Autistic Communication

Mark Aronoff

Trustees Distinguished Professor, Linguistics

CURRENT RESEARCH

Shifting paradigms in viewing autistic communication as a system of its own

An important result of the years of research on sign language is the legitimation of not just sign languages but deaf people as well. We no longer regard deaf people as defective, but rather as different. Only when researchers began to look at it as a system on its own terms did it emerge that sign language had all the hallmarks of spoken language, except for being communicated visually rather than through sound. Likewise, if we can show that autistic communication is not simply deficient communication but has distinctive properties of its own, this finding might help destigmatize autistic people. Drs. Mark Aronoff and Matthew Lerner, Distinguished Professor of Linguistics and Assistant Professor of Psychology at Stony Brook University, respectively, are using sign language as a research model to provide a unique and vital avenue of discovery regarding the nature of communication among those with and without autism. For those with autism, this provides a rigorous empirical avenue for asking questions that are simply not being addressed in the mainstream research literature. Answering such questions will help facilitate dramatically more effective social-communication interventions, and provide unprecedented insight into the nature of "endogenous communication" across populations.

The study of sign language has provided more than just its crucial insight into the nature of language and deafness, but serves as an unprecedented model for the way in which academic researchers and the individuals on whom such research is focused, can work together to answer fundamental questions regarding the human capacity for social connection in entirely new ways. Such a model is profoundly needed in the field of autism...

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AFFILIATION

Stony Brook University

EDUCATION

- Ph.D. in Linguistics 1974,Massachusetts Institute of Technology

AWARDS

- American Academy of Arts and Sciences Exploratory Fund Project, 2015
- John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, 2014
- Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2013
- Resident, Rockefeller Foundation Center, Bellagio, 2013
- NIDCD-funded study of Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language, 2003-2013

RESEARCH AREAS

Linguistics, Humanities, Psychology, Neurological / Cognitive

FUNDING REQUEST

Your contributions will support the pioneering research of Drs. Mark Aronoff and Matthew Lerner at Stony Brook University as they bring together a Consortium of researchers worldwide to identify the patterns underlying autistic communication. Donations will help fund personnel, equipment, imaging, and conferences; a funding at $200K will be invaluable in moving this field forward. Partner with them to seek deeper understanding of how people connect, across populations and conditions.

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