



ECHOLALIA

Do you notice children using rich intonation and repeating chunks of repetitive words? That's a great sign that they are using echolalia, which can be referred to as Gestalt Language Processing (GLP). For example, they may repeat words they have heard other people say or lines from media (songs, videos, shows, commercials).

ECHOLALIA

Echolalia is a sign that the child is going through Natural Language Acquisition (NLA) on their way to self-generated utterances. NLA describes the work of SLPs (Speech Language Pathologists), Barry Prizant et al. and Marge Blanc.



GESTALT

Gestalts are specific scripts or chunks of vocabulary with rich intonation linked to an emotional meaning for the child. That “chunk” they repeat is attached to a meaningful experience; it is just not always understood by their communication partner yet.

There are stages to NLA that can help us assess where a child’s language development is at. In most cases, we have been taught to think of analytic language development as the “typical” way to process language. View the chart below to compare how we can describe gestalt language processing and analytic language processing. There’s nothing wrong with either approach, just different! (Meaningful Speech LLC)

ANALYTIC LANGUAGE PROCESSING (ALP)

1. Single words
2. Two-word combinations
3. Phrases with grammar
4. Sentences



GESTALT LANGUAGE PROCESSING (GLP)

1. Echolalia
2. Mix & match chunks (mitigation)
3. Isolating single words or two-word combinations
4. Phrases with grammar
5. Sentences
6. Complex sentences



ECHOLALIA

Knowing the stage our child is at can help you pick which strategies will match their development! *Notice at what stage your child is communicating in about 50% of the time and model language at that level.* Here are GLP Examples from Stage 1-4:

STAGE 1

Long whole scripts of Echolalia:

immediate or delayed repetition of language, may also use stuck single word gestalts, used with rich melodic intonation. May include jargon that you can't understand or songs (whole or parts of). I.e. "blue skidoo wants to fly" means 'let's go play' (script from Blue's Clues), "twinkle twinkle little star", "Let's get help" means 'there is a problem' or 'this is broken/fix it'.

STAGE 3

One- & two-word combinations: This consists of mainly nouns or describing nouns. Learning to use single words as meaningful units, the child is breaking them apart from the whole chunk. I.e. "frog jump" or "frog fast" and "tape" or "get tape" or "tape go/gone".

STAGE 2

Mix & Match stage: mitigating gestalts that the child uses, using partial gestalts in chunks or in combinations for a variety of communicative intentions/purposes. I.e. "Here I go + jump" or "Here I go + fast" and "Let's get + tape" or "Let's get + outta here".



STAGE 4

Grammar begins! You will notice your child start to use their own 3 word+ combinations in phrases. *Poor grammar is a good sign in this stage!* It means they are no longer echoing utterances and instead making their own phrases. I.e. "me jump frog", "Bluey goed fast", "here not frog", "Lemme tape box" or "no more tape?"

All children may use echolalia at some point in their development. For Autistic children, their first recognizable verbal words are most often echolalia. These repeated single words or phrases rich with intonation can sometimes be called "jargon". Autistic children tend to use echolalia *more frequently than other children.*



ECHOLALIA

**For children who are using Echolalia (GLP stage 1),
here are some strategies to consider:**

1. *Honor any echolalia your child uses as meaningful.* A delighted personal reaction to your child's sounds will teach them that speech sounds are powerful! Show them that these sounds volleyed back and forth are meaningful and fun!
2. *Repeat the scripts/gestalts that your child uses back to them.* This will help maintain or establish emotional co-regulation or connection.
3. Try to understand what your child is saying or referring to. This will give you time to think of connections.
4. *Don't take the echolalia literally.* For example, if they echo, "You're gonna break it" while holding on to a small breakable ornament they might mean that they notice it is something fragile, but it does not mean they are actually meaning to break it or they think you are going to break it.
5. *Model new potential scripts during playful partnered/Be-together activities.* Pick potential new gestalts that can be easier to mix & match (mitigate). For example, model "Let's get another one" (so it can turn into "let's get + an apple" or "Let's get + our shoes"). This makes it easier to mitigate than a whole script of a song or voice of a character.





ECHOLALIA

For children who are using Echolalia (GLP stage 1) here are some strategies to consider:

6. *Never ask your child to repeat or copy a possible gestalt that you want them to say.* This is not helpful in case they have motor planning difficulties. Your child will repeat a gestalt once they attach emotional meaning to the script.

7. *Write down echolalia that your child is using and the new possible gestalts you are modeling.* This can help you notice patterns and track their language growth! Share and compare this list with other people who know your child to better understand their expressive language.



8. If you have modelled a new gestalt and it is not ‘sticking’ (child is not repeating it), *try changing the tone or adding a sing-song quality to see if it is more interesting to them.*

9. *Don't fuss over receptive language goals at this point.* Focus on building their expressive language by modeling possible new gestalts in fun interactions with your child!