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Redefining the study of interactions with autistic adolescents: A discourse analytic perspective

Nowe podejście do badania interakcji z młodzieżą ze spektrum zaburzeń autystycznych (ASD) z wykorzystaniem analizy dyskursu

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List of original publications

This PhD dissertation comprises the following thematically related publications:

Article 1

Maciejewska, Eliza. 2019. "Discourse analysis as a tool for uncovering strengths in communicative practices of autistic individuals", *Discourse Studies* 21, 3: 300-316. DOI: 10.1177/1461445619829237

Article 2

Maciejewska, Eliza. 2020. "Autistic resources from a discourse-analytic perspective", *Qualitative Psychology* 7, 3*:* 348–366. DOI: 10.1037/qup0000167

Article 3

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List of abbreviations

ASD – autism spectrum disorder

CA – conversation analysis

CARM – conversation analytic role-play method

CAT-Q - Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire

CDA - critical discourse analysis

DA – discourse analysis

DSM-V – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th edition)

GPS – Growth through Play System

MDA – mediated discourse analysis

MMDA – multimodal discourse analysis

NGO – non-governmental organisation

RHLB-PL – Right Hemisphere Language Battery (Polish version)

RICA - reflective interventionist conversation analysis

SAA - speech act analysis

TCU - turn-constructional unit

ToM – theory of mind

TRP – transition-relevance place

Introduction

The focus of this doctoral thesis is the language and communication of people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (henceforth ASD). The dissertation takes the form of three thematically related articles concerning interactional and communicative practices identified in interactions between either an interviewer or therapists and adolescents affected by ASD. The interactions were analysed with the broadly defined methodology of discourse analysis (DA), within which conversation analysis (CA) was a key method. Although each of the papers has different individual objectives, all of them concern autism spectrum disorder. The analyses presented in the three papers aim at redefining our understanding of autistic interactions by interpreting them from a DA perspective. In particular, the articles detail how the use of language-oriented analytic tools allows the researcher to identify new features of autistic communication as well as demonstrate how more well-documented characteristics may operate as functional and situated adaptations in the context of a specific conversation. Importantly, the discursive approach adopted in the articles highlights the role of the neurotypical (non-autistic) interlocutor. By drawing on the idea of collaborative production of discourse by all interactants, the articles reveal how neurotypical participants significantly contribute to the outcome of an interaction with an autistic adolescent. Their conversations emerge then as a joint accomplishment of actions that are situated in a specific interactional context.

The aim of this introduction is to provide the theoretical background to the current doctoral thesis, as well as to identify the gaps in the present state of knowledge, which the thesis is going to address. In order to contextualise the present dissertation, both theoretically and methodologically, and provide the reader with the current trends in ASD research, the scope of the introduction goes beyond the content of the articles. The first section opens with a presentation of the phenomenon that will be discussed in this doctoral thesis, namely autism spectrum disorder. Next, it proceeds to present the extant research on the topic of interactions in ASD, including both quantitative and qualitative studies. Subsequently, the main goals of the thesis are presented, followed by a description of methodology which was used throughout the research project. Next, participants and datasets are detailed, and the description of the research process is offered. Finally, all articles are summarised separately, and whilst the individual goals of the papers are

presented, how the articles are intertwined is also delineated. The introduction ends with future research perspectives concerning the study of autistic interactions.

1. Autism spectrum disorder

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) (APA 2013), autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition which involves social communication and interaction difficulties, and restricted, repetitive behaviours. The detailed criteria include: deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviours used for social interaction, deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships, stereotypical movements, insistence on sameness, and restricted interests (APA 2013). DSM-V redefined ASD significantly, describing it as a spectrum of symptoms rather than a group of similar conditions, including autism, Asperger's syndrome (AS), Rett syndrome, etc. (see also Hodges et al. 2020). Due to, among others, the change of criteria, better diagnostic tools and a greater societal awareness, the prevalence of diagnosed ASD is constantly evolving. More precisely, depending on the sources and the year of their publication, it affects between 1 in 59 (Baio et al. 2018) to 1 in 54 (Maenner et al. 2020) to even 1 in 44 (Maenner et al. 2021) individuals. However, it has to be underlined that the methodology behind these numbers has been criticised (see Fombonne 2018). Regardless of the exact data, different studies confirm that the number of diagnoses is growing rapidly (Hodges et al. 2020; O'Reilly et al. 2017). The population of autistic people is very diverse and consequently, features which are characteristic of ASD are not shared by all individuals diagnosed with this condition (see also Lai et al. 2019).

Recent research on ASD highlights the importance of distinguishing between male and female autism phenotype when diagnosing ASD (Happé and Frith 2020; Hodges et al. 2020; Iyama-Kurtycz 2020). As Hodges et al. (2020: 58) explain: "[n]ot only are females less likely to present with overt symptoms, they are more likely to mask their social deficits through a process called 'camouflaging', further hindering a timely diagnosis. Likewise, gender biases and stereotypes of ASD as a male disorder could also hamper diagnoses in girls."

Another salient topic in the area of ASD concerns ageing (Happé and Frith 2020; Lever and Geurts 2016; Wise 2020). Happé and Frith (2020) call for moving away from viewing ASD as a childhood condition and approach it as a condition that affects the life

span of an individual. The authors point out that the number of studies concerning autistic adults is scarce, consequently, it cannot be verified if and how the condition develops as autistic individuals grow older. As a result, insufficient data inhibit the development of appropriate services for older people on the spectrum (Happé and Frith 2020: 222).

Current ASD research, in particular qualitative studies, promotes the concept of *neurodiversity*, where autistic characteristics are seen as differences rather than deficits (Grant and Kara 2021; Kapp et al. 2013; Woods et al. 2018). More precisely, "autism may be considered a difference ('neurodivergence') that constitutes a disability in the context of the demands of the neurotypical world" (Happé and Frith 2020: 228). Furthermore, the idea of *inclusive research* or *participatory research* supports a collaborative approach, where autistic people are no longer merely the subjects of the study, but are actively involved in it as contributors. According to Happé and Frith (2020: 228), "[n]ew participatory research models challenge nonautistic researchers to collaborate with autistic people at every stage of research, from identifying key questions, designing methods, recruiting participants, interpreting findings, to dissemination and public engagement" (see also Mallinson 2022; Sarangi 2002).

Given the growing number of diagnoses, evolving diagnostic criteria and the changing perception of ASD, it is crucial to investigate this condition from more interdisciplinary perspectives in order to demonstrate the complexity of the autistic phenomenon and develop a view of people on the spectrum that better identifies their behavioural and interactional strengths and needs. The next section presents quantitative and qualitative approaches to studying interactions in ASD. It briefly explains their objectives and describes selected studies in the field of ASD, adopting a given approach.

2. Researching interactions in ASD

As social and communication difficulties are salient for diagnosing ASD, interactions with individuals on the autism spectrum constitute an important source of data in ASD research. These interactions have been investigated with the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. According to the review prepared by Happé and Frith (2020), the number of existing publications concerning ASD in 2018 exceeded 6,000. For this reason, it is impossible to distinguish the dominant trends in the current research on ASD, as different aspects of this condition are being studied. The following subsections review

selected quantitative and qualitative studies on the topic of autistic interactions, highlighting some of the important trends in recent ASD research.

2.1. Quantitative research

Quantitative methods still prevail in the research on autistic communication and interactions. The studies adopting these methods are usually large-scale, so their results are generalisable and, potentially, have a greater impact than small-scale studies.

Earlier quantitative work on autistic language investigated, for instance, the narrative abilities of children with high-functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome (Losh and Capps 2003), concluding that their narrative competence is connected with emotional understanding but not with theory of mind (ToM) or verbal IQ. Eigsti et al. (2007) focused on the pragmatic difficulties of people on the autism spectrum, scrutinising morphosyntactic development in autism. Compared to their neurotypical counterparts, autistic participants demonstrated specific language impairments including syntactic delays, difficulties with discourse management and a greater number of non-meaningful words in their speech. Hale and Tager-Flusberg (2005) studied the relationship between discourse deficits, in particular non-contingent discourse, and autism symptomatology, confirming that they are interconnected. Finally, Morett et al. (2016) concentrated on gestures and speech production in ASD, and revealed that autistic individuals find it challenging to use speech and gesture to communicate effectively if visible listeners are present. They further conclude that deficits in social processing rather than language deficits contribute to communication problems of high-functioning adolescents on the autism spectrum.

Most of the above studies represent an experimental paradigm and are individual-focused (O'Reilly et al. 2016). This leads to concentrating on the autistic interlocutor and results in comparative studies, which demonstrate deficits of participants on the autism spectrum that are absent in their neurotypical peers (Walsh et al. 2016).

Regarding current quantitative research on ASD, I would like to refer to a few recent studies, which I find of great relevance when it comes to future research on autism. These studies focus on camouflaging, female autism and ageing in ASD.

The first study, conducted by Hull et al. (2019) describes the development and validation of the Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q). The authors define social camouflaging as "the use of strategies by autistic people to minimise the visi-

bility of their autism during social situations" (Hull et al. 2019: 819). This term is important in the context of female autism, as camouflaging is one of the potential reasons why girls and women are not diagnosed with ASD early in life (Hull et al. 2019). The authors describe the process of creating CAT-Q, identifying such aspects of autistic camouflage as compensation, masking and assimilation. They conclude that "[t]he CAT-Q is a valid and reliable self-report measure of adults' social camouflaging behaviours, suitable for use in autistic and non-autistic male and female populations" (Hull et al. 2019: 831). From this, we can take that CAT-Q may become an important diagnostic tool, increasing the quality of ASD diagnoses.

Another study devoted to the topic of camouflaging and female autism is a neuroimaging study conducted by Lai et al. (2019). The authors compared autistic men and women with their neurotypical counterparts in the context of their neural responses during mentalizing (understanding mental states of oneself and others) (Frith and Frith 2003) and self-representation, as well as the association of these responses with 'compensatory camouflaging'. In their article, camouflaging is defined as "acting as behaviourally neurotypical" (Lai et al. 2019: 1211) and is interpreted as a coping strategy. The results of the study show that unlike autistic men, who showed differences in the neural responses when compared to typically developing men, autistic women did not differ in their responses from neurotypical women. The authors (2019: 1210) suggest that "[t]here is a lack of impaired neural self-representation and mentalizing in autistic women compared to typically developing women". The study indicates that camouflaging is increased in autistic women (in comparison to autistic men), which may be connected to neural self-representation response. As Lai et al. (2019: 1210) conclude: "[t]hese results reveal brain-behaviour relations that help explain sex/gender-heterogeneity in social brain function in autism."

A study by Lever and Geurts (2016) examined the changes of cognitive abilities of autistic individuals across lifespan. The authors reveal that "while some cognitive abilities (visual and verbal memory) and difficulties (generativity and semantic memory) persist across adulthood in ASD, others become less apparent in old age (ToM). Age-related differences characteristic of typical ageing are reduced or parallel, but not increased in individuals with ASD" (Lever and Geurts 2016: 666). The authors conclude that ASD may partially protect people on the spectrum against a decrease in cognitive functioning that is related to age.

To sum up, quantitative studies of autistic interactions are crucial in identifying phenomena that are present in communication with individuals on the spectrum. They allow for research that involves a greater number of participants, thus their results are potentially applicable to a big percentage of autistic population. However, despite their affordances, quantitative studies mostly involve comparative studies of autistic and neurotypical participants, which consequently result in a deficit-focused approach to autistic communication.

2.2. Qualitative research

Unlike quantitative research, which involves numerous participants, qualitative studies are usually much more restricted in numbers, and typically involve case studies. Although the limited number of participants entails a number of drawbacks, for instance, lack of generalisability (in a traditional sense, i.e. referring to the whole population under scrutiny), the small-scale studies allow for a more in-depth analysis of contextualised data and an investigation of phenomena that escape quantitative methods. In addition to a detailed data analysis, there is another important argument and a justification when it comes to small-scale, qualitative studies. There are certain phenomena, and ASD is one of them, which are especially challenging to measure with the use of standardised questionnaires (see Tager Flusberg 1999, 2004; see also Happé and Frith 2020). Due to individual difficulties of participants, the testing procedures have to be adjusted and some tasks eliminated, which makes it impossible to interpret the results properly. Moreover, autistic people exhibit features, including communicative behaviours, which are exclusive for them. Therefore, case studies may be the best choice for scrutinising autistic interactions. Finally, data concerning individuals on the spectrum, in particular from therapeutic sessions, are very sensitive and difficult to obtain. This is also one of the reasons why researchers may decide on the use of case studies when examining ASD.

Among recent qualitative studies that have contributed to a better understanding of autistic interactions and communication, two will be discussed here, one concerning camouflaging (Hull et al. 2017) and the other one regarding neurodiversity and inclusive research (Grant and Kara 2021). The former was chosen in order to show how the topic of camouflaging is addressed in qualitative studies, in comparison to quantitative studies, as presented above, and the latter due to its importance for the current trends in ASD research.

The first study, conducted by Hull et al. (2017), focused on social camouflaging in adults on the autism spectrum, which is a salient topic in present ASD research. The authors used thematic analysis to identify seven themes that were further divided into three categories: motivations for camouflaging, what is camouflaging and the consequences of camouflaging. The findings suggest that autistic individuals use camouflaging to fit into society (assimilation) or to make connections with other people. Furthermore, their camouflaging behaviours can be divided into masking of their autistic features or compensation strategies (aimed to meet social expectations). The identified consequences of camouflaging, suffered by autistic individuals, include: exhaustion, anxiety, changes in self-perception, mental-health problems and restricted access to support. The authors indicate that camouflaging strategies are used by many people with ASD, regardless of their gender; however, there might be some qualitative differences regarding, for instance, the techniques they choose. Importantly, the findings of the study served as the basis for developing CAT-Q (Hull et al 2019: 823), described in the quantitative studies section.

The other article, by Grant and Kara (2021), focuses on the concept of the 'autistic advantage', and the strengths of autistic researchers. The article represents the 'inclusive-research approach', where research is conducted *by, with* or *for* people, in contrast to *on* people who are the subject of the study (Grant and Kara 2021: 591; see also Cameron 1992) – in this case, researchers on the autism spectrum. The authors, being on the spectrum themselves, discuss their professional strengths, including long periods of concentration (hyperfocus), creative thinking and attention to detail (Grant and Kara 2021: 589). They argue that autistic features, listed above, can be an asset in professional contexts, especially in qualitative research, as they facilitate the work of the researcher. Furthermore, the authors provide guidance for promoting inclusive working. The article highlights key topics in the current ASD qualitative research, namely neurodiversity, inclusive research (including Critical Autism Studies (see Woods et al. 2018)) and reflexivity.

A special kind of qualitative studies are language-focused studies, which use discursive methods for data analysis. Discourse-analytic studies, especially conversation analytic, focus on naturally occurring data, for instance an actual interaction between an autistic individual and a therapist, and take into consideration the interactional behaviour of both interlocutors, turn-by-turn. These studies are considered to have a high internal validity, thus giving an accurate depiction of the investigated issue (Pope et al. 2002). Discourse analysis and language-oriented analytic methods will be discussed in section 4.

There are a handful of seminal papers which have promoted using language-focused methods of analysis in the field of ASD, and consequently contributed to changing the perception of this condition. The present dissertation also draws on the conclusions from these studies, which are described below (see the articles for details).

One of the first papers applying conversation analysis in the context of ASD was written by Local and Wootton in 1995. In their article entitled "Interactional and phonetic aspects of immediate echolalia in autism: A case study", the authors employed CA to describe different features of echolalia (i.e., repetition of the words and utterances of others), demonstrating its usefulness as a discursive strategy used by autistic individuals, allowing them to follow and maintain a conversation.

Dobbinson et al. (1998) presented a case study of a woman with ASD, focusing on differences in conversational patterns between her and a neurotypical interviewer. The authors argued that the use of CA methodology changed the perspective on autistic language, by interpreting it as an effect of a collaborative action of two interlocutors rather than a deficient performance of an individual with ASD. According to the authors, the communicative difficulties of interactants result from specific structural patterns in a conversation, which, however, can be changed.

Solomon (2004) highlights the discourse competence of children on the autism spectrum by examining their narrative introductions. The paper illuminates what autistic interlocutors orient to in a conversation and which narrative resources they use locally to actively participate in an interaction. The findings demonstrate that children with ASD have relatively little difficulty with initiating narratives, whereas co-telling and maintaining a conversation can be challenging for them.

Damico and Nelson (2005) adopted the resource-oriented approach (where the focus is on the strengths rather than deficits of autistic people), and used CA to demonstrate how problematic behaviours of a person on the autism spectrum, namely "vocal creak" and "sparkle hands", can be reinterpreted as compensatory adaptations. The authors showed how a seemingly irrelevant behaviour may serve a communicative purpose.

Stiegler (2007) employed *adapted CA* and *speech act analysis (SAA)* (see Stiegler 2007: 401) to reveal communicative competencies of nonspeaking children with ASD, as well as identify communicative patterns of their non-autistic interlocutors, which may positively or negatively influence the autistic individuals' performance. Both methods were presented as a way to "a more accurate interpretation of unconventional nonverbal communicative behaviors" (Stiegler 2007: 407) of the children on the autism spectrum,

and as important tools for the analysis (and further assessment) of the neurotypical inter-actants' contributions.

A similar approach can be found in the work of Sterponi and de Kirby (2016). In their case study, the authors demonstrated how discourse analytic methods can reveal the function of "prototypical features of autistic language" (Sterponi and de Kirby 2016: 394) as valuable communicative strategies, which help individuals with ASD to actively participate in an interaction. Moreover, the article puts an emphasis on the role of the other interlocutor in a conversation, defining language use as an interactional accomplishment (Sterponi and de Kirby 2016: 395), thus sharing responsibility for the interactional outcomes between autistic and neurotypical participants.

Finally, Maynard and Turowetz (2017) investigated the procedure of testing and diagnosing children with ASD, detailing how concrete competence can influence their performance. The authors argue that clinical tests concentrate on the abstract (second-order) competence, omitting the concrete (first-order) competence, which results in a focus on autistic deficits. Furthermore, they highlight the role of the *interactive environ-ments,* "established by the test instrument, scoring metrics, etc." (Maynard and Turowetz 2017: 467), and the *interactional environment* ("the practices by which protocols are im-plemented as clinician and child do the test" (Maynard and Turowetz 2017: 467)) on the child's performance. The authors indicate that the final result of the test is a collaborative product of the child, the clinician and the test (Maynard and Turowetz 2017: 484). The study supports the resource-oriented perspective and calls for a more diverse testing and better diagnostic tools.

Granting the importance of quantitative research in the study of ASD, the present thesis employs the qualitative approach to explore the communicative practices of young people with ASD and their co-interactants. Taking into consideration the crucial role of language and communication in diagnosing ASD, language-oriented analytic methods, namely DA and CA, were used to analyse interactions with autistic adolescents. Drawing on the concepts introduced in the aforementioned articles, in particular, compensatory adaptations, communicative strategies and the idea of collaboration, this thesis follows the resource-oriented approach, focusing on the functions of analysed contributions in their local interactional context.

3. Aims

This doctoral thesis examines conversations between autistic adolescents and their therapists or an interviewer as collaborative interactions and a shared responsibility of all involved participants. More specifically, the articles detail how the contributions of both parties are interlocked and co-constructed, as well as illuminate the role of the neurotypical interlocutor in constraining or facilitating a conversation with an autistic person. In this way the project, by applying tools and insights from DA and CA, moves away from the research tradition of focusing on the communicative deficits of individuals with ASD and concentrates on the situated interactional resources mobilised by all interaction participants in conducting their conversations.

The dissertation focuses on the communicative practices of adolescents on the autism spectrum, whose utterances are examined in the local, situated context of their interactions with the interviewer or the therapists. Autistic adolescents tend to be omitted in ASD research, as most studies focus on autistic children. Hence, it is important to investigate this age group in order to verify whether the features of autistic language and communication, which are widely recognised among children with ASD, remain unchanged when autistic individuals grow older. By scrutinising interactions with adolescents on the spectrum, the thesis also contributes to research on ageing in ASD.

A key aspect of the dissertation is its interdisciplinary character. That is, whilst the thesis is clearly situated within the field of applied linguistics (see section 4.2.1.), the employment of language-focused methods of analysis in the field of psychology enables the author to identify and investigate phenomena (e.g. listing, mirroring, recast) that would be impossible to observe without focusing on the language and interaction of participants.

Two articles presented in the thesis examine one of the non-directive therapies of ASD, namely the Growth through Play System (GPS) (Houghton 2010). These therapies are relatively new and understudied when compared to the dominant directive therapies (e.g., Dolan et al. 2016; Koegel et al. 2016; McGillivray and Evert 2014; Weston et al. 2016). Therefore, one of the aims of this dissertation is to identify and describe therapists' practices in non-directive therapy (GPS), by analysing authentic therapeutic data. Consequently, the articles reveal communicative practices of non-directive ASD therapists and their autistic clients, including their effect on an interaction, which may be of use to other therapists working with clients on the spectrum.

Furthermore, all the articles included in the dissertation highlight autistic strengths - adopting a resource-based approach to ASD - and frame this condition as a neurodiversity rather than an impairment. This approach is still being developed in autism research (Grant and Kara 2021; Hull et al. 2017; Kapp et al. 2013), constituting another gap addressed by this thesis.

Finally, the original data for all the studies are in Polish, which is important when it comes to language-focused analysis. The vast majority of language-oriented studies of ASD involves English-speaking participants. Therefore, applying these methods to the Polish context may fill in the research gap and help verify whether the linguistic phenomena identified in English-speaking individuals on the autism spectrum can also be observed among Polish-speaking autistic adolescents. As of writing (summer 2022), to the best of my knowledge, no DA- or CA-oriented studies of communicative practices of Polish-speaking individuals with ASD have been published.

Further goals of the thesis are unique to each of the articles and will be described in section 7.

4. Methods

The analytic framework applied in this dissertation involves language-oriented methods of analysis, namely DA and CA. The adopted methodological approach allows for a redefinition of the study of autistic interactions. In particular, instead of comparing autistic adolescents with their neurotypical peers (which is common in quantitative research and results in the focus on autistic deficits), the studies comprising the dissertation offer an in-depth analysis of interactions of adolescents on the autism spectrum and their non-autistic interlocutors, treating both parties as responsible for the outcome of their conversation and involved in its co-production. Consequently, the applied methods enable unmotivated exploration (Sacks 1984; Psathas 1995; Sidnell 2012) of communicative practices used by both participants, and allow us to identify new phenomena in autistic communication or reinterpret what have been typically referred to as impairments as coping strategies and resources used by both interactants to communicate effectively. Furthermore, the discursive approach adopted in the thesis changes the focal point of analysis, i.e., from linguistic forms to functions. More precisely, by analysing authentic interactions, the studies show how language is used by autistic individuals and their interlocutors to achieve conversational and social goals.

It is important to stress that discourse-analytic approaches such as those adopted in here, involve data-driven studies, which implies that the research process does not start with the creation of hypotheses regarding the topic under study (Peräkylä 2004). The role of the researcher is to become involved in scrutinising the collected data and let ideas emerge from this analytic process (Dobbinson et al. 1998; Sidnell 2012; Wooffitt 2005). As a result, the data analysis takes the form of the above mentioned "unmotivated exploration" (O'Reilly et al. 2020; Peräkylä 2004; Sidnell 2012) or "unmotivated looking" (Sacks 1984), which leads to developing hypotheses, research questions and interpretations.

The sections below present a detailed description of the analytic methods applied in the dissertation. First, DA is introduced with a distinction made between DA as a method and DA as a cluster of methods. Next, the focus of attention turns to CA, which is the main method of data analysis used in the thesis. This section includes applied CA and discursively informed CA, with the latter term coined specifically for the purpose of the dissertation.

4.1. Discourse analysis

According to Cook (2011: 431) "[d]iscourse can be defined as a stretch of language in use, of any length and in any mode, which achieves meaning and coherence for those involved. Discourse analysis can be defined as the use and development of theories and methods which elucidate how this meaning and coherence is achieved."

DA is a qualitative, language-oriented method of analysis, which focuses on "functional and sense-making properties of language" (Wooffitt 2005:71). Importantly, DA can be understood in two ways: as an independent analytic method or as an umbrella term (Nikander 2012; Cameron 2001) which includes different discursive approaches, for example, CA.

In the first meaning, DA is an inductive (Potter 1997), data-driven method whose level of interpretation goes beyond the content of the scrutinised interactions, focusing "on the wider interpersonal or social functions served by a passage of talk" (Wooffitt 2005:80). Potter (1997: 212) explains that:

> Discourse analysts are concerned to use evidence from the materials as far as possible rather than basing interpretations on their own prior assumptions (…) this does not mean that the

analysts expect to be able to free themselves of all their preconceptions, rather it is that analysis is, to an important extent, an interrogation of those expectations.

DA concentrates on identifying "recurrent patterns" in the use of language (Herring 2004: 4). Moreover, unlike CA, whose primary interest is talk-in-interaction, DA is concerned with a greater variety of language practices, such as, for example, accounts in talk or texts (Wooffitt 2005).

It has to be mentioned that the identity of DA has become more ambiguous throughout the years (Cook 2011). At the beginning (1950s), "DA was understood in theoretical structural linguistics as the potential extension of language analysis beyond the level of single sentences to discover distributional principles between sentences as well as within them" (Cook 2011: 432). However, the development of new approaches to DA, some of which will be described below, has made "pure" DA harder to define. As Cook (2011: 440) sums up:

> While it may be commendable to draw eclectically upon the strengths of many research traditions to gain a rich insight into communication, there is a valid case for saying that there is no longer a single theory or method of analysis which can be clearly labelled as discourse analysis. It has become a superordinate term for a wide range of traditions for the analysis of language in use, so general and all-inclusive that it is hardly worth using.

This brings us to the second meaning of DA, where it is treated as a broad category that encompasses various discursive methods of analysis. Depending on the sources, DA has been classified in many different ways (for an extensive list see Sarangi 2017; see also Cook 2011). In their handbook of discourse analysis, Gee and Handford (2012) distinguish a number of approaches to discourse analysis, e.g.: critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, narrative analysis, mediated discourse analysis and conversation analysis (see section 4.2). Each of them will be briefly described below. They have been chosen to illustrate the variety of DA and its applicability in researching different aspects of social life.

According to van Dijk (2015) critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of DA that is embedded in social and political contexts. In particular, CDA provides a multidisciplinary analysis of social and political issues. It goes beyond describing the discursive structures, trying to explain them in the social context, focusing on "the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power abuse (dominance)* in society" (van Dijk 2015: 467). Next, multimodal discourse analysis

(MMDA) is described by Kress (2012: 37) as an approach which "assumes that language, whether as speech or as writing, is one means among many available for representation and for making meaning." Therefore, in order to grasp the full meaning of a given text or work, different modes need to be taken into consideration. Further, narrative analysis examines the structure of stories (formal features), their cultural resonance and interactional design (Thornborrow 2012: 51). Importantly, storytelling is perceived as an interactional phenomenon, involving both the person who tells the story and the hearer (Thornborrow 2012: 54). Finally, mediated discourse analysis (MDA) was developed by Ron Scollon and colleagues. This type of DA "investigates what part texts play in actions undertaken by social actors on the one hand and how texts arise as the outcomes of social interactive processes of production on the other hand" (Scollon and de Saint-Georges 2012: 66). In particular, it concentrates on how discourse and action are connected in social situations.

In addition to that, Gee and Handford (2012) also highlight the use of DA in different contexts, such as educational and institutional. The detailed specification of possible DA applications is beyond the scope of this introduction. In the current dissertation, DA is used as an umbrella term, with a focus on CA as the primary method of analysis.

4.2. Conversation analysis

The beginnings of CA can be found in ethnomethodology and practical reasoning (Garfinkel 1967). In his studies, Garfinkel (1967) demonstrated "that joint understandings of everyday situations are the product of the application of shared methods of reasoning about objects and events in context" (Heritage and Stivers 2013: 662). In other words, interlocutors rely on the position of an utterance in its local context in order to understand others' actions and react to them in an understandable manner (Heritage and Stivers 2013). Another thinker whose works were fundamental for the development of CA was Erving Goffman (1983), who introduced the term *interaction order*. Specifically, the interaction order determines the way interlocutors develop their own contributions and regulate their behaviour, as well as how they understand their interactants.

However, it was not until the works of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (who created the CA transcription system), that CA was developed. The researchers introduced a unified theory of social action, which was followed by a methodology that allowed for a systematic analysis of the organisation of an interaction (CA) (Heritage and Stivers 2013).

CA, as a subcategory of DA, is a language-based method of micro-level analysis, which focuses on the structural organisation of naturally occurring interactions in their local context (Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 2007; Sidnell 2012). According to Psathas (1995: 2):"[c]onversation analysis studies the order/organization/orderliness of social action, particularly those social actions that are located in everyday interaction." In other words, CA is concerned with the *endogenous organisation* (Mondada 2012) or the *intrinsic orderliness* (Psathas 1995: 8) of the scrutinised activity. As Psathas (1995: 17) further explains:

> Order was seen to be a produced order, integral and internal (endogenous) to the local settings in which the interaction occurred. That is, it was ongoingly produced in and through the actions of the parties. It was not imposed on them, nor was it a matter of their following some sort of script or rules. They were freely involved in that production and were themselves oriented to that production.

The role of the analyst is to identify the interactional order, rather than impose an order that is based on a "preconceptualized category system" (Psathas 1995).

In CA, talk is action (Schegloff 2007); therefore, it aims at identifying the interlocutors' actions in a conversation and describing the practices which are used by them to perform these actions (Sidnell 2012). A practice is defined by Heritage (2011: 212) as "any feature of the design of a turn in a sequence that (i) has a distinctive character, (ii) has specific locations within a turn or sequence, and (iii) is distinctive in its consequences for the nature or the meaning of the action that the turn implements."

One of the primary assumptions of CA is the sequential organisation of an interaction (Schegloff 2007). According to CA, turns in a conversation are intrinsically related, which means that each turn is preceded and followed by relevant turns (Schegloff 2007). As Antaki (2011: 2) explains:

> [P]eople perform the actions of everyday life by the way they design their turns in the sequential organisation of talk; those turns set up normative expectations on what is to follow, which fellow-interactants abide by or flout; and the analyst's job is to find evidence for varieties of turn-design, sequences and the actions they perform by looking to the internal construction of turns and the way in which the next speaker orients to the talk that has gone before.

Importantly, the sequentiality of talk plays an important role in the validation of a CA-oriented analysis, which is referred to as the *next-turn proof procedure* (Peräkylä 1997: 291; Sidnell 2012: 79). The idea behind this procedure is that the next turn of the interlocutor B shows their comprehension of the prior turn of the interlocutor A, and thus

confirms or negates the analyst's interpretation. For a detailed discussion of validity in CA research see Maciejewska (2019).

Apart from turn-taking, which is considered "the basic form of organisation for conversation" (Sacks et al. 1974: 700), there are other important elements which are involved in the structure of a conversation. These include: turn-constructional units (TCU), transition-relevance places (TRP), adjacency pairs and repairs. A TCU is a basic unit of a conversation that constitutes a turn. It can be, e.g., a sentence or a phrase. The completion of the TCU introduces a TRP, where a change of a speaker is possible but not necessary (Sacks et al. 1974: 702, see also Psathas 1995). The next speaker can be selected by the current speaker or can select him-/herself (turn-allocation component) (Sacks et al. 1974: 703). Turns in a conversation are organised into adjacency pairs, which complete one another, e.g., question-answer, greeting-greeting and invitation-acceptance/decline (Sacks et al. 1974: 716). In addition, there are repair mechanisms, in case of turn-taking errors or violations, e.g. false starts, repeats and premature stopping (Sacks et al. 1974: 723). For a detailed discussion of conversational rules see Sacks et al. (1974). To learn more about the development of CA see Psathas (1995).

Another important tenet of CA, similarly to DA, is the idea of co-construction, according to which interlocutors collaborate to achieve their conversational goals (Jacoby and Ochs 1995; Schegloff 2007). Sacks et al. (1974: 727) introduced the term *recipient design*, which they define as "a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants". The collaboration of interlocutors makes contributions of all interactants important in the analysis, and presents language as an "interactional accomplishment" (Sterponi and de Kirby 2016: 395). In this view, language is an effect of social interaction, which stays in contrast to the traditional perception of language as a demonstration of one's cognitive abilities. This approach to language is also adopted in this dissertation.

Finally, the context of interaction is crucial for CA studies. CA and ethnomethodology base their analyses "on what the speakers display to each other as relevant to their conversational business" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 57). Drew and Heritage (1992: 19) point out that "the CA perspective embodies a dynamic approach in which 'context' is treated as both the project and product of the participants' own actions and therefore as inherently locally produced and transformable at any moment". The authors

explain that interlocutors' utterances require the context to be comprehended and responded properly, hence they are *context-shaped* (Drew and Heritage 1992: 18). By the term 'context', the authors understand both the internal structure of an interaction (i.e. preceding utterance) and the external environment in which the scrutinised conversation takes place (Drew and Heritage 1992: 18). Moreover, each new action and utterance develop the contextual framework of an interaction, becoming the immediate context for the next turn. In this way, subsequent turns are *context renewing* (Drew and Heritage 1992: 18). In addition to that, producing the next turns requires understanding from participants. This understanding occurs at different levels and concerns, for instance, the function of the previous utterance and its addressee (Heritage 2004). It is further confirmed or rejected (repaired) by the subsequent turn. As Heritage (2004: 105) explains: "[t]hrough this process they [understandings] become mutual understandings created through a sequential architecture of intersubjectivity."

Psathas (1991) highlights that turns are not only *context-sensitive* (or context-shaped) but also *context-free*. According to this author, every interaction is a social structure:

> As a social structure, it is occasioned, sequentially organized, and responsive to the particulars of the parties (their knowledge, assumed knowledge, displayed understandings, etc.) that is, it is context sensitive. And yet, as a structure, it can be shown to have an organization that is recurrent, orderly and patterned with organized modes of suspension and restorability and with recognizable beginnings and endings, that is, it is context-free. (Psathas 1991: 214)

The distinction between the context-sensitive and context-free character of an interaction is important for CA, as it means that "interactional phenomena may not be dependent on the kinds of contextual particulars ordinarily considered to be of utmost importance in the social sciences" (Psathas 1995: 36).

4.2.1. Applied CA

CA as a methodological approach has been used in various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics (see Sidnell and Stivers 2012). According to Sidnell and Stivers (2012: 3):

> [t]he interdisciplinarity of the field is important for CA because the knowledge needed to study social interaction draws on all of these disciplines: without an understanding of culture,

gesture, grammar, prosody, pragmatics and social structure, it would be difficult to have a meaningful theory or method for the study of spontaneous, naturally occurring social interaction.

The above mentioned interdisciplinarity of CA resulted in a distinction of its focus between everyday talk and institutional talk: "researchers recognised that CA could be used to inform practice, and a differentiation emerged between 'pure' (or basic) CA and 'applied CA'" (O'Reilly et al. 2020: 621).

Antaki (2011) distinguishes six types of applied CA: foundational, social-problem oriented, communicational, diagnostic, institutional and interventionist. The current dissertation involves two of them. The first one is communicational which, according to Antaki (2011: 1), "offers complementary or alternative analyses of communication problems". The thesis provides an alternative, functional interpretation of autistic conversational contributions. Thus, it changes the deficit-oriented view of autistic communication into the resource-oriented one. The second one is institutional, which "illuminates the workings of society's institutions" (Antaki 2011:1), as the dissertation details communicative patterns in the structured events of a research interview (article 1) and a therapeutic session (articles 2 and 3).

Institutional talk is the focus of the latter type of applied CA. Importantly, it is not the setting or location that determine whether a given interaction is institutional: "[r]ather, interaction is institutional insofar as participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged" (Drew and Heritage 1992: 3). The aim of institutional CA is "to describe how particular institutions are enacted and lived through as accountable patterns of meaning, inference, and action" (Drew and Heritage 1992: 5).

An important aspect here is the relationship between theory and practice. This element of institutional CA has also been highlighted by Peräkylä and Vehviläinen (2003), who introduced the concept of *professional stocks of interactional knowledge (SIKs)*. The term relates to knowledge that is shared by professionals (theory), which defines the objectives of and the means for their interventions. According to these authors (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003), CA can complete, verify or add a new dimension to the SIKs by juxtaposing the theory with the authentic conduct of specialists (practice). The importance of CA in the context of collaboration between research and practice has been highlighted in recent studies (e.g., Barnes 2019; O'Reilly et al. 2020).

Another important point of analysis refers to the discrepancies between institutional talk and everyday conversations, which include restricted options for actions and the specialisation of interactional contributions in the former. These differences between institutional talk and ordinary conversation, as well as between different institutions "may contribute to a unique 'fingerprint' for each institutional form of interaction" (Drew and Heritage 1992: 26).

Institutional talk is characterised by asymmetry (Drew and Heritage 1992: 47). Unlike the ordinary conversation, where the relationship between the speakers is symmetrical, giving them the same rights in an interaction, institutional talk takes into consideration the role and status of an interlocutor and the prerogatives or obligations connected with them (Drew and Heritage 1992: 49; see also Pawelczyk and Faccio 2022), making the positions of both interlocutors unequal. According to Drew and Heritage (1992: 49), this asymmetry may be connected to "differential distribution of knowledge, rights to knowledge, access to conversational resources, and to participation in the interaction". The authors also mention the question-answer pattern that is characteristic of institutional talk as a significant dimension of this asymmetry (Drew and Heritage 1992: 49).

Drawing on the typology provided by Antaki (2011), one more type of applied CA is worth mentioning here, namely *interventionist CA*. Antaki defined it as "applied to a practical problem as it plays out in interaction, with the intention of bringing about some sort of change" (Antaki 2011: 1). A good illustration of this concept is CA role-play method (CARM), developed by Elizabeth Stokoe (Stokoe 2014). In this approach, the aim is to use CA-based analyses of authentic, naturally-occurring data in order to train and improve communication skills of practitioners from a given institutional context (Stokoe 2014). In this case, the primary goal of CA is to identify communicative problems that can be further challenged and solved in the course of a role-play workshop. As a result, practitioners receive research-based information on which practices are successful and which should be modified. CARM is an example of how CA can be applied to "produce research with impact" (Stokoe 2014: 7).

The idea of interventionist CA was further developed by O'Reilly et al. (2020), resulting in *Reflective Interventionist CA* (RICA) (O'Reilly et al. 2020). What makes RICA special is the fact that it does not necessarily address an a priori problem (O'Reilly

et al. 2020). In particular, according to these authors "[i]t is entirely appropriate to conduct applied CA from the perspective of wishing to inform practice that may or may not identify areas that require improvement or change and may or may not identify areas of existing good practice" (O'Reilly et al. 2020: 621). In this way, RICA maintains the "unmotivated looking" approach to the analysed data.

Nevertheless, the method has some elements in common with the standard interventionist CA, as it both involves participants in the research process and takes into consideration the implications of the findings for participants (O'Reilly 2020: 622).

Another important aspect of RICA is its commitment to making CA findings accessible to people who are not discourse analysts, in particular to practitioners (O'Reilly 2020: 630). For this reason, "one of the priorities of RICA is to use language that is relevant to the given substantive field, assuring that the language is closely related to that of the practitioners" (O'Reilly 2020: 631).

The approach to applied CA taken in the current dissertation is similar to RICA in that it also offers an unmotivated analysis of the data and is not deficit-driven. The studies examine the interactions, identifying what is happening in them rather than trying to solve a priori problems. The data presented in the articles have been transcribed according to simplified Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Jefferson 2004). Moreover, extensive psychological or pedagogical explanations of identified practices have been provided, in order to make the findings more accessible to practitioners.

4.2.2. Discursively informed CA

In two of the articles comprising the thesis, where naturally occurring data are analysed, the analytic method is referred to as *discursively informed conversation analysis*. This term was coined for the purpose of the articles and explained in one of them as follows:

> The article applies the analytic apparatus of CA, providing a sequential analysis of the therapeutic interactions under scrutiny. However, the interpretation of the phenomena demonstrated with CA goes beyond the context of the interaction, referring to characteristic symptoms of ASD or various aspects of a nondirective therapy, and thus involves the DA framework. Therefore, the method used in this paper will be referred to as discursively informed CA. (Maciejewska 2020: 349)

It is worth mentioning that the first article also employs the analytic method described above; however, I had not devised the term when the article was being written (see section

6 for details). For this reason, the method of analysis in the first article is referred to as DA, as it takes into consideration the external context of the scrutinised interactions.

5.   Data: description of datasets

There are two types of datasets used in the dissertation: semi-structured research interviews and naturally occurring professional-client encounters (Sarangi 2010).

In the first article, three audio-recorded interviews with autistic adolescents aged 17-18 years old are analysed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted by one interviewer – the same for all participants. Participants were recruited through an autism NGO (non-governmental organisation) in Poznań, Poland. There were three autistic participants who took part in the study, two girls and one boy. All of them were monolingual, native speakers of Polish. In addition, they did not manifest any intellectual deficits and attended high schools or vocational schools. The data were collected in Poland in 2014 for the author's MA research project. The recordings were further transcribed (Jefferson 2004). The analysis focused on two tasks from the interview: picture description and narrative production.

Interviews, in this case, were not treated as a "methodological resource for gathering information" but rather as a "topic of inquiry" (Mondada 2012: 33). The focus of the article was on the interview as a process of interaction (Nikander 2012) in its local context (Rapley 2001). The analysis concentrated on how the interviewer and the interviewees on the autism spectrum orient to each other's utterances and what strategies they use throughout the interview to maintain and further develop their interaction.

In the next two articles twelve hours of video-recordings from a non-directive ASD therapy are examined. As in the case of the first article, the analysis does not concentrate on the content of the interactions but on the language use of therapists and their clients, as well as interactional and discursive strategies of both parties. The focus of the analysis is on the micro level of talk and its analytic themes (Sarangi 2010).

This time, the participants were also recruited through an autism NGO in Poznań; however, not the same as in the first study. The participants were siblings diagnosed with autism, a boy aged 15 and a girl aged 17 at the time of recording, as well as two female therapists in training. The therapists represented a non-directive play therapeutic approach: Growth through Play System (GPS) (Houghton 2010). The autistic participants' level of functioning was different – the girl was communicative, though repetitive, and

her brother's verbal abilities were restricted significantly. Both participants and therapists were monolingual, native Polish speakers. The data were collected between January and July 2016 as part of the therapists' training. The therapeutic sessions varied in length and the number of participants (individual sessions, siblings and one or both therapists). The therapeutic encounters took place at participants' home. The researcher was not present during the sessions.

The parents and therapists of autistic participants were informed in detail about the project. They were also reminded about their (and their autistic children) right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. The participants with ASD also received information about the study and their rights as participants; however, the information was adjusted to their level of comprehension. Written (Article 1) or oral (Articles 2 and 3) parental consents were obtained. The procedures performed in the studies were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee (Research Ethics Committee at Adam Mickiewicz University) and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

The data presented in the papers were transcribed according to Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Jefferson 2004) and anonymised. As the original language of both datasets was Polish, the translations into English were done by the author. Moreover, in order to ensure the validity of research – "validity through transparency and access" (Nikander 2008: 227) – the original Polish transcriptions have been provided in all articles, either in the form of a line-by-line transcription/translation (articles 1 and 2) or in the appendix, due to a restricted word limit set by the journal (article 3). The analyses were conducted on the source data (Sarangi 2010; Nikander 2008).

6. Research process

Following the notion of *reflexivity* (Palaganas et al. 2017; see also Cameron 2021; Mallinson 2022), which is "about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the research" (Reay 2007: 611), section 6. describes the research process with a focus on *epistemological reflexivity* (Dowling 2006; see also Palaganas et al. 2017). Reflexivity is an important element of current qualitative research, as it "contributes to making the research process open and transparent [and] (…) is important to ensure rigor in qualitative research" (Palaganas et al. 2017: 431). In addition to that, the authors claim "that reflexivity

should be recognized as a significant part of the research findings" (Palaganas et al. 2017: 426).

My interest in the area of autism spectrum disorder began in 2009, when I was preparing my BA thesis on language in ASD. At that time, I decided to become involved in the autistic community and became a volunteer for an autism NGO in Poznań. I got to know autistic individuals from different age groups (children and adolescents), their teachers and therapists. In the meantime, I continued developing my knowledge of ASD, both theoretical and practical. My engagement resulted in another project, an MA thesis at the Department of Psychology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The project required recorded interviews with autistic participants. It involved sensitive data; therefore, not only the consent of participants and their parents but also the approval of the AMU Ethics Committee were needed. Despite my contacts in the autism NGO, finding participants for the study was an extremely challenging task and took me approximately six months. If it had not been for the help of the NGO's members, the study would not have taken place. This is one of the reasons why all my studies were case studies. The interviews for my MA study were later analysed according to the criteria drawn from RHLB-PL battery (Łojek 2007), which focuses on language and communication; however, in this case, the analysis was quantitative in nature. The same interviews were later used in my PhD project. I examined the data in my first article "Discourse analysis as a tool for uncovering strengths in communicative practices of autistic individuals" (Maciejewska 2019), using insights from language-focused analytic methods.

After completing my MA studies, I decided to continue my research on ASD and make it more interdisciplinary, drawing on the analytic methods from the field of linguistics, namely discourse and conversation analysis. I started my PhD project under the supervision of prof. Joanna Pawelczyk from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As discussed above, my first article comprising the PhD thesis was based on the material obtained for the purpose of the MA project. I analysed the recordings using DA and CA. The focus of the project was on the prototypical features of autistic communication, framing them as potential resources of people with ASD as well as highlighting the role of a neurotypical interlocutor in developing these features. I had a chance to share the findings from my project during three conferences (Young Linguists' Meeting in Poznań, Poland 2016, Communication Medicine and Ethics COMET in Aalborg, Denmark 2016 and Critical Autism Studies CAS in London, UK 2017) and received positive feedback, especially

from practitioners, who found this approach useful in their work with autistic individuals. This motivated me to explore the field further.

Consequently, I came into contact with the members of another autism NGO, and met a family with three autistic children, who were willing to share video recordings from their children's therapy for my PhD project. I had the opportunity to visit the family and meet the therapists, as well as take part in therapeutic sessions. I spent the whole day with the therapists and their clients, which was a wonderful occasion to observe both the adolescents and the therapists in action. This helped me better understand the data in the form of video recordings I received from them.

After gaining access to video recordings, the time-consuming process of transcription and analysis began. I spent hundreds of hours listening to the recordings and transcribing them. At that time, I was on a scholarship at Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, where I had a chance to consult my project with dr Monika Geist. Dr Geist was of immense help in terms of methodology and gave me numerous tips on the transcription process and the categorisation of my datasets.

I presented the findings from my second study during the International Conference on Conversation Analysis ICCA, Loughborough, UK 2018 and Young Linguists' Meeting in Poznań, Poland 2018. The first conference was especially inspiring when it comes to the current research in the field of CA, and gave me an opportunity to participate in a feedback session with prof. Tanya Stivers, whose remarks were valuable in terms of my PhD project. YLMP 2018, on the other hand, gave me a chance to meet practitioners and therapists and, again, this was the group who found my research findings the most helpful.

In 2019, I went on another scholarship to the doctoral School of Mind and Brain at Humboldt-University of Berlin. There, I joined the team of PhD students of prof. Isabel Dziobek. This was another inspiring and interdisciplinary experience, with a focus on quantitative studies on ASD from the psychological perspective. I had an opportunity to participate in therapeutic supervisions and research group meetings, where autistic participants were also actively involved. At that time, I expanded my knowledge of autistic resources from the psychological point of view.

During my stay in Berlin, I was working on another article, which ultimately became the last one in the series, "Non-directive play therapy with autistic adolescents: A qualitative study of therapists' interactional practices" (Maciejewska 2022). I had to stop my writing for some time, as I received a kind invitation from prof. Neill Korobov from the University of West Georgia to contribute to a special issue of Qualitative Psychology,

which focused on language-oriented analytic methods. It was an honour to join the project and publish my article, "Autistic resources from a discourse-analytic perspective" (Maciejewska 2020) in this journal. As the article I was working on focused on therapists' interactional practices, I decided that the paper for Qualitative Psychology would concentrate on autistic participants and their communicative resources. I received valuable feedback from prof. Agnieszka Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, which allowed me to improve the quality of my work and resolve methodological issues. One of the outcomes of this consultation was the term "discursively informed conversation analysis", which I adopted in the second and third article.

Finally, I published the last article in "Text and Talk". Due to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, the review process of this final article lasted over a year, so it was a great relief when the article was finally published.

An important part in the publication process was played by anonymous reviewers, whose feedback contributed to major changes in the final versions of the articles, and significantly improved their quality.

It has to be mentioned that there are some discrepancies between the articles in terms of nomenclature (see section 4.2.2). In particular, the term 'discursively informed CA' was devised after the first article had already been published. Therefore, although the method of analysis was the same in all articles, this term does not appear in the first article. Working further with the data and taking into consideration the feedback I received from reviewers of the remaining articles, I have decided that the term 'discursively informed CA' best reflects the analytic process applied in the study.

7.   Findings

Article One: *Discourse analysis as a tool for uncovering strengths in communicative practices of autistic individuals*
The first article focuses on DA as a method which can change the researchers' perspective by moving the focus away from potential communicative deficits of people on the spectrum and concentrate on their resources to reveal valuable aspects of autistic communication, which have been omitted in more quantitatively-oriented research on ASD. The relevant data extracts analysed in this paper come from three one-hour interviews with autistic adolescents, all of whom were native speakers of Polish. The participants accom-

plished two tasks: picture description and narrative production. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed (Jefferson 2004) and analysed with the methods of DA. The transcripts were subsequently translated into English. By relying on the concept of co-construction (Schiffrin et al. 2001), the analysis details how contributions of people with ASD are construed as relevant (Solomon 2004) or as coping strategies (Sterponi and de Kirby 2016), helping them to accomplish a communicative task in the local interactional context. It also highlights the role of the interviewer, who can constrain their autistic interlocutor, using inadequate communicative strategies (Stiegler 2007), for example, closed-ended questions. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how DA can help identify and then reinterpret the communicative practices of participants on the autism spectrum. Thus, the study shows how autistic individuals function as skilled interactants and it uncovers their communicative strengths. The article details typical phenomena observed in communication of people on the autism spectrum, for instance listing, repetitions or shifting. Moreover, it provides the function-focused interpretation of these phenomena (based on the scrutinised data) that stands in contrast to the common, deficit-oriented approach. Importantly, the article, as well as the other two, takes under scrutiny autistic adolescents, who are an understudied group among individuals with ASD. Moreover, all articles examine data in Polish, which is salient when it comes to language-focused studies, typically concerning English (see section 3).

Article Two: *Autistic resources from a discourse-analytic perspective*
The second article is a continuation of the idea introduced in the first paper, namely identifying autistic strengths in communication. The data used for this case study consist of twelve hours of video-recorded therapeutic sessions, which were transcribed (Jefferson 2004) and analysed with the use of discursively informed CA. The transcripts were subsequently translated into English. The participants include two ASD therapists and two adolescents on the autism spectrum. All participants were native speakers of Polish. There are four main goals of the article, which have been determined based on the potential interests of the readers of the outlet journal (Qualitative Psychology). Consequently, they focus more on methodology, assuming that the readers may not be acquainted with it. The first goal is to familiarise the reader with discourse analysis as a language-based approach to examining communicative practices. The article introduces discourse analysis and conversation analysis and guides the reader through the analytic process. It focuses on different quality aspects of discourse-analytic methods, including their validity, reliability

and generalisability. The second goal is to demonstrate autistic resources, which can be identified via tools and insights of discursively informed conversation analysis. The article depicts the role of contextualisation of interlocutors' turns in the interpretation and recognition of their functional potential. The third goal is to present the value of the discourse-analytic approach as a source of hypotheses for applied quantitative studies as well as implications for practitioners. The study demonstrates how interactions between therapists and their clients on the autism spectrum, and autistic individuals themselves, are co-constructed by the interlocutors, making all parties responsible for the outcome of a conversation. The final goal is to acquaint the reader with a non-directive therapy of ASD by analysing authentic therapeutic data, focusing on interactional aspects of this approach to ASD treatment. The analysis reveals how participants' contributions are oriented to by therapists, (positively) reinterpreted, and used to maintain a therapeutic interaction.

Article Three: *Non-directive play therapy with autistic adolescents: A qualitative study of therapists' interactional practices*

The third article complements the preceding papers, in particular the second article, as it concentrates on interactional practices of non-directive therapists. The data for this study come from the same therapeutic sessions as the second article; however, this time the focus shifts from individuals on the autism spectrum to therapists. The final article has three main goals. The first one is to identify and examine specific interactional practices, which are used by therapists during their sessions with autistic clients. The therapists' contributions identified in the analytic process (talk-in-practice) are subsequently juxtaposed with theories regarding interactional practices in non-directive therapies (talk-in-theory) in order to present a more detailed picture of these practices (see section 4.2.1). The described practices include, among others, mirroring (Ferrara 1994), online commentary (Heritage and Stivers 1999), recast (Saxton 2005) and scaffolding (Wood et al. 1976). The second goal is to use these findings to complete the theoretical descriptions of non-directive interactional practices, as depicted in stocks of interactional knowledge (SIKs) (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). Finally, the article aims to provide implications for practitioners, demonstrating the usefulness of discourse-analytic approaches in identifying the local functions of therapists' practices in view of the therapy goals.

Each paper shows how the study of autistic interactions can be redefined by applying DA methodology, and how the introduction of discursive methods enables us to gain new

insights into the communicative behaviours of participants on the autism spectrum and their neurotypical interlocutors that were unavailable with the use of other, non-discursive methods. In particular, the turn-by-turn analysis of the studied interactions reveals the interactional practices of both parties, showing how they orient to each other's utterances. Framing the communicative interaction as co-production, the studies encourage changing the perspective in research on ASD from the focus on individual to both interlocutors, and offer function-focused interpretations of their contributions. These findings may be of practical relevance to the work of therapists and other professionals who specialise in ASD.

8. Future research perspectives

Due to its ever-increasing prevalence, ASD is likely to remain within the scope of interest for researchers for a considerable time. The use of DA and CA in autism research can complete the existing knowledge of language and communication of people on the autism spectrum and their interactional behaviours by shifting the view of language from a manifestation of individual cognitive abilities to an interactional accomplishment. This shift is crucial when it comes to the understanding of communicative exchanges and may lead to a reinterpretation of utterances or practices, based on the interactional context provided. The reinterpretation carries practical implications for practitioners. First of all, it may lead to reassessment of current ASD therapies, showing which strategies work and what needs to be modified. Next, it may help develop novel approaches to ASD treatment, where autistic features that were meant to be eliminated in previous therapies will be treated as resources on which therapists can build their interventions. Furthermore, the findings from DA studies may also be useful for lay people who communicate with autistic individuals on a daily basis. Being aware of autistic styles of communication, neurotypical interlocutors can understand their autistic interactants better and thus improve their mutual communication.

From the point of view of researchers, such a 'holistic' approach to an interaction (taking the roles of both interlocutors into consideration) has a number of important consequences. Firstly, DA provides the context for interpretation of utterances under scrutiny. They are embedded in and no longer separated from the analysed interaction. Future research could involve further analysis of such conversations in terms of the interactional

functions of autistic utterances, rather than their forms only. Secondly, DA studies consider the interactional behaviour and contributions of all interlocutors, making them equally important subjects of the analysis. Research in this respect could, alternatively, focus on the neurotypical interlocutors, analysing what makes their communication with autistic individuals more or less effective and what strategies they use in order to convey their message. The research could also look into individual differences between interlocutors, such as, for example, accommodating one's language to the co-interactant. Future studies could examine conversational practices of people with ASD and/or neurotypical individuals in various social contexts and verify to what extent these practices differ depending on the context or the interlocutor.

Taking into consideration present trends in ASD research, future studies should take a closer look at autism phenotype, when it comes to differences between male and female autism, with a special focus on language and communication. According to Happé and Frith (2020: 221) "research evidence disproportionately reflects male autism" and "[t]here is as yet little robust research to tell us whether/how autism looks different in females, in part because of reliance on diagnosed samples who by definition meet current criteria". Therefore, further studies are necessary to offer insight into potential gender differences in autism.

Another important aspect that requires further investigation is ageing in autism. Namely, how the abilities and coping skills of autistic individuals change with age. As mentioned earlier, the focus of the majority of research is on children with ASD. Adolescents and adults on the spectrum are still understudied.

In light of the current thesis, an important area for further research, with the use of the presented methodology, concerns ASD therapies themselves. As discussed in the third article, future research could take the whole therapeutic process under scrutiny (the present project does not include the beginning and the end of the therapy), which could provide a greater variety of interactional strategies and become the basis for the assessment of their effectiveness. In addition, it would enable the researchers to monitor the progress of participants on the autism spectrum. Another important aspect would be a comparison of a number of therapist-client pairs from the same therapeutic approach. This would allow researchers to observe which interventions result from the therapeutic method and which come from the therapist's preferences or their possible adjustment to the participant's needs. Following the concept of RICA (see section 4.2.1) and the present trends in ASD research, namely inclusive research, further studies could also involve

therapists and invite them to a collaborative reflection about the findings concerning their interventions in order to, e.g., identify the best practices.

All of the studies presented in this doctoral thesis were case studies. Therefore, further research is required in order to verify whether the observations described in the articles can be replicated and generalised across the whole ASD population. Moreover, the observed phenomena could potentially constitute the basis for large-scale, quantitative studies, which may investigate whether the interactional practices presented in the current studies can be confirmed with the use of different methods, thus leading to developing new tools (e.g. questionnaires), strengthening collaboration between qualitative and quantitative researchers and, most importantly, broadening and verifying the knowledge of ASD.

SUMMARY

Language and communication difficulties belong to the core symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The prototypical features of autistic language include echolalia (repeating the words of others), pronoun reversal and pragmatic deficits. They all make an interaction with an individual on the autism spectrum more challenging for a neurotypical interlocutor. The presence of these characteristic features of autistic communication has been confirmed by numerous studies, most of which were of quantitative and comparative character. This resulted in the deficit-oriented approach, where autistic features were seen as a deviation from the neurotypical norm.

The growing number of ASD diagnoses led to the emergence of new approaches to ASD research and the application of alternative, language-focused, methods of analysis, in particular discourse and conversation analysis. This has allowed the researchers to reframe the meaning of communicative practices of people on the autism spectrum by situating and interpreting their utterances in the local context of interaction. As a result, a shift in the perspective has occurred from looking at the interaction with people on the spectrum as deficit-oriented to focus more on their strengths. The latter perspective entails the idea of co-construction of an interaction by both interlocutors, and thus opens the door for a reinterpretation of autistic features.

The current thesis introduces the reader to a language-oriented approach to ASD research. It demonstrates the value and importance of discourse-analytic methods in redefining communicative practices of autistic individuals by revealing their interactional functions and highlighting the role of the neurotypical interlocutor in a successful communication of both parties.

The data analysed in this research project come from two sources: semi-structured interviews and therapeutic sessions. The data were audio- or video-recorded, transcribed using simplified Jeffersonian transcription (Jefferson 2004) and analysed with the use of discourse and conversation analysis. The original language of interviews and sessions was Polish, the transcripts were subsequently translated into English by the author.

The dissertation consists of three articles, which complement one another. The first paper focuses on the language of autistic adolescents during an interview with a neurotypical researcher. It identifies communicative practices of participants in view of the prototypical features of the autistic language. The findings suggest how, by applying discourse-analytic methods, these practices can be interpreted in terms of their functional

value in the local interactional context. Moreover, the article shows how the communicative behaviour of a neurotypical interactant may constrain the autistic interlocutor's input in a conversation. The second article also concentrates on the autistic adolescents' language, however, in a therapeutic setting. Different aspects of autistic communication are analysed and contextualised in a therapeutic interaction. Again, the application of language-focused methods of analysis enabled the positive interpretation of autistic utterances, demonstrating their interactional importance or construing them as coping strategies of people on the autism spectrum rather than their deficits. The role of the therapist is also considered in the article. The final article in the series focuses on the interactional practices of ASD therapists, who represent an understudied, non-directive therapeutic approach (GPS). The findings show how therapists structure their contributions in order to maintain an interaction with their autistic clients and develop their language skills. The article stresses the importance of the therapists' engagement in an interaction with autistic clients as well as the cooperation of both parties.

STRESZCZENIE

Trudności językowe i komunikacyjne należą do podstawowych symptomów spektrum zaburzeń autystycznych (ASD). Prototypowe cechy języka autystycznego obejmują echolalię (powtarzanie słów innych osób), odwracanie zaimków oraz deficyty pragmatyczne. Wszystkie te elementy sprawiają, że interakcja z osobą autystyczną stanowi wyzwanie dla neurotypowego rozmówcy. Występowanie tych charakterystycznych cech w komunikacji osób z ASD zostało potwierdzone w licznych badaniach, z których większość stanowiły badania o charakterze ilościowym i porównawczym. Zaowocowało to podejściem zorientowanym na deficyty, gdzie cechy autystyczne były postrzegane jako odstępstwo od neurotypowej normy.

Rosnąca liczba diagnoz spektrum autyzmu doprowadziła do pojawienia się nowych podejść do badań nad spektrum autyzmu oraz zastosowania alternatywnych, skoncentrowanych na języku, metod analizy, w szczególności analizy dyskursu i analizy konwersacyjnej. To pozwoliło badaczom przeformułować znaczenie praktyk komunikacyjnych osób autystycznych poprzez umieszczenie i interpretację ich wypowiedzi w lokalnym kontekście interakcji. W rezultacie nastąpiła zmiana perspektywy z podejścia do interakcji z osobami na spektrum koncentrującego się na ich deficytach do skupienia się na ich zasobach. Ta ostatnia perspektywa odwołuje się do pojęcia współtworzenia interakcji przez obu interlokutorów, a przez to otwiera drzwi do ponownej interpretacji cech autystycznych.

Niniejsza praca doktorska wprowadza czytelnika do zorientowanego na język podejścia do badań nad spektrum autyzmu. Ukazuje ona wartość i znaczenie dyskursywnych metod analizy w przedefiniowywaniu praktyk komunikacyjnych osób autystycznych poprzez ukazanie ich funkcji w interakcji oraz podkreślenie roli neurotypowego rozmówcy w skutecznej komunikacji obu stron.

Dane analizowane w tym projekcie badawczym pochodzą z dwóch źródeł: częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów oraz sesji terapeutycznych. Dane zostały nagrane w formie audio lub video, następnie dokonano ich transkrypcji z użyciem uproszczonego systemu transkrypcji zaproponowanego przez Jefferson (Jefferson 2004) i przeanalizowano przy użyciu analizy dyskursu i analizy konwersacyjnej. Oryginalnym językiem wywiadów i sesji był język polski, transkrypty zostały w dalszej kolejności przetłumaczone na język angielski przez autorkę.

Dysertacja składa się z trzech artykułów, które wzajemnie uzupełniają się. Pierwszy tekst skupia się na języku autystycznych adolescentów podczas wywiadu z neurotypowym badaczem. Artykuł identyfikuje praktyki komunikacyjne uczestników w świetle prototypowych cech języka autystycznego. Wyniki wskazują, jak poprzez zastosowanie metod analizy dyskursu praktyki te mogą zostać zinterpretowane w kontekście ich funkcjonalnej wartości w lokalnym kontekście interakcyjnym. Ponadto artykuł ukazuje, jak zachowanie komunikacyjne neurotypowego rozmówcy może ograniczać wkład autystycznego uczestnika konwersacji. Drugi artykuł także koncentruje się na języku adolescentów z ASD, ale w sytuacji terapeutycznej. Różne aspekty autystycznej komunikacji zostają przeanalizowane i osadzone w kontekście interakcji terapeutycznej. Zastosowanie skoncentrowanych na języku metod analizy ponownie umożliwiło pozytywną interpretację autystycznych wypowiedzi, ukazując ich istotność w procesie interakcji lub postrzegając je bardziej jako strategie radzenia sobie osób autystycznych niż ich deficyty. Rola terapeuty także została wzięta pod uwagę w tym artykule. Ostatni artykuł w serii skupia się na praktykach interakcyjnych terapeutów ASD, którzy reprezentują mało przebadane, niedyrektywne podejście terapeutyczne (GPS). Wyniki pokazują, w jaki sposób terapeuci konstruują swoje wypowiedzi, by utrzymać interakcję z autystycznymi klientami i rozwijać ich umiejętności językowe. Artykuł podkreśla, jak ważne jest zaangażowanie terapeuty w interakcję oraz wzajemna współpraca obu stron.

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Appendix A: Original publication 1

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Discourse analysis as a tool for uncovering strengths in communicative practices of autistic individuals

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Abstract

This article aims to show how discourse analysis can help identify and reinterpret the communicative practices of individuals with autism spectrum disorder, presenting them as co-constructed by the neurotypical interlocutor. The data described in the article come from three interviews with autistic adolescents. The participants completed two tasks: picture description and narrative production. The interviews were further analysed with the use of discourse analysis. The study demonstrates how the participants oriented to the interviewer's utterances and what communicative strategies they used throughout the interview. Discourse analysis is presented as an approach to the study of autistic communication, which can substantially contribute to the current state of knowledge about autism spectrum disorder, and be an invaluable help for practitioners.

Introduction

An interaction with an autistic individual tends to constitute a challenge from the perspective of a neurotypical interlocutor. Numerous psychological and linguistic sources described non-verbal and verbal deficits of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), such as lack of eye contact (Ames and Jarrold, 2007; Pisula, 2010; Wiklund, 2016) and echolalia (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016; Tager-Flusberg, 1999), which may affect the perception of a person with this condition by non-autistic people, and impede communication

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between these two groups. Few of the papers on autistic communication took into consideration the interactional contribution of the other, usually neurotypical, participant in the conversation. Since the act of communication requires the cooperation of at least two parties, the input of both interlocutors needs to be considered in order to gain a holistic view of their conversation and see how participants orient to each other's utterances and co-construct their interaction (Dobbinson et al., 1998; Stiegler, 2007).

A possible way of illuminating this collaboration is the use of discourse analysis (DA) in research. DA is an approach to the study of language whose goal is to recognise and describe repeated patterns in discourse (Herring, 2004). This method allows one to observe regularities in a communicative exchange and apply this knowledge to enhance the process of communication (Stiegler, 2007).

This article aims to identify, with the use of DA, the communicative practices of people with ASD, showing them as co-constructed by the typically developing interlocutor. The change of perspective enables the reinterpretation of selected phenomena observed in autistic communication, revealing their possible function and meaning, which are alternative to what has been described in the psychological literature.

The analysed data come from three audio-recorded interviews with autistic adolescents. The tasks completed by participants included picture description and narrative production. DA was applied to analyse the recordings. The study identified the participants' communicative strategies and the ways they oriented to interviewers' contributions throughout the interview.

The following article presents DA as a valuable tool in the study of autistic communication and shows how it can contribute to the current state of knowledge about ASD and its treatment.

Theoretical background

Approaches to language and communication in autism research

Atypical language and communication are among the key elements that constitute the *autistic dyad*, which is the basis for diagnosing ASD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The term is used to describe the areas of life that are affected by this condition. Apart from social communication impairments, the dyad includes repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviour (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Given the important role that communication and language play in establishing the diagnosis of ASD, it comes as no surprise that many studies have been devoted to exploring this area of the autistic spectrum. Although their subjects of interest are varied, there are some features that most of these studies have in common, namely focus on an individual, experimental paradigm and quantitative analysis.

Individual-focused work concentrates on language and communication of individuals diagnosed with ASD, without discussing the interactional input of the other interlocutor in a conversation. The language of autistic participants is perceived solely as a reflection of their communicative and psychological competencies (O'Reilly et al., 2016). As a result of this decontextualised approach, individual-focused studies pay attention to deficits connected with ASD (Stiegler, 2007). Alternatively, language can

be seen as an *interactional accomplishment* (Sidnell, 2012; Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016), the product of interaction between a speaker and a hearer. This perspective makes both interlocutors responsible for the conversation (Dobbinson et al., 1998). For instance, possible interruptions in the flow of a dialogue are no longer considered a sign of incompetence of one or both participants, but rather seen in a broader context of the interaction itself (Antaki and Wilkinson, 2013). This is how communication is viewed in discourse analytic approaches.

Numerous studies use an experimental paradigm to uncover some unrecognised aspects of the autistic spectrum or verify new or existing hypotheses (Colle et al., 2008; Vanmarcke et al., 2016). These are usually comparative studies, which aim to identify differences in people on the autism spectrum and their neurotypical controls. Experiments concern various domains: genetics, cognition or neurology. Possible discrepancies are further examined in the context of their potential influence on language performance of individuals with ASD (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

Currently, the quantitative approach dominates in the studies on autistic language and communication. This kind of research involves many participants who are tested against hypotheses that have been created in advance. Quantitative studies use tests or specific procedures that are supposed to ensure an objective assessment of individuals' abilities, in order to compare their results with the rest of the population. The final outcome of these studies is a statistical report with correlations, which shows relations between different elements that have been analysed.

The contribution of quantitative research to the study of ASD cannot be neglected. Many characteristic features of this condition have been identified and described with the use of quantitative methods, which can provide useful information regarding a given population (for instance, the frequency of some phenomena in the group under scrutiny). Nevertheless, since the core impairments in ASD concern social communication, it seems that language-oriented qualitative methods, which enable examining the actual conversational practices, will be more relevant in this case (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

In contrast to the quantitative approach, which focuses on whole populations, qualitative research concentrates on an individual. It aims to understand and interpret the phenomenon under study. The number of participants in this case is very limited, and these are often case studies. Instead of a statistical report, one gets a narrative report as a final product of a qualitative study.

Despite the fact that qualitative methods still seem to be the secondary choice among researchers, there is a growing number of studies that adopt them. This refers especially to the areas where the access to participants is restricted, for example people with rare conditions, and it would be impossible to get a sufficient amount of data for a quantitative analysis or where standard testing procedures do not apply, for example due to some limitations in the group under study (Tager-Flusberg, 1999). ASD is no exception here.

Qualitative methods in autism research

As the population of people with ASD is extremely diversified, the analysis of single cases seems to be the only way to understand this condition (Markiewicz, 2004). Qualitative

methods enable an in-depth analysis of the subject and thus go beyond the statistics and show how something works or can be achieved (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

What is more, the qualitative approach may be a 'way of giving a "voice" to participants' (O'Reilly et al., 2016), resulting in both empowering them and changing the perspective in research. For instance, when analysing the natural speech samples of a particular population, for example people with ASD, one can see a given phenomenon from the point of view of people whom it concerns, which may lead to conclusions different from those of an outsider. It is also worth mentioning that due to their focus on naturally occurring data, the qualitative methods are considered to have a high internal validity and provide an accurate depiction of the scrutinised issue (Pope et al., 2002).

Among language-based qualitative approaches in autism research, one can distinguish DA and conversation analysis (CA). They are both data-driven methods of analysis (O'Reilly et al., 2016), which means that the data generate new hypotheses or theories, not the other way round.

DA

DA is a language-focused analytical method whose main aim is to identify and describe regular patterns in the use of language (Herring, 2004). It is an umbrella term that encompasses different approaches, for example DA proper, interactional linguistics or CA (Roberts and Sarangi, 2005). DA assumes that interlocutors co-construct any communicative event (Schiffrin et al., 2001), so it studies the utterances of both participants. The focus of DA is on language use in context, thus it examines mainly naturally occurring interactions; however, it is also employed in interviews and text analysis. Because the patterns observed in language use are produced both consciously and unconsciously (Goffman, 1959), DA can be useful for practitioners, as it can uncover the practices of which they were unaware before and thus help them use these practices deliberately (Antaki and Wilkinson, 2013; Roberts and Sarangi, 2005).

Contrary to the psychological approach, where language is viewed as a representation of one's thoughts and cognitive abilities (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016), which means it is context independent and individual, DA considers language to be an interactional accomplishment that takes place in a given context. This contextual embeddedness of utterances is very important, since it may influence their meaning (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016).

CA

CA is a subgroup of DA (Roberts and Sarangi, 2005) that concentrates on the study of talk in interaction (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Every act of communication follows a certain set of rules; for instance, each turn in a conversation is usually preceded by a previous action and followed by another relevant action (Sidnell, 2012; Solomon, 2004; Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016). CA focuses on such regular patterns and illuminates the organisation and purpose of a given interaction. This method of analysis is more restrictive than DA in terms of data type. Based on the view of social interaction as a joint contribution of co-participants, which is situated in a local context, it 'insists on the study of naturally

occurring activities as they ordinarily unfold in social settings' (Mondada, 2012). CA, being a data-driven approach, allows an unbiased analysis of a communicative interaction and can help identify phenomena (O'Reilly et al., 2016) that tend to be overlooked in more traditional (theory-driven) approaches to language research.

When comparing both methods, one can observe that DA uses a wider analytic frame than CA (Solomon et al., 2016). The latter focuses on a more technical, utterance-by-utterance analysis of a given speech sample. According to Sidnell (2012), CA, as a method, is restricted to 'the talk and other conduct in interaction', meaning that the analysis involves the context of the interaction itself. The former, DA, goes beyond the talk-in-interaction and takes into consideration also the external context of a conversation.

Methodology

The methodological approach in this article employs the view of language as a contextualised, interactional accomplishment (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016), where language is situated in an interaction co-constructed by both interlocutors who orient to each other's utterances. The data were collected in the form of audio-recorded interviews and thick notes that include descriptions of participants' non-verbal behaviour and their comments after the interview. The data obtained in this way were further analysed with the use of DA, where the researcher identifies 'recurring features and structures in a corpus of data that point to the relationship between the structural organisation of language and its functional interpretation in context' (Pawelczyk, 2011).

Aims

The goal of this study is to show how DA can help uncover the communicative practices of individuals on the autism spectrum, which tend to go unnoticed by the dominant approaches discussed above. While analysing the data, the author reveals phenomena observed in autistic communication and provides their function-focused interpretation that is alternative to the common, deficit-oriented approach. Moreover, taking into consideration the turns and utterances of both parties, the author depicts how the above-mentioned practices are co-constructed by the neurotypical interlocutor.

Ethics

The project was approved by the appropriate authorities to ensure it met the standards of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). The parents of all participants received a detailed description of the project, including the planned procedures. They were also informed (on behalf of their children) about their right to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at a later stage. Similarly, the participants were informed about the study and their rights as participants; however, the information was adjusted to their comprehension abilities. Written parental consent was obtained. All data were anonymised to ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of participants and their families.

Participants and data

The study described in this article is a case study of three autistic adolescents (2 girls, 1 boy) aged 17–18 years old. All participants were monolingual, native Polish speakers. The study qualitatively analyses, with the use of DA, audio-recordings of two tasks, namely picture description and narrative production, which were the elements of an individual interview with adolescents on the autism spectrum. The interaction of the researcher with each participant lasted for about an hour. Both tasks were conducted in a home setting. The recordings were transcribed according to transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004, see Appendix 1).

Picture description

The participants were asked to describe a picture from the book 'Moje ciało' ('My body') by Agnès Vandewiele (2005). In the picture, a group of people are on a beach and they are occupied with different activities. The open-ended question from the researcher was 'What is happening in the picture?'. The same question was repeated with every participant. There was no time limit to accomplish this task and no further instructions were provided. It was left to the participants what they wanted to focus on in their descriptions. The researcher asked additional questions if a given participant was struggling to give an answer.

Narrative production

The second task in the study was narrative production, which was intertwined with a semi-structured, dyadic interview. At the beginning, all participants were asked the same question – 'What did you do at school today?'. What followed depended on the participants' answers, therefore each interview covered different topics. Again, no time limit was set to complete the assignment.

The examples discussed in the article were chosen because of the common features of autistic language that they represent (Tager-Flusberg, 2004). In order to provide alternative interpretations of the actions observed in the analysed communicative interactions, the aspects of autistic language that are widely referred to in the literature, for instance listing and repetitions, were shown in the context of a conversation.

Findings

This section is organised according to prototypical features of autistic language (Tager-Flusberg, 2004), which are illustrated in the examples from the data. At the beginning of each subsection a brief introduction is provided, showing the perception of the selected aspects of autistic communication, as presented in the literature. This perspective is further juxtaposed with the discourse analytic view.

The analysis of the data illuminated a number of phenomena that could have been observed in communicative interactions between the person diagnosed with ASD and the interviewer. Taking the interactional contributions of both parties into consideration and

situating them in the conversational context allowed the provision of an alternative interpretation of what happened in the analysed stretch of talk.

Listing

Individuals on the autism spectrum are said to have problems with producing narrative descriptions (Tager-Flusberg, 1999). Instead of joining different elements into a coherent unity, they have a tendency to name objects without embedding them in any context. A possible explanation for this phenomenon would be *weak central coherence (WCC)* (Frith, 2008), which refers to autistic preference for local over global information. People with ASD tend to focus on details and do not pay attention to context (either conversational or general). They seem to lack the holistic view. This feature is troublesome in context-dependent situations, such as having a conversation, but can be valuable in tasks that require observation and attention to detail (Dawson et al., 2007; Solomon, 2004), for instance doing jigsaws. The inclination towards naming instead of producing a coherent narrative is referred to as *listing* in this article.

Example 1 comes from the picture description task, where the participant was presented with a picture and asked to describe it. The person in the first example was an 18-year-old girl diagnosed with ASD. Throughout the interview she demonstrated extensive vocabulary, and the utterances she produced were well organised and to the point, though rather short. This tendency for precision, understood here as restricting the answers to the exact requirements of the assignment, is also visible in the picture description task. The excerpt below illustrates the literalness (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016) of the participant's answers, resulting from the way she oriented to the interviewer's questions.

Example 1: Listing - verbs

1   I: co **się dzieje** na tym obrazku?
         *what **is happening** in the picture?*
2   P1: (na tym) ludzie **są** na plaży i (3.0) **robią** babki z piasku (1.0) **rozmawiają** (2.0) **siedzą** (5.0) **kopią**, jeden **trzyma** koło ratunkowe
         *(in the) people **are** on the beach and (3.0) **are making** sand cakes (1.0) **talking** (2.0) **sitting** (5.0) **digging**, one **is holding** a life ring*

To begin with, the wording of the question asked by the researcher seems to play a major role in this task. She asks (line 1) 'what is happening in the picture?', thus giving her autistic interlocutor a sign that she is interested in the actions that are visible in the picture. That is exactly how this question is oriented to by the individual with ASD. One can see that instead of describing the whole picture (which was in fact what the researcher expected), the participant focuses on the actions, saying, '(…) people are on the beach and (3.0) are making sand cakes (1.0) talking (2.0) sitting (5.0) digging' (line 2). The result is a list of activities rather than a picture description.

One could claim that the preference for local information combined with the participant's precision led to listing the actions in the picture instead of describing it, thus seeing this interaction from the deficit perspective. Although these factors cannot be

neglected, it is nevertheless important to highlight the interviewer's contribution to the task. Clearly, the way she asked the question determined the participant's orientation to it, and consequently constrained her answer. Taking this into consideration allows one to see the participant's response as an accommodation of the researcher's requirement (naming actions in the picture) rather than a demonstration of her deficits.

Interestingly, the listing was task-specific, as during a more spontaneous interaction (interview part) the participant was capable of taking part in a conversation, using complete sentences, taking her turns and providing both detailed and general information on various topics. This, again, draws attention to the phrasing of the question asked by the researcher and the extent to which it shaped the response of the participant.

Schema

Among the characteristic features of ASD, one can find insistence on sameness (Seligman et al., 2003). People on the autism spectrum are afraid of unexpected changes, and therefore they try to perform different activities always in the same way (Szatmari, 2007). This helps them lower their level of anxiety. This strategy can also be observed in autistic communication, where individuals tend to start a conversation or a narrative description in the same way, as if they were using some *schema* or templates.

Another participant was a 17-year-old girl with ASD. She also had rich and sometimes sophisticated vocabulary and was much more detailed in her answers than her predecessor. However, this could be seen only during the interview, as in the picture description task her replies were very short and precise. Her performance on this task is analysed in Example 2.

Example 2: Using templates

1   I: co **się dzieje** na tym obrazku? (…)
        *what **is happening** in the picture?(…)*
2   P2: ((odchrząknięcie)) **tutaj** (.) dzieci (.) y **tutaj** dzieci i dorośli **bawią się** na plaży. (…)
        *((clearing her throat)) **here** (.) children (.) erm **here** children and adults **are playing**
    on the beach. (…)*
3   I: mhm↑
        ***mhm**↑*
4   **(7.0)**
5   I: coś jeszcze mi możesz opowiedzieć na tym obrazku? (.) co się dzieje?
        is there anything else you can tell me about this picture? (.) what is happening?
6   P2: **tutaj** dzieci: **robią** zamki z piasku.
        ***here** childre:n **are making** sand castles.*
7   I: °zamki z piasku°. okej, co dalej?
        °sand castles°. OK, what else?
8   P2: **tutaj** dorośli **się opalają i odpoczywają**.
        ***here** adults **are sunbathing and resting**.*

The participant starts all her answers with the same word 'here' (lines 2, 6 and 8), which is followed by selected actions visible in the picture. Interestingly, the word is not accompanied by any gesture, for instance pointing to the elements being described at the

moment. 'Here' appears to be a template in her narrative production. The discursive strategy of repetition of the item 'here' that begins her utterances seems to help the girl structure and organise her answers. This allows one to see it as a resource more than a deficit. By relying on her strategy, the participant manages to build complete sentences instead of a list of verbs, as in the previous example.

Again, one can observe that the wording of the interviewer's question results in focus on actions presented in the picture. All utterances are structured in the same way and refer to what people are doing, for instance 'here childre:n are making sand castles' (line 6).

Taking into consideration the researcher's contribution, there is a marker of active listening, namely 'mhm↑' with rising intonation (line 3). However, it is not oriented to by the participant as an invitation to continue her description, which is indicated by a 7-second gap in line 4. It seems that the autistic individual considers her answer to be complete and therefore is not willing to proceed. However, when the interviewer asks additional questions (lines 5 and 7), the participant replies without any pauses or interruptions, knowing that she is expected to produce an answer. Moreover, every time she points to new elements in the picture, which suggests that she does not have any problems with recognising what is presented there, and could possibly provide a much more detailed description if she knew that this was her task. What is also worth noticing is the way the typically developing interlocutor formulates her questions, in order to maintain the conversation. She keeps asking exactly the same question, thus getting similar answers from the participant, focusing on actions. Perhaps if the researcher had tried to rephrase her question, the participant would have described different elements in the picture.

This observation is important in terms of the effectiveness of communicative cues used in an interaction with an autistic person. Sometimes, the utterances of a neurotypical interlocutor fail to convey information successfully (e.g. what the aim of a given task is), resulting in an underestimation of the abilities of an individual on the autism spectrum.

Repetitions

Another prototypical feature of ASD is *echolalia*, which involves repeating the words and utterances of others (Eigsti et al., 2007). Interestingly, it refers to echoing not only the language of another person but also his or her intonation (Local and Wootton, 1995; Tager-Flusberg, 1999). Echolalia can be associated with repetitive behaviour, which is one of the core symptoms of the autistic spectrum. Although limiting on the surface, as it puts the words of others into autistic individuals' mouths, echolalia can be valuable for people with ASD, since it enables them to take part in a conversation even if they do not fully understand it (Tager-Flusberg, 1999). What is more, as has already been acknowledged by Kanner (see Sterponi and de Kirby, 2016), echoes can be functional and work as affirmative responses, which can be observed in Example 3.

Example 3: Repetitions

1   I: jak myślisz, **dobrze się tam bawią**?
       *what do you think, **are they having fun there?***

2   P2: **dobrze się bawią**.
      they are having fun.
3   **(11.0)**
4   I: i co, **coś jeszcze byś chciała dodać** czy to już koniec?
      so, ***would you like to add anything*** *or is that all?*
5   P2: >nie, niekoniecznie. **nic nie chcę dodawać.**<
      >*no, not necessarily.* ***I don't want to add anything***.<

The third example presents another excerpt from the picture description task of participant number 2. Trying to obtain a more detailed description of the picture from the participant, the researcher asks an additional question (line 1) – 'what do you think, are they having fun there?' – to which the participant replies by partially echoing the words of her interlocutor 'they are having fun' (line 2). Although repetitive, the answer fits perfectly in context, becoming a relevant reply to the interviewer's question. A long, 11-second gap follows, which indicates that the autistic participant perceives her answer as complete (line 3). The neurotypical interlocutor makes another attempt to get a more detailed reply from the participant, asking 'so, would you like to add anything or is that all?' (line 4). The participant answers with a *mitigated echo* (Local and Wootton, 1995), that is, by repeating the interlocutor's words and adding her own (line 5): 'no, not necessarily. I don't want to add anything'. Her reply, again, seems to be an appropriately fitted conversational move.

From the discourse analytic perspective, repetitions can be viewed as a discourse strategy (Local and Wootton, 1995), where a person with ASD uses the words of the other party to construct his or her answers. It is also a sign that the autistic individual is monitoring the conversation and orienting to the prior turn, since echoes tend to occur in the sequential position where the interlocutor with ASD is required to take a turn (Local and Wootton, 1995).

It is worth noticing that in the above example, the researcher uses closed-ended questions. These are questions that can be answered with some specific information or with a simple yes/no. As illustrated by Example 3, closed-ended questions encourage repetitions, and usually do not help maintain a conversation. What is more, this type of question can cause a given utterance to directly determine the interlocutor's reply, as the respondent can echo the wording introduced by the interviewer (Local and Wootton, 1995). Therefore, in order to explore the linguistic abilities of people with ASD and allow them to use their communicative competence fully, it seems salient to refrain from closed-ended questions and leave space for autistic individuals to speak with their own words. Still, the usefulness of echoing cannot be denied because, as presented in Example 3, it can be an effective strategy that helps people on the autism spectrum to actively participate in a conversation and provide conversation-relevant input to it.

Question–answer exchange

A conversation with an autistic person has been identified to resemble a question–answer exchange rather than a dialogue (Seligman et al., 2003). Individuals with ASD are usually very literal in their replies and provide little input to an interaction. They do not pro-actively co-construct the dialogue, mostly restricting their contributions to instances

when they are directly asked for one, thus gaining the status of rather passive interlocutors (Local and Wootton, 1995). This can be connected to the turn-organisation of a conversation, which tends to be challenging for an autistic person (Eigsti et al., 2007; Hale and Tager-Flusberg, 2005). They find it difficult to recognise when the interlocutor's turn ends and they are expected to contribute to the interaction. Nevertheless, they rarely have problems with direct questions (e.g. wh- questions, where it is clear that the speaker awaits an answer), as can be seen in Example 4. This kind of utterance usually allows one to have an uninterrupted and relatively fluent conversation with an individual on the autism spectrum. However, the type of question matters here. As has been described in the previous section, open-ended questions tend to be more effective in maintaining an interaction.

Example 4 comes from the narrative production task. This time the participant is the same girl as in the first example. After completing the picture description task, participants were asked to tell the researcher about their day at school. As illustrated below, although the girl does not refuse to take part in the dialogue, she keeps her answers to a minimum, giving the impression that she is unwilling to talk. The result is a question–answer exchange.

Example 4: Question–answer exchange

1   I: (…) jak dzisiaj było w szkole?
          (…) how was it at school today?
2   P1: dobrze.
           fine.
3   I: a coś więcej mi powiesz?
          will you tell me something more?
4   P1: nie.
           no.
5   I: a słyszałam że: (3.0) że chodzisz na kółko (.) filmowe, tak? (…)
          and I've heard tha:t (3.0) you are attending a film (.) club, right? (…)
6   P1: tak.
           yes.
7   I: i jak tam jest?
          and what is it like?
8   P1: fajnie.
           nice.

The researcher starts with a closed-ended question in line 1: 'how was it at school today?'. The participant gives a single-word reply: 'fine' (line 2). The interviewer attempts to continue the conversation, which is visible in line 3: 'will you tell me something more?'; however, she does not succeed because the question is again closed-ended and does not require an elaborate answer. The participant says 'no' (line 4), refusing to continue the conversation. In this case, the neurotypical interlocutor tries to change the topic (line 5), finishing her utterance with a question tag ('right?'). The result is an affirmative, one-word answer: 'yes' (line 6). Another question follows (line 7), which again leads to a single-word reply (line 8). All the questions in this exchange were closed-ended. This allowed the participant to keep her answers short and made it impossible for the typically developing interlocutor to maintain the conversation.

Interestingly, this reluctance of the participant to speak with the researcher was limited to school topics only. After switching the subject of the conversation to baking (which was one of the girl's interests), she was willing to talk and gave quite detailed descriptions of what she could bake.

This observation points to another possible strategy used by autistic individuals. It seems that withdrawing from a conversation may not be connected to lack of communicative competence, but can be a sign of disinterest or unwillingness of an autistic individual to talk about a particular subject.

To sum up, the above example shows that non-fluent and laboured conversations may not be the result of autistic deficits, but of the type of the interlocutor's questions or the topic of a conversation.

Topic management – shifting

Digressions are the last aspect of autistic communication to be discussed in this article. People with ASD have a tendency to include off-topic comments in a conversation (Eigsti et al., 2007; Hale and Tager-Flusberg, 2005) or start new subjects without preparing their interlocutors for the change (Dobbinson et al., 1998), which is referred to as *shifting* in this article. Although going back to a previous topic or introducing a new one are common elements of every conversation, doing so without using connective markers, such as 'well' (Ochs et al., 2004), may be confusing for co-participants.

The extract below illustrates an example of shifting. It comes from an interview with the third participant, a 17-year-old boy with an ASD diagnosis. Overall, his speech was slow, and the answers he provided were usually short and exact. Nevertheless, he presented a wide vocabulary and was engaged in the conversation, which was visible in his rather detailed answers.

Example 5: Topic management (shifting)

1   I: mhm. (.) ale tych prób dużo pewnie musi być, [żeby tak **grać**?=
       *mhm. (.) well there has to be a lot of these rehearsals [to **play** like this?=*
2   P3:   [ta:k   =tak.
                                              [ye:s   =yes.
3   (2.0)
4   I: i- i **jak wygląda taka próba**? możesz mi opowiedzieć o niej?
       *an- and **what does such a rehearsal look like**? can you tell me about it?*
5   P3: no: jest- (4.0) próba, że spotyka się kilka osób i potem (.) nieraz (.) w zeszłym roku też byliśmy na targach poznańskich
       well, there is- (4.0) a rehearsal, so a couple of people meet and then (.) sometimes (.) last year we were also at the trade fair in Poznan
6   I: mhm
       mhm
7   (3.0)
8   P3: edukacyjnych znaczy się, przepraszam y:: które były- na któ:- gdzie też **graliśmy** jakieś przedstawienie.
       *education ((fair)) I mean, I'm sorry erm:: which was- at whi:- where we also **played** ((sic!)) some theatre performance.*

This final example addresses the phenomenon of topic management. In line 1, the researcher introduces the topic of theatre rehearsals, suggesting that many rehearsals are required in order to perform well. The participant interrupts her stretch of talk twice (line 2). First, an *overlap* can be observed, which is a situation where both interlocutors speak simultaneously. The participant confirms with a short 'ye:s' that indeed many rehearsals are needed. Then, the interviewer specifies her thought, saying 'to play like this', which is followed without any break (*latched*) by the autistic participant's 'yes', showing his agreement with the interviewer, but no further elaboration is provided. This part of the exchange illustrates the aforementioned difficulties with turn-taking among individuals with ASD; however, it also depicts the participant as an active listener who, with his short confirming interruptions, assures the interviewer that he is following the conversation. In line 3 there is a short pause, after which the neurotypical interlocutor tries to continue the conversation, asking the participant to describe a rehearsal (line 4). In response to this request, the autistic individual starts his description with a discourse marker 'well' (line 5), signalling an intention to build a coherent answer: 'well, there is- (4.0) a rehearsal, so a couple of people meet and then (.) sometimes (…)'. There are numerous pauses in his reply, implying that he is struggling with the construction of the answer. Suddenly, the participant shifts the topic (line 5) and starts talking about a trade fair. The interviewer does not clarify this change in any way, encouraging the participant to proceed with a continuer 'mhm' (line 6). Another gap follows (line 7), and the participant continues his response, describing a performance at an education fair (line 8). Two cut-offs can be observed in his turn, where the participant attempts to self-repair his utterances, changing the structure of the sentence: '(…) which was- at whi:- where'. This presents him as a self-conscious speaker who tries to control his stretch of talk. In terms of content, his answer seems to be irrelevant on the surface; however, when analysed in the local interactional context, it becomes meaningful. The participant refers back to the word 'play', used by the researcher in line 1. Therefore, his utterances can be seen as *proximally relevant* (Solomon, 2004), that is, not explicitly connected with the previous talk. The concept of proximal relevance is based on the assumption that relevance is not absolute but relative.

It is worth noticing that this time the researcher used an open-ended question (line 4), which, in contrast to the closed-ended one (line 1), resulted in a detailed and quite long answer. This confirms the importance of question types in an interaction.

As with the previous examples, the seemingly unrelated utterances turned out to be purposeful and meaningful when analysed in the context of the conversation.

Discussion

The study revealed a number of communicative practices used by individuals with ASD, such as listing, repetitions and topic shifting. Although these practices could have been interpreted in terms of communicative deficits of autistic participants, seeing the utterances in the conversational context allowed the identification of their function and relevance. The alternative interpretations of the participants' answers, presented in this article, included an accommodation to task requirements (listing), a discursive strategy (repetitions) and the *proximal relevance* (shifting). It could be observed that in many

cases the answers were determined by the preceding utterances of a neurotypical inter-locutor. What is more, participants' performance differed, depending on the task. Some of them dealt better with the more structured one (picture description), and others pre-ferred to engage in an interview – their narratives were more natural and spontaneous. This confirms the importance of the variety of tasks when assessing the communicative abilities of an individual on the autism spectrum (Tager-Flusberg, 1999).

Comparing DA to experimental paradigm, where prototypical characteristics of autis-tic language are treated as a manifestation of a neurological or cognitive disorder, one can observe that the DA framework allows researchers to see these features as responses situated in the local, interactional context and strategies that help individuals to over-come the challenges of being involved in an interaction (Damico and Nelson, 2005; Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016; Stiegler, 2007). By focusing on both interlocutors in a conversation, rather than solely on the autistic participant, DA broadens the interpreta-tion and reveals the alternative meaning that can only be discovered when the whole dialogue is seen in context. This change of perspective enables going beyond deficit interpretations and points to the abilities and resources of people with ASD, which are neglected in traditional, individual-focused approaches to autism research.

DA can complete the existing knowledge of ASD, shedding new light on certain aspects of autistic language and showing their possible, alternative functions. The aim of this method is not to deny the deficits observed in autistic communication, but to shift the focus from deficits to abilities. Seeing prototypical features of autistic lan-guage as coping strategies and a demonstration of competencies may lead to novel approaches in professional treatment of ASD, where these features would not be rejected but treated as important aspects around which interventions can be built (Sterponi and De Kirby, 2016; Stiegler, 2007). Therefore, discourse analytic findings can become the basis for re-assessment of current therapies of ASD, raising aware-ness among professionals and making them use various communicative practices more consciously (Bottema-Beutel, 2017; Dobbinson et al., 1998; O'Reilly et al., 2016; Sarangi, 2013). By monitoring, with the use of DA, their own strategies for maintaining a therapeutic interaction, therapists can assess the effectiveness of par-ticular communicative cues and modify the unsuccessful ones. Moreover, shifting from the deficits approach, which is encouraged by DA, makes therapists see their clients as competent interlocutors and treat the unique features of their language as potential resources that can facilitate the therapeutic process.

This study involves a number of limitations that have to be mentioned. First, being a case study, the project engaged a small number of participants, which means that the findings may not refer to the whole autistic population. The observed tendencies require further investigation in order to conclude whether the described features are typical for individuals with ASD. Other limitations are connected to the qualitative approach, which has been used in the current project, for instance the risk of subjectiv-ity of the author in her analysis and interpretation. Finally, the individual interviews described here were conducted at participants' homes, therefore each person responded in different conditions, which could have influenced their responses. All the above-mentioned factors point to the possible drawbacks of this study and encourage more research in this field. Future studies could analyse conversational practices of people

with ASD in various environments and verify to what extent these practices differ depending on the context or interlocutor.

The number of discourse analytic studies of autistic communication is still limited; therefore, further exploration of the topic is required. Due to the increase in the number of ASD diagnoses (O'Reilly et al., 2017), it seems to be especially important to shift from the 'nomenclatures of deficits and deviance' (Solomon, 2004) and focus on resources and strategies that autistic people use to facilitate their communicative interactions. Following Happé (1999), success is more interesting than failure.

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Author biography

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Appendix I

Transcription conventions – adapted from Jefferson (2004)

[ ]	Overlapping speech
=	'Latching' stretch of talk, that is no discernible gap between the utterances
-	Cut-off or self interruption
↑	Rising intonation
(1.0)	Pause length (in seconds)
(.)	A 'micropause', that is, a pause of less than a second
(())	A non-verbal activity (e.g. crying); author's comments
( )	The occurrence of an unclear utterance; or a removal of a part of the utterance due to privacy policy.
:::	Prolongation of immediately preceding sound. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
?	Rising intonation
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing intonation
°dog°	Lower volume than surrounding talk
< >	Slower than surrounding talk
> <	Faster than surrounding talk

Appendix B: Original publication 2

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Autistic Resources From a Discourse-Analytic Perspective

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The current article scrutinizes extracts from a nondirective therapy of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) from a discourse-analytic perspective. Discourse analysis (DA) serves here as an umbrella term, which includes other discursive approaches (Sarangi, 2017), in particular conversation analysis (CA). This latter, in-depth method of analysis allows one to study different types of communicative exchanges turn-by-turn, revealing their interactional and discursive details that tend to be overlooked in quantitative approaches. By employing the analytic apparatus of CA, the article demonstrates the application and relevance of this method to professionals. The study shows how interactions between therapists and their clients with ASD, as well as exchanges between autistic individuals, are progressively coconstructed by the interlocutors. Concentrating on the organization and content of the interactions, the article guides the reader through subsequent stages of the analytic process, acquainting them with the discourse-analytic approach. The paper demonstrates how applying the discursive perspective allows one to construe the autistic individuals' contributions as resources that can be tapped into by the therapist to facilitate a successful act of communication in the local context of the interaction. Consequently, the article supports the concept of neurodiversity, focusing on positive interpretations of the autistic clients' utterances and highlighting the communicative strengths of this population. Moreover, by analyzing authentic data from therapeutic sessions, the article affords the reader a glimpse into a nondirective therapy of ASD, showing how practitioners manage therapeutic interactions, building upon autistic resources.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, case study, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, nondirective therapy

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is one of the most frequently researched childhood psychiatric diagnoses (Lester, 2015; Wolff, 2004), but the intricacies of this condition still remain challenging for researchers and professionals. The understanding of ASD has significantly changed since the first diagnosis of autism in 1943 (Kanner, 1943). Currently, the condition is

defined as a range (spectrum) of neurodevelopmental disorders, which involve deficits in social interaction and communication as well as restricted behavior and interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Due to the variety of conditions that are encompassed in ASD, not all the symptoms are shared by individuals who receive the diagnosis. As a result, there are autistic people who are mute and unable to take care of themselves and autistic people who are perfectly capable of communicating with others and leading an independent life. The diversity of autistic population causes problems in terms of social inclusion; for example, the concept of neurodiversity (to be discussed further), and research on ASD, as the research findings and results cannot be applied to every person on the autism spectrum. Consequently, some researchers turn to small-scale qualitative methods in order to study this condition, claiming that a

detailed analysis of single cases is the way of getting a full picture of ASD (Dobbinson, Perkins, & Boucher, 1998; Markiewicz, 2004). This involves the use of discourse-analytic methods, such as conversation analysis (CA). Narrowing the perspective to a limited number of participants or case studies allows analysts to scrutinize phenomena that cannot be captured in large-scale, quantitative studies. For instance, an in-depth, contextualized analysis of the autistic language shows that some atypical elements (e.g., echolalia) may have a functional value (Local & Wootton, 1995; Prizant & Duchan, 1981; Prizant & Rydell, 1984). Moreover, discursive methods of analysis highlight the role of both participants, illuminating how they orient to each other's utterances (O'Reilly, Lester, & Muskett, 2016; see also Fasulo & Fiore, 2007; Tarplee & Barrow, 1999). Consequently, these language-focused analytic methods demonstrate how the ability of cointeractants to recognize the intended meaning of the other party influences the trajectory of a conversation (e.g., proximal relevance; Solomon, 2004). Visibly, qualitative methods, in particular CA, have the potential and can be used to identify the resources of the population with ASD and extend our knowledge about this fascinating condition.

The current article has four main goals. The first one is to acquaint the reader with a discourse-analytic perspective as a language-based approach to examining communicative practices. The second goal is to demonstrate autistic strengths, which can be identified via tools and insights of a discursively informed CA (to be explained further). The article depicts how the contextualization of interlocutors' turns may influence their interpretation and reveal their functional potential. The third goal is to show the value of the discourse-analytic approach as a source of hypotheses for applied studies and implications for practitioners. Finally, the article aims to familiarize the reader with a nondirective therapy of ASD by analyzing authentic therapeutic data, with a focus on interactional aspects of this approach to ASD treatment.

Theoretical Background

Discourse-Analytic Perspective

The present study employs a discourse-analytic perspective to examine the collected data. Discourse analysis (DA) is an analytic approach devoted to "studying discourse as texts and talk in social practices" (Potter, 1997, p. 203). In its interpretations, DA goes "beyond the 'here and now' of social interactions to enrich a sense of their context" (Solomon, Heritage, Yin, Maynard, & Bauman, 2016, p. 381). In this way, it reaches to the external context of the communicative exchange, extending the interpretive framework of the interaction under scrutiny (Solomon et al., 2016). However, DA can also be seen as an umbrella term that includes different microlevel discursive approaches; for example, conversation analysis (CA; Nikander, 2012; Roberts & Sarangi, 2005; Sarangi, 2017). DA has been applied to both quantitative and qualitative studies, scrutinizing data at both macro- and microlevel, and referring to various interpretive frameworks. However, this multiplicity of DA applications is beyond the scope of this article.

DA as a data-driven, inductive and "overwhelmingly qualitative" (Potter, 1997) approach, usually concentrates on small groups of participants (mostly case studies). It aims at identifying and describing recurrent patterns in the use of language (Herring, 2004). DA illuminates the aspects of an interaction that are manifested through language. Most importantly, one can single out repetitive sequences that help understand how a conversation is developed. DA can also reveal some idiosyncratic patterns that are characteristic of a given individual, thus showing their personal style of communication. In addition, it can disclose those aspects of communication that may be common among people with the same condition; for example, ASD.

In the current study, DA is used as an umbrella term, as the article relies on conversation analysis (CA) while drawing on general insights of DA. The article applies the analytic apparatus of CA, providing a sequential analysis of the therapeutic interactions under scrutiny. However, the interpretation of the phenomena demonstrated with CA goes beyond the context of the interaction, referring to characteristic symptoms of ASD or various aspects of a nondirective therapy, and thus involves the DA framework. Therefore, the method used in this paper will be referred to as *discursively informed CA*.

CA is a microlevel discursive method, which belongs to the broad category of discourse-analytic approaches. "Conversation analysis in-

volves a detailed, qualitative study of talk in its sequential context in order to discover the common-sense understandings and procedures people use to shape their conduct in particular interactional settings" (Garcia, 2012, p. 352). There are two important principles of CA (Muskett, 2017). The first one refers to the sequential organization of an interaction, according to which turns in a conversation are intertwined. It means that each conversational turn is usually preceded by an action and followed by another relevant action (Muskett, 2017; Sterponi & de Kirby, 2017). The second principle of CA relates to the fact that "sequential analysis is grounded in the responses of the participants in the interaction itself" (Muskett, 2017, p. 121). Therefore, it can be said that CA focuses on the *endogenous organization* (Mondada, 2012) of a conversation in the local here-and-now of the interaction, as "[t]he conversation is assumed to be a context within which participants shape their own utterances and interpret the utterances of others" (Garcia, 2012, p. 352). CA identifies regular patterns in the scrutinized interactions, showing their purpose and organization in a given communicative context. According to this method, "any order of detail in talk (. . .) is potentially consequential for interaction" (Potter, 1997, p. 216). CA is very restrictive in terms of the subject of its analysis and insists on *naturally occurring data* (Garcia, 2012; Mondada, 2012), that is, data that were not obtained by "the researcher using an interview schedule, a questionnaire, an experimental protocol or some such social research technology" (Potter, 1997, p. 205).

Discursively informed CA, applied in this article, may be seen as a method that mutually complements with quantitative approaches (Dobbinson et al., 1998). On the one hand, it can be used as a tool that enables one to scrutinize the phenomenon of interest in detail and identify those aspects that are impossible to notice in quantitative studies. On the other hand, discursively informed CA can become a source of hypotheses, which can be further verified in large-scale studies.

Focus on Coconstruction

Unlike quantitative approaches, where the focus of an analysis is on the autistic individual, qualitative, language-based methods take into consideration all interlocutors, as they collaborate in and contribute to developing their communicative exchange (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Discourse-analytic approaches view language as an effect of social interaction—"an interactional accomplishment" (Muskett, Perkins, Clegg, & Body, 2010; Schegloff, 1982; Sterponi & de Kirby, 2016)—which challenges the traditional understanding of language as a demonstration of one's mental abilities or deficits. As Dobbinson et al. (1998, p. 115) suggest, "individual language use is most interesting in the context of conversation." This contextualization of language is very important, because it enables one to see conversational difficulties as consequences of particular structural patterns rather than communicative faults of the autistic participant. This implies that interactional obstacles can be overcome by modifying the conversation, leading to an improvement in communication for both interlocutors (Dobbinson et al., 1998; Fasulo & Fiore, 2007; Tarplee & Barrow, 1999).

How to Do Discourse-Analytic Studies?

A discourse-analytic study starts with data collection "with one's analytic priority in mind" (Sarangi, 2010, p. 398). The type of data that discourse analysts are most interested in is naturally occurring data, such as professional–client encounters; however, textual materials or interviews have also been investigated with the use of this approach (Sarangi, 2010). The process of data collection has its own challenges, including the *observer's paradox* (Labov, 1972) and the *participant's paradox* (Sarangi, 2007). Both terms refer to the influence of the observer's presence and actions on the data being collected, which may lead to an unwanted bias and further misinterpretation of the gathered material. The researchers need to be aware of that in order to minimize data contamination. One of the possible solutions to this problem is to eliminate the analyst from the data-collection process, which has been done in the current project. There are two ways of gathering the material for the analysis: audio- or video-recordings. Both methods reveal a lot of personal information about participants and their interlocutors (e.g., names, images); therefore, another important element in the analytic process is the anonymization of data to ensure that

the personal details of all individuals involved in the study will remain confidential (Sarangi, 2010). This step is usually taken after the transcription of data, which directly follows the data collection. Transcription "with line or turn numbers" (Roberts & Sarangi, 2005, p. 633) is the second stage of a discourse-analytic study and it is a very time-consuming process (Sarangi, 2010), which involves repeated listening to the recorded material. This stage is very important, as "qualitative research sees transcripts as a central means of securing the validity and guaranteeing the publicly verifiable, transparent and cumulative nature of its claims and findings" (Nikander, 2008, p. 225). Depending on their analytic purpose, transcriptions vary in the level of detail (Nikander, 2008). This is also connected with the selection of transcription conventions used by the analyst (e.g., Jefferson, 2004, used in the current study). What is more, if the original data are not in the target language, as in the case of this article, transcription has to be followed by translation. There are different ways of presenting the translated data, again, depending on the aim of the study. Nikander (2008) describes three possibilities: a line-by-line transcription/translation format (which is the option chosen in this paper), a three-line transcription/translation format and a parallel translation/transcription format. Importantly, the analysis is always performed on the source data (Nikander, 2008). This is particularly crucial if there are discrepancies between the source and target languages (Sarangi, 2010). Discourse-analytic approaches are data-driven, which means that a researcher does not start their analysis with a set of hypotheses in their head (Peräkylä, 2004). Rather, they get involved with their data corpus, listening to it and reading the transcripts multiple times, allowing the ideas to emerge from the data (Dobbinson et al., 1998; Sidnell, 2012). Such *unmotivated exploration* (Peräkylä, 2004; Sidnell, 2012) aims "to identify recurrent actions and patterns of interaction that are characteristic for the data studied" (Peräkylä, 2004, p. 291). What follows is an inductive examination of the communicative exchange between interlocutors, which results in generating hypotheses and interpretations. Both are further supported with the existing literature (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003) on the object of the study, leading to final conclusions. For more detailed descriptions of the analytic process, see also Goodman (2017) and Lester (2014).

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research requires redefinition of such concepts as *validity, reliability,* and *generalizability*. Due to small groups of participants and a specific type of data under scrutiny, qualitative methods cannot meet the rigorous standards of quantitative approaches in this respect. However, it does not mean that qualitative analysis is invalid or unreliable. The above concepts need to be adjusted to the area of qualitative research, where they are addressed in other ways.

Peräkylä (1997) discusses the questions of reliability and validity in CA, in particular, he focuses on *institutional interactions*, that is, interactions between professionals and clients. He claims that reliability and validity of qualitative studies are crucial for objectivity in this type of research.

> In research practice, enhancing objectivity is a very concrete activity. It involves efforts to assure the accuracy and inclusiveness of recordings that the research is based on as well as efforts to test the truthfulness of the analytic claims that are being made about those recordings (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 283).

Leung (2015, p. 326) describes reliability from a quantitative viewpoint as the "exact replicability of the processes and the results." In a qualitative approach, more precisely in discursive research, reliability refers to the quality of recordings and transcripts, which constitute the "raw material" that can be later accessed by other researchers, and thus verified (Peräkylä, 1997).

When it comes to validity in language-based research, the concept becomes rather complex. According to Peräkylä (1997, p. 290), there are numerous issues that contribute to validity in CA, including the *transparency of analytic claims, validation through 'next turn', or the generalizability of conversation analytic findings*. To begin with, the results of an analysis should exhibit *apparent validity* (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 290), which means that the reader should be convinced that what they read is "transparently true" (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 290), as they have experienced similar elements in their own interactions, although they were not aware

of their formal names. Another form of validation is the analysis of the next turn, where the subsequent turn of the other interlocutor reveals their understanding of the prior turn, and serves as a confirmation (or negation) of the analyst's interpretation. This is called the *next-turn proof procedure* (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 291; Sidnell, 2012, p. 79). Finally, Peräkylä (1997) suggests defining generalizability in qualitative research not in terms of its "distributional" ability but referring to the *possibilities of language use* that are offered by CA (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 297). More precisely, the author claims that certain patterns or practices that have been identified and described with CA methods may be found in various settings, although they may be performed in different ways. Therefore, the results of discursive studies offer possibilities of language use that can be looked for across different interactional contexts. In this sense, these results are generalizable. A similar view is shared by Goodman (2008, p. 273): "a discursive strategy can be generalizable to the extent that the 'action' (. . .) that it accomplishes can be generalized across contexts." This also refers to the high *ecological validity* of CA studies, namely that the phenomena identified in this type of research can be observed in real life (representativeness of data; Brewer, 2000). According to Cicourel (2007, p. 738) "[v]alidity is viewed as an inherent quality of 'naturally occurring' and formal and informal 'institutional' talk'."

Discourse-Analytic Approach in ASD Research

Tager-Flusberg (2004) lists a number of methodological problems concerning traditional, comparative studies on language in the autistic population. The author foregrounds the heterogeneity of individuals with ASD, both regarding the autistic spectrum itself and the comorbid conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety disorder) that may influence the participant's performance. Other issues involve mental retardation (which concerns only a part of the autistic population), developmental changes, and small sample sizes (Tager-Flusberg, 2004, p. 75). Tager-Flusberg implies that in order to get a full picture of the autistic language—"the language phenotype of autism" (Tager-Flusberg, 2004, p. 77)—one needs to apply a more individual, within-group approach in their re-

search. In addition, in her earlier article, Tager-Flusberg (1999) discusses challenges that researchers encounter when studying the language of people with ASD. The author suggests that evaluation methods (e.g., standardized language tests) have to be adjusted in order to provide meaningful information about this group of participants. Moreover, she identifies certain limitations of studies on the autistic language, such as excluding nonverbal individuals or those with behavioral problems. Finally, she highlights specific features of people with ASD, for example, unwillingness to engage in communicative interactions, which may negatively influence the results of their language assessment. In the light of all these issues, alternative research and analytic methods are needed in order to gain a better understanding of the ways people with ASD use language and communicate. The discourse-analytic approach addresses this gap.

Language-based methods of analysis are of particular relevance in the context of mental health research, as language is the medium through which therapeutic encounters are constructed (Brown, Nolan, Crawford, & Lewis, 1996; Dobbinson et al., 1998; Lester, 2014; Roberts & Sarangi, 2005). Lester (2014) also stresses the advantages of discursive methods, showing them as a means for alternative interpretations of the autistic communicative behaviors. According to Sterponi and de Kirby (2017, p. 34) "[d]iscourse analytic studies in autism have offered important insights into the interactional significance and context sensitivity of key features of autistic language, notably echolalia and inflexibility" (see Local & Wootton, 1995; Muskett et al., 2010). Instead of seeing these behaviors as indications of deficits, the microanalytic method of CA allows one to identify them as meaningful and relevant in the context of the therapeutic interaction. This further leads to redefining the communicative competence of individuals with ASD (Lester, 2014, p. 183). A similar claim can be found in the article by O'Reilly et al. (2016, p. 356), where the authors suggest that language-oriented analytic methods enable the researcher "the identification of novel and unpredictable aspects of social interaction involving people with the diagnosis," which are overlooked in other approaches (see also Garcia, 2012).

Furthermore, the use of discourse-analytic methods allows the analyst to demonstrate that the source of an interactional struggle does not necessarily lie in the deficits of an autistic individual, but may derive from the context of an interaction; for example, autistic behaviors being misunderstood by neurotypical interlocutors (Lester, 2014; Muskett, 2017; Sterponi & de Kirby, 2016). Consequently, the discursive perspective shifts the researchers' attention from pathology toward social diversity (Lester, 2014).

Autistic Strengths

Applying discourse-analytic tools allows one to see the characteristic features of the autistic language, traditionally regarded as deficits, as effective discursive strategies in the here-and-now of the ongoing conversation. An example of this is a case study conducted by Local and Wootton (1995), where the authors analyzed *echolalia*, that is, repeating the words of others, using the method of CA. The authors observed that "constructing a reply out of material contained in the prior turn is frequently a successful discourse strategy" (Local & Wootton, 1995, p. 183). In many cases, these echoic answers were accepted by cointerlocutors as relevant "conversational moves" and they were well-fitted in the context of the conversation. Moreover, the authors noticed that "the design of adult turns (. . .) relies on and fosters repetition skills" (Local & Wootton, 1995, p. 183). The constraining influence of the other interlocutor was also highlighted by Sterponi and de Kirby (2017). For instance, closed-ended questions encourage answers that are based on the words used by the predecessor. The view of echolalia as an interactional resource was confirmed by Sterponi and Shankey (2014), who presented this feature of autistic language as an "interpersonal outcome," which helps the interlocutor with ASD achieve conversational goals. They also stressed the social dimension of echolalia, calling it a "by-product of discernible interactional sequences" (Sterponi & Shankey, 2014, p. 300).

The strengths of autistic people can also be seen from a broader perspective, not directly connected with language and communication. In their manual, Dziobek and Stoll (2019) distinguish a number of personal traits, which they categorize as resources of autistic individuals; for example, sincerity, determination, or reliance on the structure of a given interaction (e.g., therapeutic session). Although these aspects refer to general features that are characteristic of people with ASD, they are also manifested through their language.

Focusing on the strengths of autistic individuals requires introducing the concept of *neurodiversity*. According to it, an atypical neurological development should be considered a natural variation (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). In addition, autistic features are to be treated as an integral aspect of a person's identity. As a consequence, neurodiversity proponents are against treatment that aims at eliminating autistic behaviors, recognizing them as harmless and identifying their coping potential (Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman, & Hutman, 2013). They support "adaptive rather than typical functioning" (Kapp et al., 2013, p. 60). Moreover, neurodiversity implies that a person with ASD is not solely accountable for social or interactional difficulties, shifting the responsibility for autistic exclusion toward the society.

> To say that these people have a mental disorder because of the consequences of their condition is in a sense blaming the victim. The consequences of their condition are perhaps for a very important part the result of society's reaction to their condition. (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012, p. 25).

From this perspective, autistic disabilities are, to some extent, socially constructed (see also Muskett et al., 2010). Therefore, education of the society is required in order to change the perception of ASD into a more positive one.

Method

This case study investigates a nondirective therapy of ASD, focusing on the autistic participants' contributions and construing them as manifestations of their communicative and personal resources. The article also highlights the role of therapists as coconstructors of an interaction, demonstrating how the way they orient to their clients' contributions influences the communicative exchange. The study employs discursively informed CA to scrutinize and interpret the collected data.

Participants and Data

There were four participants in this study. The first two were intellectually disabled adolescent siblings with ASD, a 17-year-old girl (Julia) and her 15-year-old brother (Mike). It is important to mention that the girl's level of functioning was much higher than her brother's, whose ability to communicate was seriously restricted. The other two participants were nondirective therapists in training, Elizabeth and Anna. The therapists varied in terms of experience and time of cooperation with the autistic participants; however, it was not less than 6 months (which is the time scope of the analyzed recordings). All participants were monolingual, native speakers of Polish.

The data include 12 hr of video-recorded sessions of a nondirective therapy of ASD. The recordings were transcribed with the use of Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004; see Appendix) and subsequently anonymized. The analysis was performed on the original Polish recordings and transcripts; however, the transcripts were later translated by the author for the purpose of the current article. The therapeutic sessions that are scrutinized in this article were conducted in the same location, that is, the autistic participants' home. The video material was recorded for the therapists' training and supervisions. It covers the period of 6 months (January–July 2016) of selected therapeutic meetings rather than consecutive sessions. All participants and autistic adolescents' parents were informed in detail about the project and gave their consent to use the recordings for the purpose of the present study. The procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee (Research Ethics Committee at Adam Mickiewicz University) and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Findings

Before the analysis, the institutional character of the data under scrutiny should be discussed. As mentioned earlier, these are video-recordings from therapeutic sessions, which frames the examined interactions as therapist–client exchanges. According to Drew and Heritage (1992, p. 3), the "institutionality of an interaction is not determined by its setting. Rather, interaction is institutional insofar as participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged." Therefore, although the therapy analyzed here took place at autistic participants' home, it should still be regarded as an institutional discourse. The institutional talk differs from everyday speech, and certain features which would be considered atypical in an ordinary conversation, such as role-related interactional asymmetry (Drew & Heritage, 1992), are common for this type of communicative exchange.

The current article focuses on autistic strengths; therefore, the following section will present these moments of the therapeutic interactions where the resources of participants with ASD could be observed. Their strengths were visible in typical autistic features; for example, echolalia (Local & Wootton, 1995; Tager-Flusberg, 1999) or topic shifting (Dobbinson et al., 1998; Sterponi & Shankey, 2014), which are traditionally perceived as deficient, but—as the analysis will demonstrate—may also support communicative interaction and serve as discursive strategies. The autistic resources were also observed in the personal traits of participants with ASD that were manifested through language, such as determination or meticulousness.

It is important to comment on the role of the therapists in the communicative exchanges presented below. Their interactional engagement and the ability to interpret the contributions of their clients as relevant in the local context of the conversation is crucial in these exchanges. The extra effort of the therapists to facilitate the interaction is visible both in their language use and the ways they manage the conversations.

Mitigated Echo as a Discursive Strategy

A *mitigated echo* is one of three possible forms of immediate echolalia distinguished by Local and Wootton (1995), the others being a *pure echo* and a *telegraphic echo* (Local & Wootton, 1995, p. 156). The pure echo is an exact repetition of the prior turn or part of it. The telegraphic echo is a repetition of "words which are not adjacently positioned in the target utterance" (Local & Wootton, 1995, p. 156). Finally, the mitigated echo refers to repetitions

that include selected or all words from the prior turn with some new words added. The authors point out that echoes can have a functional role, which makes them "appropriately fitted conversational moves" (Local & Wootton, 1995, p. 167) and effective strategies for maintaining a conversation (Garcia, 2012; Tarplee & Barrow, 1999). The functional potential of echolalia was also described in detail in earlier papers by Prizant and Duchan (1981), concerning *immediate echolalia*, and by Prizant and Rydell (1984), focusing on *delayed echolalia*. Taking into consideration three dimensions, namely interactiveness, comprehension, and relevance, the authors distinguished as many as 7 functional categories for immediate echolalia (Prizant & Duchan, 1981) and 14 for delayed echolalia (Prizant & Rydell, 1984). In the extract presented below, Mike, the autistic participant, relies on repetitions in his session with one of the therapists, Anna. At the beginning of this sequence, Mike is sitting on a mattress in silence, looking out of the window, while Anna is rocking on a ball next to him.

Example 1—Mitigated echo

---

1   A: ((buja się na piłce obok M)) ↑a:le wiatr wieje.
    ((rocking on a ball next to M)) ↑the wind is blowing ha:rd.
2   (3.0)
3   A: ↑drzewa się ruszają.
    ↑the trees are moving.
4   (15.0)
5   A: ((kaszle)) m: jaką jeszcze mamy dzisiaj pogodę ↑Mike świeci słońce czy nie dzisiaj?
    *((coughs)) m: what other weather do we have today ↑Mike **is the sun shining** today or not?*
6   M: >świeci słońce przyjdzie lato:<
    *>the sun is shining **su:mmer is going to come**<*
7   A: ↑ta:k, jak świeci słońce to przyjdzie lato. racja.
    ↑ye:s, when the sun is shining summer is going to come. right.
8   (3.0)
9   M: jak przyjdzie słoneczna będziemy się kąpać nad jezio:rem.
    when the sunny comes we will be bathing at a la:ke.
10 A: mhm. ↑masz rację Mike. jak przyjdzie mocne s:- ciepłe słoneczko to będziemy się kąpać nad <u>jezio:rem.</u>
    będzie już ba:rdzo ciepło.
    mhm. ↑you are right Mike. when a strong s:- warm sun comes we will be bathing at the <u>la:ke</u>. it will be ve:ry warm then.

In line 1, Anna breaks the silence with a neutral statement about the weather, "the wind is blowing hard," trying to initiate a conversation. After a gap of 3 seconds, she comments on the weather again, in the same manner (Line 3). Again, there is another gap, this time 15-s long, which does not evoke any reaction from Mike either. In Line 5, Anna coughs and makes another attempt to engage her partner in a conversation. There is a hesitation marker "m:" that is followed by a direct, open-ended question to Mike, which the therapist immediately narrows down to a closed-ended question: "is the sun shining today or not?" The change of strategy brings the expected result, as Mike orients to her question, answering it. His response is a mitigated echo (Local & Wootton, 1995), as it is partially based on the wording used by Anna ("the sun is shining"). Still, Mike develops his reply with a general observation "summer is going to come" (Line 6). It is important to mention that in Polish, unlike in English, the first part of Mike's response does not require any inversion ("świeci słońce"), he merely repeats the therapist's words. In Line 7, Anna orients to Mike's answer with an upgraded confirmation ("yes" followed by a paraphrase of his words). A 3-s gap follows, after which Mike speaks again, referring to the sunny weather (Line 9). Although his observations are rather general, the discursive strategy he relies on allows him to maintain the conversation with the therapist. In Line 10, Anna responds with "mhm" which serves here as a confirmation and a direct validation of Mike's observation, followed by another, slightly modified, paraphrase of his words. The therapist finishes her turn with a comment on the temperature, which is possi-

bly aimed as a trigger for continuing the conversation.

Although Mike's communicative competence is visibly restricted, he uses the discursive strategies of mitigated echo (Local & Wootton, 1995) and delayed mitigated echo (Prizant & Rydell, 1984, p. 184), which help him successfully engage in a conversation (Prizant & Duchan, 1981). Building his response partially on the therapist's contribution (Line 6) allows Mike to develop an interaction despite limited language resources. On the surface, Mike's repetitive contributions in the above excerpt are within social norms and do not necessarily classify as echolalia. However, taking into consideration the overall level of Mike's utterances (see examples below), it becomes visible that the structure of his second contribution (first conditional) is far more complex than what he usually employs in his speech. According to Prizant and Rydell (1984, p. 185), this discrepancy in the language level is one of the criteria that help identify echolalia: "[t]o be considered delayed echoes, utterances (. . .) had to be beyond the child's level of grammatical complexity when compared to creative utterances." As Dobbinson et al. (1998, p. 130) suggest "the phenomenon of linguistic repetitiveness" is common among individuals on the autism spectrum and helps them maintain the current topic of a conversation. Autistic interactants depend either on the words of the other party or their own utterances (*cross-turn repetitions*; Dobbinson et al., 1998, p. 120). Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding, it is important to know the context of an interaction. Garcia (2012, p. 357) highlights this fact, referring to topic perseveration: "studies of topic perseveration which ignore the sequential production of talk in its interactional context may lead to an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of this symptom."

The therapist does not orient to Mike's utterances as inaccurate, which does not support the claim of their echolalic character (Peräkylä, 1997; Potter, 1997). However, analyzing the remaining extracts, one can recognize a similar interactional pattern of both therapists. They follow the clients' trajectory, regardless of the relevance of their input, with the aim of maintaining the conversation and thus developing the clients' communicative and interactional skills. In addition, acceptance of such interactional "disruptions" by speakers without communicative difficulties was confirmed in other studies (e.g., Muskett et al., 2010). Interestingly, neurotypical interlocutors frequently foster the strategy of echoing among autistic individuals (Muskett, 2017), using particular turn designs (Local & Wootton, 1995), such as closed-ended questions in Example 1.

Another term, and a complementary interpretation of Mike's contributions, that is worth mentioning in connection to this excerpt is *dialogic resonance* (Du Bois, Hobson, & Hobson, 2014):

> Dialogic resonance regularly occurs when one speaker draws on a prior utterance by a conversational partner as a resource for constructing a new utterance, selectively reproducing some of the words, structures, and other linguistic resources used by the previous speaker. This produces a degree of parallelism between the paired utterances, which yields resonance, defined as "the catalytic activation of affinities across utterance" (Du Bois et al., 2014, p. 412).

Example 1 illustrates how both interlocutors "build on each other utterances by recycling segments of the prior turn and adding to it an original component" (Sterponi & de Kirby, 2017, p. 47). In this way, Mike and the therapist become attuned to each other and begin to resonate together in their dialogue. Dialogic resonance requires from the interlocutors the capacity to identify with the attitudes and experiences of other people (Du Bois et al., 2014), which involves intersubjectivity, that is, "the coordination of subjective states between people" (Hobson, Hobson, García-Pérez, & Du Bois, 2012, p. 2719).

What comes to the foreground in this interaction is an extensive input of the therapist. By describing the situation outside of the window, she not only encourages Mike to join in a conversation with her but also provides him with useful vocabulary, modeling a potential contribution of her interlocutor. Mike relies on the therapist's input, as his answer is based on the wording used by Anna. Furthermore, the therapist elaborates on her interlocutor's utterances (Lines 9–10): she confirms Mike's observation, indirectly corrects (*recasts*; Saxton, 2005) his utterance, changing "sunny" (adjective) into "sun" (noun), and adds new information, continuing the conversation. By using the same vocabulary as her interlocutor and agreeing explicitly ("yes", "right"), Anna makes Mike feel well understood, strengthening the bond be-

tween them. Finally, one could also notice the long gaps in Lines 2, 4, and 8, which significantly exceed "comfortable silences" in an ordinary conversation (Lester, 2015). However, they are not oriented to as unusual by the therapist, as such longer periods of silence are common in a therapeutic (institutional) context.

Topic Shift Strategies

Abrupt shifts in the topic of a conversation are also common elements of an interaction with people on the autism spectrum (e.g., Dobbinson et al., 1998). They may serve as distractors, which help the person with ASD "escape an undesirable course of action" and engage the cointeractant in the activity of their (the autistic person's) interest (Sterponi & Shankey, 2014, p. 290). What is more, topic shifts make the interlocutor with ASD the leader of an interaction, as he or she determines the direction of the conversation (Sterponi & Shankey, 2014). Dobbinson et al. (1998, p. 118) describe the topic shift in a typical, nonautistic conversation, referring to the concept of an *ancillary topic,* which "must be accepted by the participants if it is in turn to become topicalized." According to these authors, although there are recognizable "connecting factors" in a conversation with a person on the autism spectrum, they are not relevant enough to become an ancillary topic (Dobbinson et al., 1998, p. 118). Solomon (2004) presents a different point of view, describing such contributions as *proximally relevant* (Solomon, 2004, p. 271). She suggests that although these utterances do not directly refer to the previous

turn, they can "be accepted as relevant, and further built upon, by the *generous interactional partners"* (Solomon, 2004, p. 271).

Furthermore, Dobbinson et al. (1998, p. 128) observe the circularity in autistic talk, where interlocutors with ASD tend to return to topics that were discussed previously. This tendency supports the discursive strategy of repetitions, being "a clear indicator that she [the autistic interlocutor] relies heavily on what has come before in structuring her present talk" (Dobbinson et al., 1998, p. 129). All the concepts described above highlight the importance of the contextualization of the analyzed excerpts. Without knowing the context of a conversation, one would not be able to observe the proximal relevance or circularity, and would interpret the utterances of a person with ASD as incongruent talk that is incoherent with the current topic of an interaction. Such decontextualized, restricted analysis leads to misinterpretation and underappreciation of autistic contributions, and strengthens the deficit perspective, which is still prevalent in the medical literature. The next extract concentrates on the strategies that are used by the autistic participant, Julia, to change the topic of the conversation. The example shows that these shifts are not entirely unexpected and there are certain patterns in Julia's speech that prepare the interlocutor for the topic switch. Example 2 depicts a conversation between Julia and Elizabeth (the therapist), where Julia quickly shifts the topic of the interaction using different discursive strategies.

Example 2—Topic shift

((Elizabeth is reading riddles to Julia and Mike))

1   J: ((wskazuje palcem w górę)) słyszę: słyszę jak samolot leci:
    ((points up with her finger)) I can he:ar hear a plane fly:ing

2   E: ja też słyszę °samolot°.
    I can also hear a °plane°.

3   J: gdzie leci samolot?
    where is the plane flying?

4   E: nie wiem. na niebie gdzieś wysoko. nie widzimy. chmury są dzisiaj
    I do not know. somewhere high in the sky. we cannot see it. there are clouds today.

5   (7.0)

6   J: **Elizabeth?**

7   E: **mhm?**

8   J: czekałaś na mnie?
    were you waiting for me?

9   E: tak. wczoraj wieczorem <u>czekałam</u> na ciebie.
    yes. yesterday evening I was <u>waiting</u> for you.

At the beginning of the conversation, Julia points up with her finger and initiates a new topic, commenting on the current situation ("I can hear a plane flying", Line 1). The therapist orients to her observation with a confirmation. In Line 3, Julia continues her topic, asking a question about the plane. Elizabeth (Line 4) follows her interactional trajectory, trying to answer the girl's question. There is a 7-s gap in the conversation after which Julia uses an attention grabber, calling the therapist by name (Line 6). Elizabeth confirms that she is listening and encourages Julia to proceed with a continuer ("mhm") with a rising intonation. After receiving the confirmation from the therapist, Julia introduces another topic, asking Elizabeth a different question. The therapist responds with a direct validation ("yes") and elaborates on the new topic.

The excerpt above illustrates two effective discursive strategies used by Julia to initiate a new topic in a conversation. First, she refers to external prompts (sounds, her current activity), and by commenting on them she starts a new topic. Second, she uses an attention grabber, usually calling the therapist by name. According to Muskett (2017, p. 133), when a turn is prefaced by the other interlocutor's name, it "strongly projects for an answer." Only after Julia receives a confirmation that the interlocutor is listening (an active listening marker, a direct confirmation), she introduces a new topic (or returns to the topic discussed before). In both cases, as shown above, Julia is successful in engaging the therapist in the topic of her choice.

The nondirectiveness of the therapeutic approach described in this article is visible in the flexibility of the therapist who willingly follows her client. She does not signal any irrelevance of Julia's contributions; treating them as appropriate moves in the conversation, and thus encourages her autistic interlocutor to actively participate in the communicative exchange. This can also be observed in the 7-s gap (Line 5), where Elizabeth potentially gives space to Julia to continue the topic of her interest. What is more, the therapist is not surprised by Julia's second question (Line 8). This is because Julia returned to their previous topic, which they have already

discussed in the same therapeutic session. Nevertheless, the topic is accepted by the therapist and becomes the ancillary topic of their interaction. By following Julia, the therapist shows her understanding and interest in the girl's contributions and, consequently, strengthens their therapeutic alliance.

Using External Prompts as Supportive Communication

Referring to external prompts is proved to be a very effective way of getting one's message through. Toddlers learn that in order to draw their carer's attention to the object of their desire, they have to point to it with a finger. People with limited communicative abilities, for example, aphasic patients, rely on external aids, such as communication boards, to communicate with others. This also applies to individuals on the autism spectrum, whose speech, according to Lester (2015, p. 444), has been described as unconventional, as they "did not always use words to convey their ideas." Capps, Kehres, and Sigman (1998, p. 337) observed that autistic children in their study (similarly to the comparison group) "were (. . .) apt to use gesture to augment communication" and, some of them, "effectively enacted a behavior or circumstance they were attempting to describe." In their article, Dickerson, Stribling, and Rae (2007) describe tapping as a communicative gesture used by individuals with ASD. Taking into consideration the sequential location of tapping in an interaction, the authors present this gesture as meaningful and relevant in the context of the communicative exchange: "[B]y investigating the motor movement within the sequence of interaction in which it occurs we can examine both how it may *respond or orientate to* prior action, as well as how it may *shape and project* subsequent action" (Dickerson et al., 2007, p. 275). Mike also relies on tapping and external prompts in his communicative exchanges. Example 3 shows Mike in another interaction with Anna. Mike is sitting on a mattress next to a wall of colorful toy bricks, while Anna is standing behind him.

Example 3—External prompts

1   M: bus nie ma haka: ((stuka palcem w rząd niebieskich cegieł))
       the van has no hoo:k ((tapping a row of **blue** bricks with a finger))
2   A: tak, bus nie ma haka niebieski
       yes, **the van** has no hook **the blue one**
3   M: ((stuka w czerwony rząd cegieł)) >czerwonym busem< jedziemy
       ((tapping the row of **red** bricks)) > **the red bus** < we take
4   A: mhm. ↑ pojedziemy czerwonym busem, jasne.
       mhm. ↑ we will take **the red bus**, of course.
5   M: czerw<u>o</u>nym busem do k<u>o</u>ni ((stuka w czerwone cegły podkreślając akcentowane samogłoski))
       the r<u>e</u>d bus to the h<u>o</u>rses ((taps the **red** bricks, emphasizing the stressed vowels))
6   A: jasne, czerwonym busem pojedziemy do k<u>o</u>ni:
       of course, on the **red bus** we will go to the <u>horse:s</u>

In Line 1, Mike is talking about a van with no hook, while he is simultaneously tapping a blue brick with his finger. The therapist (Line 2) orients to his observation with a confirmation ("yes") and also recognizes his nonverbal contribution adding "the blue one," thus showing that she understands his message. In Line 3, Mike continues his nonverbal strategy, but this time he also mentions the color of the vehicle in his utterance. The therapist orients to it with an active listening marker ("mhm") and a direct confirmation ("of course"), which is preceded by a paraphrase of Mike's utterance (Line 4). Mike develops his previous contribution, adding the goal of the trip ("to the horses"). He taps the red bricks multiple times, emphasizing selected words. In Line 6, Anna proffers a direct validation ("of course") and a paraphrase of Mike's words.

Example 3 showed another interactional strategy of Mike, which enables him to actively participate in a conversation. The boy uses external prompts (i.e., bricks in the relevant color) in order to complete his utterances and make himself better understood by the other interlocutor. The above strategy is not only effective for maintaining a conversation but also for initiating it. In their article, Korkiakangas and Rae (2013) described how teachers manipulate objects in order to guide autistic children's attention. The authors presented this strategy as a resource that is used by the teachers to engage the children in a particular activity. Example 3 depicts a reverse situation, where the participant with autism manipulates external objects to draw the therapist's attention and convey an additional message. Indeed, an effective use of external objects can be a resource not only from the perspective of teachers/therapists but also their clients.

Still, the role of the therapist in supporting this communicative exchange cannot go unnoticed. Anna is very attentive to Mike's behavior and combines his verbal and nonverbal contributions, helping him to express his message and facilitating the communication process. Similarly to Example 1, Anna extends Mike's contribution, specifying the color of the van (Line 2). The therapist proffers a *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) for Mike, modeling a more precise utterance, and thus supports her client in enhancing his communicative abilities.

The importance of the therapist is also highlighted by Lester (2015), who describes their role as crucial "in the positioning and co-constructing of communicative acts, with what comes to be counted as legitimate, meaningful, and functional" (Lester, 2015, p. 455). These supportive behaviors of therapists can be further referred to as *mediated rhetoricity,* which denotes the "language used for the benefit of the disabled person, which is (co)constructed by parents, advocates and/or committed caregivers who know the disabled person well" (Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003, p. 161). Indeed, mediated rhetoricity requires additional engagement from the therapist, who needs to be attentive to the client's actions, in particular their nonverbal behavior, identify them as relevant, and orient to them as such (Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003).

Personal Strengths of Autistic Participants Manifested Through Language

Although the deficits connected with ASD frequently remain in the foreground, people diagnosed with the condition also tend to exhibit a variety of positive characteristics, such as sincerity, meticulousness, determination, or creativity (Dziobek & Stoll, 2019). These undera-

ppreciated resources are often visible in the language of autistic individuals. In Example 4, Mike is interacting with another therapist, Eliz-

abeth. The therapist is blowing up balloons and Mike is giving instructions to her.

Example 4—Personal strengths

1	M: ((podaje E nowy balon)) *((gives a new balloon to E))*
2	E: okej ((bierze balon i zaczyna dmuchać)) *okay ((takes the balloon and starts to blow it up))*
3	M: ((śmieje się)) *((laughs))*
4	E: ((przerywa, patrzy na M)) *((stops, looks at M))*
5	M: ((naśladuje odgłos dmuchania)) ***((imitates the sound of blowing))***
6	E: ((kontynuuje dmuchanie)) *((continues to blow up the balloon))*
7	M: ((śmieje się)) *((laughs))*
8	E: ((znów przerywa i patrzy na M)) *((stops again, looks at M))*
9	M: ((naśladuje odgłos smuchania)) ↑ DMUCHAMY ***((imitates the sound of blowing))* ↑ *WE BLOW IT UP***
10	E: dmuchamy, dobra ((dmucha dalej, przerywa)) *we blow it up, okay ((continues to blow, stops))*
11	M: ↑ jeszcze ***↑ more***
12	E: jeszcze, dobra ((dmucha, przerywa, czeka na reakcję M)) *more, okay ((blows, stops, waits for M's reaction))*
13	M: zawiązujemy ***we tie it***
14	E: ((kiwa głową i związuje balon)) *((nods her head and ties the balloon))*

At the beginning of the interaction, Mike gives a balloon to the therapist. The therapist takes the balloon, saying "okay", and starts to blow it up, demonstrating her understanding of Mike's nonverbal request (Line 2). In Line 3, Mike laughs, showing that he enjoys this activity. Next, Elizabeth stops and looks at Mike, waiting for his reaction (Line 4). Mike orients to it with a nonverbal request for continuation—he imitates the sound of blowing (Line 5). The therapist (Line 6) continues the blowing to which Mike starts to laugh again (Line 7). Elizabeth stops once more (Line 8) and looks at Mike, waiting for his reaction. The boy imitates the sound of blowing again, but this time he also strengthens his request with an exclamation "we blow it up" (Line 9). The therapist repeats Mike's words and gives a direct confirmation ("okay") that she understood the request. She resumes the blowing and after a while stops again. This time Mike gives her a direct verbal instruction ("more", Line 11), which is confirmed by Elizabeth in the same manner as previously (Line 12). After a moment of blowing

another stop follows. This time Mike decides that the balloon is big enough, and orders Elizabeth to tie it, with another direct contribution ("we tie it"). The therapist confirms nonverbally (nodding her head) and ties the balloon (Line 14).

The above example depicts Mike's personal strengths. First, one can see the boy's determination. Despite the obstacles (the therapist regularly stopping to blow up the balloon), Mike is motivated to use different strategies in order to make the therapist continue the activity, which visibly (laughing) gives him pleasure. Next, Mike is creative in pursuing his goal. The boy relies on both nonverbal (imitation of blowing) and verbal (direct instructions) methods in order to achieve his aim. Finally, Mike is also meticulous, he is very precise in naming the actions that he wants the therapist to perform, for example, "we tie it" instead of "stop".

What is interesting in this exchange is the switch of roles. Mike becomes the leader of this interaction and Elizabeth follows his instructions. This illustrates the client-centeredness of

a nondirective therapy, where the therapist adjusts to their client's interactional trajectory and orients to their contributions. In this way, the therapist strengthens the relationship with their client, which has a positive influence on the therapy's outcome (Spinhoven, Giesen-Bloo, van Dyck, Kooiman, & Arntz, 2007).

Potential for Mutual Understanding

Davidson (2008) suggests that individuals with ASD have their own "distinctive autistic styles of communication" (Davidson, 2008, p. 791). These styles are idiosyncratic and differ from the neurotypical ones. Consequently, the members of the autistic population find communicative exchanges and understanding within their group less problematic in comparison to communication between a typically developing person and the one with ASD (Davidson, 2008, p. 797; Dobbinson et al., 1998). The last extract (Example 5) involves three participants: Mike, Elizabeth, and Julia. At the beginning of the interaction, Julia and Elizabeth are alone in the room, talking about a board game that they are going to play. Suddenly, Mike enters the room.

Example 5—Mutual understanding

((Julia and Elizabeth are sitting on a mattress))

1 M: ((wchodzi do pokoju, wskazuje palcem na grę)) NIE BĘDĘ W TO GRAĆ
((enters the room, points to the game with his finger)) I WON'T PLAY IT

2 E: ((odpowiada cichym, spokojnym głosem)) zagramy tylko w chińczyka, i: pomasujemy i wyjdziemy.
((responding in a quiet, calm voice)) we will only play ludo ((name of the board game)), a:nd give you the massage and go out.

3 M: ((zamyka drzwi)) JA NIE LUBIĘ W TO GRA:Ć ↑
((closes the door)) I DON'T LIKE TO PLA:Y IT ↑

4 E: a w co Mike lubisz grać?
and what do you like to play Mike?

5 M: ((stojąc kręci się na boki)) ↑ JA NIE LUBIĘ ↑ ((siada na materac)) ↑ JULIA MIKE NIE CHCE:?
((standing, turns to sides with his whole body)) ↑ I DON'T LIKE ↑ ((sits on the mattress)) ↑ JULIA MIKE DOES NOT WANT TO:?

6 J: nie, Mike nie chce, jak chcesz to nie chcesz.
no, Mike does not want to, if you want to you do not want to.

7 M: nie może tak grać
he can't play like this

8 E: °nie musisz grać.°
°you don't have to play.°

9 J: nie mu:sisz zagra:ć. no spoko::jnie no nie mu:sisz zagrać.
you don't ha:ve to pla:y well take it e::asy yeah you don't ha:ve to play.

In Line 1, Mike enters the room and points to the board game with his finger, exclaiming "I won't play it." The therapist orients to his contribution with an explanation what the current plan of the therapeutic session is (board game, massage), in a quiet, calm voice. In Line 3, Mike closes the door, but he still replies in a loud voice, showing his dislike for the game. The therapist (Line 4) attempts to change the topic, asking Mike about the games he likes. However, the boy seems not to recognize the shift of topic and continues to refuse to play the game, supporting his refusal with a relevant movement of his whole body (Line 5). In the same turn, he addresses his sister, asking her for a validation of his words ("Julia, Mike does not want to?"). Julia gives a direct confirmation, followed by a repetition of Mike's words. Then she continues, giving her approval to Mike to refuse to play if he does not want to ("if you want to you don't want to"). Although her reply is not grammatically correct, it is understandable to her brother who finally calms down, which can be recognized by the lower volume of his voice in his next turn (Line 7). He again states that he will not play the game ("he can't play like this"), which is oriented to by the therapist with a quiet agreement ("you don't have to play") in Line 8. This is once again confirmed by Julia (Line 9), she repeats Elizabeth's words and shows her recognition of her brother's negative excitement, trying to calm him down ("take it easy").

This triadic exchange illustrates how Mike differently orients to both interlocutors. Although the therapist replies to his contributions in a calm voice, she does not manage to lessen his negative excitement. This is only achieved by Julia, who gives Mike a permission to refuse to play. Visibly, the mutual understanding between the two siblings is much stronger than between the boy and the therapist, even though the clarity of the adolescents' utterances is limited in the eyes of an external observer. While communication styles specific to ASD can be challenging for neurotypical interlocutors, they can be regarded as a resource within the autistic population—they indicate that individuals with ASD are capable of effective communication among themselves.

Another interesting phenomenon that can be noticed in this exchange is *pronominal avoidance* (Sterponi, de Kirby, & Shankey, 2015b). This term denotes a tendency of autistic individuals to refer to themselves and others using proper names as well as employing agentless passive constructions in a sentence. According to Sterponi et al. (2015b, p. 289), one of the reasons for these characteristic speech patterns can be "a high demand on the child in terms of shifting perspectives or weaving them together in his speech." Therefore, they occur in situations that are challenging both cognitively and linguistically (Sterponi et al., 2015b, p. 289). In Line 5, Mike refers to himself using his own name when he changes his interlocutor from the therapist to his sister, which is a good illustration of the above explanation. Although pronominal avoidance is not a resource as such, it may be helpful for autistic individuals, as it informs the therapist that their client is struggling and enables them to manage the interaction accordingly.

Conclusion

The article demonstrated how discursively informed CA can illuminate the resources of individuals with ASD, which are manifested through their language use and communicative behaviors. The paper introduced DA as an umbrella term, which includes different language-oriented methods of analysis, explaining the theoretical background for this approach and describing consecutive steps

that need to be taken in order to perform the analytic process. Next, the author applied CA to the extracts from a nondirective therapy of ASD, showing the analysis in practice. The study listed a number of autistic strengths connected with communicative patterns of participants on the autism spectrum as well as their personal characteristics. Starting with echoing, one of the prototypical features of the autistic language, whose functional potential has been demonstrated, the article further presented the strategies for changing the topic of a conversation, which showed interlocutors with ASD as active and competent participants of an interaction who influence the direction and content of the communicative exchange. Subsequently, a nonverbal communicative strategy, that is, relying on external prompts, was illustrated, which is an undeniable resource in facilitating a conversation. Next, the article focused on personal strengths of autistic participants; for example, creativity or determination, which turn out to be valuable in the context of an interaction. Subsequently, the phenomenon of "distinctive autistic styles of communication" (Dobbinson et al., 1998) was depicted, presenting the difference in mutual understanding between autistic and neurotypical individuals. This can be seen as a resource within the autistic population, namely as a more effective way of communicating with individuals affected by the same condition. The article also highlighted the role of the therapists in managing and facilitating the communicative exchanges. Their engagement during the therapeutic sessions and the way they oriented to their clients' contributions as relevant and meaningful were crucial in coconstructing the conversations and building a bond between them and the autistic participants. Moreover, through the implementation of such strategies as scaffolding or recast, the therapists actively supported their autistic interlocutors in developing their communicative skills. Finally, by examining extracts from authentic therapeutic sessions, the article also acquainted the reader with the nondirective therapy, showing how therapeutic interactions are developed in this type of ASD treatment.

As every case study, this project has its limitations. First of all, the small number of participants on the autism spectrum does not allow one to extend the conclusions over the whole autistic population. Therefore, the strengths or coping strategies depicted in this article may be idiosyncratic of particular in-

dividuals who took part in the project, regardless of their diagnosis. Next, the recorded material scrutinized in the article includes 12 hr from 27 different therapeutic sessions. Although the time frame covered in the article is quite broad (6 months), the fact that the data rarely involve whole and consecutive sessions may lead to over- or underestimation of the autistic participants, as we do not get the full picture of their abilities. Moreover, the therapeutic material analyzed in this study has been selected by the therapists, which poses a risk of nonobjectivity, as the criteria according to which they chose particular extracts remain unknown.

Implications for Practitioners

Discursive analysis of the exchanges between autistic individuals may illuminate how therapists can more effectively communicate with clients on the autism spectrum. By observing how participants with ASD achieve mutual understanding, practitioners may recognize particular discursive strategies or behaviors of their clients that lead to their successful communication (distinctive autistic styles of communication). Subsequently, they may incorporate these elements in their own conversations with autistic people. In addition, the concept of idiosyncratic communication styles of individuals with ASD calls for a change in the society's attitude (Lester, 2015). Instead of looking at autistic participants as incompetent and expecting them to adjust to the neurotypical norms, we could take a different perspective and try to find relevance in their interactional contributions (Muskett, 2017) or even treat these contributions as *compensatory adaptations*, that is, "methods used by the ASD individual to communicate in spite of their limitations" (Garcia, 2012, p. 357). This, in turn, foregrounds the role of therapists in shaping communicative exchanges with participants on the autism spectrum. Seeing the unusual communicative behaviors of their clients from the resource perspective, therapists can use autistic contributions to build therapeutic interventions around them instead of trying to eliminate or replace these specific behaviors (Prizant & Duchan, 1981; Sterponi, de Kirby, & Shankey, 2015a). Finally, taking their own utter-

ances under scrutiny (with the use of CA), professionals may improve their communicative and therapeutic practices, identifying those that lead to the expected results and those that need to be modified (Antaki, 2011; Garcia, 2012; Peräkylä & Vehviläinen, 2003; Sarangi, 2010; Stiegler, 2007).

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions (Adapted from Jefferson, 2004)

[ ]	Overlapping speech
=	"Latching" stretch of talk, that is, no discernible gap between the utterances
—	Cut-off or self-interruption
↑ ↓	Shifts into high/low pitch
(1.0)	Pause length (in seconds)
(.)	A "micropause", that is, a pause of less than a second
(())	A nonverbal activity, for example, crying; author's comments
()	The occurrence of an unclear utterance; or a removal of a part of the utterance due to privacy policy.
:::	Prolongation of immediately preceding sound. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
?	Rising intonation
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing intonation
°dog°	Lower volume than surrounding talk
< >	Slower than surrounding talk
> <	Faster than surrounding talk
<u>dog</u>	Stressed syllable
DOG	Higher volume

Appendix C: Original publication 3

Maciejewska, Eliza. 2022. "Non-directive play therapy with autistic adolescents: A qualitative study of therapists' interactional practices", *Text & Talk* 42, 3: 369-390. DOI: 10.1515/text-2020-0063

Eliza Maciejewska*

Non-directive play therapy with autistic adolescents: a qualitative study of therapists' interactional practices

Abstract: This case study identifies and examines interactional practices of non-directive play therapists during their therapeutic sessions with autistic adolescents. The study involved two therapists and two adolescents (siblings) on the autism spectrum. The video-recorded sessions took place at participants' home and were conducted in Polish. Employing insights and tools from discourse-analytic approaches, in particular conversation analysis (CA), the findings show how clients and therapists are both involved in co-constructing therapeutic interactions by orienting to each other's utterances. CA is presented in this article as a useful tool for recognizing and describing the therapists' interactional contributions and their local functions. The therapeutic practices identified in the analysis (talk-in-practice) – e.g. mirroring, meaning expansion, recast and scaffolding – are further juxtaposed with theories concerning interactional practices in non-directive therapies (talk-in-theory) in order to provide a more detailed picture of these practices as well as complete them. The findings from this study expand the current state of knowledge of non-directive play therapies of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and carry practical implications for specialists involved in ASD treatment.

Keywords: adolescents; autism spectrum disorder (ASD); conversation analysis; discourse analysis; non-directive play therapies; qualitative study

1 Introduction

According to DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association 2013), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition whose core symptoms

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include persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior. Deficits in these two areas are the basis for diagnosing ASD. Currently, the number of autistic cases is constantly growing (O'Reilly et al. 2017). Although the reason for this increase is not yet known, researchers and specialists try to address this issue by developing new therapies.

One of such therapies is Growth through Play System (GPS), developed by Kat Houghton (Houghton 2010), which "combines positively verified elements of various non-directive programs which concentrate on relations and the brain with a view to determining proper therapeutic actions that would be focused on communication, social, emotional and cognitive development" (Czyż 2013: 192). GPS, similarly to other non-directive play therapies, "is based on developmental cognitive principles which relate directly to learning and should not be confused with non-directive counselling, which is a psychotherapeutic technique" (Cogher 1999: 7).

The current article presents a case study which examines interactions between GPS therapists and their autistic clients, aiming to identify recurring patterns in the therapists' interactional behavior. The purpose of this study is threefold. Firstly, it aims to scrutinize therapists' contributions, with the use of conversation analysis (CA), and identify interactional practices they use in their work with adolescents on the autism spectrum. The next goal is to use these findings to complete the theoretical descriptions of non-directive interactional practices, as depicted in *stocks of interactional knowledge* (SIKs) (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003, see below). The final aim is to provide implications for practitioners, by demonstrating the usefulness of the conversation-analytic approach in identifying the local functions of therapists' practices in view of the therapy goals.

The article is not intended to promote a particular therapeutic method but to give an insight into non-directive ASD therapies, and show how discursive approaches can elucidate what is happening in a therapeutic session, thus broadening our knowledge of a given therapy and becoming an invaluable assessment tool for therapeutic interventions.

The article begins, in Section 2, with a brief introduction to non-directive play therapies and an explanation of the concept of SIKs (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003) as well as a selective review of previous studies. This is followed, in Section 3, by a description of the data setting and the analytic method. In Section 4, an analysis of six excerpts from the GPS therapy is presented. The article ends with a discussion, including limitations of the study and recommendations for practitioners.

2 Literature review

2.1 Non-directive play therapy

Non-directive play therapy, in particular GPS, similarly to other developmental therapies, is based on the assumption that every child develops in a specific order, and to gain abilities at a higher level, the child has to acquire more basic skills first (Bruner 1973; Houghton 2010). The role of the therapist is to diagnose the current state of the child's development and, starting from the present stage, help him or her consolidate their skills and learn new, more advanced ones.

> The system helps parents and practitioners to identify pivotal developmental steps that a child has missed and then prescribes activities that can be conducted by parents with the child in a responsive interactive manner to help the child fill developmental gaps. By focusing on missing pivotal skills and developmental steps, the GPS indirectly addresses other missing or challenged skills that depend on the pivotal skills making those skills easier to acquire and develop. (Houghton 2010: 10)

Cogher (1999: 10) lists five features of non-directive play, whose goal is to improve children's language learning:
(a) joint attention is established through following the child's lead in play;
(b) gentle challenges to children's level of learning are introduced by imitation of their behaviour or actions, and then demonstration of how these can be changed slightly and extended;
(c) children's communicative behaviours are responded to consistently and adaptively;
(d) opportunities for play routines to develop are facilitated by the adult partner;
(e) a running commentary is provided, which is timed to reflect the focus of attention and interest.

The characteristics described above belong to SIKs (see Section 2.2) of non-directive play therapies and illustrate some of the practices that are involved in this therapeutic approach.

Non-directive play therapies concentrate on improving social interactions and communication (Czyż 2013; Greenspan and Wieder 2014; Salter et al. 2016), which constitute the core problems of autistic people.

2.2 Professional stocks of interactional knowledge

An important concept that underlies data interpretation in the current article was introduced by Peräkylä and Vehviläinen (2003) under the label of 'professional

stocks of interactional knowledge' (SIKs). This term refers to "organized knowledge (theories and conceptual models) concerning interaction, shared by particular professions or practitioners" (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003: 730).

According to Peräkylä and Vehviläinen (2003), conversation analysis (CA), which is the basic analytic method applied in this article (to be discussed later), can be positioned in four different relations with SIKs. First of all, it can "falsify or correct assumptions that are part of an SIK", by comparing the theory with what is actually happening in an interaction. Next, it can "provide a more detailed picture of practices that are described in an SIK". Moreover, CA may "add a new dimension to the understanding of practices that are described in an SIK", for example, CA may show that a given practice may have some additional functions besides those described in an SIK. Finally, CA may give "the description of practices not provided by a very abstract or general SIK" (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003: 727). More precisely, based on the practices identified in the analysis, it can complete the current SIK. Consequently, the task of CA is both critical and complementary (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). It can enhance the state of knowledge regarding a given therapy as well as indicate what needs to be improved or changed.

2.3 Discourse-analytic approaches in ASD studies

Discourse and conversation analyses (DA and CA) are relatively rare in autism research, where quantitative methods are still the dominant trend. However, the gradual appreciation for these exploratory interactional approaches, which are complementary to quantitative studies, have resulted in a growing number of this type of research (O'Reilly et al. 2017). Until now, there have been discursive studies concerning, for instance, communicative competence of autistic people (Lester 2015; Maciejewska 2019), autistic language (Sterponi et al. 2015; Sterponi and de Kirby 2016), and parent-practitioner interactions (O'Reilly et al. 2017). Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, none of these studies focused on interactional practices in non-directive therapies of ASD.

3 Data and methodology

The article analyses data from a non-directive therapy of ASD (GPS). The data consist of 12 hours of video-recorded therapeutic sessions which were later transcribed according to Jeffersonian transcription conventions (see Appendix 1; Jefferson 2004) and anonymized. All sessions took place at the home of autistic participants (siblings). The participants include two intellectually disabled

adolescents on the autism spectrum, a girl aged 17 (Julia) and her brother aged 15 (Mike), and two non-directive GPS therapists in training (Anna and Elizabeth). The language of all participants was Polish.

The time of cooperation with the siblings varied for both therapists, but it was not less than six months. Some of the therapeutic sessions were joint sessions (two clients at once), others were individual, hence the need for two therapists. The recordings show therapy sessions from three different rooms in the participants' home. Each room was equipped with one camera that was placed (permanently) in the corner of the room, close to the ceiling. The intention was to minimize the influence of the camera on the clients' (and therapists') behavior.

The video material was recorded for six months (January–July 2016), as a part of the therapists' training. The therapists received feedback from their supervisors on the basis of video-recordings; however, this was not connected with the current study nor the author of this article. Importantly, although the examined recordings cover a period of six months, these were not consecutive sessions but selected therapeutic encounters from this time frame (see Section 5).

The extracts scrutinized in this article are the English translations of the Polish transcripts, which were done by the author. The analysis is based on the original Polish recordings and transcripts. The family that agreed to take part in the current study was identified through one of the autism societies in Poland.

Both the therapists and the parents of the two autistic participants received a detailed description of the project and provided their verbal consent to share the recordings for the purpose of the current study. The autistic adolescents were also informed about the study and their rights as participants. The procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee (Research Ethics Committee at Adam Mickiewicz University) and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The therapists, clients and parents were not involved in data analysis. However, the author consulted with a certified GPS therapist about her findings.

Language plays a crucial role in medical and therapeutic contexts, being the medium through which professional interventions are performed (Roberts and Sarangi 2005). Therefore, this article concentrates on language-oriented methods of analysis, providing a detailed description of therapists' contributions and scrutinizing utterances of their clients.

The analytic framework of the current study is conversation analysis (CA), understood as a micro-analytic approach within the broader domain of discourse analysis (DA) (Sarangi 2017; Sterponi and de Kirby 2016). CA is a qualitative, data-driven analytic method which focuses on the use of language and provides an in-depth analysis of a given topic (O'Reilly et al. 2016) by examining the interaction

turn-by-turn. According to this inductive analytic method "turns in conversation are inherently interlocked; a current action projects a next relevant action and often responds to a prior action" (Sterponi et al. 2015: 521). This interconnectedness of participants' utterances is known as *participants' orientations* (Maynard 2012). Furthermore, "CA views the positioning of an utterance in the ongoing conversation as fundamental to the understanding of its meaning and to the analysis of its significance as an action" (Stivers 2012: 191).

Discourse-analytic studies, especially CA studies, concentrate on *naturally occurring data*, i.e., "data that would have occurred regardless of the role of the researcher" (Lester et al. 2017: 89). CA focuses solely on talk-in-interaction (O'Reilly et al. 2016) and its *endogenous organization* (Mondada 2012). Discursive approaches assume that every interaction is a joint achievement of co-participants (Schiffrin et al. 2001), which is referred to as *co-construction*. Consequently, language is perceived as an effect of social interaction rather than manifestation of one's cognitive abilities (Sterponi et al. 2015; Sterponi and de Kirby 2016). By redefining language use in this way, CA becomes a valuable tool for scrutinizing conversational practices in the context of ASD.

This article employs the analytic framework of CA, where the investigated therapeutic contributions are analyzed with the focus on their structure and sequences within a given interaction. However, as one of the goals of the article is to provide practical implications for practitioners, the interpretations of therapists' interactional practices, which were identified with the use of CA, go beyond the context of the scrutinized data, taking into consideration the SIKs of non-directive play therapies as well as other interactional strategies. In this sense, the study touches upon DA in its broad meaning.

The current study took a form of a case study, which led to a number of limitations (see Section 5). The main causes of the small number of participants were a low popularity of non-directive play therapies of ASD in Poland, and the difficulty to obtain such sensitive data. However, the value of case studies is not to be denied, and there are a few reasons why this research method was chosen for the current study. To begin with, the case study approach gave insights into a therapeutic method that is not common enough to become the subject of a quantitative study. Next, the limited number of participants resulted in a meticulous analysis whose level of detail would be unattainable in a large-scale study. Moreover, the method of scrutinizing data applied in the current study (CA) involves an in-depth investigation of turns in an interaction, which justifies the case study approach.

4 Data analysis

The analysis in the current article focuses on the therapists' interactional practices, both verbal and non-verbal. The analyzed therapeutic contributions were chosen on the basis of their frequency – repetitive patterns that occurred throughout different therapeutic sessions – as well as the clients' orientation to a given practice, which identified a particular contribution as significant. The categorization of practices presented here resulted from the analytic process, where emerging interactional patterns were observed and their functions identified. It is important to mention that although the examples are entitled with therapeutic notions, these references were made only after the process of analysis was completed. The author's intention was to make explicit connections between the identified practices and the SIKs of a non-directive play therapy, as well as give clear implications for practitioners.

4.1 Focus on the client – joint attention

One of the core elements of non-directive therapy is the *focus on the client*. This type of therapy puts the client in the center, making him or her the leader of an inter-action (Prelock and Nelson 2012). According to Cogher (1999: 7), in the context of a child client "the work that the therapist or parent carries out is directly led by the child's current behaviour and focus of attention, resulting in appropriate social and linguistic reactions to the child's spontaneously generated actions". Example 1 illustrates the focus on the client, understood here as being attuned to the client's current interactional project and treating it as a resource for the therapist's subsequent contributions. In this extract, Julia – the autistic participant – initiates a dialogue with her therapist – Anna – asking questions about a recent situation.

Example 1 – Focus on the client

01	J (Julia):	what did Elizabeth sa:y?
02	A (Anna):	Elizabeth sa:id (1.0) she asked us, if we could
03		go to the other room↑, because she would like to
04		go with Mike for exercises↑ and **Mike does not want to go**
05		**to Julia's room** (.) °for exercises°.
06	J:	(3.0) **what Mike does <u>not</u> want?**
07	A:	Mike does not want to go to the room <u>next door</u>,
08		where we always are.
09	J:	(4.0) **what Mike does not want?**
10	A:	what am I saying that Mike does not want?

11	J:	Mike does not wa::nt to Julia's room, because I was here.
12	A:	mhm. yes, you were there, that's right.
13	J:	(3.0) **what Mike does not want?**
14	A:	Mike does not want to go to the other room (1.0)
15		he wants to have exercises here (1.0) alone with Elizabeth.

All but one contribution of Julia take the form of a direct, open-ended question. In line 01, Julia asks a question, to which the therapist (Anna) provides a detailed answer (lines 02–05). There is a self-repair at the beginning of Anna's turn ("Elizabeth said, she asked us"), which is followed by an explanation of the other therapist's action. After a 3-s gap, Julia asks another question (line 06), which has already been answered at the end of the therapist's previous turn, reiterating the words used by Anna ("Mike does not want"). This does not stop Anna from responding to the question once again, providing a more detailed explanation (lines 07–08). There is another gap followed by the same question from Julia – "what Mike does not want?" (line 09). In line 10, the therapist verifies the understanding of the participant by embedding Julia's question in her own utterance. Julia responds to the question (line 11), demonstrating that she knows the answer. Anna orients to her answer with an acknowledgement token ("mhm"), and confirms Julia's reply as correct. Moreover, the therapist alters Julia's words ("here" – "there") using a *recast* (Saxton 2005, see Section 4.5) (line 12). Nevertheless, Julia repeats the question in line 13, after another gap. The therapist (lines 14–15) answers the question once again, following the participant's interactional trajectory.

The focus on the client makes the therapist orient to the repetitive questions of the autistic participant, even though she is aware that the girl knows the answer (line 11). Instead of interrupting the flow of Julia's questions, Anna keeps answering them, waiting for the girl to finish her thread. Clearly, there is a change of interactional roles in this dialogue as the client, not the therapist, decides what their interaction will focus on next.

4.2 Mirroring

Mirroring, according to Ferrara (1994), is one of the two possible forms of repetition that can be observed in psychotherapy. Depending on the *discourse originator* (Ferrara 1994), one can distinguish *echoing* and mirroring. Echoing is client-generated, whereas mirroring is therapist-generated. As Ferrara (1994: 8) explains: "one strategic use of repetition of another's utterance displays solidarity and emphatic agreement (echoing). Another is the case of partial utterance repetition to encourage elaboration by the other (mirroring)". Mirroring is a non-directive way of

triggering the client's elaboration. Extract 2 begins at a point where the autistic client (Julia) returns to her previous conversation with the therapist (Elizabeth), concerning their nails.

Example 2 – Mirroring

01	J (Julia):	((calling the therapist by name)) Elizabeth?
02	E (Elizabeth):	((turning to Julia)) ye:s?
03	J:	and I have only white?
04	E:	let me have a look ((sitting next to Julia, looking
05		at her nails)) yes, you have white nails, with stickers,
06		very nice.
07	J:	and **I have ↑whi:te**
08	E:	mhm. **you have white**.
09	J:	**I have white**.
10	E:	**you have white**. mhm.

In line 01, Julia draws Elizabeth's attention by calling her name. After receiving a confirmation that the therapist is listening – "yes?" (line 02) – she continues, asking about the color of her nails (line 03). The therapist shows interest in the question by approaching the participant and taking a closer look at her nails. She confirms the color, white, and elaborates on other features of Julia's nails ("with stickers, very nice", lines 05–06). Julia reiterates the confirmation saying "and I have white" (line 07). Elizabeth responds with an acknowledgement marker ("mhm") and a partial repetition (mirroring) of the participant's words ("you have white", line 08). This upgraded mirroring is repeated in line 10.

This extract illustrates a number of strategies used by the therapist. First, it shows the client-centeredness of non-directive therapy. Elizabeth follows the topic initiated by Julia and shows her interest in it. Furthermore, the therapist elaborates on the topic, providing a language stimulus connected with the focus of the conversation. Finally, Elizabeth mirrors the utterances of Julia, changing the agent of the action ("I have white" – "you have white"). By using the same expression as the client, the therapist minimizes the risk of miscommunication (Saxton 2005), connected, for instance, with intellectual deficits of the client.

4.3 Meaning expansion

Meaning expansion refers to situations in which the therapist makes a seemingly irrelevant utterance of a participant meaningful in the context of their interaction.

In this way, the therapist plays a crucial role in co-constructing a legitimate communicative act (Lester 2015: 455). Lewiecki-Wilson (2003: 161) uses the term *mediated rhetoricity* to describe the language that is co-constructed by other interlocutors, such as care-givers or parents, to facilitate their communication with a person who has language difficulties. Barnes (2016) also highlights the importance of engaging conversation partners to resolve communicative problems and "reduce the linguistic burden on speakers" (p. 111) who experience interactional challenges.

Meaning expansion is in line with the idea of *proximal relevance*, introduced by Solomon (2004), where relevance is treated as relative rather than absolute. According to this concept, an utterance which is inadequate on the surface may become relevant when a broader context is taken into consideration. For instance, Capps et al. (1998: 334) observed that contributions of autistic interlocutors, which were unrelated to the discussed topic, frequently referred to "an aspect of the immediate physical environment". Example 4 illustrates a similar situation. In this excerpt, the therapist (Elizabeth) introduces a game where she is showing bowling pins in different colors to both autistic participants (Julia and Mike), and they are supposed to name an object that is of the same color.

Example 3 – Meaning expansion

((Elizabeth is showing bowling pins in different colors))

01	E (Elizabeth):	**what colo:r is this?**
02	M (Mike):	**Gregory's.**
03	E:	**BRA:VO: ((clapping)) YE:S, Gregory's tractor is green,**
04		**su:per.** ((showing a yellow bowling pin)) now Julia:
05	J (Julia):	sun.
06	E:	su:per, bra:vo. now Mike.
07	M:	**(3.0) it's hot in the summer.**
08	E:	**IT'S HOT IN THE SUMMER, OF CO:URSE. yellow color**
09		**means ho:t, su:n. oh ye:s, bravo.**

In line 01, the therapist puts a direct question to Mike, asking him to name the color. Mike, instead of providing a name of an object, gives a male name in the possessive form – "Gregory's" (line 02). Elizabeth replies with an affiliative token – "bravo" – and further confirms Mike's response, building a new, interactionally correct answer out of it (lines 03–04). Subsequently, she shows a different, yellow, bowling pin to Julia. The girl provides a correct reply (line 05), to which the therapist again responds with affiliative tokens ("super, bravo"), confirming that the answer was right (line 06). Next, she asks Mike to complete the same task. In line 07, after a 3-s gap, Mike provides another unexpected response ("it's hot in the summer"). Elizabeth acknowledges his answer as

correct and builds a broader context around it, explaining its possible meaning and making the answer relevant in the given situation. Another affiliative token ("bravo") follows (lines 08–09).

Meaning expansion plays a very important role in the positive interpretation of the autistic clients' contributions. Instead of seeing their answers as situationally inadequate, and a manifestation of deficits, the therapist shows how these answers can be relevant in a given context. Although this strategy requires more involvement from the therapist, and their familiarity with the clients' surroundings, it has a number of important functions, which makes it worth the effort. Meaning expansion not only conveys a message to the participants on the autism spectrum that they are understood by the therapist, but also makes them feel capable of providing a correct answer to the therapist's question. According to Cogher (1999: 11), in a non-directive play "[a]ttempts at communication are responded to consistently, and opportunities which arise for turn-taking and social routines are exploited. This 'contingent responsivity' gives the child the experience of effectiveness in social interaction and communication and encourages the child to build a repertoire of communication strategies".

4.4 Online commentary

The term *online commentary* comes from the medical context and it originally referred to the behavior of a doctor towards a patient where the doctor was commenting on what they were seeing, feeling or hearing while examining the patient (Heritage and Stivers 1999). In this article, online commentary denotes the behavior of the therapist where they describe and topicalize what is currently happening in an interaction or what is going to happen. Cogher (1999) refers to the same phenomenon as *running commentary*. This strategy allows the therapist to keep the participant aware of the present situation. Moreover, it serves as a language/communication stimulus, as the participants are exposed to the therapist's narrative productions. In Example 4, the therapist (Elizabeth) is playing hide-and-seek with Julia, while Mike is also present in the room. The therapist comments on what she is doing or going to do.

Example 4 – Online commentary

```
01   E (Elizabeth):   °okay, I am going to look for Julia°. Julia, Ju:lia,
02                    Julia, Ju:lia ((looks behind a roller)) she is not here.
03                    she must be under the mattress. ((lifts the mattress))
04                    I HAVE GOT YOU. oh, she is not here. (2.0)
```

05	Mike, where is Julia? (5.0) under the pillow? (3.0)
06	where is Julia? HERE SHE I::S. ((hugging Julia))
07	I've got you. I've got you Julia.

In Example 4, we can see Elizabeth providing an ongoing commentary to what she is doing. Her words are illustrated by her actions. She is also "thinking aloud", giving prompts to participants what her next step is going to be – "she must be under the mattress" (line 03). Not finding Julia under the mattress, the therapist reacts with a change-of-state token, "oh" (Stivers 2012), which is followed by a short explanation of her surprise ("she is not here", line 04). Next, Elizabeth tries to involve the other participant in the activity, asking "Mike, where is Julia?" There is a 5-s pause after which she continues the game herself. On finding Julia, the therapist loudly and enthusiastically comments on this fact: "here she is" (line 06) and strengthens her utterance, informing the participant again that the game is over: "I've got you" (line 07).

Online commentary is an important aspect of ASD therapy. It functions as a language stimulus, as the therapist provides a verbal description of the current situation. In this way, they not only give their clients an opportunity to learn or consolidate useful vocabulary but also give them a chance to experience the perspective of a different person, namely, the therapist.

4.5 Recast

The notion of *recast* has been borrowed from the field of language teaching and acquisition. It describes a technique where a teacher or a therapist repeats the incorrect utterance of a participant in a corrected form, without disturbing the communicative interaction. Very importantly, the original meaning of this utterance is preserved (Saxton 2005). According to Saxton (2005: 23), "[b]oth theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that this kind of input can facilitate the acquisition of adult-like grammatical competence". Strapp and Federico also support this point of view:

> [r]ecasts allow for direct comparison between the child's utterance and a more complex form. Attention and processing demands are low, since many of the same elements are present in the child's utterance and the recasted utterance, so even at low frequencies children are able to compare the utterances and incorporate the more complex structure into their own system. (Strapp and Federico 2000: 277)

There are two features of recasts, which have "the potential to facilitate language development: (1) adult models directly contingent on child errors; and (2) the

presentation of such models in a naturalistic, conversational manner" (Saxton 2005: 25). The theoretical background for this type of recasts is the *Direct Contrast Hypothesis:* "When negative evidence is supplied, the child may perceive the adult form as being in contrast with the equivalent child form. Cognizance of a relevant contrast can then form the basis for perceiving the adult form as a correct alternative to the child form" (Saxton 1997: 28).

In Example 5, the therapist (Elizabeth) uses a recast in order to correct Julia's utterance.

Example 5 – Recast

1 J (Julia):   'cos, 'cos **I didn't *<u>word</u>* you**?
2   ((a grammatically incorrect form of the verb 'to notice'))
3 E (Elizabeth): yeah, **you didn't notice.**

In line 01, Julia asks a question, using the grammatically incorrect form of the verb 'to notice'. Elizabeth acknowledges her utterance as relevant and answers the question with a short "yeah" (line 03). Then, the therapist provides a correction of the form of the verb, which is directly contingent on Julia's utterance ("you didn't notice", line 03).

Such corrective contributions play an important role in non-directive play therapy, where "children's communicative behaviours are responded to consistently and adaptively" (Cogher 1999: 10). Recasts serve the purpose of enhancing participants' communication skills without being directive. The therapist corrects the utterance of Julia, however, she does not stress the fact that the original version was wrong, thus preventing the client from feeling incompetent. Apart from the face-saving aspect, recasts have other advantages. Saxton (2005) claims that using the same lexical items as the participant gives the therapist greater chances to be understood by their autistic interlocutor.

4.6 Scaffolding

The basis for *scaffolding* is the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1978) in the educational setting, which denotes the abilities of a child that are not yet mastered, but possible to use with the help of a tutor. The idea is that the tutor supports the child in achieving a goal that is currently beyond the child's capabilities, thus bridging the gap between the child's actual and potential levels of development (see also Cogher 1999; Josefi and Ryan 2004). Scaffolding may take different forms,

depending on a child's developmental level, ranging from verbal instructions to demonstrations (Wood et al. 1976). Pierucci (2016) describes three scaffolding techniques: comments (direct commands or statements, including language modeling), requests (questions) and prompts (verbal or visual cues). Example 6 illustrates the first technique (language modeling). In this extract, Elizabeth (the therapist) is playing with a big, green ball, which she calls "a frog", throwing it to Julia or Mike.

Example 6 – Scaffolding

01	E (Elizabeth):	attentio:n, I am throwing a fro:g
02	J (Julia):	(2.0) **don't throw me:**
03	E:	**you can say Julia, don't throw to me:↑**
04	J:	**don't throw to me:↑**
05	E:	okay Julia:, I am throwing to Mike. attentio:n
06	J:	don't throw to me:
07	E:	okay Julia:

In this extract, the therapist gives a corrected version of the participant's incorrect utterance, thus providing a model. What differentiates this intervention from a recast is the direct correction (other-initiated other-repair) provided by the interlocutor. In line 01, Elizabeth tries to attract the participants' attention and, subsequently, informs them what is going to happen. Julia orients to the therapist's turn, saying "don't throw me" (line 02). Elizabeth corrects her request: "you can say Julia, don't throw to me" (line 03). This other-initiated other-repair is spontaneously repeated by the participant (line 04). In line 05, the therapist replies to Julia's corrected request with an acknowledgement token ("okay") and uses the correct structure once again, referring to the other participant: "I am throwing to Mike". In line 06, Julia repeats the corrected structure once again, which is acknowledged by Elizabeth (line 07).

Despite the fact that in the above example the therapist directly corrects the client, this intervention is performed in a very mild and unobtrusive way. The therapist does not require the client, for instance, to repeat the correct version; she just offers an alternative to what has been said. Her correction is presented as an option ("you can say"); therefore, her intervention is not directive. According to Cogher (1999: 11), in non-directive play "any language that the child produces is linguistically mapped into an appropriate or alternative form to enhance language opportunities".

5 Discussion and conclusion

The analytic findings demonstrate a number of practices used by non-directive therapists, which have been examined for their interactional importance by applying the insights from CA. The common element of the observed practices is the therapists' interactional *hyper presence* – acute awareness of the client's local behavior (including language) – and drawing on the client's proffered interactional input regardless of its contextual appropriateness. The findings from the analysis are further juxtaposed with non-directive play therapy's features (Cogher 1999) and goals included in professional stocks of interactional knowledge (SIKs) of this therapeutic approach, in order to provide a detailed description of practices described in SIKs and complete them. By referring to the external context of the conversation (SIKs), the study expands its CA scope and provides DA-informed insights.

The first practice was *the focus on the client,* which involved episodes of joint attention between the client and the therapist, and following the client's lead. Another point of analytic interest was *mirroring*, where the therapist partially repeated the utterances of the participant, thus minimizing the risk of misunderstanding and showing their interest in the participant's contribution. Both therapeutic strategies put the client in the role of a leader and encourage the individual on the autism spectrum to actively participate in a given interaction. The subsequent practice was *meaning expansion*, defined as a verbal strategy which enables the therapist to attach meaning to the client's utterance by referring to the concept of *proximal relevance* (Solomon 2004). In Example 3, the client had to cope with a particular situation (a task from the therapist). Although his efforts were seemingly unsuccessful, they were positively interpreted by the therapist, who made the client's utterances relevant in the given situational context. Meaning expansion is a strategy that helps the client feel well-understood, and also has the potential to increase the autistic participant's self-esteem, presenting them as competent interlocutors. The next practice was *online commentary*, which aimed to explain the current situation to the client as well as provide them with a language stimulus (the narrative production of the therapist). The last but one therapeutic contribution was *recast*, described as a form of indirect correction which helps improve communicative skills. Finally, *scaffolding*, or more precisely one of the techniques it involves – *modeling* – was introduced as a direct (but not directive) repair.

The use of discursively-informed CA enabled a detailed description of the practices that are included in SIKs concerning non-directive therapies. It also pointed to some practices that are not explicitly mentioned in SIKs for this type of therapy, but appear in other types of professional interventions, e.g. psychotherapy

(mirroring) or language teaching (recast). Therefore, CA can become the basis for verification and re-assessment of current ASD therapies (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). By analyzing what is actually happening in an interaction turn-by-turn and comparing it with the SIKs of a given therapy, therapists can gain a broader perspective and adjust their interventions to be more effective and coherent with the therapy's concept. Next, CA helps develop understanding among therapists. By showing them exactly what they do in their therapeutic sessions and how their clients orient to their interventions, CA has the potential to make them aware of the practices that bring expected results and those which are less effective. Based on this knowledge, the therapists can consciously monitor and change their contributions in order to achieve what is expected at a given stage of therapy. CA may also help discover some new functions of well-established practices, which have been omitted in an SIK. Moreover, CA may identify some new practices, not included in an SIK, thus broadening the current state of knowledge of ASD therapies and completing the variety of therapeutic methods.

Furthermore, the idea of *co-construction*, which is one of the basic premises of discourse-analytic approaches, makes both participants responsible for the outcome of the conversation. This is very important as it discourages looking for deficits in one, usually autistic, interlocutor, and welcomes the sense-making approach, where difficulties are not seen as stable features of one party, but rather as a failure in the process of interaction, which can be fixed. Following Kristiansen et al. (2017: 393) the focus of analysis is "on 'deviance' as a means for highlighting the sense-making practices that are taken for granted and remain largely invisible in the seamless co-construction of mutual understanding that overwhelmingly characterizes 'typical interaction'". In the light of a growing number of ASD diagnoses, it is salient to further investigate this topic and constantly improve the available methods of ASD treatment as well as develop new ones.

Therefore, the current study aimed to fill in the gap in language-based qualitative studies of non-directive therapies of ASD, represented by GPS. The study provides valuable observations about this therapy by focusing on the therapists rather than the autistic participants, and analyzing the therapists' practices in the local context. Consequently, it gives an insight into non-directive therapies of ASD, and shows how discursive approaches can help illuminate the intricacies of a therapeutic interaction. The study presents six therapeutic practices described above, which were identified with the use of CA, and subsequently interpreted in view of SIKs of non-directive play therapies. This juxtaposition enabled the verification of how theoretical assumptions of SIKs (talk-in-theory) are present in real therapeutic encounters (talk-in-practice). The findings reveal some practices (e.g. mirroring) which are not acknowledged among the typical elements of this therapeutic approach, thus completing the current SIKs of non-directive play therapies of ASD.

The study has a number of limitations. First of all, the video recordings analyzed in this project do not include the beginning and the end of the therapy, which makes it difficult to interpret the data, for instance, in terms of the autistic participants' progress or the effectiveness of the therapists' contributions. Moreover, the 12 hours of recordings are taken from different sessions, which took place over a period of six months. Such scattered material makes it impossible to notice how certain goals have been achieved. The sessions have been recorded for the therapists' educational purposes, independent of the current project, which enabled to avoid the *observer's paradox* (Labov 1972). Nevertheless, the recordings which have been analyzed in this article were selected by the therapists themselves, which poses a risk of non-objectivity. Finally, the limited number of participants on the autism spectrum (two adolescents) does not allow one to generalize the findings over the whole autistic population. The same limitation refers to therapists: the small number of therapists (two) and the fact that they work with the same clients and cooperate with one another (which may mutually influence their styles of work) prevent drawing general conclusions regarding the non-directive therapy they represent.

Future studies should aim to analyze the whole therapeutic process, which could be more revealing about the strategies of non-directive therapy and their effectiveness. It would also enable researchers to observe the progress of autistic participants. Additionally, it would be advisable to compare a number of therapist-client pairs from within the same therapeutic approach. This would allow one to see which interventions result from the therapeutic method and which are the consequence of some therapists' preferences or their adjustments to their clients' needs.

Appendix 1: Transcription conventions – adapted from Jefferson 2004

↑↓	Shifts into high/low pitch
(1.0)	Pause length (in seconds)
(.)	A 'micropause', i.e., a pause of less than a second
(( ))	A nonverbal activity, e.g., crying; author's comments
:::	Prolongation of immediately preceding sound. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.

?	Rising intonation
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuing intonation
°dog°	Lower volume than surrounding talk
<u>dog</u>	Stressed syllable
DOG	Higher volume

Appendix 2: Polish transcription

Example 1 Focus on the client – joint attention

01	J (Julia):	co Elizabeth powiedziała:?
02	A (Anna):	Elizabeth powiedziała:, się zapytała nas, czy możemy
03		przejść do drugiego pokoju↑, bo chciałaby
04		iść sama z Mike'm na ćwiczenia↑ a **Mike nie chce iść**
05		**do pokoju Julii** (.) ˚na ćwiczenia˚.
06	J:	(0.3) **co Mike <u>nie</u> chce?**
07	A:	Mike nie chce iść do tego pokoju <u>obok</u>,
08		w którym my zawsze jesteśmy.
09	J:	(0.4) **co Mike nie chce?**
10	A:	a co ja mówię że Mike nie chce?
11	J:	Mike nie chce:: do pokoju Julii, bo ja tu byłam.
12	A:	mhm. tak, ty tam byłaś, racja.
13	J:	(0.3) **co Mike nie chce?**
14	A:	Mike nie chce iść do drugiego pokoju (1.0)
15		chce tutaj mieć ćwiczenia (1.0) sam z Elizabeth.

Example 2 Mirroring

01	J (Julia):	((woła terapeutkę po imieniu)) Elizabeth?
02	E (Elizabeth):	((odwraca się do Julii)) słucha:m?
03	J:	a ja mam tylko białe?
04	E:	pokaż ((siada obok Julii, ogląda
05		jej paznokcie)) tak, ty masz białe paznokcie, z naklejkami,
06		bardzo ładne.
07	J:	a **ja mam ↑bia:łe**
08	E:	mhm. **masz białe.**
09	J:	**ja mam białe.**
10	E:	**masz białe**. mhm.

Example 3 Meaning expansion

((Elizabeth pokazuje kręgle w różnych kolorach))
01	E (Elizabeth):	**to jest jaki kolo:r?**
02	M (Mike):	**Grzegorza.**
03	E:	**BRA:WO: ((klaszcze)) TA:K, Grzegorza traktor jest zielony,**
04		**su:per**. ((pokazuje żółty kręgiel)) teraz Julia:
05	J (Julia):	słoneczko.
06	E:	su:per, bra:wo. teraz Mike.
07	M:	(3.0) **latem jest gorąco**.
08	E:	**LATEM JEST GORĄCO, JA:SNE. żółty kolor**
09		to jest gorą:co, słoneczko:, oj ta:k, brawo.

Example 4 Online commentary

01	E (Elizabeth):	°okej, idę szukać Julii°. Julia, Ju:lia,
02		Julia, Ju:lia ((zagląda za walec)) tu nie ma.
03		pod materacem na pewno siedzi. ((podnosi materac))
04		MAM CIĘ. No, nie ma jej. (2.0)
05		Mike, gdzie jest Julia? (5.0) pod poduszką? (3.0)
06		gdzie jest ta Julia? JE::ST ((przytula Julię))
07		mam cię. mam cię Julia.

Example 5 Recast

01	J (Julia):	bo cię, bo **cię nie uważyłam**?
02	E (Elizabeth):	No, **nie zauważyłaś.**

Example 6 Scaffolding

01	E (Elizabeth):	uwaga:, rzucam żabę:
02	J (Julia):	(2.0) **nie rzucaj mnie:**
03	E:	**możesz powiedzieć Julia, nie rzucaj do mnie:↑**
04	J:	**nie rzucaj do mnie:↑**
05	E:	dobra Julia:, rzucam do Mike'a. uwaga:
06	J:	nie rzucaj do mnie:
07	E:	dobra Julia:

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