Spoken Narratives by Autistic Adults of Under-represented Genders

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Current models of autism are generally based on a male phenotype. Recent research suggests a female phenotype of autism (Green et al., 2019). Transgender and nonbinary identities may occur more frequently in the autistic population (Dewinter et al., 2017). Gender may influence narratives, often used in diagnosis. Uncertainty about individuals who are not cisgender males can lead to misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis.
Methods: Study Design

• Mixed-methods study of spoken narratives
  • Analyzed narrative mesostructure (themes), macrostructure (cohesion), and microstructure (vocabulary & grammar)
  • Qualitative discourse analysis
  • Quantitative statistical analysis
    • Linguistic variables
    • Self-report measures
• Specifically recruited transgender, nonbinary, and female adults on the autism spectrum
## Methods: Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 20)</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>RAADS-14 Screen score</th>
<th>CAT-Q total score</th>
<th>DASS-21 score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average (SD)</td>
<td>32.85 (10.08)</td>
<td>30.75 (6.07)</td>
<td>123.35 (25.99)</td>
<td>25.00 (13.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>20 - 57</td>
<td>19 - 42</td>
<td>68 - 159</td>
<td>1 - 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Range</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>0 - 42</td>
<td>25 - 175</td>
<td>0 - 63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. RAADS-14 Screen = Ritvo Autism and Asperger Diagnosis Scale-14. CAT-Q = Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire. DASS-21 = Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale, short form.*
Methods: Participants

**Gender**
- Cis women: 6
- Cis men: 5
- Trans woman: 1
- Trans men: 3
- Autogender: 1
- Nonbinary: 4

**Education**
- Bachelor's degree: 7
- Some graduate school: 1
- PhD: 2
- Some college: 2
- Associate's degree: 1
- Master's degree: 7
Methods: Procedure

1. Screening survey
   • Eligibility info + RAADS-14 Screen
2. Zoom interview
   • 4 narrative tasks
3. Post-interview survey
   • Additional demographics + CAT-Q + DASS-21
Statistical Results

• Linguistic dependent variables
  • Length (words; C-units)
  • Complexity (words/C-unit)
  • Vocabulary diversity (TNW/NDW)
  • Filled pauses (um; uh)
  • Implicature

• No statistically significant effects of gender on
  • any self-report measure score
  • any linguistic DV.

• But...
Results: Narrative length by gender
Results: Vocabulary diversity by gender

Least diverse

Most diverse
Qualitative Results: Vocabulary & Grammar

• Verbs
  • Vision ("looks like," "appears to be")
  • Ability ("can," "able to")
  • Tense changes: more common in open-ended tasks

• Adjectives & Adverbs
  • Emotions, evaluations, qualifications
  • Combining words to form new descriptors

• Other people
  • Gender differences in reference
Results: References to other people

(Picture)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender-neutral terms</th>
<th>Gendered terms</th>
<th>Proportion of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two adults</td>
<td>nonbinary, autigender</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
<td>trans people</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pourer</td>
<td>cis people</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.40-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kite</td>
<td>nonbinary, autigender</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.40-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandcastle</td>
<td>trans people</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher</td>
<td>cis people</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7-1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Results: Narrative Structure

- Lists (*Picture*)
- One event/Many events (*Imagine*)
- Amount of commentary
- Number of narrative threads
Qualitative Results: Themes (Overall)

- Comments on the task
- Trying to get it "right"
- COVID-19
- People
Results: Themes (*People*)

**Travel**
- Nature
- History
- Concerts
- Family events
- Fantasy
- Physical activity

**Helping**
- *everywhere*
Results: Themes (Interest)

The Arts
- Performance
- Music
- Engagement

Creating
- Food

History

Nature

Connections with other people
Takeaways

• Variation characterized narrative micro, macro, and mesostructures

• No stat sig gender differences in linguistic variables
  • Some patterns suggest differences based on femininity/masculinity or binariness of gender

• Autistic people are interested in many different things!
  • Especially other people!

• Narrative tasks are a rich source of information and insight.
Acknowledgements

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• College of Health and Human Development

References at QR code or by email: klc92@psu.edu

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