

## ABSTRACT

It has been well established that language impairment is a primary deficit in autism. While past research on language functioning of autistic children suggested that deficits in communication could be observed at the early stage of development, the patterns of impairment were varying across studies. The present study adapted the input/output dichotomy of neuropsychological model for examining aphasic patients to better understand the pattern of communicative functioning in autistic children. Verbal expression and comprehension abilities were examined in a group of 19 Chinese autistic children who were in early childhood (age 5 to 6). Results showed that 42 percent of the children were impaired in both verbal expression and comprehension abilities, and 21 percent demonstrated normal comprehension but impaired expression skills. The remaining 37 percent showed quite normal functioning on both communicative dimensions. This finding suggested that language impairment related to autism can be observed at early childhood (i.e. 5 to 6 years old), and the pattern of communicative functioning in the autistic children is quite heterogeneous.