Beyond Communicative Norms: Neurodiversity, Cultural Values, and the Ethics of Autistic Communication

Dr Venkanna Maagi
ICSSR Post Doctoral Fellow National Institute of Technology, Warangal Telangana,India

Abstract
The paper presents an Expectations about intelligibility, reciprocity, politeness, and appropriate self-presentation are culturally organized. In autism, this expectation raises the ethical question of when a standard for communication allows for shared understanding. And at what point does it mark participation conditional on conformity? This conceptual article investigates this question through a selective critical engagement with neurodiversity scholarship, the double empathy problem, epistemic injustice, and prosody research and social judgment. The communicative difference that can be observed, task-specific difficulty, and negative social evaluation are distinguished in it. Recent findings that do not support an all-same-neurotype advantage in empathic accuracy are considered evidence for interactional mismatch. The article proposes a framework of reciprocal communicative recognition based on functional justification, inclusive participation, interpretive accountability and supported agency. English-language education cases show how institutions can maintain legitimate learning aims while questioning unnecessary expectations about performance style. The framework neither denies disability nor treats cultural convention as sufficient ethical justification. It is a normative process for assessing communication needs rather than a validated intervention or an empirical account of any particular cultural community.

Keywords: neurodiversity; autistic communication; cultural values; communicative norms; epistemic justice; inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a way through which people exchange information and a process through which people earn social recognition. Though a speaker's response may be appropriate, the hearer may view it as insufficiently engaged due to unexpected timing, compressed facial expression, or non-matching voice. The ethical challenge in this situation is whether the judgment identifies in fact a barrier to understanding, or is rather an expectation about how an acceptable person ought to sound in approach. In situations where judgments affect educational opportunity, professional credibility, or access to support, the distinction can be important.

The problem has a significant context in autistic communication. The idea of a neurodiversity scholarship questions the assumption that dominant behavioral expectations constitute a neutral measure of human worth. Scholars do disagree about disability, intervention and the purpose of research. Dwyer differentiates neurodiversity, as human variation, associated heterogeneous approaches and

acknowledges individual characteristics as well as environments contribute to disability (2022, 73–92). This distinction allows for a philosophical investigation that treats communication needs seriously without treating statistical typicality as an ethical ideal.

The current article poses three questions. How do we justify a communication norm in view of people's differences in meaning production and interpretation? How to assess cultural expectations when they allocate credibility and involvement unequally? What duties do educators and institutions that regulate communicative performance have? The author argues that the rationale behind communication norms is related to the function of the communication situation, the accessibility of the particular communication situation, and the agency of the subjects who are expected to comply.

The paper makes a limited conceptual contribution. It explains communicative variation, functional difficulty and devaluation. These, it suggests, can help judge institutional needs via mutual communicative recognition. The term signifies the framework we construct here. It is not presented as a previously validated model. Education in English is able to supply hypothetical applications because it makes the relation between linguistic ability and judgments of appropriate performance especially vivid. The examples do not claim to describe all autistic learners, all English teachers or any national culture.

2 CONCEPTUAL APPROACH AND SCOPE

This article is philosophical and conceptual, drawing selectively on narratives in the published literature. It does not include any new data from participants, statistical reanalysis, clinical reassessment, or systematic review. During the preparation of the manuscript, which occurred on or before 30 October 2026, we examined publicly available publisher pages, institutional repositories and research records to verify key sources and uncover relevant counterevidence. There were searches that combined autism or neurodiversity with communication, double empathy, prosody, camouflaging, cultural norms and epistemic injustice, and more. The literature produced is selective rather than comprehensive; no claim is made to exhaustive database coverage or reproducible screening.

It proceeds through1 conceptual clarification, comparison of empirical implications, normative argument, and application to hypotheticals. The sources chosen bear directly on the difference between communication performance and its evaluation, add to the ethical framework or could undermine the argument. Empirical findings published limit the discussion but do not establish moral conclusions by their finding. On the other hand, normative commitments to dignity and access do not establish that a psychological explanation is empirically correct.

The article generally uses autistic people as its term of choice while respecting choice. According to Botha, Hanlon, and Williams, terminology impacts material realities and should center autistic self-determination (2023, 870–78). Doing so

enables us to respect how certain people name themselves rather than a naming rule. The scope takes into consideration people that use speech, writing, or augmentative and alternative communication. Nevertheless, much of the evidence I have discussed has been concerned with adults able to verbally respond. We must use caution when generalizing non-speaking or people with intellectual disabilities.

3 CULTURAL NORMS AND THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION

A communication norm refers to a kind of expectation for how meaning ought to be produced. Some norms are explicit as when an examiner requires candidates to answer a question in a specific time. Some work through the unexpressed prohibitions placed on enthusiasm, sincerity, timing, or emotions. Although norms can coordinate interaction, this function of coordination does not show that all customary requirements are necessary or fair.

There need to be three evaluative levels. The descriptive level deals with what people do: for example, because a response begins after a long pause or with a narrow pitch range. The functional level refers to what happens in a given interaction when a message is misinterpreted, an instruction is not fully explicit, or an interlocutor cannot tell if a response is complete. The normative level concerns what the people infer ought to happen, for instance that a participant will respond faster, show more enthusiasm or take the expected turn. By allowing confusion among these levels, we permit a deviation from convention to be seen as evidence of incompetence without checking whether understanding actually failed.

Culture is the social meaning assigned to behavior. A pausing can mean reflecting, delaying, resisting, or withdrawing. Such meanings are contextual, relational and institutional. The issue here is with defenses of a single interpretation of the text. When the consequences for a person's status or standing are involved, then we need to take a closer look at our inference. The mere sense of unfamiliarity on a listener's part does not justify withholding an educational opportunity.

The analysis distinguishes the existence of a convention from its normative power. A practice can be widespread and impose avoidable burdens. In other words, beneficial but arduous requirements can remain justified if they are legitimate, relevant, and have regard to alternate solutions to how the requirement can be satisfied. For example, a clear confirmation of a safety instruction serves a different purpose than a demand to confirm it cheerfully. Such contrasts are hypothetical and intended to clarify evaluation, not findings about a specific school.

The consequence of axiological problem is a ranking of value. While speed, familiarity, and ease for the majority can be useful, there is no reason for these to automatically override access, autonomy or reliable understanding. An ethical assessment involves making those competing values explicit. A system that firmly presents every regular performance criterion as indispensable obscures the choices through which it allocates participation.

4 NEURODIVERSITY AND THE LIMITS OF NORMALISATION

The study by Pellicano and den Houting looks into the effects of shifting autism research to neurodiversity and engagement with autistic priorities.

The way they account for these features, then, establishes that the choice of the research and intervention goals is itself evaluative. A program may refer to its effect in hugely technical terms while assuming that appearing less autistic is a good thing. One should examine the assumption independently.

Normalization refers to making similarity to a preferred behavior pattern the key standard of success. Judging support should be done on the bases of the opportunities and capacities it creates for a person. Teaching a person to ask for help, use a communication device, or understand a potential double meaning can increase their agency. Needing to exhibit a socially approved facial expression even with adequate understanding may have weaker justification. The difference depends on intention, experience, and consequences rather than the designation of an intervention, and cannot be settled by expression alone.

The qualitative study of social camouflaging by Hull et al. describes strategies for coping with social situations and the burdens associated with them (2017, 2519–34). It is relevant to evaluation the costs of behavioral expectations. It does not demonstrate that every learned social strategy is damaging or that the reported relationships constitute a general causal effect. Someone might opt for a conversational tactic that helps them accomplish an important goal. A problem of ethics arises when, as a forced strategy, its costs are not investigated, and the setting does not unwillingly adjust.

Two conclusions can be drawn. Honoring neurodiversity doesn't have to be incompatible with addressing distress, disability and communication difficulty. Secondly, the person with an impairment should play a meaningful role in defining the object of support. Where assistance is required in determining these goals, such assistance must be readily accessible. Choice must be understood relative to available opportunities. A serious student choosing a style of performance because all else is a matter of exclusion may have a formal option without enjoying a right option choice.

5 DOUBLE EMPATHY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF EVIDENCE

Milton's concept redirects focus to communication and mutual understanding in encounters between non-autistics and autistics. The importance of the concept is that the failure of communication does not need to be explained only through one participant's characteristics. This incites reflection on how interlocutors interpret one another as well as how tasks of research define successful interaction.

The Kathleen and his fellows Crompton studied whether information transfers a chain of story retellings with 72 adults. Chains that included both autistic and non-autistic individuals were worse than either of the other two types of chains,

which were either composed of only autistic or only non-autistic individuals. The task shows that partner composition can influence specific communication outcomes. It does not gauge every facet of empathy, nor does it substantiate the claim that autistic individuals consistently communicate more effectively with each other. Generalization is limited by its small sample, prescribed task and characteristics of the participants.

The recent counterevidence matters. De Laet, Nijhof, and Wiersema (2019) examined empathic accuracy in a sample of 106 adults using video-based judgments of others' thoughts. The anticipated same-neurotype advantage for autistic individuals was not observed and the finding did not endorse the double empathy account for said task (2026, 1816–28). The contrast is analytically useful: details retained from stories, thoughts inferred by recipients, subjective feelings of rapport, and interactional comfort are different outcomes. It cannot be assumed that they converge; divergence requires explanation and not selective quotation.

The ethical argument here therefore does not depend on neurotype mismatch universally explaining communication difficulty as the result. When one account of empathy receives mixed support, respect and accessible participation do not become optional. Even when someone has a clear task-specific problem, it is still important to ask what is the most appropriate assistance, whether the task is relevant, and whether the interpretation goes further than the evidence. In the same way, one's ethical commitment must not deny an observed difficulty.

Cross-examination is so important to reciprocity. Misunderstandings can occur between participants of different capacities with respect to defining consequences. A teacher can give a student a mark; a student can rarely impose the same mark on a teacher. So mutual misunderstanding does not mean equal institutional blame. There should be stronger obligations to make the criteria for assessment or access explicit, and investigate avoidable barriers.

6 PROSODY, SOCIAL JUDGMENT, AND EPISTEMIC STANDING

Linguists, inspired by Chomsky, aim to develop a theory of phonetics. Acoustically, we can describe this speech act's fundamental frequency, duration, intensity and temporal organization; judging it isn't as easy and requires further inference; is it rude, indifferent, or unreliable? The systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Asghari and colleagues specified group differences in some prosodic measures and related heterogeneity to age and elicitation task (2021 [n. pag.]). The findings do not provide sufficient basis to support the existence of a unitary autistic vocal profile or a diagnostic reading of an individual speaker's voice.

A difference between groups is not a rule of assessment. It does not make clear whether a person can communicate a particular message, whether the listener understood it, or whether it would be helpful for the speaker to change it. To ensure responsible consonant phonetic analysis to guide practice, specify the relevant question. Making oneself easier to understand for a self-chosen task is

different from being more likely to be understood in order to make a social impression. It can matter to someone both big things and little things; however, their purposes and burdens ought to stay visible.

In their research, Sasson et al. discovered that during brief encounters, individuals tended to have negative first impressions and were less inclined to engage with autistic people. Furthermore, this pattern was not reproduced when observers were presented with only transcripts of the spoken content (2017, n. pag.). It examines how presentation affects observer judgment on suspect. It neither attributes isolation of prosody as the sole cause, proves discriminatory intent in all observer, nor attests to all real-world encounters showing the same pattern.

Fricker's account of epistemic injustice provides a way to engage philosophically with how people can be wronged in their capacity as knowers (2007, 1). The key question is whether an atypical form of communication presentation leads a listener to improperly discount relevant testimony. A reserved manner does not imply absence of distress nor does a fluent manner imply that a claim is true. Credibility should follow the evidence rather than an untested idea of emotional display.

It is important to differentiate injustice from disagreement. It is not automatically an epistemic wrong to reject a claim whose evidence contradicts it. When identity bias, or an unfair interpretative arrangement, determines whose account counts, it raises concern. Research by Uisma, Virkki, and Ylilahti concerning Finnish autistic young adults researched healthcare experiences shows how differing understanding and devaluing of expressive styles can limit epistemic agency (2026, n. pag.). As such, the evidence speaks to the conceptual issue and cannot demonstrate the prevalence of such experiences in education or other countries.

7 RECIPROCAL COMMUNICATIVE RECOGNITION

This paper proposes reciprocal communicative recognition as a norm for communication requirements. Recognition treats people as participants whose meanings and preferences deserve serious attention. Reciprocity implies sharing the work of understanding, with responsibilities distributed according to the capabilities of the participants and their institutional authority. The set of specifications is linked, rather than a psychometric scale – or validated intervention.

7.1 Functional Justification

A body should state what a communication requirement is aimed at achieving and explain how the required behavior will aid that goal. Reliable exchange of information, demonstration of a learning outcome, coordination of a consequential activity are all relevant purposes. When a behavior is sought merely because it is the familiar or agreeable one for an evaluator, justification weakens. When a requirement limits access or causes serious discomfort, it needs extra effort to explain.

You do not need to take out all the performance criteria. If an assessment of oral intelligibility, a written answer will not represent the same construct. Still, the meanings of oral intelligibility should not then quietly extend to judgements about eye contact, enthusiasm, accent prestige, or personal warmth. Criteria must identify the target ability; unrelated characteristics must not be used as proxies for it.

To identify what a communication requirement is intended to achieve and to explain how the required behavior contributes to that purpose. Achieving a reliable exchange of relevant information, demonstrating a learning outcome or coordinating a consequential activity. When a behavior is expected only because it is well-known or pleasing to an evaluator, its justification weakens. When a requirement limits access or raises serious distress, the need for justification increases.

This does not require removing all performance criteria. If a task tests intelligibility/understanding, a purely written response may not measure the same construct. Nonetheless, one's oral intelligibility should not covertly expand into assessments regarding eye contact, enthusiasm, accent prestige, or personal warmth. It should pinpoint the target ability and not confuse other characteristics as proxy abilities.

7.2 Accessible Participation

Once the necessity has been established, the institution would examine whether a different form of communication could achieve it. These may take the form of direct instructions, processing time, a written prompt, a quieter environment or an appropriate alternative mode. Here are some options you may want to consider individually. In terms of a person's choice and the actual demand of the job, an adjustment should be analyzed. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities acknowledges a wide range of communication modes and refers to expression and access to information through communication of one's choice (2006, arts. 2, 21). The framework could have a rights-based orientation. It does not resolve all evaluation disagreements or substitute consideration of the pertinent domestic legislation and the relevant institutional context.

7.3 Interpretive Accountability

Evaluators must address the difference between observation and interpretation, and allow for the correction of consequential interpretations. An assessor could specify a lack of initiation rather than idiosyncratic uninterestedness. Then assess initiation requirement, clarity of opportunity, and student understanding of the format. When the description is specific, it helps identify the error easily rather than depending on a personality label. One does not need to presuppose self-reporting is perfect to hold people accountable. It means providing an opportunity to clarify meaning in an accessible form, considering relevant testimony and giving reasons for judgments. In case of doubt, proportionality requires the evidence to be sought. Just because someone has been diagnosed does not mean that their allegation should be automatically disbelieved or that any allegation should go

unexamined.

7.4 Supported Agency

The affected person should help set communication goals and assess them. Active engagement may mean requiring accessible explanations, trusted support, alternative means of responding, and/or being invited to express a message repeatedly. Consequently, supported agency is not reducible to a single verbal consent question. The person's interests and expressed wishes should not be automatically replaced by the caregiver's or professional's convenience. This framework provides a practical ethical sequence: clarify purpose, examine relevant barriers, consider alternatives, invite clarification, and revisit the person's experience. An institutional change is warranted if a convention fails this examination. Support should help the individual participate while maintaining oversight of needless costs if a need endures. This is an argument for justified decision-making rather than a guarantee that every hard case will have an uncontroversial solution.

8 IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In English-language education, it is easy to separate learning outcomes from performance style. Imagine a seminar assessment that evaluates how you interpret a literary passage. Should the grade be dominated by spontaneous turn entry and very animated delivery, the assessment may reward additional features, other than textual understanding. Innovative prompts, a clear allocation of speaking turns, or an added written response could be considered, although not necessarily for all learners. Does the test do a fair job of assessing what it claims?

On the subject of the differences is a kind of a course whose explicit objective is meant to promote the live spoken interaction. Eliminating the interaction here would change the purpose. The framework, instead, asks if the teacher can make clear the expectations of conversation, allow proper preparation, clear up how successful repair will be evaluated, and distinguish understanding from preferred self-presentation. Students could be instructed on various methods to ask for clarification or signal completion and supported in selecting doable strategies.

Teacher training should build this capacity for critical judgment. A trainee may be asked to differentiate between what a transcript conveys, how the speaker is delivering this, and how the evaluator is marking this. The goal would be to establish where certainty finishes and assumption starts. This article does not evidence that proposed development and evaluation of such an exercise improves teacher practice.

Curriculum decisions should also reflect the thinking of Autistic people about which outcomes matter and which burdens are invisible to assessors. Nonetheless, the consultation must include different communication and support needs. Only including participants who communicate well in meetings re-creates the hierarchy we are trying to study. To ensure accessible participation, consideration of consultation's organization is required.

9 OBJECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

One first objection is that it undermines the shared standards of agents. The framework keeps standards for acceptable goals but requires application to their importance and accessibility. Coordination often needs conventions; the ethical question is about which conventions are indispensable and whether the various alternatives can achieve the same thing at lower excluding costs.

A major objection relates to significant disability. A recognition-based approach could prove inadequate were it to focus on fluent adults and frame all barriers as prejudice. The present framework allows individual challenges to require ongoing support. You have an obligation to respect a person as well as accommodate a disabling difficulty. The adequacy for people with complex support needs further participative examination.

A third objection is cultural. If expectations vary, a framework may impose a philosophical tradition as universal. Here's a procedural and limited reply: institutions should make their purposes explicit, consider the account of the affected person, and justify restrictions with consequences. Specific ways in which these commitments should operate in communities requires locally listening scholarship. This article does not provide an empirical comparison of cultures or delineate what typically happens in Indian education.

The selective literature method brings additional restrictions. The proposed framework is not unique in the literature and it can't establish the distribution of scholarly positions or estimate effect sizes. The sources in English and the research records that are available may have omitted relevant work. If only abstracts and publishers' descriptions were available, these were used for bounded claims rather than a full reconstruction of the arguments. Before any claims about effectiveness can be justified, the framework should undergo expert critique, autistic participation, and practical evaluation.

10 CONCLUSIONS

The autistic communication ethics project needs strong separation between communicative difference, task-based difficulty and social devaluation. An understanding of a culture doesn't establish the moral authority of standards; nor does a commitment to inclusion determine which psychological explanation is empirically correct. Studies have produced mixed findings on double empathy which warrants specificity in communication outcome and caution against overgeneralization. Reciprocal communicative recognition provides an ideal procedure with functional legitimacy, accessible participation, interpretive accountability, and supported agency. The key implication is that the institution seeking conformity in communication must account for the outcomes it produces and the interests it serves, as well as whether a less restrictive arrangement would be possible. The aim is to allocate the effort of understanding so that it is defensible, along with support that expands the person's meaningful opportunities to participate.

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