The Narrative Coherence of Autistic Children's Accounts of an Experienced Event over Time

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Abstract : Twenty-seven children aged 6-15 years with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and 32 typically developing children were questioned about their participation in a set of activities after a two-week delay and again after a two-month delay, using a best-practice interview protocol. This paper assessed the narrative coherence of children's reports based on key story grammar elements and temporal features included in their accounts of the event. Results indicated that, over time, both children with ASD and typically developing (TD) children decreased their narrative coherence. Children with ASD were no different from TD peers with regards to story length and syntactic complexity. However, they showed significantly less coherence than TD children. They were less likely to use the gist of the story to organize their narrative coherence. Interviewer prompts influenced children's narrative coherence. The findings indicated that children with ASD could provide meaningful and reliable testimony about an event they personally experienced, but the narrative coherence of their reports deteriorates over time and is affected by interviewer prompts.

Keywords : autism spectrum disorders, delay, eyewitness testimony, narrative coherence
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