Figurative Language

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Synonyms

Figures of speech; Metaphoric language; Non-literal language

Definition

Figurative language is language that is used in nonliteral ways in order to achieve a special effect or meaning. Similes, metaphors, idioms, proverbs, and slang are examples of figurative language. The ability to comprehend and produce nonliteral language is an important development in school-age children. Figurative language is commonly used in a variety of communicative contexts, including casual conversation, teacher talk, and written texts.

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) often have difficulty comprehending figurative language and may interpret figurative statements literally. Upon hearing the expression "It's raining cats and dogs," an individual with ASD may think that the speaker means that cats and dogs are literally falling from the sky. The meaning and appropriate use of figurative language may need to be explicitly taught to individuals with ASD. Difficulties with figurative language are common in individuals with a variety of disorders (e.g., Specific Language Impairment, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

See Also

▶ Metaphoric Language

References and Reading

Hedge, M. N., & Maul, C. (2006). *Language disorders in children: An evidence-based approach to assessment and treatment*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Paul, R. (2007). *Language disorders from infancy through adolescence: Assessment and intervention* (3rd ed.). St. Louis: Mosby.