



**THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER**

ANNOUNCES THE FINAL EXAMINATION OF

KAREN KAY KARNER

FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE
GRADUATE COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS

Friday, August 19, 2016, 3:00 p.m.
Room 3025, Allied Health Building, OUHSC

Speech Act Use by Adolescents Diagnosed with Higher Functioning
Forms of Autism When Interacting with Typical Peers in a Semi-
Structured Conversational Context

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE: Susan Benson, Ph.D., Co-Chair, Sarah Buckingham, Ph.D., Co-Chair, Hugh Buckingham, Ph.D., Daiquirie Crumrine, Ph.D., Lara Mayeux, Ph.D., Michael Anderson, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT: Few studies have measured pragmatic language used in real time by adolescents diagnosed with higher functioning forms of autism as they interact with their typical peers. As a result, little is known about language used when these two populations interact. Possible reasons for the paucity of research data in this area include difficulty in finding age-appropriate and highly appealing tasks that encourage interaction between the two populations and limited data collection techniques that measure speech act use during real-time oral communication. Evidence exists suggesting that the frequency and duration of interaction with typical peers by adolescents diagnosed with higher functioning forms of autism increased after three years of using LEGO® building systems in group therapy focused on social skills training. The purpose of this study was to investigate speech act use by adolescents diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders without language impairment as they interacted with their typical developing peers while engaged in an age-appropriate and high-interest task involving LEGO® building systems. Six triads of three participants each, one diagnosed with higher functioning autism and two who were typically developing, were formed. Triads worked together rotating three roles, engineer, supplier, and builder, every fifteen minutes. Language sampling was implemented as a technique for collecting frequency data. Samples were analyzed for types and appropriateness of speech acts used by each group in each role. Trends in results indicated that individuals on the spectrum may use speech acts with the same variety and appropriateness as their typically developing peers when the topic is focused and language abilities are matched.