



Humber Teaching  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Early Language Development and Information Carrying Words



# What is Language?

## Dictionary definitions:

- a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar, or the system of communication used by people in a particular country or type of work (Cambridge Dictionary)
- a system of communication by speaking, writing, or making signs in a way that can be understood, or any of the different systems of communication used in particular regions (American Dictionary)

# Speech & Language Therapy Definition

- **Language** refers to the words we use and how we use them to share ideas and get what we want (ASHA)

We divide language into two main areas:

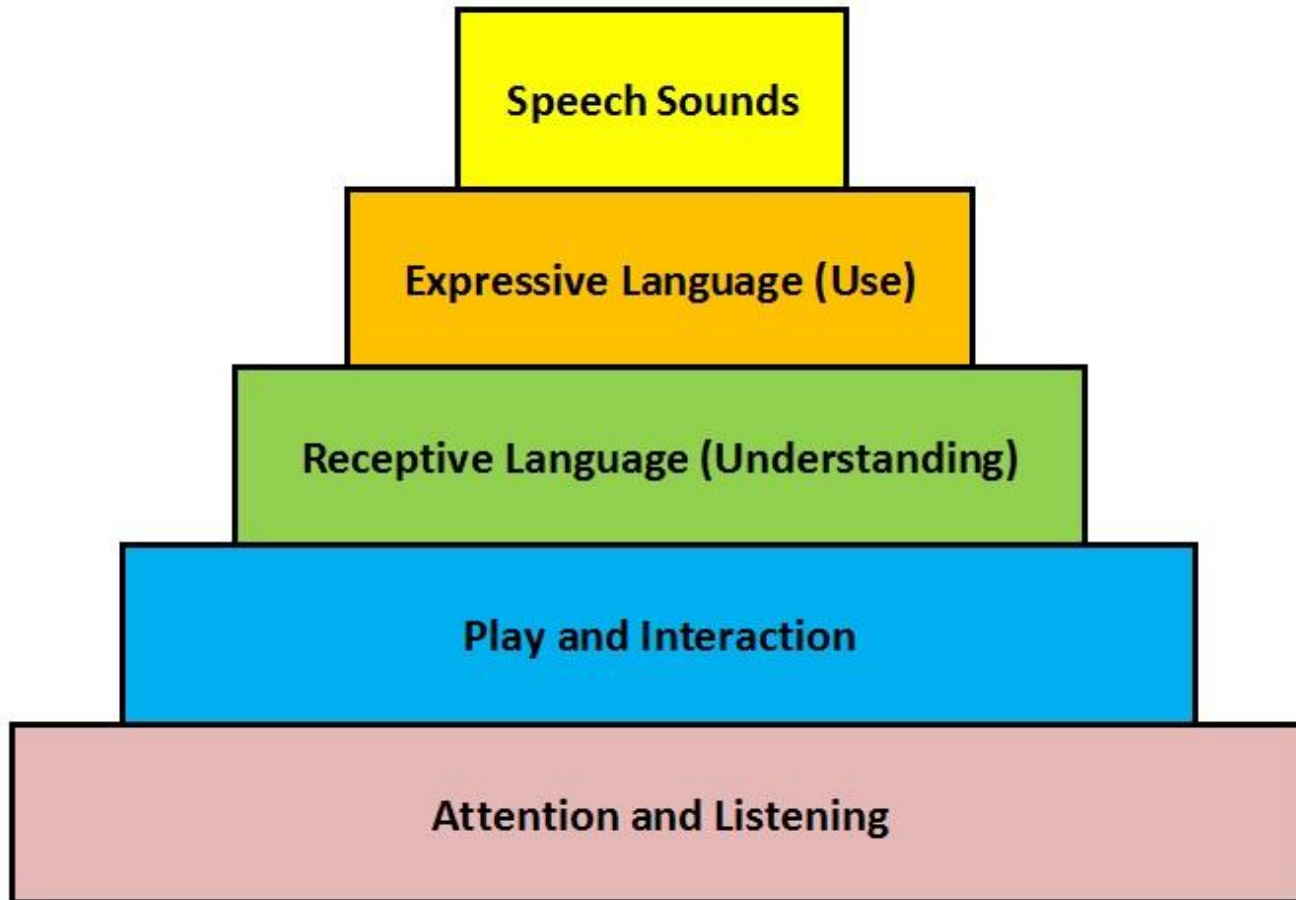
**Receptive Language** – how we understand and interpret what is said to us.

Not just the words but also the context, body language, facial expression, intonation etc.

e.g. ‘That’s really great!’ can also mean ‘That’s not good at all’

**Expressive Language** – includes the words we use and how we use them to share thoughts, ideas and feelings

# Pyramid of Communication



Typically developing children acquire many other communication skills before receptive and expressive language.

The pyramid shows that generally receptive language develops in advance of expressive and this continues to be the case throughout life – we understand the meaning of new words before we use them either in speech or writing.

Children who are using mainly single word utterances can usually understand sentences made up of two, three or four words, particularly when these are supported by context or situational cues

e.g. 'go and get your coat' they might only be able to say 'coat' but when mum is standing by the door with the pushchair they can understand the context as well as the spoken words

# Typical Language Development

Approximate Age	Expressive Language	Auditory Comprehension
2 to 4 months	Verbal play through cooing, gooing and laughing. Vowel sounds heard such as oohh, eee, and ahhh.	Turns head toward sounds and can begin to discriminate one sound from another.
4 to 8 months	Babbling begins. Some consonant sounds can be heard.	Anticipates an event (e.g. peek-a-boo) and follows a line of regard (e.g. visually follows toy moving across floor) as well as joint attention (i.e. is capable of visually attending to object with caregiver).
8 to 12 months	Syllable variation (e.g. badugatadadah). First word approximations (e.g. dada for daddy). Non-verbal communication. Jargon (i.e. unintelligible speech) is present.	Relates words with physical objects (e.g. understands that the word "ball" actually means the object ball). Responds to simple phrases such as "no".
1 to 2 years	10-15 words at 18 months, 40-50 words at 24 months. Uses mostly nouns and pronoun me/mine. Jargon (i.e. unintelligible speech) still present.	Increased attention to toys. Changes behavior in response to comments made to him/her. Knows a few simple commands with gestures needed at times. Understands simple questions. Points to simple pictures.
2 to 3 years	150 words at age 2; 300-400 at age 3 years. Uses two-three word phrases frequently. Asks simple questions. Fluency can be poor. Jargon (unintelligible speech) mostly gone. Vowel sounds intact.	Comprehension shows rapid increase. Responds to more 2 step commands with prepositions (e.g. Pick up the ball and put it on the table).
3 to 4 years	Uses 600-1000 words and 3-4 word sentences. Pronouns and adjectives are used as well as some adverbs, prepositions, past tense and plurals. Answers what, where and when questions.	Understands 1500 words. Recognizes gender differences, plurals, pronouns, adjectives, and colors.
4 to 5 years	Vocabulary increases to 1000-1600 words and 4-6 word sentences. 3-4 syllable words are being used. Articles appear. Uses more adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions. Fluency improving.	Comprehends 1500-2000 words. Understands if, because, why and when. Follows complex directions.
5 to 6 years	Vocabulary of 1500-2100 words. Uses complete 5-6 word sentences. Fluent speech. Many multi-syllabic words are used.	Understands 2500-2800 words. Understands more complicated sentences.



Children can get have difficulties in developing either receptive or expressive language or both.

- Going through the typical development pathways at a slower rate than peers is a **‘language delay’**
- Following an atypical pattern is a **‘language disorder’**

When working to develop children's language we often talk about

## **Information Carrying Words (ICWs)**





It is not necessary to understand every word in a sentence to be able to follow an instruction, or to use a fully grammatical sentence to have your meaning understood.

- An information carrying word (ICW) is a word that carries **MEANING**
- For a word to be an ICW there **must** be a contrast available

*For example, if within a daily routine, a child is told “**put your jumper on**” and the **jumper** is held out to them they don’t need to understand any of the words – context provides the meaning*

*If there are **trousers** and a **jumper** being held out then they have to understand the single word ‘jumper’ and choose the correct item*

- Many words in a sentence are not essential to making sense of what is said

ICW	Possible Equipment	Example instructions/questions
<p>1 ICW approx. 1 year</p>		<p>Where's the <u>key</u>? Show me the <u>cup</u> Give me the <u>spoon</u></p>
<p>2 ICWs approx. 2 years</p>		<p>Put the <u>spoon</u> in the <u>cup</u> Put the <u>key</u> in the <u>box</u></p>
<p>3 ICWs approx. 3 years</p>		<p>Put the <u>spoon</u> <u>under</u> the <u>cup</u> Put the <u>key</u> <u>in</u> the <u>box</u> Put the <u>key</u> <u>on</u> the <u>plate</u></p>
<p>4 ICWs approx. 4 years</p>		<p>Put the <u>spoon</u> <u>on</u> <u>dolly's</u> <u>plate</u> Put the <u>key</u> <u>in</u> <u>teddy's</u> <u>box</u> Give the <u>plate</u> to <u>dolly</u> and the <u>key</u> to <u>teddy</u> –this is more difficult as it is a longer two part instruction. Sometimes ICWs are not the only thing to consider</p>

# Early Language Concepts

Early concepts such as big/little and in/on/under do not generally develop until 2-3 ICW level of understanding

Need to consider this when planning language development activities and addressing concepts within the curriculum.

# Remember

ICWs are not the only thing that affects understanding:

- Attention and listening skills
- Vocabulary knowledge
- Complexity of words used e.g. 'flora & fauna' vs 'plants and animals'
- Interest in the subject
- Life experiences

**All listed above can and do have an influence**