Subdivisions of Language

Spoken languages are generally considered to have five components: 1.phonology, 2.morphology, 3.syntax, 4.semantics, and 5.pragmatics. In typical language development, all of these aspects of language develop simultaneously in fairly predictable sequences.

1.Phonology : Phonology deals with the system of speech sounds and the rules governing their use.It is the study of the sound system of language and includes the rules that govern its spoken form (Parker & Riley, 2010).

Phonology also examines how these sounds are arranged, their systematic organization, and rule system. According to the English phonological rule system, no more than three consonants can be at the beginning of a syllable or word, such as in "street." In addition, certain consonant sounds cannot be arranged together. For example, an "sp" combination is acceptable in English ("spot" or "wasp"), whereas a "pf" cluster is not. The smallest significant unit of sound is **the phoneme. The phoneme** is significant in that if it were to be replaced with another phoneme in a word, the meaning of the word would change. For example, the following words are the same except for the beginning phoneme in each: bat, cat, hat, that. All of these words are made up of three phonemes,or sounds, which are not necessarily the same as the number of letters, or graphemes,used to represent these three sounds. Each word has only one differing phoneme, and yet each word has a different meaning. The unit of sound that changed is significant.

Children must learn both individual speech sounds and the rules that govern their use. For example, in English they learn that words do not begin with the sounds of "m" and "b" together, although this may be common in other languages. The production of most phonemes is mastered in the first few years of life. This occurs in spite of the fact that children only hear language in long streams of sound. Language is not segmented into sounds, words, or syllables until children enter school where language is also presented in written form.

2. **Morphology** :Another area of language is morphology. **Morphology** studies the structure of words;it analyzes how words can be divided into parts labeled *morphemes* (Crystal, 2010), each of which has an independent meaning. A **morpheme** is the smallest meaningful unit of a language. The word "cycle" is one morpheme meaning circular or wheel; however, the word "bicycle" contains two morphemes, "bi-" and "cycle," "bi" indicating two. In American English, plurality is often noted with the addition of an "s," such as "book" – "books," and"ed" can demonstrate past tense as in "cooked" or "talked." All of these units, "cycle,""bi-," "book" "-s," "cook," "talk," and "-ed" are morphemes of American English.

3. **Syntax** :The third area of language is syntax. Syntax refers to the rules of word function and word order. It encompasses the rules for forming phrases, clauses, and different kinds of sentences. **Syntax** consists of organizational rules denoting word, phrase, and clause order; sentence organization and the relationship between words;word classes; and other sentence elements (Owens, 2008). We know that certain sentences, for example, are syntactically appropriate, such as "I really like to eat chocolate." or even "Chocolate, I really like to eat." However, a sentence such as "I eat like to really chocolate." would not be an acceptable sentence of American English. **Within communication disorders, we examine the development of syntactical structures** in children as well as the problems that certain populations, such as students learning English as a second language,might have when expressing themselves in complex syntactical sentences.

4.Semantics is a system of rules governing the meaning of words and word combinations. It is the study of linguistic meaning and includes the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences (Parker & Riley, 2010). Semantics includes the fact that certain words have more than one meaning, such as "bat," and that words can have similar meanings, for example, "dog" and "canine." Also certain words share more or less common characteristics. "Cat," "dog," and

“hamster” have certain commonalities, whereas “dog” and “boy” have properties that could be compared but seem not as related as the first three words. Semantics also includes phrase meanings as in the multiple interpretations of“a hot dog” and sentence meaning as in “She dressed and washed the baby.”

As children develop, they learn what the features of a dog are that distinguish it from a horse. Children’s vocabulary increases rapidly from about 50 words at 18 months to around 2,600 at age 6, and continues to increase rapidly through adolescence (Owens,2005). As vocabulary increases, children must move from learning general concepts to more specific concepts, such as learning the difference in meaning between tell and ask. During the school years, children learn to use and understand words that are used figuratively, such as March comes in like a lion or She felt so blue.

5. The last term, **pragmatics**, refers to the study of language used to communicate within various situational contexts. Pragmatics includes, among other things, the reasons for talking, conversational skills, and the flexibility to modify speech for different listeners and social situations (Paul, 2007). Included in pragmatics would be the understanding that we talk differently to small children versus older adults; that certain situations typically dictate how and what we say (such as the communication in an interview will be quite different from a night out with your friends); and that we use certain facial expressions,body gestures, and word emphases to communicate very different meanings. For example,think of the sentence “Last night was really something” said with a smile and positive head nods versus the same sentence said with a scowl, negative head movements, and a different emphasis on “really.” Within communication disorders, pragmatics may become a central issue when working with autistic children, for example.