

## **Introduction**

Children with autism (ASD) show different language profiles; non-verbal (NV), non-functional verbal (NFV) or verbal (V). This study aims to examine their developmental trajectories and characterise the profile of those who achieve verbal communication. Finding patterns on the development of the language in autism might be of great use to choose better interventions.

## **Methodology**

This longitudinal cohort study included two evaluations across a 2-year period. N=20 children with ASD, aged 2.9-4.1 years, were recruited from two specialized ASD units at two public hospitals. The CELF Preschool-2 was administered to assess language development, focusing on the Core, Receptive, Expressive Language, as well as Language Content and Language Structure outcomes.

## **Results**

Our results showed the following trajectories: of the 11 children with ASD who were non-verbal (NV) at baseline, 5 progressed to non-functional verbal (NFV), 5 remained NV, and 1 became verbal (V) with a language impairment (LI) by the second evaluation. Among the 5 initially classified as NFV, 4 advanced to V with LI and 1 to V without LI. From the 2 children who were already V, both achieved V without LI. Overall, these findings indicate that children who were NFV at the first evaluation generally became V with LI, while those who were V with LI appeared to overcome their impairment.

## **Conclusions**

At an average age of 3.5 years there is a clear difference between ASD children who are VNF and those V with a LI, but for both groups the results are quite optimistic. In contrast, the NV group showed lower chances to become V, as on the second evaluation most of them stayed NV or NFV, highlighting the difficulty of overcoming the language development barrier at this stage.

## **Key words**

Language, ASD, CELF, language disorder.