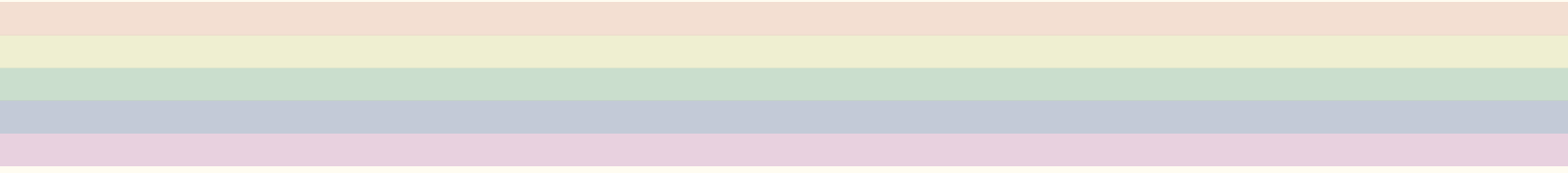


DEAF AUTISTIC COMMUNICATION

A review of current research on communication features of Autistic signers (Deaf and CODA)



This resource serves to summarize some of the current research regarding Deaf and CODA signers who have a dual diagnosis of Autism.

This research is ongoing, and in many cases consists of case studies or limited sample sizes. In addition, Autism research has recently undergone shifts towards more affirming, strengths based lenses. More research that is affirming to both the Deaf and the Autistic communities is necessary.

It is also important to note that features described here do not apply universally to all Autistic signers. Someone may present with all, some, or none of these traits. Additionally, co-occurring diagnoses such as ADHD and anxiety are common and may impact communication. Apraxia and motor planning deficits are also often comorbid with Autism, and may impact movement and handshape.



Facial Expressions

Differences in facial expressions have been documented for both hearing and Deaf Autistic people. For signers: this can impact nonmanual markers. Remember that these may not be present for all.



Absent or reduced question facial markers

- Raised eyebrows for yes/no questions
- Raised eyebrows for rhetorical questions
- Furrowed eyebrows for WH questions
- Furrowed eyebrows for choices

* The individual may compensate by using the signed question marker to ensure partner understands they are asking a question



Absent or reduced facial markers for describing

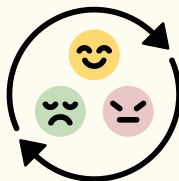
Facial tension to emphasize (e.g. describing neon pink)

*Size descriptors:
oo, mm, chh

*Distance descriptors:
ee, aah

* The individual may compensate by using larger body and hand movements to emphasize

Absent, reduced, or atypical facial markers for affect/emotion



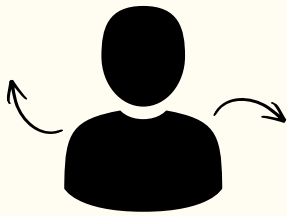
Some signs have expected facial expressions to match affect. An individual may compensate with a lexical sign or by acting out

*these NMM were NOT explicitly included in research discovered by this writer. This writer hypothesizes that these facial NMM would be similarly impacted.



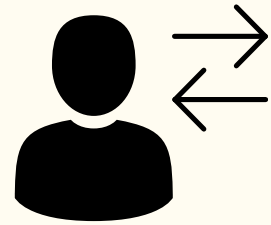
Head and Body Movement

Differences in “body language” have been observed in both hearing and Deaf Autistic individuals. Differences sometimes can be attributed to Autism itself (e.g. stimming), and sometimes to comorbidities (e.g. motor planning due to coexisting apraxia). For signers, this can impact nonmanual markers.



Absent or reduced shoulder shift

In ASL, a shoulder turn is expected when offering choices or comparing and contrasting two topics

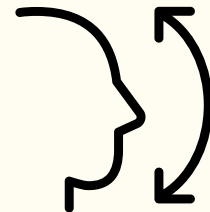


Absent or inconsistent head shake for negation



Stimming

Stimming may occur. For signers, stimming could impact message clarity if the communication partner interprets hand and body movements to be linguistic.



Absent or reduced backchanneling

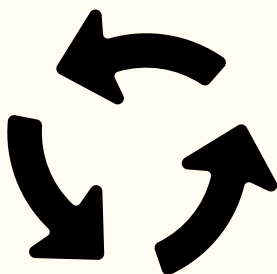
During signed conversations, backchanneling (nodding to show understanding) is expected.



Imitation

Studies show that the way Autistic vs. Allistic (non-autistic) children and adults approach imitation of signs and gestures is different. This can result in sign errors.

imitation strategy		description		used by
Mirroring	■ ■ ■ ■	Copying as if looking in a mirror Possible error: using nondominant hand if both communication partners have same dominant hand, lateral movement error	■ ■ ■ ■	Non signing adults, very young signers
Anatomical	■ ■ ■ ■	Activating the same muscles and body parts as the signer Possible error: selecting a non dominant hand if it is different than communication partner	■ ■ ■ ■	Sometimes used by nonsigning adults, children learning sign
Visual Matching	■ ■ ■ ■	Imitating the sign as it appears from the signers point of view Possible error: errors in inward-outward movement, palm orientation, and lateral movement	■ ■ ■ ■	Autistic signers, very young typically developing children
Reversing	■ ■ ■ ■	Viewing the movement and flipping it mentally to reproduce Will not produce an error as long as signer is aware of dominant hand use	■ ■ ■ ■	Typically developing adults with regular exposure to sign



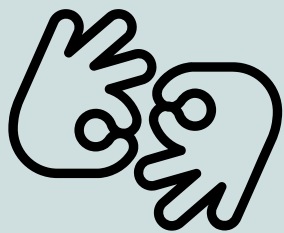
Echolalia

Occurs in sign similar to in speech

May begin echoing before communication partner finishes their utterance

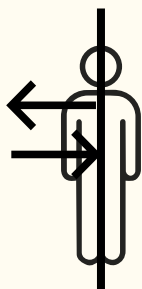
May see reduplication of sign (more-more-more)

May see pronoun errors in ASL here (you vs. I), or may see "mitigated" - the Autistic signer changes the directionality



Sign Production Errors

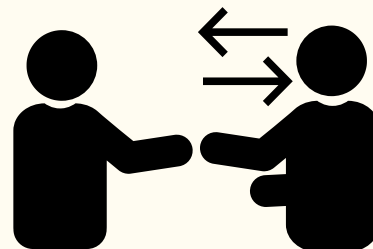
These sign errors have been documented in Autistic signers exposed to sign from birth (CODA and Deaf).



Reversing signs with lateral movements

Autistic signers may make directional errors for signs that start on the same side of the body (ipsilateral) and go to the opposite side of the body (contralateral), and vice versa.

Example: summer (starts on CONTRAlateral side, ends on IPSIlateral side)



Reversing signs with inward-outward movements

Autistic signers may make directional errors for signs that start on close to the body and move towards the communication partner, and vice versa.

Example: want (starts away from body, pulls in closer to body)



Palm orientation

Autistic signers create more errors in which direction the palm is pointing than allistic (non-autistic) signers. Example: bathroom vs. 't'



Hand choice

Autistic signers create more errors in choosing the non dominant vs. dominant hand to sign

References

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