The origins, development, and neural bases of language impairments in ASD

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Abstract: Impairments in language and communication are among the core symptoms of ASD. In children there is enormous variability in the language phenotypes associated with ASD ranging from highly fluent to the absence of any communicative speech. Studies of high risk infants have highlighted the early onset of differences in brain organization and communicative impairment associated with language development. In toddlers diagnosed with ASD there is considerable variability in language ability are already evidence. At this stage differences in the social, cognitive, and motor skills that are important factors in language acquisition predict divergent developmental pathways for children with ASD into the preschool years. By middle childhood neuroimaging studies have found significant differences in brain structure, functional organization and connectivity that are associated with some of the varied language phenotypes in ASD, as well as the parallels between ASD and other language disorders.

Biography:
Helen Tager-Flusberg received her Bachelors in Science in Psychology from University College London, and her doctorate from Harvard University. From 1978 through 2001 she was a Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts –Boston and from 1996 – 2001 she also held the position of Senior Scientist at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center/UMass Medical Center. Since 2001 Dr. Tager-Flusberg has been at Boston University initially with primary appointments in the Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology and Pediatrics at the School of Medicine and now as Professor of Psychology at Boston University, where she was the Director of the Developmental Science Program from 2009 to 2012. Dr. Tager-Flusberg conducts research on autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders, investigating developmental changes in language and social cognition using behavioral and brain imaging methodologies. Her research has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and private foundations, including Autism Speaks, The Simons Foundation, the Autism Consortium, the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation and March of Dimes. Dr. Tager-Flusberg is currently the President of the International Society for Autism Research, serves on the editorial board of several professional journals and is Associate Editor of the Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders.