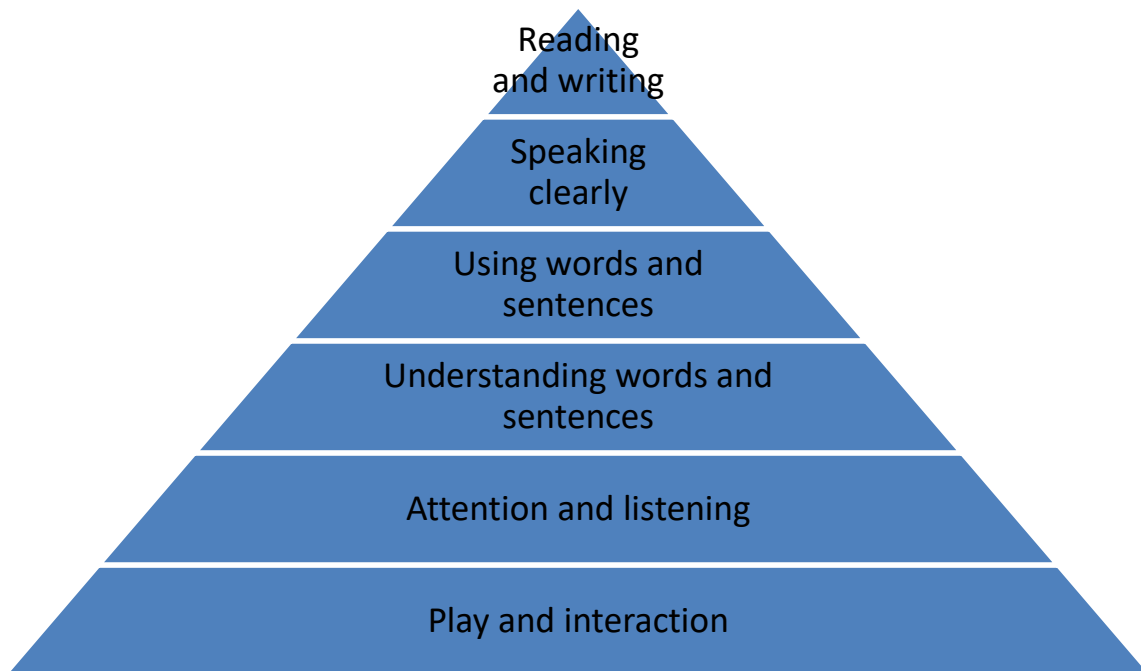


The Language Pyramid



There are a number of different versions of The Language Pyramid. This is perhaps the clearest and most helpful. It sets out the various aspects involved in language, and helps to explain how they develop and interact with each other.

We generally talk about **developing**, rather than **learning**, speech and language. This is because children do not usually need to be taught how to talk. Most children acquire speech and language naturally, at much the same time and in much the same way.

- The first stage begins long before there is any actual speech. Babies start **interacting** with their parents and carers and **engaging in simple play** as soon as they are born.
- They quickly notice that this interaction involves talking and soon start **paying attention** and **listening** to what the people around them are saying.
- Slowly they then start to make out and recognise individual words, phrases and eventually sentences. This is the beginning of **understanding** language.

- Soon after this, children will start to **say** words that family members can understand.
- Gradually their **speech** improves and becomes clearer, so that other people outside the family can also understand them.
- Then, when they are around 4 – 5 years old, their speech and language are good enough for them to start learning to **read and write** – and this is something they do have to be taught. It doesn't just happen spontaneously.

Once children have reached a certain point in the first stage (or lower level in the pyramid), they then begin to add the next stage while continuing to refine and develop the earlier stage, and so on. As a result, any disruption to the earlier stages or lower levels tends to adversely affect the development of the later stages.

So, for example, a difficulty with understanding language will almost inevitably have an impact on what children say, and usually their speech development too. Having said that, some children with language or communication difficulties do develop fully intact sound systems. Speech sound disorders are a bit of an anomaly in this respect. They in turn will, however, have some impact on a child's reading and writing.

Generally speaking too, the lower down the pyramid the difficulties lie, the greater the impact of the disorder, and the harder it is to overcome. So difficulties with speech and children's spoken language can, and in many cases do, largely or wholly resolve with the right input. Difficulties with understanding language and using language to communicate effectively are much more persistent.

The exact pattern of difficulties each child has will vary, depending on where precisely in the speech and language process things go wrong, and whether or not there is a single deficit or several.