

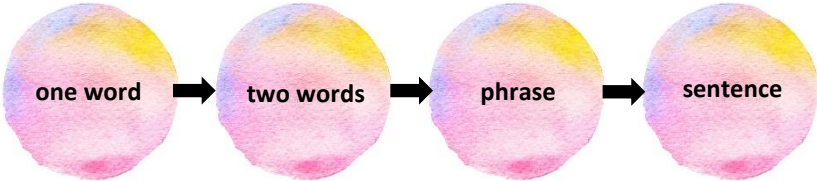
**What is Echolalia?**

Echolalia is when an individual copies what they have heard. The individual can copy his/her own speech, others’ speech, and/or audio media. It is stored in a "chunk." There are two types of echolalia – immediate and delayed. **Immediate echolalia** is when individuals repeat words right after they hear them. **Delayed echolalia** is when individuals repeat words at a later time. For example, a child might enjoy a song his teacher sang at circle time, and then later asks to sing the song at home by saying, "It’s circle time" instead of saying the name of the song.

**Analytic vs. Gestalt Language Processors**

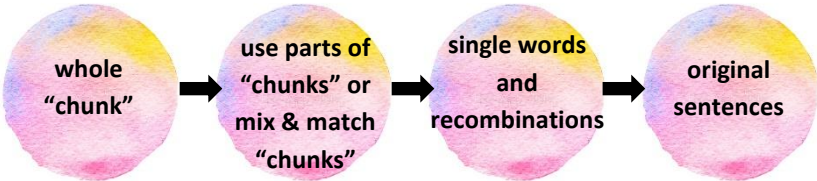
There are two types of language processors – Analytic Language Processors and Gestalt Language Processors. **Analytic Language Processors** use first words to make sentences. Although this is how most people learn language, it is not the only way to learn language. **Gestalt Language Processors** process language in whole "chunks" instead of single words...at first. While everyone uses some echolalia, echolalia is the essential part of language development for Gestalt Language Processors.

Analytic Language Processors:



Analytic Language Processors
1. Milk
2. More milk
3. Mama more milk
4. Mom, I’d like some more milk please.
Gestalt Language Processors
1. Milk is from cows.
2. Milk is so good.
3. Milk
4. Milk and cookies are my favourite.

Gestalt Language Processors:



## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Gestalt Language Processors

When people hear echolalia used by an individual with ASD, the reaction is often, “Should I ignore it?” or “How do we get rid of it?” Gestalt language development is a normal and natural way to develop language and is not only seen in individuals with ASD. In fact, many children begin acquiring language as “chunks,” we just don’t realize their “jargon” is really echolalia. However, some individuals stay stuck using echolalia and need help to move to original language, which is where Natural Language Acquisition (NLA) is used. NLA is a way of looking at language development from echolalia to original, flexible language. NLA acknowledges that echolalia is an attempt to communicate and helps the child break apart their “chunks” and recombine the pieces into new combinations, phrases, and sentences.

### What can I do?

#### DO:

1. Know that the script is an attempt to communicate with you. Do acknowledge that you know that – even if you don’t know what it means.
2. Take a conversational turn. Nod – or smile – or repeat back a keyword – or write it down.
3. Show that you are a communication partner and that you will try to understand better.
4. Follow-up to try to discover what the comment means. We can’t take the words literally. The “chunk” was stored because it carries a meaning for the individual that we may not understand. Uncovering it can help us better communicate with the individual.

#### DON'T:

1. Do not take the scripted comment literally!
2. Do not teach replacement language. Language development is a process. Our goal is not to extinguish, remove, replace, or make scripts go away.
3. Do not prompt kids with “Say \_\_\_\_.” You should say what you want them to say (e.g., if you’re looking at a cat don’t prompt with, “Say cat”, instead model, “cat”). That’s language modelling. Most children imitate what they see and hear, not what they are told.

**“Echolalia is not something to fear, to be frustrated with, or to ignore.**

**Here is why: echolalia communicates!” – Marge Blanc, M.A., CCC-SLP**

### References:

- Lowry, L. (2016). *Helping Children Who Use Echolalia*. The Hanen Centre. <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Helping-Children-Who-Use-Echolalia.aspx>
- Zachos, A. (2022). *The Meaningful Speech Course*. Meaningful Speech. <https://www.meaningfulspeech.com/>