Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are doing a study to investigate the unique speech quality of children with Autism. We would like to determine the speech characteristics that distinguish children with Autism based on age and gender. For example, we would like to study your child’s pitch and voice quality, motor speech abilities, and how your child plans and sequences speech for communication purposes. To participate in this study we would like children that meet the following criteria: a) children formally diagnosed with Autism by a specialist (pediatrician, autism specialist, psychologist, etc.) who are between the ages of 4-8 year; b) have no known uncorrected hearing or visual impairments; c) have no cranial-facial malformations (cleft palate, cleft lip); d) have no history within the past 6 months of self-injury or injury to others or damage to property; and e) vocalize (communicate with at least 10 words orally and at least 50 words using some other form of communication, such as PECS, ASL, AT/AAC, etc.).

If you are interested in participating, please contact us via email or by telephone as noted at the bottom of this letter expressing your interest in having your child participate in this study. At that time, with your verbal permission, you will be asked a few screening questions to determine if your child meets our study’s inclusion criteria. If you chose not to participate after hearing about the study, your child’s information will not be recorded and if any notes were taken, they will be immediately destroyed according to University protocols. If you agree to participate and your child meets inclusion criteria, you and your child will be scheduled on a day and time that is most convenient for you to participate in the study, which will take place on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus at either our MSD Lab located at 213 Arnold House on 715 North Pleasant Street or at the Center for Language, Speech and Hearing, located at 358 North Pleasant Street. You will be informed of the exact location once you are scheduled for an appointment.

During the study session, your child will be given some standardized speech and language tests and will engage in some informal conversation over the course of one session that will take approximately sixty (60) minutes. We prefer that your child is comfortable and motivated, and we will not attempt to complete all the testing in session if they exhibit fatigue. The tests will evaluate your child’s speech skills in depth and will be organized in a fun, lively way with breaks so your child will not get frustrated, bored or tired. We
will also administer a vocabulary test and some basic language measurements. Your child will be rewarded for his/her efforts and participation with parent approved items such as stickers, food, etc.

With respect to confidentiality, to the best of our ability your child’s answers in this study will remain confidential. The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your child’s study records. Although your child will be recorded during the testing process, your child’s eyes will be blocked out in all recordings when reviewing the videos for analysis. The investigators will practice measures to protect the identity of all participants and to avoid any breach of confidentiality. The researchers will keep all study records, including any codes to your child’s data, in a secure location on secured hard drives. Your email address will receive the same code as your child’s data. This code will be used at all times to refer to your email and will allow us to cross reference your email with your child’s unique code. A master key that links your email address to your code ID will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and videos of your child will be destroyed five (5) years after the close of the study. All electronic files that are used, such as databases and spreadsheet, containing the identifiable code information will be password protected and encrypted. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. All research data and instruments will be kept in a locked laboratory to which only the principal investigators have access. In addition, only the principal investigators of the research team will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings and/or present their research findings at a peer-reviewed scientific conference. Information will be presented in summary format and your child will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

For your child’s participation, you or he/she will be paid $25 in the form of a Target gift card for the session.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Assistant, Alyssa Lewandowski, or Dr. Mary Andrianopoulos at (413) 545-0551 or mva@comdis.umass.edu if you have questions. We are happy to discuss the purpose of the study, review the inclusion criteria for participating in the study and what it participation of the study entails

Sincerely,

Alyssa Lewandowski,
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Associate Professor
University of Massachusetts Amherst