Flipping the Script

Prioritizing the autistic voice in the understanding of scripting

Dr. Colleen D. Arnold, 2020
Knowing our Audience: A) Parent, B) Professional
Curiosity Peaked
Agenda

Lens of the Research

Defining Scripting

Previous Literature

Methods and Research Questions

Results: Benefits and Barriers of Scripting

Strategies to Improve Communication with Autistic People

Questions
Lens of research

Neurodiversity Model, Social View of Disability

• This includes the notion of autism as an integral part of one's identity and as all pervasive part of existence (Brown, 2015).

- Thoughtful language choices
  - Use of identity-first language
  - Use of the term “scripting” versus delayed echolalia

Shift away from the deficit model

Society creates barriers and “othering” for people on the spectrum
Person with autism

Autistic person

Neurology is not an accessory
www.identityfirstautistic.org
In 2015, a study conducted by The National Autistic Society, the Royal College of GPs and the UCL Institute of Education asked 502 autistic people their language preferences.

The term ‘autistic’ was endorsed by 61% of autistic people. In contrast, only 18% of autistic people preferred the term ‘person with autism’.

source: www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/describing.aspx
### Defining Scripting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Delayed Echolalia”</th>
<th>“Scripting”</th>
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| - Term used primarily in research  
- Emphasis is on it as a behavior to be eradicated  
- Traditional research lacks autistic voices  
- Lack of understanding of the communication and self-regulation benefits it provides the individual | - Term used more often by the autistic community  
- Emphasized as linguistic communication tool  
- For some it is used as a synonym for delayed echolalia |
Key Terms

- **Immediate Echolalia:** the repetition of words soon after they are heard
- **Delayed Echolalia:** the repetition of words heard at an early time (hours, days or months may pass between the original spoken words and the echo)

- **Interactive echolalia:** imitates the structure of interactions

- **Echolalia:** the repetition of spoken words

- **Unmitigated Echolalia:** exact repetition of phrases
- **Mitigated Echolalia:** substitution of a word in a phrase

- **Neologism:** the use of an existing word or phrase in a new way

- **Non-interactive echolalia** is the use of words for:
  - self-regulation
  - self-direction
  - rehearsal
  - stimming

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Scripting As Communication

- A way to interact and to solicit play
- To express understanding, socialize, communicate a need
- To communicate a feeling
- To reduce the stress of a situation through humor
- Self-monitoring strategy/behavioral reminder
- To self-regulate, for calming or fun

(Prizant & Rydell, 1984; Tarplee & Barrow, 1999; Prizant, 2015; Sterponi & Shankly, 2006; Wooton, 1999)
**Scripting can...**

- Change over time (Mitigated Scripting)
- Be impacted by the listener
- Be used as neologisms, with private understandings
- Act as a strong emotional connection
- Can be animated, mimicking voice inflection and tone
- Be better understood by knowing the history, context, and sources of the script

(Sterponi and Shankey, 2013)
Scripting as Communication hits the mainstream
Disney Movie Enthusiasm as a Link

Due to Owen’s fascination with Disney, some of the professionals suggested putting the TV under lock and key.

At the time, the majority of Owen’s speech was taking the form of scripts based on various Disney films.

Began to see how Owen was using Disney to connect and understanding the complex world around him.

The family’s approach changed and they began to utilize Disney as a way to learn about Owen and connect with him, including some creative role play with Iago from Aladdin.
“Sharing our passions with people we love is how we show we care and how we connect with you” (pg. 1).
Purpose of the study (Arnold, 2019)

• Frame the autistic voice as the priority.
• Utilize the autistic personal experiences and reflections upon the use of scripting to frame general understanding.
• Identify how familiar listeners impact the successful use scripting as a form of communication.
• Analyze what outside influences are placed on communication partners to react to scripting in a specific way, and what factors influence decisions to take a different approach.
Research Questions

1. What benefits does scripting provide, as described by autistic individuals that use scripting?

2. What are the communicative features of scripting as described/used by autistic individuals?

3. How do communication partners, specifically familiar listeners, influence the use of, and effectiveness of scripting as a form of communication? How does this contrast to other communication partners?
Research questions

4. From the autistic perspective how can communication partners impact scripting, and what strategies and supports can be utilized by neurotypical individuals to improve communication and build meaningful relationships?

5. How does scripting evolve over time as described by autistic individuals and their familiar communication partners?

6. What outside influences and pressures impact the way familiar listeners react to scripting?
**Methods**

- Qualitative Methods

- Online survey data on a national level of Autistic adults age 18 and older

- Pilot to assist in creating the survey questions and format with feedback from an autistic advocate

- Option for follow-up semi-structured interview (Part 2)
Research Methods

• Coding: Invivo Coding (Saldana, 2016), Verbatim Principle
• Focused Coding
• Like groups, develop categories
• Maintained codes despite lack of frequency across participants
• Codebook
  • Constant Comparison, Dual coding as appropriate
• Reflective memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007)
Participants

- Online survey was completed by 22 participants
- 22-65 years old, with concentration at 30 years and 51 years
- 59% female, 18% male, 22% gender non-conforming
- Recognition of Autism between ages 7-41
- Follow Up In Depth Interview (PART 2)
  - 3 participants
  - 2 Autistic participants from the original survey
  - 1 father identified by a participant as a successful communication partner
In this survey, we will be talking about scripting, which will be defined as using language that was gained from a previous source, like a TV show, book, movie, or language someone else used in the past. I am really interested in knowing if scripting is a part of the way that you communicate?

22 responses

- **Yes**: 68.2%
- **No**: 22.7%
- **Maybe**: 9.1%
Results: Benefits

- Communication
- Benefits
- Comfort
- Career Success
Benefits: Communication

Complex Thoughts and Emotions

Communication

Stressful Situations

Small Talk
Benefits: Communication

Autistic adults reported that scripting helps to:

1. Engage in small talk
2. Communicate complex thoughts
3. Communicate their emotions
4. It is beneficial when faced with stressful situations
...Shorter, or communicating a lot of sense, emotions that
Benefits: Stressful Situations

Stress can impact communication, and this was especially true for the study participants.

- Stress can lead to overstimulation and shut down, and scripting helps to avoid that
- Readily prepared scripts can decrease anxiety

Language is on a very flexible continuum, especially autistic adults
Autism as a continuum

What does the autism spectrum look like?

More autistic

Less autistic

X
The autism spectrum is more than a simple scale from lower to higher functioning.
Benefits

Comfort:
Used for pleasure, both comforting and fun

Career Success:
32% of all participants described the positive impact scripting has in relation to their job success
Barriers: Reflecting on Childhood Scripting

Isolation

Embarrassment

Negative Assumptions

- “Retarded” “Annoying” “Strange”
- Neurology of the Listener
Barriers with Communication Partners

- Over-reliance on scripting
- Being misinterpreted
- Pressure to fit in

  • Originally coded as a benefit, clearly has dangerous implications
Features of scripting (Arnold, 2019)

Mitigated Scripts
• More nuanced, adapt to experiences
• Metacognitive process

Neologisms
• Complicated social device
• Surface level understanding although intent has more depth
• Dual meanings for speaker and listener
• Understanding impacted by neurology
Strategies and supports to improve communication

Handout–
Questions
Capture the magic of a sensory-friendly Santa, with your safety in mind!

- An Understanding Santa on his horse-drawn sleigh
- An inclusive event for children of all abilities and ages
- Siblings Welcome! It's a Family Affair!
- Exciting gifts for all
- Several Professional Photo Opportunities based on comfort

Generously hosted by All Children Academics
www.allchildrenacademics.com

Event is FREE ($20 donation goes includes raffle entry)
References


