the next few lessons, we will discuss how we use verbal behavior to help teach patients with ASD several different skills.



TERM TO KNOW

Expressive Language

How a person uses language to communicate



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the different types of language, including **receptive language**, which involves the ability to understand the words and language of others, and **expressive language**, which refers to how a person uses language to communicate. For instance, a patient may demonstrate receptive language by following instructions and/or performing an action. On the other hand, a patient may demonstrate expressive language by giving a spoken answer to a question or statement, or saying something that the individual sees or wants, or communicating through gestures, exchanging a picture, or using an electronic device.



TERMS TO KNOW

Expressive Language

How a person uses language to communicate.

Receptive Language

The ability to understand words and language.