

# The Natural Language Acquisition Guide: 'Echolalia' is all about gestalt language development

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Marge Blanc, M.A. CCC-SLP

Illustrated by Jon G. Lyon

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## 'Delayed echolalia'! It's all about gestalt language development!

Welcome to an adventure in natural language development — one in which you are a crucial player, because you support a child or young adult who is using, and probably developing, language — naturally — the gestalt way!

Please join our growing community of people who understand that gestalt language processing and gestalt language development are natural, and all around us. Your eyes will be opened.

To get you started, please read these 'echolalic'/gestalt comments, and realize something profound.

These phrases and others like them are vitally important because they make up the first, critical stage of language development, real language development, for children and young adults who process and store language gestalts. When they use them later, their echolalia is 'delayed,' which is how that term was coined. But more accurately, these individuals are gestalt language processors (GLPs) and they develop language naturally! They start with whole 'chunks' of language: some short, some long — some from media, some from songs, and plenty from the other people in their lives, including you! From now on, you will never see



echolalia the same way! It is gestalt language processing — and gestalt language processors use their gestalts to communicate, and in natural language development!

See if you recognize these common gestalts:

- “Howyadoin?”
- “Wow!”
- “Toinfinityandbeyond!”
- “Letsgetoutofhere!”
- “Wantsomemore?”
- “Abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz”
- “Happybirthdaytoyou”
- “Ifyourehappyandyouknowitclapyourhands”

See what we mean? Familiar language, often spoken indistinctly, often melodically, and sometimes not spoken at all, but cued up on YouTube, ready to be played — and shared. And, yes, echolalia communicates. So, get ready to learn more!

**First some background:**

Research in the natural development of language is foundational to the field of Speech-Language Pathology. More than two decades



of research was summarized by Ann Peters (1983) and Barry Prizant (1983). Re-released by Ann Peters in 2021, *The Units of Language Acquisition* describes how children naturally acquire their first ‘units of meaning’ from the speech stream around them. Some ‘units’ are single words, often the ones parents ‘reference’ by pointing, looking, and naming. These words provide the foundation for what we have called ‘typical language development.’ More accurately, this is ‘analytic

language development,' the kind we are most familiar with, in which analytic language processors (ALPs) start with single words, then develop two-word combinations, then short phrases — and longer sentences.

But there are other kinds of 'units' — gestalt units. The word 'gestalt' means 'whole' in German, so 'gestalt units' are typically long 'wholes,' whole sentences, whole songs, whole stories. And GLPs naturally recognize their importance when they hear them because they're part of whole experiences. Gestalts are like the sound track of experiences, or life episodes. And when they're spoken or sung in their environment, children recognize their boundaries by the silences that surround them. The speaker or singer pauses momentarily, and gestalt kids pay attention. These 'units' are whole chunks of language, and if spoken/sung/ accessed later ('delayed echolalia'), they become/make up the foundation of gestalt language development. Yes, they can be single words like "Wow!" or "No!" but are more often longer. "How ya doin'?" "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands; if you're happy..." The language of any important experience or 'episode' of life might be a gestalt that a child spontaneously acquires and uses later. And any language 'whole' that is acquired naturally represents a 'unit of meaning' for a gestalt child. The meaning isn't the adult definition, but the emotional/social 'whole' of the situation as experienced by the child: happy moments expressed by the two examples above, and other emotion-filled moments experienced in real life or via media.

The meaning of any gestalt is singular to the individual who picks it up. As the sound track of an important experience, a language gestalt carries the emotion felt by the GLP at the time. "We gotta get going" says Mom as she herds the kids towards the door. "I don't wanna go" responds big brother as he pulls away. The feelings of the situation matter to the younger sibling, and "I don't wanna go" is the sound track of resistance. But big sister is excited. "Yay, let's get McNuggets!" she shouts as she prances towards the door, and the gestalt of a fun-filled adventure includes a very different sound track. "Yeh geh nuheh!" our little gestalt processor yells and he's ready to go.

See how natural this all sounds? It is all spontaneous extraction of meaning from the 'language soup' that young ones are immersed in whether by single word pointing and referencing for analytic processors, or multi-word 'gestalts' for gestalt processors, delivered with emotion-filled intonation.

Barry Prizant and colleagues recognized this natural process in autistic children who used ‘delayed echolalia.’ And even more exciting, using Ann Peters’ description of gestalt language processing, they discovered that ‘delayed echolalia’ in autism changes over time, just like with neurotypicals, and develops into spontaneous, self-generated language. Prizant presented this natural process as four consecutive stages, developing from gestalts at Stage 1 to self-generated language at Stage 4. As it had for neurotypicals, this natural process became part of the literature on language development in autism!

## **Natural Language Acquisition and Gestalt Language Processing**

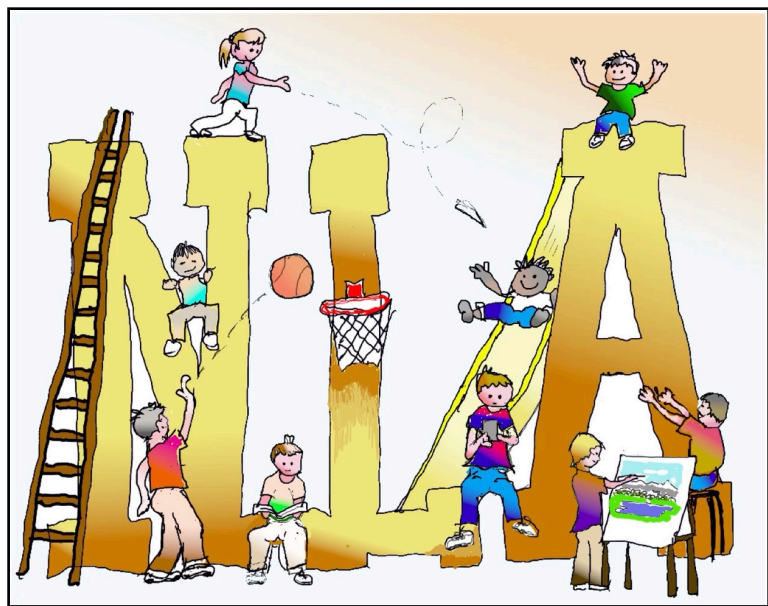
Using the framework discovered by Barry Prizant and colleagues with autistic children, our clinic collected longitudinal data on the language development of autistic children, and other GLPs who were our clients. At a time when even the intentionality of autistic children was questioned, we elicited and analyzed longitudinal language samples, describing that four-stage process in detail. As the data emerged, we recognized two additional stages, Stages 5 and 6 which acknowledged more advanced grammatical development detailed by Developmental Sentence Analysis (L. Lee, 1974).

Calling this process ‘Natural Language Acquisition,’ we highlighted the natural quality of this progression, distancing it from the pathologizing history of ‘echolalia.’ Almost all our clients were autistic, but we found the same process in our neurotypical gestalt clients as well. In 2005, preliminary NLA data were first published in the *Autism-Aspergers Digest* as, “Finding the Words: to Tell the Whole Story.” With greater longitudinal data, we presented NLA in the book, *Natural Language Acquisition on the Autism Spectrum: the Journey from Echolalia to Self-Generated Language* (M. Blanc, 2012). The longitudinal data Barry Prizant had felt was necessary in 1983 was finally there, and in 2015 Prizant endorsed the book as “the most comprehensive consideration of echolalia and language characteristics of persons with autism to date.”

To reiterate the connection between Natural Language Acquisition and gestalt language development, NLA is a detailed description of the natural gestalt language development process — detailed by longitudinal language development data. NLA describes the four developmental stages identified by Prizant and colleagues, expands these to six, and quantifies them so the natural language of

each gestalt processor can be assessed, followed, and used in planning natural environmental supports at each stage.

Data-collection was part of regular clinical services. The children were all receiving speech and language services at the Communication



Development Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and data collection was through natural language sampling using the guidelines developed by Laura Lee (1971). Since almost all clients were autistic, ranging in age from three to eighteen, their language development data served to expand the documentation of Prizant and colleagues. Like the classic ‘intonation babies’ described by early qualitative researchers, these were all gestalt processors whose musicality, frequent lack of intelligibility, and general lack of referential language distinguished them from the classic ‘word babies’ known in the research literature as ‘analytic processors.’

The NLA book served to complete the story begun many years earlier by Barry Prizant and others. As noted by Prizant in 2015, “In this seminal work, Marge Blanc, an experienced clinician and clinical researcher, brings us back to a crucial understanding of language characteristics and language acquisition in ASD based on her deep understanding of language development from a social-pragmatic, child-centered perspective.”

The NLA book became the cornerstone of the courses, trainings, webinars, and podcasts which have followed in these venues among others: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Northern Speech Services, Natural Communication, Uncleft, Inc, The Gestalt Get-Together, New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence, Meaningful Speech, a large number of Instagram accounts, and a variety of Facebook groups, including AAC and Gestalt Language Development, Canadian SLPs and CDAs for Natural Language Acquisition, a UK/Ireland study group, a Spanish language group, and a francophone group in Canada. In addition, the Communication Development Center website has become a home for existing qualitative and anecdotal data, a registry of NLA SLPs, and a place to expand internationally.

## Gestalt Language Development and Analytic Language Development

Having introduced the process of gestalt language development, it's now time to revisit the larger context of language development for all children. The two defined styles of language development, ALP and GLP, represent the ends of a natural continuum that extends from one extreme to the other. Less clear-cut are the varieties of a combined process (A. Peters, 1983) which is most-often witnessed only by parents - as it tends to go 'under the radar,' because unintelligible utterances are seen only as 'jargon,' until clear phrases and sentences emerge. SLP/SLTs infrequently see this process in clinical situations because language tends to develop fairly seamlessly, with the 'best of all worlds' available to the 'dual processor.' But this continuum is important to the big picture, and in fact is the big picture! We eagerly try to read all the stories about dual processors who develop meaningful utterance 'frames' and the single words to fill in the movable 'slots' within them, as described by Ann Peters.

Now let's go back to what most of us know: the style of acquiring 'units of meaning' first through single words as 'analytic processing.' This is the familiar process in which single-word 'units' become the building blocks of phrases and sentences. ALP is easy-to-recognize because it seems straight forward and looks 'transparent' to us. Much of the child development literature refers to it as 'typical,' even though we now know it is just one style of 'typical,' or, more accurately, one end of the typical continuum.

In contrast to ALP, the other defined style of naturally acquiring language, gestalt language development, may be harder to recognize, but perhaps no less common. Gestalts are often identified by their melody, sometimes songs sung without identifiable words, or intonational contours spoken without identifiable speech sounds. Since long multi-word gestalt units are hard for young children to say, they are most-often unintelligible. We





misunderstand, and call this language ‘jargon.’ Far from jargon, these gestalts are just as meaningful as single words, and generally more-so because they represent whole events. They are just harder to understand and their meaning is harder to decipher. They are spoken later (‘delayed’ in time) so their origin is often a mystery (to us). Sometimes called ‘unconventional,’ they are anything but, just longer, harder to say, and harder (for us) to match with meaning.

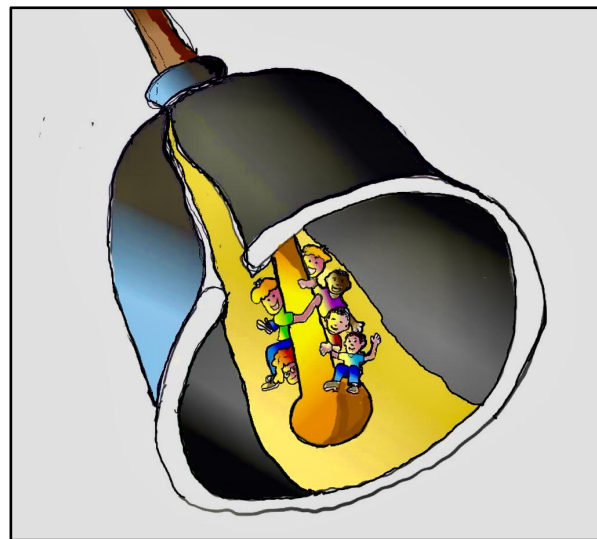
To complicate matters (for us), some of these gestalts come from sources other than everyday language, often media, so uninformed people may think gestalt processors are ‘just echoing,’ ‘just stimming,’ or using echolalia that should be ignored. Gestalt processors are very often misunderstood, and need our understanding. A poignant quote comes from a source included in a recent survey of the literature, “Repeating purposefully: Empowering educators with functional communication models of echolalia in Autism” (E Cohn, K McVilly, M Harrison, L Stiegler, 2022) “Dyer and Hadden...offered a six-category model of communicative functions in delayed echolalia...and pointed out that the onus is on the communicative partner to discover what the Echolalic is attempting to say.” They wrote, “Often it is only the person who manages to deduce the ‘clue’ who can make a response that does not lead to panic in the autistic child at not being understood.” (Dyer & Hadden, 1981). As any of us knows, the importance of being understood as a communicator cannot be overestimated.

### **Older individuals have time for gestalt language development**

The good news for GLPs is that once we understand the process, we can help. Too often, people have thought that children older than 6 or 7 were too old to acquire grammatical language. If a child is autistic, we have often presumed they were incapable of developmental language at all. When we underestimate minimally-speaking and unintelligible children, we sometimes decide to ‘teach’ them to say (or access) rote language instead. If they are considered ‘disordered analytic processors’ instead of gestalt language processors, they are then subjected to drills and prompts to say the things they are not neurologically-designed to say. They are met with IEP goals that target seemingly-functional phrases like, “I want...” and “I need help, please,” on the premise that these ‘language skills’ or ‘language behaviors’ will at least give them something to say in order to make choices and begin to advocate for themselves.

This compensatory strategy is misguided, however, undermining both neurodivergent and neurotypical gestalt processors, and interfering with natural language development. Your understanding of NLA is changing all of that. Sharing among SLPs and parents has filled in many of the gaps in our qualitative data bank, and the various NLA groups, regionally and on Facebook, abound with success stories about gestalt language processors who are being supported naturally and successfully as they move toward self-generated, and naturally-acquired grammar. Additionally, collaboration between parents and experts in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and literacy are paving the way for language development among multi-modal, non-speaking, minimally-speaking, and unreliably-speaking gestalt language processors.

Children who could have been misunderstood are now being understood, and are proving their capacity for language development — even into their teens and 20's, as long as they have begun by age 9 or 10. While progress is certainly possible for individuals recognized as GLPs at an older age, it is yet-unknown if useful grammar will be achieved and reliably-accessed. But even being able to change/mitigate gestalts (Stage 2) to make them more flexible increases communicative success significantly! The light is coming in through the 'crack in the bell,' and GLPs are resonating with that light!



We want to continue this enlightenment! To do so, what do we need to do? What are the basics of language development that we all need to understand? Here are the first ones:



- (1) some children use an analytic language development process much more than a gestalt language development process
- (2) other children use the gestalt process much more
- (3) some children are able to use both. Generally speaking, the younger the child, the less it matters which style is dominant if both styles are supported by our use of natural/gestalt language.

With a finite number of gestalts in their minds, young gestalt processors can often break down their gestalts between the ages of 12 and 36 months, discover the parts, and then the single words, within them — and start to build phrases and sentences much like analytic processors. They may be (relatively) ‘delayed,’ but catch up with their analytic peers. This is especially true when someone recognizes their process, and ensures that they hear everyday language that is easy to break down and recombine for more flexible communication.

Very young children using both styles of language processing were reported in the original research — and with the re-releasing of Ann Peters’ work in 2021, reported again today. We would love to hear from parents of such children as we look towards a new wave of qualitative research. So-called ‘dual processors’ can pick up ‘Fivelittlemonkeysjumpingonabed’ as a whole — melodic but unclear — gestalt, and ‘trampoline’ as an important single word, and sing “Fivelittlemonkeysjumpingonatrapoline.” As mentioned previously, this combined style was described by the ‘frame and slot’ research of Ann Peters, so we know it can quickly lead to further language development. With the combined support of families and their SLPs, such children’s progress promises to expand our understanding of language processing. Please pay attention to your child and believe in their process. Please report back to us; we are listening.

### **The trajectory of language development from a gestalt perspective**

To illustrate the entire process of gestalt language development, let’s look at an overview of how it progresses over time. While this ongoing process is never completely predictable or ‘clean,’ and its often-simultaneous parts are exciting to witness, the general trajectory described by Natural Language Acquisition allows us to naturally support our children and young adults along the way. NLA gives us the confidence to believe in our gestalt language processors!

Natural Language Acquisition Stage	
1	Language gestalts (wholes, scripts, songs, episodes)
2	Mitigations (mitigated gestalts, partial scripts) Mix and match combinations of partial scripts
3	Isolated single words Two-word combinations of referential single words
4	Original phrases and beginning sentences
5	Original sentences with more complex grammar
6	Original sentences leading to a complete grammar system

Stages 1 and 2 address language gestalts and their mitigations. At Stage 3, further mitigation into single words appears, and the emphasis shifts to isolating the building blocks of future grammatical utterances. At Stage 3, GLPs show the qualities ALPs demonstrate as they begin their analytic language journeys with single words: pointing, referential naming, greater speech clarity, and pausing to consider the next referential word to be chosen — qualities that suggest the greater volitional nature of Stage 3. These new qualities in language processing usher in the shift to the semantic relationships coded by grammar at Stage 4, and then more advanced grammar at Stages 5 and 6.

The next three displays are expansions of the first chart. Stage 1 utterances are followed as they are changed/shortened/mitigated, ‘mixed and matched,’ and

made more flexible so they can be used in a greater variety of situations. Children are amply rewarded then, as people are much more aware that they are speaking in a way we understand — and communicating. Some Stage 2 communicators are so facile with their mitigations, in fact, that they are seen as using original grammar, which they are not. At Stage 3, single words are first derived from mitigations, and then other single words are used referentially for the first time. At Stage 4, referential single words are then combined into completely original utterances through the use of beginning grammar.

The next chart shows the first two stages, starting with the use of stored/processed gestalts at Stage 1. As we have said, gestalts can be as short as one word like ‘Wow!’ or ‘Thanks!’ and as long as whole books and movies. Stage 2 follows with any of three processes: shortening of long gestalts, dividing gestalts into parts, and recombining parts in a ‘mix-and-match’ fashion.

**1 Storing, processing, and use of whole language gestalts**

“Let’s get out of here!”

“Want some more?”

“ABCDEFGHijklmnop”

“Upabovetheworldsohigh”

**2 Mitigating gestalts and use of mitigations**

**2a Shortening long gestalts**

“ABCDEFG” “So high”

**2b Dividing gestalts into smaller chunks**

“Let’s get” + “out of here!”

“Want” + “some more?”

**2c Combining smaller chunks to create new utterances**

“Let’s get + some more!”

“Want + out of here?”

The next chart shows the second mitigation step, where GLPs naturally divide shorter Stage 2 chunks into single words and/or single word combos. Spending adequate time at Stage 2 is necessary for Stage 3 readiness, so we should not attempt to lead children to Stage 3. As a natural step in the process, Stage 3 happens in due time, and we should not try to rush it. GLPs always lead to Stage 3. But when Stage 3 spontaneously happens, it is like a (very gentle) light bulb moment. Children in our research and since have all sounded quietly perplexed, thoughtful, and even pensive when it happens to them, and even without neuroscience to confirm what we see clinically, it feels like witnessing a true ‘brain shift’ from right-brain episodic language to left-brain referential language. The child’s world seems to stand still for a moment. When we quietly realize this magic moment, we react thoughtfully by taking a conversational turn to gently continue the conversation so the child can truly live this pause.

At a practical level, Stage 3 launches vocabulary-development, beginning with a period of referential pointing and eye gaze as we ‘refer’ to nouns, locations, and qualities with the child, much like the ‘Mommy + sock’ combinations that precede grammar development in analytic processing. Our support at Stage 3 is the partnership we give our children as we refer to other noun + noun, noun + descriptor, and noun + location combinations together. We model combos we can see, touch, or hold, references in our environment. We refer to one word ... then another word. Our pause between words amplifies the fact that these are combos of words, not phrases. Please pause right now! And try it for yourself!

We take turns, and we play with language that has no particular word order, avoids grammar, and helps prepare children for the next Stage, the addition of more semantic relationships, those expressed through word order and grammar. It is highly important that the referential combos at Stage 3 make a solid impression on gestalt language processors as they transition to Stage 4. Very young children may be ready for the transition in a day or within a few weeks. Elementary-age students may take several weeks or months before they’re ready. But as long as children start when they are young (we have documented age 9;10), they can take as long as they need, and will then be ready for grammar.

We should note that during this Stage 3 period, children are using language at Stages 1 and 2 as well. We do not expect children to engage in Stage 3

conversations throughout their day. But they sprinkle in single words and two-word combos naturally. We note those times and play with single words then, and we make sure to use supported Stage 3 practice several times a day.

**3a Further mitigating/dividing Stage 2 mitigations into single words that sound like mitigations of Stage 2**

“Get ... more” “Want ... out?” [from our earlier example]

“I ...toy” “Daddy ... ball” “Three ... wood” [from case examples]

**3b Creating combinations of two referential words**

‘Ball...there’ ‘Ball...here’ ‘Red...ball’ ‘Red...blue’ ‘Floor...table’

‘Ball...floor’ ‘Table...there’ ‘Here... chair’ ‘Outside... kitty’

‘Door...window’ ‘Kitty...window’ ‘Tree...flower’ ‘Rain...

puddle’ ‘Rain...cloud’ ‘Raincoat...snow’ ‘Boot...snow’ ‘Foot...

boot’ ‘Coat...fuzzy’ ‘Mommy...coat’ ‘Coat...hanger’ ‘Closet...coat’

The chart on page 15 shows the process of creating two and three-word combinations at Stage 4. Stage 4 begins with pre-sentence grammar, and is really a continuation of Stage 3: expressing conceptual and semantic relationships that involve all types of grammar: verbs, pronouns, wh-question words, conjunctions, negatives — all at the pre-sentence level. This is where Developmental Sentence Types (DST) is invaluable as a guide to the semantic relationships that precede sentences. Stage 4 grammar naturally moves from pre-sentence grammar to sentence grammar once the semantic relationships of DST have been explored.

Sentence-level grammar is outlined in Developmental Sentence Scoring (DSS), and the beauty of its natural progression is that the constructions at each level make up the foundation of the constructions at the next higher level. For that reason, it behooves us to be aware of all the DSS Levels 1-3 structures as our child enters Stage 4. For GLPs, we find that the structures at DSS Levels 1-3 develop at about the same time, so we can feel free to use almost any of them in

our own natural language. It takes some practice for us to stay within Stage 4 in our own conversation, but once we get used to the possibilities and limitations of Levels 1-3, it can become almost second-nature to us. Once we can use these structures to express ourselves, we can adopt the ‘mix-and-match’ of grammatical elements in our own exchanges with our children just like we did with Stage 2 mitigations.

We know that language modeling should never stray from meaningful contexts, however. We use meaning as our guide always. Function remains our focus, with form being just a ‘tool.’ Stage 4 grammar is always experimental, and continues to reflect semantic relationships more than accuracy. We never want to ‘correct’ a child’s experimental grammar or ‘expect’ a child to ‘say-what-we-say.’ Another caveat at Stage 4 is to refrain from using the hallmark words from Stages 1 and 2. Avoiding ‘mini-chunks’ like ‘It’s...,’ ‘I’m...,’ ‘Let’s...,’ etc. will help keep our GLPs from retreating back to the familiar world of Stage 2 mitigations. Instead, we help break up mini-chunks in ways we will discuss soon. Likewise, we refrain from using ‘you’ until later in Stage 4, to avoid that pronoun until ‘I’ as a single word is used solidly.

Stages 5 and 6 continue the self-generating process, with the order of grammar development reflected in the work of Laura Lee’s description of the eight levels of self-generated grammar development. Equated to NLA Stages, NLA Stage 4 = DSS 1-3; NLA Stage 5 = DSS 4-6; NLA Stage 6 = DSS 7-8. Stages 5 and 6 naturally follow Stage 4 when GLPs are ready, and even though ‘form’ does become more complex, the value of grammatical structures remains grounded in function. Stages 5 and 6 are the higher levels of grammar for analytic processors as well, with the caveat that our GLPs may be tempted at various junctures to ‘revert’ to the old, mitigated gestalts under some conditions. Dysregulation is one of them, as retrieving/finding words and grammatical structures takes time and thoughtfulness. When formulation is taxing, old gestalts and mitigations may be accessed more automatically. Having them to fall back on can be very useful as well, as long as we remain aware of our children’s two processes: more-automatic gestalts vs more-thoughtful formulations.

The following chart shows the three Stages of self-generated grammar, with particular emphasis on the three phases of Stage 4: first pre-sentence phrases (4a), first sentences (4b), and all basic sentence patterns (4c). Stage 4 takes considerable time, but the results are astounding. The utterances included in the



chart show just the linguistics of them. The development of them is far from smooth, however, because the GLP is starting grammar development ‘from scratch,’ and relying on us to support them. We will address that in the next section of this Guide, but suffice it to say, it happens!

**4a Generating first phrases**

‘water...get it’ ‘got...water dish’ ‘clean now?’ ‘where dish?’ ‘not dish blue’ ‘and red?’ ‘because! ... cold!’ ‘(take) take out’ ‘maybe not out’

**4b Generating first sentences**

‘Kitty ... get (wa...)...more water.’

‘I get (more) more water ... kitty’

‘Kitty want out?’

**4c Generating all basic sentence patterns**

‘My kitty (like)...likes to play with his toys.’

‘My kitty and me (are) are good friends.’

‘We played in the snow (I)...last winter.’

‘Is your kitty climbing that tree?’

**5 Generating more complex sentences**

‘How long do you wanna play outside?’

‘Can we play with the kitty outside?’

**6 More advanced grammar; a complete grammar is developed**

‘I don’t think we can play outside if we want to play with the kitty!’

‘Do you think it’s ok to leave the kitty all alone for about an hour?’

‘I know what we can do: play together so kitty won’t get bored.’

The entire process of gestalt language development is exquisite, and fully natural. If it seemed ‘strange’ to us at first to begin language development with gestalts, we have only to wait for the child to begin to move through the Stages in their language development to see how natural it is. The gestalt process does not need to ‘make sense’ to us because it makes sense to the gestalt child.

Our description of the NLA Stages is now complete and leads us to the natural supports at each stage of gestalt language processing. This section begins with natural supports at all Stages, including the foundational pieces of establishing trust, engaging in regulating activity, and observing so we can follow the individual's lead in play or activity, and superimpose language on real life events.

## **Natural support for gestalt language development:**

### **At all Stages: trust, regulation, observation**

Language develops naturally if we recognize the processes involved and partner with our children. That means recognizing analytic processing and/vs gestalt processing, knowing the stages of language development for each style, and allowing each individual adequate time at each stage. But the foundation also includes deeper principles of child development. It all begins with trust. Trust defines a supportive relationship with the child, and it is up to us to earn and keep that trust. Without trust, we have little right to try to second-guess (and model) language a particular child might want to keep as their own.

Trust comes first, and allows true partnership to evolve. Within partnership, we can observe the child's natural inclinations, and 'follow the child's lead' even as we supply the 'ramps' for them to demonstrate it through motoric means (speech, AAC, signing, etc.). Co-regulation means we figure out how we both can feel good, and can play freely together. With self-regulation as an ongoing goal, we watch all aspects of physical development and coordination grow, and make sure they continue to do so as the child gets older (and bigger).

We pay close attention to the language the child uses and accesses. That language may be songs sung with only a slurred tune, intonational contours that are attempted, unintelligible sound-making that we mistake for jargon, YouTube clips that are chosen over and over — all mistaken for nonsense by someone who is not aware of gestalt processes.

### **Stage 1: Storing and using/accessing whole language gestalts**

As we are well-aware, gestalt language processors naturally acquire language from their environment: real life and media. At a young age, these are the 'sound

tracks' of lived (or witnessed) 'episodes of life,' and carry emotional relevance to the child. When the child stores language as a gestalt, language development is launched. We become witness to this language development once the child uses (or access) any gestalt in another situation to communicate and to share their experience with others. Since it is their best rendition of the initial sound track, it may be unintelligible: just a partial melody or sound blur — very often impossible for listeners to decipher.



And as we also know, the child's use of Stage 1 gestalts is 'delayed' from their first experience hearing it, and has, therefore, been called 'delayed echolalia.' And as we also know, if language is imitated immediately after hearing it, it has been called 'immediate echolalia.' This imitation of language is helpful, and often gives a child a chance to take a conversational turn, or another chance to process it, but it is not part of language development per se unless it is stored for later. Language development can happen without any outward evidence, but once it has been accessed later, we recognize it as part of language development.

"Let's get out of here!"

"Want some more?"

"Abcdefghijklmnop"

"Happybirthdaytoyouhappybirthdaytoyouhappybirthdaydear..."

"Toinfinityandbeyond"

"ihuhaaeehuhohhehclapyourhandsihyourehappyandyou..."

Gestalt language development begins at any age GLPs find themselves in an environment that supports it. A very young child in a linguistically-rich environment may have an easy time of storing, accessing, and then mitigating. This means using the 'frame + slot' process described by Ann Peters. But for most children who are older, it takes the cognizance of at least one partner who

recognizes it is happening. With the conversational partnership of at least one person, the child can begin a journey that takes place over in a matter of several years. But even if gestalt processing is unrecognized until a person is a teenager, the journey can begin, and continue with the use of a greater variety of Stage 1 and 2 utterances and intentions, at least into an individual's 20's.

But the commonality of support, at all ages, is trust.

Trust allows us to add to a person's language environment, and to judiciously and naturally introduce other, often more-easily mitigable, language an individual might want to acquire. With this ability, we can support language progress in all the ways that help each individual. The decision to acquire particular language is up to the individual, of course, but if we have modeled just-the-right language for a person's particular experience, we may find that they have stored it away as part of their language, and accessed it later to use. We are thrilled when that happens, but when it does not, we continue our partnership. We remain watchful and add language to the 'teachable moments' we share. This is what defines a supportive linguistic environment.



The older an individual, the more complicated the process, however. If 'echolalia' has not been understood to be communicative, the individual may have given up on sharing language — and the use of natural gestalt language may have gone 'underground.' With trust comes opportunity, however, so the process of gestalt language development can begin at the age of 10, 15, or even later. It will always begin with trust, but once that is established, the individual

may well become more willing to share — and more willing to consider other language we might share.

The bottom line here is that there is no reason **not** to get started with supporting gestalt language processing! And every reason to start! Even if the individual is older, and grammar may not be a viable goal, experiencing successful communication with gestalts and mitigations can make all the difference to a life of hope and sharing.

## **Stage 2: Shortening and dividing gestalts; creating new combinations**

After sufficient time processing/storing/using Stage 1 gestalts, the GLP naturally discovers that gestalts can be shortened to better reflect (or still reflect) the essence the person felt about the original gestalt. So “Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a grumpy troll.” can be said more simply in several ways, depending on the part of the original that resonates most. Maybe “Once upon a time” or “in a land far away” or maybe “lived a grumpy troll.” Not only is a mitigation easier to say, but it’s easier for other people to understand — and realize the GLP is talking and communicating. Mitigating is natural, and often easy when children are young and don’t yet have an encyclopedia of gestalts in their minds. If they are older than 5 or 6, however, they may have so many gestalts in their heads, that these scripts are very hard to break down. It may take many ‘rewinds’ for the GLP to discover, and isolate, the more salient parts.

The rewards of mitigation are many, however, and one reward is exercising the second part of Stage 2. It is visibly exciting when GLPs discover the commonalities among favorite gestalts, and even more exciting when they can move towards the ‘mixing and matching’ of them! To be able to say, “Once upon a time + to infinity” and “Happy birthday + clap your hands” is empowering, and leads to more of the same.

This process is natural even with older individuals, but often daunting without a partner who understands the process. If we do our job right, we make it all easier. Mitigable gestalts are mitigable because they share a commonality with other similar gestalts, which is exactly what gestalt language processors are born to discover. This ‘redundancy’ in the language environment makes it possible for GLPs to hear ‘Let’s’ in many of the language models around them, ‘It’s’ in others, and ‘I’m’ in still more. Once GLPs recognize this commonality, they can

say, 'It's a ball,' and 'It's a flower,' and then a new utterance they've never heard before, 'It's a caterpillar.' They gradually achieve success with communicating more flexibly with smaller chunks and combinations of smaller chunks, which offers them greater intelligibility, greater acceptance among their communication partners, and more precise communication.



With this 'mixing and matching' of partial gestalts (mitigations) comes easier reciprocity with others, which means a greater ability to demonstrate both understanding of language and intentionality. Once their intentionality is easier for us to recognize, it begins to grow more nuanced as GLPs experience greater success with their communicative 'bids,' and are happy to continue exploring more Stage 2 possibilities. The illustration here is of one older individual who began the gestalt language development process at almost age 10 and achieved this level of linguistic success within a two-year period. Known as 'Bevin' in the NLA book, real-life Benjamin became a respected communicator once he had mastered Stage 2. His communicative intentions were more apparent, and it was clear they were as broad as any ALP's. The sky was the (limitless) limit.

Stage 2 is natural, and works best when individuals have play/activity and conversational opportunities during which they can discover and create a wide variety of combinations.

As it was for Benjamin, individuals at Stage 2 are often seen as competent. This is good, of course, but their success sometimes makes the step to Stage 3 seem confusing — to others, that is. For Benjamin, it seemed quite natural. So our job at Stage 3 is to believe in that naturalness, and discover along with the GLP. If we are comfortable with Stage 3, their natural inclination to discover will be supported. As we said earlier, please stop now...and practice Stage 3 again!



### Stage 3: Isolating and recombining single words

Gestalt language processors naturally move to Stage 3 referencing after they have experienced enough success using Stage 2 language to express myriad communicative intentions. Success supports success, and NLA has found that when 50 - 75% of an individual's communication is comprised of a nice variety of Stage 2 language, GLPs naturally begin to break down language chunks even further. This time it's into single words.

The first Stage 3 moment can be dramatic to witness; and probably always is dramatic to experience for the GLP. Having witnessed many of these 'Aha' moments, I could feel the confusion + excitement of individuals who were used to making long intonationally-supported comments like, "I gotta have that toy" all-of-a-sudden declare "I ..... toy!" The moment is truly magic.

The significance of the 'Aha' moment seems to be two-fold. First of all, the gestalt processor is dissolving all the 'frames' from Stages 1 and 2, and recognizing that words can be used in isolation to convey meaning. All-of-a-sudden, language becomes referential, and represents something we can literally and figuratively point to! Life slows down; and it looks to us like a true 'brain shift' between cerebral hemispheres that the GLP feels happening.

Almost simultaneously, the GLP recognizes the value of single words as 'building blocks' of larger meaning. The first single word isolation/combo 'packs a punch' just as strong as the phrases they were derived from, but then hints at the potential each of the "I ...toy" words holds, and the potential each holds for further combinations. Stay tuned because that's where we fit in! Sometimes the Stage 3 quantum change seems to occur virtually overnight, or in a single moment. I've had the privilege of witnessing many classic Stage 3 moments. Each had the leap-of-faith quality similar to the one Mary McLaughlin reported in her blog, MOM-Not Otherwise Specified, in which she described her son, Bud's language progression:

- Stage 1: Quick, Dipsy. Help Laa Laa catch the ball!
- Stage 2(a): Quick + Daddy. Help Mama + catch the ball!
- Stage 2(b): Daddy catch the ball!
- Stage 3: Daddy ... ball?!
- Stage 4: I playing ball with you, Daddy!

The magic of Bud's Stage 3 discovery is captured in this illustration. The confusion of the Stage 3 question also communicates the statement. It all happens at the same time!



As we have said, the true significance of this magic Stage 3 is that, for the first time, GLPs have the opportunity to fully ‘refer’ to single words. On the surface, this may seem similar to the way analytic processors ‘refer’ to single words at a much younger age — but for the older and wiser GLP, each single word ‘unit’ is more than an analytic-style ‘label.’ It is a meaning-filled reference point the GLP has worked hard to get to, one that can be used in all the ways that grammar will eventually allow — starting with first, two-word ‘semantic relationships.’ Since semantics is the meaning of individual words, ‘semantic relationships’ refer to how one reference point relates to another reference point. It’s a process that grows as grammar grows. And once a word has been used in all the constructions of Stages 4-6, it becomes part of a multi-point constellation that conveys more and more ‘relationships’ that continue to multiply all the rest of our lives.

But now back to our role at Stage 3. As we have said, once GLPs arrive at Stage 3, they almost immediately begin to combine single words into these conceptual two-word combinations. This is natural, of course, but which combinations will set the tone for the rest of their language development? The only combinations they have ever known so far have been combos of mitigations. How will they realize the power of their newly-minted grammatical possibilities if we (their supporters) are unaware of how important Stage 3 is? We owe it to our GLPs to ‘push pause’ in our desire to move on to sentences, and have some fun with the word + word combos we can see around us. In order to realize the power of

grammar, we need to help GLPs get a deep feel for the potential of the WORD as a building block.

So, we are the ones who need to pause and savor the moment, and realize how Stage 3 feels and sounds, so we can recognize it and honor it. It does not sound like the language of Stage 2, so we need to recognize it for itself and fully-understand its importance. Stage 3 naturally moves forward, not back into Stage 2. That temptation was much less 15-30 years ago when the NLA data was taken, and even 10-15 years ago when the NLA book was written. But in our media-rich, pandemic-altered world of today, it is quite real. Stages 1 and 2 language surrounds us all, and the drama of it is much greater than that of much of self-generated language. We truly need to partner with our Stage 3 GLPs to ‘push pause,’ so they can move forward — naturally!

Stage 3 two-word combinations have great potential for the GLP’s future. They are the first ‘relationships’ between independent, and independently-chosen single words. It is crucial that we recognize that. If we ‘push pause,’ we can take stock of that, and support our GLPs through our example. If we don’t, they will have no other language partners to engage with. Partnering in this natural Stage 3 place is how we support our GLPs. If you need more practice, take it now!

Stage 3 word + word combos we support express relationships among things and qualities: tangible things we can see, hear, touch, and point to — attributes we can notice and reference — things and places we can gesture towards. They are not mini-gestalts any more. They are not anything that sound like Stage 2. They open our children’s minds to other possibilities. They presage grammar, but are not grammar. They are vocabulary, tangible, referential vocabulary. And without vocabulary, grammar is irrelevant. Now is the time to consider vocabulary and set the stage for a lifetime of developing more vocabulary.

The time spent at Stage 3 varies for each GLP. A very young child needs only a modicum of single words, and two-word referential combos, to set the stage for future development — but a GLP who is older has a library of non-referential language in their heads, and will naturally develop a dictionary of single-word building blocks — as long as they are not made to feel babyish or strange doing so. That’s our job. It’s important to realize that GLPs at Stage 3 feel good about it. They feel surprised and empowered. It’s natural for them, even if it seems awkward to us. **We** are emerging from the misconception that ALP is the only

way, so we need to remind ourselves of that fallacious thinking, and recognize the goodness-of-fit that Stage 3 is for the GLP. A GLP has known how natural their style is all their lives; that's why they are the leaders, and we are not.

So how do we do our job? **We practice by ourselves until we can feel the naturalness of Stage 3.** We practice as we cook dinner, as we drive our car, as we walk the dog. Then we play word games with our family. We can play these games with our child: on a walk, playing a memory game, just looking around in a new setting. The formats can vary — and depend on what is fun and empowering for the child. But it is up to us to feel comfortable with Stage 3, which then creates a supportive atmosphere for our GLPs. Look at the examples on page 25. Try making some combos yourself — right now — try it for a full minute. It gets easier with practice.

Empower your family, then your GLP.

Have fun.

**Now let's look more specifically at Stage 3 supports:**

1. Acknowledge the first Stage 3 utterance the GLP naturally offers. When the child naturally and spontaneously splits up a Stage 2 utterance and says “I... toy” instead of “I gotta have that toy,” casually acknowledge it, and recognize its importance. You don't have to stop anything at that moment, however; just know that it happened. You can do a little Stage 3 play right then, but don't stop the conversation. You can continue the Stage 3 play later.
2. Depending on the child's age, think about what to do next. Find a time of day you can play the referencing game together. Play for anywhere from 5 minutes to a half hour; then return to talking naturally (Stage 2). Keep the conversation going, but resist moving into Stage 4 grammar yet.
  - If the child is very young, and has a small repertoire of Stage 2 utterances to split up, support the child to play at Stage 3 here and there until you sense the child is completely comfortable, and ready to move on. Try for several minutes, a few times each day, for a week.

- If the child is older than 3 or 4, they may need more time at Stage 3. Try for several minutes each day for a few weeks. Make sure you play the word + word game in different places, so the vocabulary from each environment is different. Walk outside; play a memory game; repeat.
  - If the child is much older and has a virtual library of Stage 2 utterances, partner with the child in the word + word discovery process for as long as the child wants. Think several weeks at least, if not a whole month or two. Re-read the chapters about Bevin's Stage 3 in the NLA book — and feel empowered by the naturalness of it in older GLPs.
3. Play at Stage 3 by taking equal 2-word turns: focusing on nouns, location words, and attributes. If the GLP moves on too quickly and does not have the feeling of 'referential' language, they may need to revisit Stage 3 again. That's not bad but it does take more time and effort.
- Physically 'reference' the nouns, qualities, locations you model
  - Point, gesture, or look to each word, pause, then reference the next
  - Make it fun; model referencing, but don't require it
  - If your child doesn't play this time, try again later
  - If they didn't play, consider why; change it up next time
  - Make it more fun
  - Use a flashlight to highlight each reference
  - Use a flip book to create funny combinations
  - Play a memory game
  - Create a scavenger hunt
  - Pick fruits and veggies to put in your shopping cart
  - Make it fun

4. Again, know that you can come back to Stage 3 if/when you discover some mini-gestalts that need to be separated.

Again, here are examples of the types of combinations that are referential:

Table + brown, Brown + table, Chair + table, Table + chair, Milk + table, Milk + white, Chocolate + Milk, Cookie + Chocolate; Outside + cloud, Rain + sun, Sun + park, Park + slide, Puppy + there, Puppy + furry, Fur + soft, Puppy + kitty

5. Please stop for a full minute and practice this yourself! Every little bit of practice helps make this easier and more automatic — for you! It will help you model/take turns with Stage 3 combos with confidence.
6. Please remember that word order is irrelevant. Referential combinations are just that. If you model (or hear) combos that sound more like a phrase than a word + word combo, make sure to model the same words in the opposite order.
7. And here are two other important Stage 3 principles to keep in mind:
  - Avoid language that sounds like the student’s own Stage 1 or 2 language. We want to give gestalt processors every opportunity to move forward in language development, and not retreat to Stages 1 or 2 as a ‘default.’ Of course, GLPs will include more Stage 1 and 2 gestalts and mitigated gestalts in their ‘language soup’ well into the future, but right now is their opportunity to play the ‘referencing game’ so they can move forward.
  - Avoid verbs. Verbs tend to make word combinations sound like Stage 2 - and Stage 4, and tend to reduce the opportunity for gestalt processors to remain at Stage 3. This is first opportunity a GLP has had to experience semantic relationships among referential words, the ones ALPs experienced early in language development. We want our gestalt processors to have an adequate opportunity to develop vocabulary in the form of true referential units of meaning, referential vocabulary. Yes, they will develop more vocabulary the rest of their lives, but time spent at Stage 3 is invaluable as a template for the future.

#### **Stage 4: Self-generating phrases and sentences**

As we have pointed out in the last section, the first step into grammar involves word play similar to that in Stage 3, but with greater variety from other classes of words: verbs, articles, pronouns, negatives, question forms, adverbs, conjunctions, and a greater variety of nouns and adjectives. Developmental Sentence Types (DST) includes a wealth of grammatical combinations that further extend the ‘semantic relationships’ accessed at Stage 3 but include the



other grammatical constructions that ALPs - and GLPs - acquire before sentences.

First Stage 4 phrases are known for their experimental grammar, which helps us know that children are playing freely with the words that reflect relationships among concepts - which is what grammar is all about! We love the naturalness of early grammar. Grammar itself is only a

'code' within a culture. So experimenting with possibilities is just right. First try, second try, pause, try it again...it's all good!



As we have said, support at early Stage 4 involves meaning-based, conversation-based modeling, and judicious introduction of those first elements of grammar identified by researchers and catalogued in DST (Laura Lee, 1974), and monitoring of the variety the GLP uses. Once all the combinations that ALPs had a chance to acquire early in their development have been experienced by GLPs at emerging Stage 4, it's time for us to support sentence grammar as outlined in Developmental Sentence Scoring. Age norms for ALPs were derived in the 1970s, and cannot be applied to GLPs, of course, but they serve to guide our supports of gestalt processors who are ready for sentence grammar. The order of exposure to the grammatical elements in DSS depends on each GLP and depends on the meaning (semantic relationships) a GLP is interested in, or trying to express. Meaning always comes first! We help by supplying the grammar that will help the GLP express that meaning.

As you know, NLA Stage 4 encompasses DSS Levels 1, 2, and 3, but the order of development will likely be different for a GLP than an ALP. One of the differences has been mentioned already, and that is that the pronouns ALPs acquire early in their grammar development at Level 1 will not be GLPs' first targets. The reason is simple: our GLPs have not separated out "I" and "you" yet, so personal pronouns are confusing, and should not be early Stage 4 grammar targets. Also, we would be wise to try not to use the Level 1 pronouns like "it" and "that" at first either, since they may sound all-too-similar to "It's..." and "That's...", which were likely prominent at Stage 2. Although "It's" is a

Level 1 construction, we will avoid it as well at early Stage 4. By the end of Stage 4, contractions like ‘It’s’ and ‘That’s’ will likely reappear without sounding too much like Stage 2 this time.

Instead of the DSS Level 1 targets ALPs use first, our GLPs will likely find early success with grammar that has more clear meaning, like verbs. Certain present tense verbs may be a good beginning point. But they can be awkward to model past “I love ...” “I think...” and “I have...” which can become stilted and too-reminiscent of ‘taught’ language like “I want ...” and “I see ...” (And we don’t get to model “I’ve got...” yet, because it can become ‘chunked’ since it’s a higher-level verb construction). But past tense verbs can be almost-unlimited early targets because they are numerous and meaningful. The following often resonate early. “Did,” “went,” “saw,” “found,” “lost,” “ate,” “took,” “got,” etc., are the so-called ‘irregular verbs,’ the ones without ‘ed’ endings which are harder to hear and to say (“followed,” “walked,” “carried,” “opened,” etc.). We found in our research that these easy-to-use past tense verbs tended to develop before the present tense verbs for GLPs — so have some fun coming up with a list (it will be long), and practicing how they might be used in numerous, meaningful ways!

Our general tack at Stage 4 will be to see which grammar our GLP might need, and to feel comfortable modeling/using any grammar at Stage 4 (DSS Levels 1, 2, and 3) that does not require foundational grammar first (e.g., “Isn’t it ready?” requires “It is ready” first so it doesn’t become a ‘chunk’). And we can be open to dipping into a little Stage 5 (DSS Levels 4 - 6) grammar a child is looking for as long as the construction does not require an earlier-level precursor (e.g. “because” and “but” are Level 5 conjunctions that many Stage 4 communicators are looking for and neither has a precursor besides ‘and’).

So what does this GLP-style experimental self-generated language sound like? A lot like this: basic grammatical structures, lots of trial-and-error, simple present, past, and future tenses, grammar that is ‘all over the map’ and strung loosely together with pauses, reformulations, and repetition of sounds, syllables, words, and phrases. Early grammar has been called ‘bad grammar’ since gestalts often contain the ‘good grammar’ of the original. But a better and more respectful term is ‘experimental,’ and the natural disruptions in the flow of it are known as ‘linguistic mazes,’ and are recognized as markers of syntactic growth. They are not ‘stuttering,’ or cause for alarm. In fact, the age norms for mazes in ALP language samples scored with Systematic Analysis of Language Samples (SALT)

shows the % of mazes per 100 utterances increasing steadily from the age of 3 to the age of 7 (*Language Sample Analysis*, 1992). So, just imagine how challenging Stage 4 and 5 are for GLPs, which buys them considerable grace!

Another feature of Stage 4 utterances are the not-yet-analyzed ‘mini-chunks’ of language from Stages 1 and 2. They are not cause for alarm either, and do not suggest that the Stage 4 GLP is reverting to Stage 2. While that can happen, of course, an otherwise self-generated utterance can contain mini-chunks through the entirety of Stage 4, and even Stage 5. These are often resolved in the course of continuing conversation, as long as the communication partner is aware of them, and continues the conversation without showing concern. If they do not resolve, there is always the next conversation where the partner can model something that might resolve then!

The following examples of early self-generated grammar contain mazes of various kinds and mini-chunks as well. Of the mazes, pauses and abandoned utterances are marked with ..., and reformulations and repetitions are contained in (parens). Mini-chunks are *italicized*.

‘Gots...water...yes!’

‘Kitty got ...’

‘Kitty ... (got) gots (m)...more water?’

‘Kitty (w...want)...want go out’

‘(*Where’s the*)...(is) is...he...coming?’

‘(*It’s over*)...He’s playing (*over there...over*)...over on the bed.’

Over time, and with lots of experimenting, conversational use, and growing automaticity, Stage 4 includes all the basic sentence patterns and grammatical elements:

‘My kitty (like)...likes to play with (hims)...his toys.’

‘*It’s*...My kitty (and)...and me are good friends.’

‘We played (*over there* on the) on the playground in the snow last winter.’

‘Is your kitty climbing...climbing that tree?’

A wonderful progression! And even though we expect mazes and mini-chunks to be a continuing part of Stage 4 (and 5), we will see lots of self-generated grammar become more automatic as it is used in a great variety of situations,

and within a great variety of conversations and narratives. By the end of Stage 4, we also want to make sure that almost all words a child used at Stage 2 have been ‘freed up’ to stand alone. We need, especially, to inventory all contractions, and support freeing up each word as an independent agent. By the end of Stage 4/beginning of Stage 5, GLPs will use contractions again (because everyone does). But, we need to make sure that every-single-word has become a free agent, and can be used singly first.

How can we make sure all words are free agents? One way is by playing with word + word versions of contractions and other mini-chunks, including freeing up “I” (from ‘I’m’), “We” (from ‘We’re’), “It” (from ‘It’s’), “is” (from ‘It’s’ and ‘That’s’), and “are” (from ‘We’re’ and ‘They’re’).

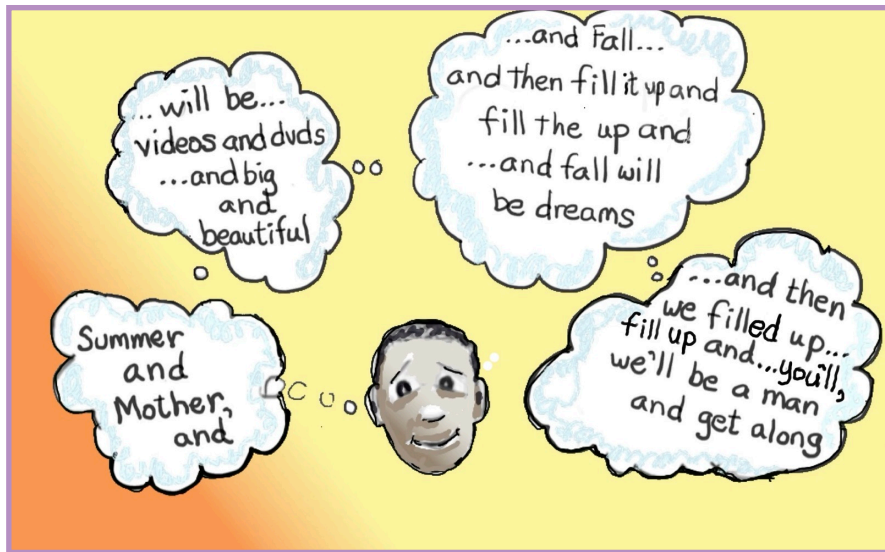
To practice freeing-of-single-words-from-contractions, we have to be a bit creative. Start by thinking completely in single words yourself! The following dialogue illustrates how we can play with one such mini-chunk, “It’s + x”:

- C: “It’s time to go outside!”  
A: “It is? Oh, right, it IS time!!”  
C: “I just said that. It’s time to go.”  
A: “Is it REALLY time to go out?”  
C: “I just TOLD you. It IS!!”

As the GLP moves along in the Stage 4 process, DSS continues to be our guide, and we know that we can always dip back into early Stage 4 DST when it’s easier to play with grammar outside of sentences.

But eventually, it all comes together. The illustration below features the language produced by my friend, Benjamin as he developed confidence with Stage 4 grammar accuracy, and Stage 5 grammar experimentally! It shows how grammar can sound when a GLP begins the process at age 10, and by age 13, achieves grammar. As we mentioned, at some point in Stage 4, GLPs will use contractions again, but we will support GLPs best if that time comes ‘later’ rather than ‘sooner.’

## **Stage 5: Self-generating sentences with more complex grammar**



Gestalt language processors naturally move into Stage 5 grammar as they realize the power of verb forms to express past tense and future tense, a variety of pronouns, the power of question forms, and the conjunction 'and.' Our support continues to include recognizing the natural order of grammar development, partnering with individuals in their discovery of its power, and a good dose of grace as we focus on the message of self-generated language and forego critique of its accuracy.

Stage 5 encompasses the grammar of DSS Levels 4-6, which follow naturally after Levels 1-3. Secondary verbs, conjunction forms 'or,' 'but,' 'because,' and 'so' make expressing relationships so much more nuanced. Negative forms such as 'don't' and 'can't' also emerge here, with the caveat that 'do' and 'can' need to precede them so those common negative forms aren't used as 'mini-chunks' like they might have been in Stages 1 and 2.

When individuals are able to develop Stage 5 grammar during their teen-age years, their academic use of higher-level language in speaking and writing will be well-served. And we now know that Stage 5 can continue into many individuals' 20's, so our time spent in continuing partnership is well-justified.

### **Stage 6: Self-generating sentences with a complete grammar system**

After sufficient success acquiring all the grammatical structures at Stages 4 and 5, Stage 6 is where gestalt language processors have the opportunity to acquire

the full grammar of the language. Depending on the age a GLP has arrived at this juncture, the natural expansion of grammar development is available. Our experience has included seeing individuals continue the process through their teen years and into their 20's, and this process may be available to even-older individuals.

Support at Stage 6 involves a continuation of careful assessment and conversational introduction of the grammatical structures of more advanced grammar, while carefully addressing the meaning behind the grammar, and insuring, as always, that 'form' does not outstrip 'function.' Maintaining the premise of meaning first/then grammar, the cognitive and communicative value of each addition to a grammar system is imperative. Form without function counts for very little.

### **Life-long Learning: After grammar development has ceased**

Rest assured that even when a full grammar system is not achieved by a particular gestalt language processor, communicating with Stage 4 grammar allows self-generated language adequate for most day-to-day situations. Stage 4 grammar includes all pronouns, basic past tense verbs, basic future tense verbs, basic question forms (both interrogative reversal and many 'wh' question forms, and basic negation). Please refer to the Stage 4 sentences in the earlier chart and imagine how these types of sentences satisfy most of our daily needs.

Rest assured also that even without achieving a full grammar system, individuals who begin the gestalt language development process in their teens or even 20's can achieve something incredible in their partnership with you. It is this: "being respected as a communicator." Without you, they may not have been acknowledged as using language at all and might have spent the rest of their lives being ignored. With your partnership, they can come out of hiding behind their 'whisper' or 'silent' scripting and use their gestalt language in the light of day. And, since hearing more and more stories about individuals in their 20s, we can say that we have found Stage 2 mitigation to be a reasonable goal!

But the bottom line is this: even if an individual does not develop language beyond Stage 1, when that language is acknowledged, they are communicators! And they can be honored as communicators — because of you!



## **Reviewing gestalt language development:**

Gestalt language development is natural, and natural strategies of supporting language development are applicable once we recognize that an individual is a GLP!

Following are strategies that we can freely use. Some are intended for helping us get started with language development; others are most relevant during the first steps, and others are more important at specific stages:

### **Principles at all stages of gestalt language development:**

- (1) Check in with yourself about your partnership with the GLP — and make sure you fully believe in the premise and promise of communication and language development. Development begins with the individual, and is led by the individual. The timing is specific to the individual. The timeline allows for language development throughout the teen years and into an individual's 20's. Your partnership allows you to be supportive but does not allow you to expect compliance or 'skills' outside of natural development.
- (2) Review all aspects of the gestalt language development process, and make sure you believe in language development: both analytic and gestalt. If you do not, your intervention not only undermines the individual's potential trust in you, but undermines the process of language development itself. Language that is taught, prompted, and/or reinforced outside of natural gestalt language development interferes with language development itself.
- (3) Ensure that you have the individual's trust — and can maintain it. Without it, you really have nothing. At a practical level, without trust, your language models will have no relevance.
- (4) Honor your connection with the GLP. If it ever lapses, go back and repair it or rebuild it.

### **Getting started with natural gestalt language development:**

- (1) Now that you understand gestalt language development, acknowledge what the Stage 1 individual says/sings/accesses. These are gestalts, whether we understand them or not. Stage 1 gestalt language processors are sharing as best they can. They have done their part to communicate. Our acknowledgment completes the loop —and communicates that we know they are communicators.
- (2) If you understand anything the individual says/sings/accesses, acknowledge what you understand. When you do, you have taken a conversational turn. But even if you don't understand anything, your response is a 'turn,' and it can be as simple as making eye contact, smiling, nodding, following their gaze — whatever you sense the individual might wish you to do to be a good communicator.
- (3) Try to tune into the meaning, feeling — or intention of the gestalt. The GLP cannot make their message any more clear, so it's up to us to tune into them. Do you recognize the melody? How does the individual seem to feel when listening to that song? When sharing that song with you? What might that song mean to the GLP? Why might they be singing it now? It may take time to uncover the meaning, but it's worth it! Once the GLP 'knows that we know,' we are in this together!
- (4) Don't worry if you are not successful with a particular endeavor. There will be more. In the meantime, there is plenty to do!
- (5) Talk naturally while you go through your day, whether at school or at home. Allow plenty of silent time too, but when you talk, talk from your heart — with your authentic emotion built in. Talk without expecting the GLP to do anything but enjoy a new 'sound track' that they can voluntarily choose to store to become part of their language development.
- (6) All of our language is actually unintended 'language modeling' to a Stage 1 gestalt processor, so it helps when we become conscious of what we say. Just talk naturally 50% of the time. But instead of a complex sentence like: 'After we get home, we'll ask your dad to help us find your book,' think about simple sentences: 'We're almost home. We can look for the book together.'

- (7) Be aware of your own language. Use these pronoun constructions — because what you say is an unintended language model:
- use language from a first person perspective, that is use ‘I’ sentences: (‘I love that one,’ ‘I’m thinking about lunch’)
  - use language from your joint perspective (‘We gotta...,’ ‘Let’s find...,’ ‘We’re making...’)
  - use language from a neutral perspective (‘It’s time for lunch,’ ‘That’s the best,’ ‘There’s another one,’ ‘Where did it go?’ ‘What’s happening?’). Questions can be used as language models — but not for eliciting answers until Stage 4.
  - avoid using ‘you’ which promotes ‘pronoun reversal.’ Try not to say, ‘You look so cute’ (instead say “I love that cute hat.”). Avoid saying ‘Do you want some more juice?’ (instead say, “We can get some more juice” and then get it, while you watch the GLP’s expression for concurrence or rejection)
- (8) Think about language the GLP might like, but don’t overly worry about how useful it is, or how quickly the GLP might use it. If one model doesn’t resonate, another one will. Common language ‘frames’ in American English include: ‘I’m + x,’ ‘Let’s + x,’ ‘Where’s + x,’ ‘Look at + x,’ ‘It’s + x’ (or ‘That’s + x’), ‘How about + x?’ ‘Don’t + x.’ Whatever you pick, it’s important that they sound natural in the context of your home or school environment, and that you don’t over-think this. 50% of your time can then be spent just listening to the GLP, responding to them, and being yourself with the individual. Here are some examples:



- I'm + so excited; I'm + gonna eat lunch; I'm + working so hard; I'm + thinking about it; I'm + getting tired; I'm + fixing a sandwich for us)
- We're + a great team; We're + the best; We're + good friends; We're + going to lunch now; We're + taking the bus; We're + gonna ride together
- It's + the best; It's + so pretty; It's + mine; It's + not scary; It's + for our lunch; It's + up there; It's + happening tomorrow; It's + working.
- Look at + that shark!; Look at + the snow!; Look at + our colors!

(9) Try to use natural variety in your language. That helps to provide the 'redundancy' that GLPs need to hear so they realize there are smaller parts inside gestalts. Then they can extract those parts to help them move to Stage 2. Once a GLP is solidly in Stage 2, the variety of possibilities are endless. GLPs will discover their own combinations, but your additions will make their language richer.

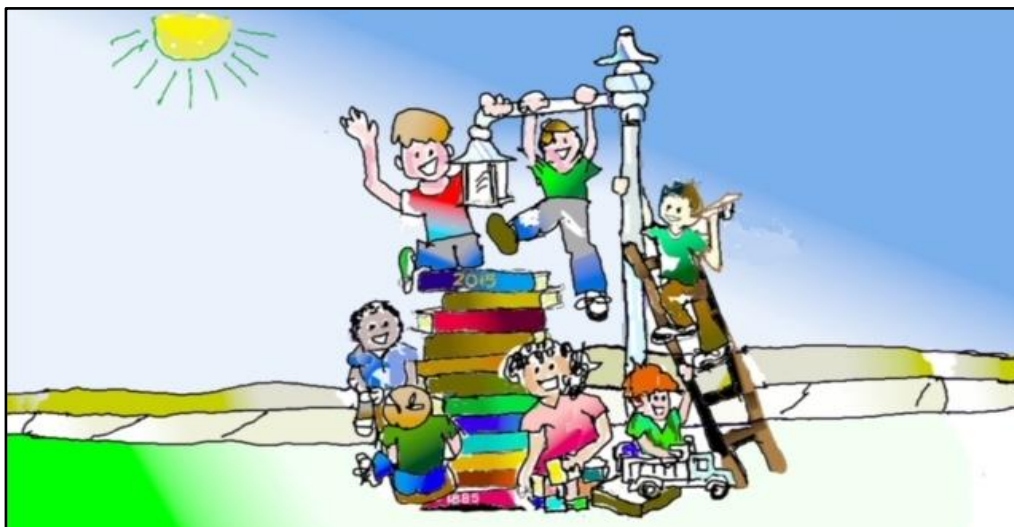
(10) Media language offers possibilities (and challenges) of its own. When language is easily accessible for replaying, such as on YouTube, it can be heard again and again which helps with a GLP hearing it well, saying it intelligibly, and processing it (perhaps even without the visual) as a gestalt. The challenges may include the length of a language chunk (making it impossible to say), its limited mitigability (e.g., challenging to mitigate from "To infinity + and beyond" to "To infinity + and the store" or "To + the store + and beyond")

(11) Unless we are familiar with the origin of a GLP's gestalts that come from media, individuals can be at a disadvantage if the gestalts are not easy-to-break-down — and no one understands what they're saying or why. Some language, particularly media language, cannot be mitigated easily — and may remain in its gestalt form for years until someone recognizes that the 'echolalia' is really gestalt language. This phenomenon isolates GLPs from language development until we realize that the best supports for gestalt processors are providing a rich linguistic environment and a knowledgeable partner.

(12) Everyone benefits from hearing and using natural language that matters. If the language matters to us, we deliver it with authenticity. If it matters to the GLP, they can make it a part of their language development. Delivered during meaningful activity, SLPs, teachers, parents, and others can gauge how resonant our language models are, and use natural phrases and sentences the child relates to, freely chooses



to acquire, and when they're ready, uses to continue their natural language acquisition journey. If we sense that other (more mitigable) language could be paired with a media gestalt and resonate well with a GLP, we can offer it — without expectation. It is imperative, however, that we first honor the GLP and their original language. Not until we have the GLP's full trust should we take this step. We must be incredibly careful that the GLP has no reason to think we find their own language to be deficit in any way — or ours better! Avoid anything that might be taken as an 'expectation.' Avoid any hint of 'replacement language' or 'compliance' training!



(13) Questions and answers can be modeled as units: “What’s happening? Oh, I know,” “What’s next? Oh right. Pajamas are next,” “What’s that animal? Oh, it’s a squirrel,” “What’s under there? Oh, it’s a salamander,” “What’s that letter? Oh, It’s a Q!” So the form of Q/A itself becomes a language model, which may be helpful and is very different from asking a Stage 1-3 child to answer ‘questions’ that, of course, they do not perceive as questions. Not until Stage 4!

### **Gestalt language development support guidelines:**

Gestalt language development is natural, but unless a child is very young, it usually needs to be supported by someone who understands that it is natural. As long as the child is not taught, prompted, or made compliant with ‘contingent’ requirements for adult-selected language, their natural language development is possible. Unless the child is younger than three and has a rich linguistic environment, having someone who understands the process is imperative. Also imperative are natural language models that the child can freely-adopt. If those requisites are available, the child has the opportunity to develop a full grammar system they can use into their future.

Even if the process begins when the child is much older, and a full grammar is not possible, the outcome can make all the difference to that individual! Some self-generated language opens doors of flexibility that mitigations cannot. Rest assured, though, that even without a grammar system at all, individuals who begin the gestalt language development process in their teens or even 20’s can achieve something profound in their partnership with you:





\* The flexible use of Stage 2 mitigations can be life-altering. For many GLPs, this is where they are often recognized for the first time as communicators!

\* Even without achieving Stage 2, the Stage 1 communicator can be respected as a communicator! Without you, they may not have been honored as using language at all and might have spent the rest of their lives ignored as simply ‘echolalic.’

\* Regardless of whether an individual achieves Stage 2, or only Stage 1, they will be honored as a communicator — because of you!

### So just get started!

**Developmental Sentence Types**  
Reprinted from Laura Lee (1966)

Nouns	Designators	Descriptors	Verbs	Vocabulary items
ball, car, Mommy, kitty, hot dog, etc; balls, cars, men; me, something, nobody; book? car? truck?	here, there, this, that, it those, these this? that? here? there?	big, pretty, broken, one, two, more, on, off, up, none; my, his; red? big?	eat, sleep, walk, fell, ate, eating, sleeping, going; eat? sleep? can't, won't	yes, no, OK, hey, hi, bye, uhoh; again, now, too, OK? what? who? where? when? how? why? because
a ball, the truck; Daddy car; more car, other truck; big car; the cars; car truck; Mommy Daddy; now car; doggie bone; car garage; this one, my truck, her cookie; not car, not truck, not this; another truck? which one? and this, and car	here car, that truck, it truck; there trucks; that again; there now; that one, here something; not this, not there, that truck? this car? who this? what that? and this, and here, and there	car broken, TV on, car there, truck there, truck here; cars here, lights on; that pretty, it big, something here, another one; car broken? it gone? Where car? what here? who there?	hit ball; sit chair; fall down; baby sleep; that go, it fall; saw car; eat cookies, see cars; eat now, fall too; see it, find one; not fall, can't go; see it? Go home?; where go? what find? what take? who go? and sleeping; wanna go; gonna go	for Daddy, in car; on chairs, in cars; too big, all gone, up now, here again, right here, over there; to you, in it; not big, not there; in here?, all gone? and big, but dirty, and here

Nouns	Designators	Descriptive Items	Verbs	Vocabulary items
ball, car, Mommy, kitty, hot dog, etc; balls, cars, men; me, something, nobody; book? car? truck?	here, there, this, that, it those, these this? that? here? there?	big, pretty, broken, one, two, more, on, off, up, none; my, his; red? big?	go! stop! wait! come! eat, sleep, walk, fell; eating, sleeping ate, went; eat? Sleep? can't, won't; won't?	here, there, this, that, it those, these this? that? here? there?
a ball, ball truck; more balls, Daddy ball; other truck; big car, dirty truck, baby bear; the cars car truck, Mommy Daddy; now car; doggie bone; car garage; Mommy window; this one, my truck, her cookie; not car, not truck, not this; another truck? which one? and this, and car	here car, that truck, it truck; there trucks; that again; there now; that one, here something; not this, not there, that truck? this car? who this? what that? and this, and here, and there	car broken, truck dirty, light off, TV on, car there, truck here; cars here, lights on; that pretty, it big, something here, another one; car broken? It gone? Where car? What here? Who there?	hit ball; sit chair; fall down; baby sleep, that go, it fall; saw car; eat cookies, sees cars; eat now, fall too; see it, find one; not fall, can't go; see it? go home? where go? what find? what take? who go? and sleeping; wanna go; gonna go	for Daddy, in car; on chairs, in cars; too big, all gone, up now, here again, right here, over there; to you, in it; not big, not here; in here?, all gone? and big, but dirty, and here
my big car; the car in front; all of them; some other cars; now the car; the car the truck; the car the garage; all of mine; not that one; the other car? which other one? How many cookies? and the car, car and truck	here another car; there another car; this a red car; it my truck; here some cars; here car now, there Mommy Daddy, that somebody car, here his car, that not car, that a car? who that boy? what that one? here and truck	the car broken, the TV on, car in garage; spot a good dog; all cars broken; light off now; truck too dirty; it off now; this not broken; it off now? where that one? who in car? what color car? car and truck here?	eat the cookie; put the table; take off hat, turn on light; the car go, a boy eat; goes in barn; see car now, got in too; want it now; not fall down; see that one? eat more cookies? where put car? what take out? what find here? what doing to car?; and find car; wanna see it, gonna go home; gotta find it	dog, cow, pig, 1234; in the car, for the boy; on the chairs, in car too, back over there, on my head; not in it; in here too? in the car? and for me

Developmental Sentence Analysis: A Grammatical Assessment Procedure for Speech and Language Clinicians  
*Reprinted from Laura Lee (1974)*

Score	Indefinite Pronouns or Noun Modifiers	Personal Pronouns	Main Verbs	Secondary Verbs
1	it, this, that	1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> person: I, me, my, mine, you, your(s)	A. Uninflected verb: I see you. B: copula, is or 's: <i>It's red.</i> C: is + verb + ing: <i>He is coming.</i>	
2		3 <sup>rd</sup> person: he, him, his, she, her, hers	A. -s and -ed: <i>plays, played</i> B: irregular past: <i>are, saw</i> C: Copula: <i>am, are, was, were</i> D: Auxiliary <i>am, are, was, were</i>	Five early developing infinitives: <i>I wanna see. (want to see)</i> <i>I'm gonna see. (going to see)</i> <i>I gotta see. (got to see)</i> <i>Lemme [to] see. (let me [to] see)</i> <i>Let's [to] play. (let [us to] play)</i>
3	A. no, some, more, all, lot(s), one(s) two (etc.), other(s), another. B. something, somebody, someone	A. Plurals: we, us, our(s), they, them, their B. these, those		Non-complementing infinitives: <i>I stopped to play.</i> <i>I'm afraid to look.</i> <i>It's hard to do that.</i>
4	nothing, nobody, none, no one		A. can, will, may + verb: <i>may go</i> B. Obligatory do + verb: <i>don't go</i> C. Emphatic do + verb: <i>I do see</i>	Participle, present or past: <i>I see a boy running.</i> <i>I found the toy broken.</i>
5		Reflexives: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, themselves		A. Early infinitival complements with differing subjects in kernels: <i>I want you to come, Let him [to] see.</i> B. Later infinitival complements: <i>I had to go, I told him to go, I tried to go, He ought to go.</i> C. Obligatory deletions: Make it <i>[to] go.</i> D. Infinitive with wh-word: I know what <i>to get</i> , I know how <i>to do it.</i>
6		A. Wh-pronouns: who, which, whose, whom, what, that, how many, how much B. Wh-word + infinitives: I know <i>what</i> to do, I know <i>who(m)</i> to take.	A. could, would, should, might + verb: <i>might come, could be</i> B. Obligatory does, did + verb C. Emphatic does, did + verb	
7	A. any, anything, anybody, anyone B. every, everything, everybody, everyone C. both, few, many, each, several, most, least, much, next, first, last, second (etc.)	(his) own, one, oneself, whichever, whoever, whatever: Take <i>whatever</i> you like.	A. Passive with <i>get</i> , any tense Passive with <i>be</i> , any tense B. must, shall + verb: <i>must come</i> C. have + verb + en: <i>I've eaten.</i> D. have got: <i>I've got it.</i>	Passive infinitival complement: With <i>get</i> : <i>I have to get dressed. I don't want to get hurt.</i> With <i>be</i> : <i>I want to be pulled, It's going to be locked.</i>
8			A. have/had been + verb + ing B. modal + have + verb + en: <i>may have eaten</i> C. modal + be + verb + ing: <i>could be playing</i> D. Other auxiliary combinations: <i>should have been sleeping.</i>	Gerund: <i>Swinging is fun.</i> <i>I like fishing.</i> <i>He staring laughing.</i>



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Developmental Sentence Analysis: A Grammatical Assessment Procedure for Speech and Language Clinicians  
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Score	Negatives	Conjunctions	Interrogative Reversals	Wh-Questions
1	it, this, that + copula or auxiliary is, 's, + not: It's <i>not</i> mine., This <i>is not</i> a dog., That <i>is not</i> moving.		Reversal of copula: <i>Isn't it red?</i> <i>Were they there?</i>	
2				A. who, what, what + noun: <i>Who am I? What is he eating?</i> <i>What book are you reading?</i> B. where, how many, how much, what...do, what...for: <i>Where did you go? How much do you want? What is he doing? What is a hammer for?</i>
3		and		
4	can't, don't		Reversal of auxiliary be: <i>Is he coming? Isn't he coming? Was he going?</i>	
5	isn't, won't	A. but B. so, and so, so that C. or, it		When, how, how + adjective: <i>When shall I come? How do you do it? How big is it?</i>
6		because	A. Obligatory do, does, did: <i>Do they run? Does it bite? Didn't it hurt?</i> B. Reversal of modal: <i>Can you play? Won't it hurt? Shall I sit down?</i> C. Tag question: It's fun <i>isn't it? It isn't fun, is it?</i>	
7	All other negatives: A. Uncontracted negatives: I can <i>not go</i> . He has <i>not gone</i> . B. Pronoun-auxiliary or pronoun-copula contraction: I'm <i>not coming</i> . He's <i>not here</i> . C. Auxiliary-negative or copula-negative contraction: He <i>wasn't</i> going, He <i>hasn't</i> been seen, It <i>couldn't</i> be mine, They <i>aren't</i> big.			Why, what if, how come, how about + gerund: <i>Why are you crying?</i> <i>What if I won't do it?</i> <i>How come he is crying? How about coming with me?</i>
8		A. where, when, how, while, whether (or not), til, until, unless, since, before, after, for, as, as + adjective + as, as if, like, that, than: I know <i>where</i> you are, Don't come <i>til</i> I call. B. Obligatory deletions: I run faster <i>than</i> you [run], I'm <i>as big as</i> a man [is big], It looks <i>like</i> a dog [looks]. C. Elliptical deletions (score 0): That's <i>why</i> [I took it], I know <i>how</i> [I can do it]. D. Wh-words + infinitive: I know <i>how</i> to do it. I know <i>where</i> to go.	A. Reversal of auxiliary have: <i>Has he seen you?</i> B. Reversal with two or three auxiliaries: <i>Has he been eating?</i> <i>Couldn't he have waited?</i> <i>Could he have been crying?</i> <i>Wouldn't he have been going?</i>	Whose, which, which + noun: <i>Whose car is that?</i> <i>Which book do you want?</i>

## More resources:

The NLA book, and a variety of articles, courses, podcasts, webinars, and other resources further describe NLA, including the research and background:

### American Speech-Language-Hearing Association:

“Using the Natural Language Acquisition Protocol to Support Gestalt Language Development” (Marge Blanc, Amanda Blackwell and Paulina Elias, 2023)

[https://pubs.asha.org/doi/full/10.1044/2023\\_PERSP-23-00098](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/full/10.1044/2023_PERSP-23-00098)

“Examining the Echolalia Literature: Where Do Speech-Language Pathologists Stand?” *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* (Lillian N. Stiegler, 2015)

[https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/2015\\_AJSLP-14-0166?](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/2015_AJSLP-14-0166?casa_token=sJYaKBUa4qcAAAAA:OSJZvKXaVhQAoaIkGOqHYcLMGExOF4q8vzCO6voj91o1IxCNuj8iNycBrJYVocac4DruVi2xVG7Q)

[casa\\_token=sJYaKBUa4qcAAAAA:OSJZvKXaVhQAoaIkGOqHYcLMGExOF4q8vzCO6voj91o1IxCNuj8iNycBrJYVocac4DruVi2xVG7Q](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/2015_AJSLP-14-0166?casa_token=sJYaKBUa4qcAAAAA:OSJZvKXaVhQAoaIkGOqHYcLMGExOF4q8vzCO6voj91o1IxCNuj8iNycBrJYVocac4DruVi2xVG7Q)

Echolalia and Its Role in Gestalt Language Acquisition

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/autism/echolalia-and-its-role-in-gestalt-language-acquisition/>

“From Echolalia to Self-Generated Language: Case Studies in Natural Language Acquisition” (on demand webinar) (Marge Blanc, Lillian M. Stiegler, Alexandria Zachos)

[https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=From+Echolalia+to+Self-Generated+Language%3A+Case+Studies+in+Natural+Language+Acquisition+(On+Demand+Webinar))

[Webcode=olsdetails&title=From+Echolalia+to+Self-](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=From+Echolalia+to+Self-Generated+Language%3A+Case+Studies+in+Natural+Language+Acquisition+(On+Demand+Webinar))

[Generated+Language%3A+Case+Studies+in+Natural+Language+Acquisition](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=From+Echolalia+to+Self-Generated+Language%3A+Case+Studies+in+Natural+Language+Acquisition+(On+Demand+Webinar))

[+\(On+Demand+Webinar\)](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=From+Echolalia+to+Self-Generated+Language%3A+Case+Studies+in+Natural+Language+Acquisition+(On+Demand+Webinar))

“A Language-Based Approach to Managing Echolalia” (On Demand Webinar)

[https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+(On+Demand+Webinar)&utm_source=asha&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=wecholia)

[Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+(On+Demand+Webinar)&utm_source=asha&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=wecholia)

[\(On+Demand+Webinar\)&utm\\_source=asha&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=wecholia](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+(On+Demand+Webinar)&utm_source=asha&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=wecholia)

[ia](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+(On+Demand+Webinar)&utm_source=asha&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=wecholia)

Selected texts:

*Natural Language Acquisition on the Autism Spectrum: The Journey from Echolalia to Self-Generated Language* (Marge Blanc, 2012) <https://www.northernspeech.com/echolalia-autism/natural-language-acquisition-on-the-autism-spectrum/> (the original book detailing and quantifying gestalt language development, and describing its natural supports, based on 15 years of clinical research)

“Using the Natural Language Acquisition Protocol to Support Gestalt Language Development” (Marge Blanc, Amanda Blackwell and Paulina Elias, 2023) [https://pubs.asha.org/doi/full/10.1044/2023\\_PERSP-23-00098](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/full/10.1044/2023_PERSP-23-00098) (a succinct description of using NLA supports in gestalt language development)

“Finding the Words... To Tell the ‘Whole’ Story” <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Finding-the-words-to-tell-the-whole-story.pdf> (the first article describing Natural Language Acquisition; a readable case example)

“The Natural Language Acquisition Guide: Spanish” (“Guía para la Adquisición Natural del Lenguaje”) [https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Guia\\_de\\_la\\_ANL\\_web.pdf](https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Guia_de_la_ANL_web.pdf)

“When Speech Gets Stuck. A Hierarchy of Practical Supports for Dyspraxia in Children with ASD” <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/When-Speech-Gets-Stuck-.pdf> (an article describing the levels of speech development that precede and support ‘praxis’)

### Selected Courses:

Natural Communication Course by Amanda Blackwell, Paulina Elias, and Marge Blanc: <https://comunicacion-natural.com/products/one-hour-introduction-to-nla-w-marge-blanc-paulina-elias-and-amanda-blackwell>

Natural Communication Course by Amanda Blackwell, Paulina Elias, and Marge Blanc (Parent course): <https://naturalcommunication.myshopify.com/products/natural-communication-course-for-parents>

Natural Communication Course by Amanda Blackwell, Paulina Elias, and Marge Blanc (Professional Course): <https://naturalcommunication.myshopify.com/products/natural-communication-english-course>

<https://www.northernspeech.com/echolalia-autism/natural-language-acquisition-in-autism-echolalia-to-self-generated-language-level-1/> (original academic-level assessment course by Marge Blanc)

<https://www.northernspeech.com/echolalia-autism/natural-language-acquisition-in-autism-echolalia-to-self-generated-language-treatment-level-2/> (original academic-level treatment course by Marge Blanc)

<https://www.northernspeech.com/autism-assessment/natural-language-acquisition-in-autism-echolalia-to-self-generated-language-level-3/> (current advanced academic-level course by Marge Blanc)

New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence Webinars:

Making Sense of Echolalia: It's All About Language Development! (by Marge Blanc, 3/04/21) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVgTud-IhQA>

Gestalt Language Development: the 'Other' Natural Language Acquisition Style! (by Marge Blanc, 9/16/21) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwzkwkyjSLY>

Echoes of Echolalia: Looking at Autistic Language Development Through a New Lens (by Marge Blanc, 10/27/21) <https://www.njace.us/webinars/echoes-of-echolalia-looking-at-autistic-language-development-through-a-new-lens>

AAC: Connecting with Language Learners (by Kate Flaxman and Marge Blanc, 12/02/21) <https://njace.us/aac-connecting-with-language-learners/>

Podcast:

The Gestalt Get-Together (Corinne Zmoos with Marge Blanc) <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/gestaltgettogether/episodes/Communication-Development-Centers-NLA-Stage-1-e26nhvb>

Research:

*Natural Language Acquisition on the Autism Spectrum: The Journey from Echolalia to Self-Generated Language* (Marge Blanc, 2012) <https://www.northernspeech.com/echolalia-autism/natural-language-acquisition-on-the-autism-spectrum/> (the original book detailing and quantifying gestalt language development, and describing its natural supports, based on 15 years of clinical research)

“Examining the Echolalia Literature: Where Do Speech-Language Pathologists Stand?” *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* (Lillian N. Stiegler, 2015) [https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/2015\\_AJSLP-14-0166?casa\\_token=sJYaKBUa4qcAAAAA:OSJZvKXaVhQAoaIkGOqHYcLMGExOF4q8vzCO6voj91o1IxCNuj8iNycBrJYVocac4DruVi2xVG7Q](https://pubs.asha.org/doi/pdf/10.1044/2015_AJSLP-14-0166?casa_token=sJYaKBUa4qcAAAAA:OSJZvKXaVhQAoaIkGOqHYcLMGExOF4q8vzCO6voj91o1IxCNuj8iNycBrJYVocac4DruVi2xVG7Q)

“A Language-Based Approach to Managing Echolalia” (On Demand Webinar) [https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+\(On+Demand+Webinar\)&utm\\_source=asha&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=wecholalia](https://apps.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Webcode=olsdetails&title=A+Language-Based+Approach+to+Managing+Echolalia+(On+Demand+Webinar)&utm_source=asha&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=wecholalia)

“Language Acquisition and Communicative Behavior in Autism: Toward an Understanding of the ‘Whole’ It.” (Barry Prizant, 1983) <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/1983Towardwholeofit.pdf> (one of the seminal articles describing the first four stages of gestalt language development)

*The Units of Language Acquisition* (A Peters, 1983, 2021) <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Units-of-Language-Acquisition.pdf> (a compilation of the early qualitative research that first described language development, both analytic and gestalt)

### **Post Script:**

Language development is natural, for neurotypical and neurodivergent children! To insure a person’s language develops naturally, we have to refrain from ‘teaching and prompting rote language’ —ever!

Rote language is learned as a skill (or verbal 'behavior') but learning these 'splinter skills' interferes with natural language development!

This is the bottom line: language development is a life-long, natural process - for analytic processors, gestalt processors, and the 'dual processors' in between!

We have no reason to give up on anyone...and every reason to ...  
**Just Get Started!**

