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Joint Attention and Oromotor Abilities in Young Children With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Highlights
- Sequencing oromotor movements is correlated with joint attention in children with ASD.
- Multi-modal speech cues increased oromotor imitation performance in young children.
- Some verbal preschool children with ASD exhibit oromotor imitation deficits.

Abstract

Purpose
This study examined the relationship between joint attention ability and oromotor imitation skill in three groups of young children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder using both nonverbal oral and verbal motor imitation tasks. Research questions addressed a) differences among joint attention and oromotor imitation abilities; b) the relationship between independently measured joint attention and oromotor imitation, both nonverbal oral and verbal motor; c) the relationships between joint attention and verbal motor imitation during interpersonal interaction; and d) the relationship between the sensory input demands (auditory, visual, and tactile) and oromotor imitation, both nonverbal oral and verbal motor.

Method
A descriptive, nonexperimental design was used to compare joint attention and oromotor skills of 10 preschool-aged children with ASD, with those of two control groups: 6 typically developing children (TD), and 6 children with suspected Childhood Apraxia of Speech (sCAS) or apraxic-like symptoms. All children had at least a 3.0 mean length utterance.

Results
Children with ASD had poorer joint attention skills overall than children with sCAS or typically developing children. Typically developing children demonstrated higher verbal motor imitation skills overall compared to children with sCAS.
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