In the documentary *Extreme Love: Autism*, Louis Theroux visits three families that have children with autism and catches a glimpse about what life is like for them. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, autism is a developmental disability characterized by difficulty in communicating and forming relationships with other people. In the film, Theroux meets with a family who has a 19 year old son named Nicky with autism. Nicky lives with his mom, twin sister and three older brothers. Nicky was essentially non verbal until he was 6 years old and was sent to the DLC Warren School in New Jersey, one of the best schools in the United States for autism (*Extreme Love: Autism*, 2012). After making exceptional progress at the school, Nicky became one of the most highly functioning children with autism and was preparing to transition into a mainstream school. The focus of this clinical is to explain Nicky’s communication abilities through language form, content and use as well as comparing it to other chronologically aged-matched peers.

When observing Nicky in the film, it was evident that his language form and content was developmentally similar to a 19 year old without autism. Language form is referred to as grammar because it is the structure of all language and language content is understanding the meaning of words or sentences (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016). Normally, school-aged children with a language impairment struggle with the ability to form complex sentences. They
often use mazes which are false starts, repetitions and reformation of sentences during the production of language (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016). In Nicky’s case, he had exceptional syntax and was able to arrange words and phrases to create well-rounded sentences when talking to people. In addition to Nicky’s ability to form complex sentences, he can tell descriptive narratives just like age-matched peers without a language impairment. For example, Nicky wrote his own book which includes long, grammatically complicated sentences and effective expository writing with a main idea, supporting details and a conclusion (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016). Nicky also displayed impressive language content similar to his chronological age. His capability to learn, speak and understand Japanese showed an increased skill in his expressive vocabulary, words that a person can produce by speaking and receptive vocabulary, words that can be understood by a person including written words, (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016). Lastly, Nicky presented an average lexicon of about 3,000 words annually which is normal for other people his age (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016).

Despite the fact that Nicky exhibits enhanced qualities in language form and content for his condition, his language use is not as strong. In the documentary, Nicky is shown having problems with pragmatics, or linguistics dealing with language use and the context in which it is used (Gilliam, Marquardt, & Martin, 2016). An example of this is Nicky not knowing how to take turns in a conversation. He is seen multiple times interrupting people when they are talking and taking over the whole conversation. Other 19-year-olds without autism act different from Nicky in this way, they show the ability to wait their turn during a conversation and not disrupt the other person. Another flaw in his social language is his use of inappropriate references. When Nicky is upset he often lets his emotions take control of his communication. He has gotten in
trouble many times for saying threats to his classmates such as “if you don’t stop I’m going to stab you,” (Extreme Love: Autism, 2012). This loss of emotional control is not present in most people Nicky’s age when upset. These examples are typical social language problems in people with autism that normally aren’t found in other chronologically aged peers and may continue to be apparent without proper intervention.

As seen in the film, Nicky’s language use is developmentally lower than his chronological age. Other than this delayed skill, Nicky seems to be normal or above average in other skills pertaining to language form and content. Teaching Nicky appropriate social language skills would not be as hard as teaching other kids that are autistic because he is so high functioning. To stop Nicky’s threats, the clinician should create an intervention plan for him that contains different written social scenarios that show appropriate ways of dealing with comments that upset him. They should also implement role play to have Nicky practice his newly developed skills which help aid him when real situations of this occur. Furthermore, to improve his skill of taking turns, the clinician should talk him through what a normal conversation should look like emphasizing not to interrupt the person talking and to wait his turn to speak.
Works Cited

