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Common Speech–Language Pathology Terms

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Many words that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) use are unique to their field and the field of special education. Being familiar with some of these terms can help those outside of these fields better understand what they may read in a report or hear at a conference.

VS. Speech/Language Difference vs. Speech/Language Disorder

Difference: distinct or different variations of a language (related to speech production—an accent or dialect for example) (*Ling just moved from China. She is learning to speak English. She has a speech difference.*)

Disorder: impairment; atypical language usage as compared to a person that is the same age (*Juan just moved from Mexico. He had trouble with grammar in Spanish and saw a Speech-Language Pathologist in Mexico to work on his language*



skills. He also has trouble with grammar in English. He has a language disorder.)

VS. Articulation vs. Phonology

Articulation: producing speech sounds (*Amanda says the /s/ and /z/ sounds with a “lisp.” We work on her articulation, or pronunciation, in speech/language therapy sessions.*)

Phonology: how speech sounds go together/follow patterns to make words (*Joey says /t/ for /k/ and /d/ for /g/. His speech does not follow the patterns for how to correctly make the /t/ and /d/ sounds. We work on his phonology in speech/language therapy sessions.*)

VS. Phonological Awareness vs. Phonics

Phonological awareness: awareness of individual sounds in spoken words as well as how those sounds go together and how they can be changed to make new words (*Lindsey used her phonological awareness skills to rhyme “cat” with “bat,” “hat,” “mat,” and “sat.”*)

Phonics: relationships between written letters and their spoken sounds (*In her phonics lesson, Martie learned that “phone” is spelled with a /ph/, not an /f/ as in “fone.”*)

VS. Organic vs. Functional

Organic: the cause of impairment is known (*Jimmy has cerebral palsy which affects his speech production. The cause of his speech errors is organic.*)

Functional: the cause of impairment is not known (*Sadie has trouble pronouncing the /s/, /z/, /ll/,*

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(cont.)

and /r/ sounds. We do not know of any physical reason why she has trouble with saying these sounds correctly. The cause of her speech errors is functional.)

vs. Fluency vs. Dysfluency

Fluency: speech that is clear, rhythmic, smooth; effortless or "easy" speech (*Meg is working on using her "easy" speech in speech/language therapy sessions to help improve her fluency.*)

Dysfluency: also known as "stuttering"; speech that is disrupted or "bumpy" (prolongations, blocks, etc.); effortful speech (*Jayson has trouble starting sentences when he is speaking. He says the first word of the sentence over and over. He has dysfluent speech.*)

vs. Accommodations vs. Modifications

Accommodations: tools or strategies put in place to help a student complete tasks/achieve goals (*Nicholas receives accommodations such as extended time to take tests and a notetaker.*)

Modifications: actual changes made in a task, routine, etc., to help an individual complete tasks/achieve goals to the best level possible within the general curriculum (*Sophie receives modifications such as shortened tests and reduced assignments in her regular classroom.*)

vs. Syntax vs. Semantics

Syntax: grammar (*Harry works on his syntax in speech/language therapy sessions. He is learning how to use regular and irregular verbs properly.*)

Semantics: word meaning; vocabulary (*Paul has trouble with semantics, particularly knowing the difference between literal and figurative language. In speech/language therapy, we are working on understanding figurative language such as the idiom "It's raining cats and dogs."*)



vs. Augmentative Communication vs. Alternative Communication

Augmentative Communication: a device or tool that "adds to" or helps a person communicate (*Josie only says a few words. She uses picture cards to communicate words she does not say. Using picture cards as augmentative communication helps her parents and teachers know what she needs and wants, "ice cream" for example.*)

Alternative Communication: a new/different type of communication that replaces another form of communication (speaking) (*Mark is unable to speak. He has an electronic board that talks for him. He types what he wants to say in his alternative communication device then hits "play" to have the device say what he wrote.*)

vs. Oral vs. Aural

Oral: refers to spoken language; or can refer to the mouth (*Maggie has to give an oral presentation in her social studies class tomorrow.*)

Aural: refers to the ear or the sense of hearing (*Maggie's classmates will listen to her presentation aurally.*)

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