The authors thank participating children, parents and the principals, for their cooperation. The study was supported by a grant from the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University. Informed consent was obtained from parents/participants prior to testing, and all procedures were approved by a university institutional review board. The study was approved by the institutional review board of New York University, Department of Communicative Sciences and Disorders. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Background

The present study is one of few that have compared children with typical development (TD) and those with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFA) on a variety of language measures. These studies typically have focused on either core language, pragmatic language, or social participation. A study by Bishop et al. (2003) compared children with TD and those with HFA on a task that involved reading and answering questions. The results showed that children with HFA performed significantly worse than those with TD on the reading and answering questions task.

Method

Two sessions with standardized testing and discourse tasks: the expository task and the social discourse/Conversational task. The expository task was a fictional retelling task, where children were asked to retell a story they had heard. The social discourse/Conversational task was a conversation with a partner about a picture. The language production was analyzed using transcription, segmentation and all coded measures. (Epstein, 2005; Hadley, 1998)

Results

Table 1: Results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for the number of Fillers/P-unit and pragmatic competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Fillers/P-unit</th>
<th>Pragmatic Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HFA</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant difference in number of Fillers/P-unit between groups (p=0.001). Significant difference in number of Pragmatic Competence between groups (p=0.001). There were no significant differences in Fillers/P-unit or Pragmatic Competence between groups.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that children with HFA differ from those with TD in their language production. Children with HFA produced fewer fillers and had less causal language than children with TD. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have found differences in language production between children with HFA and those with TD.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the understanding of language production in children with HFA. The findings suggest that children with HFA may benefit from interventions that target pragmatic language and causal language production.

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