



The Benefits of a Bilingual Environment on The Psycho-Speech Development of Children With ASD

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Abstract: The article discusses the influence of the bilingual environment on the psycho-speech development of children with ASD. It also addresses the inclusion of these children into a bilingual environment to enhance their communication and speech skills. The research conducted within the article shows that children with ASD raised in a bilingual environment demonstrate a "bilingual advantage," which manifests in improved executive functions of brain activity.

Keywords: Bilingualism, bilingual, monolingual, children's bilingualism, autism spectrum disorder, bilingual advantage, bilingual environment, cognitive functions, communication skills.

Introduction: Early childhood autism (ASD) is a complex disorder of mental development, which is manifested by significant difficulties in the field of social interaction and communication [5].

According to a number of researchers (E. R. Baenskaya, M. M. Liebling, O. S. Nikolskaya, U. Frith, L. Wing, and others), one of the key factors limiting the adaptation and successful development of children with ASD is the underdevelopment of the psycho-speech sphere [2].

The speech development of such children may deviate from the age norm both in quantitative terms (speech delay, limited vocabulary, low speech activity) and in qualitative terms (echolalia, grammatical disorder, difficulties in using speech for communication).

A study by scientists from the University of Geneva (Switzerland), the University of Thessaly (Greece) and the University of Cambridge (Great Britain) has shown that bilingualism partially compensates for the deficit of the model of mental and executive function in autistic children. This is reported in a press release from the University of Geneva.

Over the past ten years, researchers have been studying the development of autistic children in a bilingual environment. They found that contact with two languages does not hinder the speech development of children on the autism spectrum. The researchers observed the speech development of bilingual verbal children with autism and compared it with the development of children who had contact with only one language. Research results have shown that children who come into contact with two languages master speech skills no worse than children who come into contact with only one language.

So far, we have no research on the impact of a bilingual environment on children who do not use spoken language to communicate. However, we know that bilingualism does not harm the development of verbal children on the autism spectrum.

Research shows that children with ASD often do not have a natural need for communication, which is expressed in avoiding contact, lack of dialogue, limited expression of emotions, difficulties in understanding other people's experiences and cognitive disharmony [1]. The speech symptoms in this group of children vary in severity and nature, which makes it difficult for them to integrate into the social environment.

In today's multicultural society, more and more families use two or more languages in everyday communication, forming a bilingual environment.

Children with ASD growing up in such conditions are an increasingly common social phenomenon. Previously, it was assumed that bilingualism could negatively affect speech development in children with ASD. In this regard, many families were inclined to abandon one of the languages, believing that this would simplify the communicative development of the child. However, the results of modern research do not confirm the link between bilingualism and the deterioration of speech abilities in children with ASD [3].

International experience confirms that if a child is able to master one language, he has a similar opportunity to master two. Modern research shows that children

with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are able to learn two languages no less successfully than their monolingual peers. A number of studies have not revealed differences in language skills, including vocabulary and stages of early language development, between children with ASD who speak one and two languages.

Moreover, the use of the native language in the home environment provides the child with more diverse speech patterns, which contributes to a better assimilation of the language of the surrounding society [6].

Some studies have documented improvements in cognitive and executive functions in bilingual children with ASD compared to monolingual peers. In particular, bilingualism can mitigate typical delays in speech and cognitive development.

For example, an analysis conducted at McGill University (Canada) showed that bilingual children with ASD switch between tasks faster, demonstrating the so-called "bilingual advantage" — improved planning skills, focus of attention and flexibility of thinking. The parents of such children also noted a great ease in the transition between actions in everyday life.

The results of research conducted at the University of Geneva (Switzerland), the University of Thessaly (Greece) and the University of Cambridge (Great Britain) confirm that bilingualism partially compensates for the deficit in the development of the "mental model" — the ability to understand the intentions and emotions of other people, and also strengthens executive functions. Bilingual children with ASD showed significantly higher results in tasks that included assessments of thinking flexibility, planning ability, and understanding of other people's mental states.

Scientists emphasize that the need to constantly take into account the linguistic context and the interlocutor contributes to the training of skills important for overcoming communicative and cognitive difficulties. These data confirm that bilingualism can play a positive role in the cognitive and speech development of children with ASD, contributing to their adaptation and social integration.

The conclusions of scientific research in this area are unequivocal: There is no reason to deprive a child with ASD of the opportunity to communicate in several languages, as this leads to a limitation of his communicative spheres and an increased lack of

interaction. Scientists emphasize that children with ASD are able to master two languages, despite the peculiarities of their psychophysiological development. Moreover, such children can demonstrate comparable success in both bilingual and monolingual educational environments.

Maintaining bilingualism in the family helps not only to expand the child's communication skills, but also to strengthen his ethnic and cultural identity. This, in turn, creates additional conditions for social interaction both in the home environment and outside it — with relatives, representatives of the native ethnic group and society as a whole [4].

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