

# Beyond the limits of neurotypical linguistic variation

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Language functionality is an essential constraint on human social interaction and communication, and arguably on cognitive development and functioning as well. In mental disorders, language function tends to be affected, with linguistic phenotypes emerging that range from no language development at all (as in up to 30% of the autism spectrum) to fluent but unintelligible and disorganized language (as in people with formal thought disorder and a diagnosis of schizophrenia). I argue, based on studies of our lab of language patterns in autism, schizophrenia, and dementia, that such linguistic variation cannot be conceptualised as either a reduction in, or as a secondary affectation of, normal linguistic functioning. Rather, it reflects genuine deviance and qualitative change in our language capacity, which can help us to not only identify and detect, but also to understand and potentially treat the cognitive changes involved.