BOCA RATON, Fla. -- David J. Lewkowicz, Ph.D. a professor of psychology at Florida Atlantic University, along with doctoral student Amy Hansen-Tift, said they have discovered how infants learn to talk. Lewkowicz said the two-year study shows infants learn how to talk by listening and looking. "Our research found that infants shift their focus of attention to the mouth of the person who is talking when they enter the babbling stage and that they continue to focus on the mouth for several months thereafter until they master the basic speech forms of their native language," Lewkowicz said. Lewkowicz said, in other words, infants become lip readers when they first begin to produce speech-like sounds. The study sheds new light on the way doctors diagnose autism spectrum disorder, Lewkowicz said. Currently, the disorder can be diagnosed around 18 months, and by 2 years of age, autistic children focus their attention on the mouth of a talker whereas developing children typically start to focus on the eyes. "When these facts are combined with our findings, it is likely that, contrary to typically developing children, infants who are as yet undiagnosed, but who are at risk for autism, may continue to focus on the mouth of a native-language talker at 12 months of age," said Lewkowicz, who added that the finding could allow early diagnosis. "This would provide the earliest behavioral confirmation of impending developmental disability and would give clinicians an early start on intervention procedures aimed at lessening or preventing the most devastating effects of autism and other communicative disorders," Lewkowicz said.