

ADOS-2 Coding Guidance Stereotyped/Idiosyncratic Use of Words or Phrases (A4)

This document has been created as ADOS-2 trainers often receive questions about A4 in the ADOS-2, and reliability meetings often involve discussions about what should be included in this coding item. It is important to stress that whilst we code these features of language and communication in the ADOS-2, none of them are 'exclusive' to autism and they can all be observed in the general population. Everything that is observed during the ADOS-2 should be considered alongside other sources of information (including a developmental history) and the assessment process should involve someone who is trained in assessing differential diagnoses. It is also important to consider language and communication differences if English is not the individual's first language.

If you have any comments or suggestions about how to improve this document, we would welcome your feedback. Please contact us at info@compasspsy.co.uk.

Stereotyped language

I usually describe this as language which sounds as though it has been 'borrowed' from elsewhere (for example, a teacher / parent / television / film / radio). Sometimes this is very obvious (for example, a younger child using phrases such as: "*oh for crying out loud*" / "*let's get back to work*" / "*let's get a bit of fresh air in here*" / "*I'm in my element with this spanner*" / "*it's a piece of cake*" / "*you're full of surprises aren't you?*"). Sometimes these phrases are used communicatively (for example, a 7 year old saying "*by gosh, I don't even know your name*" when trying to find out the name of a peer) but at other times the phrases will not be communicative (for example, saying "*what have we here? Toes!*" when this is not relevant to the immediate context). It would be coded in A4 regardless of whether it is communicative or not, but the functionality and integration into context is relevant for other codes in the ADOS-2. Sometimes people will use stereotyped language when describing relationships (for example, saying "*we have an unbreakable bond*" when talking about friendship). If you ever suspect that the phrasing around friendships / relationships / emotions / social difficulties are stereotyped, it is really important to unpick this (in a non-leading way!) to find out if they have a true understanding, or whether they are providing surface level answers with no real understanding. For example, you could just ask "*what does the word 'bond' mean to you?*". In adolescence the stereotyped language can be much more subtle and the nuances of this require discussion and careful consideration.

Idiosyncratic language

If you hear a phrase which makes you think *'that's a strange way of saying it, but it sort of makes sense'* then it may be idiosyncratic. For example, during the *'Demonstration Task'* when describing how they brush their teeth someone might say *"first you brush your tooth-fronts"* or *"you need to fertilise the toothbrush with some water"*. Describing trousers as *"leg sleeves"* or feathers as *"bird leaves"* and milk as *"cereal water"* are also examples of idiosyncratic speech. Word finding/retrieval difficulties (for example, struggling to think of a word and saying *"the thing you hang your washing on..."* when talking about a clothes dryer rack) should be considered here. You must always code what you hear/observe in the ADOS-2, regardless of your perception of the underlying reason (you can consider differential diagnoses / reasons for behaviour after you have completed the ADOS-2 when you are weighing up the developmental history and other sources of information).

Formal language is also coded in A4. For example, saying *"I've cultivated the optimum environment to maximise enjoyment within my own home. It would be absurd to voluntarily remove myself from that context for any extended period of time"* in response to being invited on holiday.

Repetitive language (including repetitive words and phrases, intonation patterns and sentence structure) is coded in A4. This is sometimes missed as it can be quite subtle. People may use words such as *"presumably"* and *"obviously"* in a repetitive way, or start/finish sentences with the same word or phrase. It's important to 'tally' this as soon as you hear something which may be repetitive (you can always discount it later if it's not).

Neologisms are completely made up words (for example, *"moop"* to refer to a bowl). Be aware that some words may sound like neologisms but are in fact from a book or computer game. You can ask the person what the word means and/or do an internet search to determine this.

Across person pronominal reversal is coded in A4 (for example, mixing up 'you' and 'I' by saying *"you want a car"* when they mean *"I want a car"*). Pronominal reversal which is not across person (for example mixing up he/she or him/her) is not coded in A4. However, this could potentially be coded in A1 if considered as a recurrent grammatical error.