Assessment of Communication Skills

Jessica Folk-Farber M.SLP RSLP

Kate Wishart M.Sc RSLP

Vancouver CoastalHealth
Promoting wellness. Ensuring care.

BC Centre for Ability
Beyond challenges—the sky's the limit

Learning Objectives

Participants will understand

- The ICF Framework as it relates to assessment of children's communication skills

- That assessment involves a focus beyond the child performance in structured tasks including evaluation in real life situations

- And of communication partners

What is Language?

- Language is not a single entity
- **Form** = grammar/structure
- **Content** = words
- **Function** = use of language in appropriate context
- Without all three, there is no shared communication

Language is more…

…than just words and sentences

- Most of us communicate through speech
- Some communicate through sign
- We all use
  - Body language
  - Gestures
  - Facial expression
  - Tone (prosody)
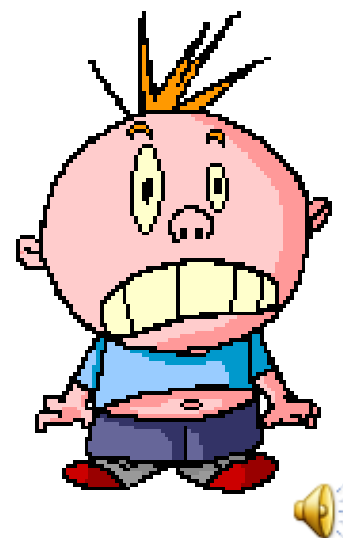
- Communication is both **use** of language and **comprehension** of language

- Talking AND listening

What is language?

Form
Sounds and grammar

Use
Language Functions
Appropriateness of Language

Content
Words
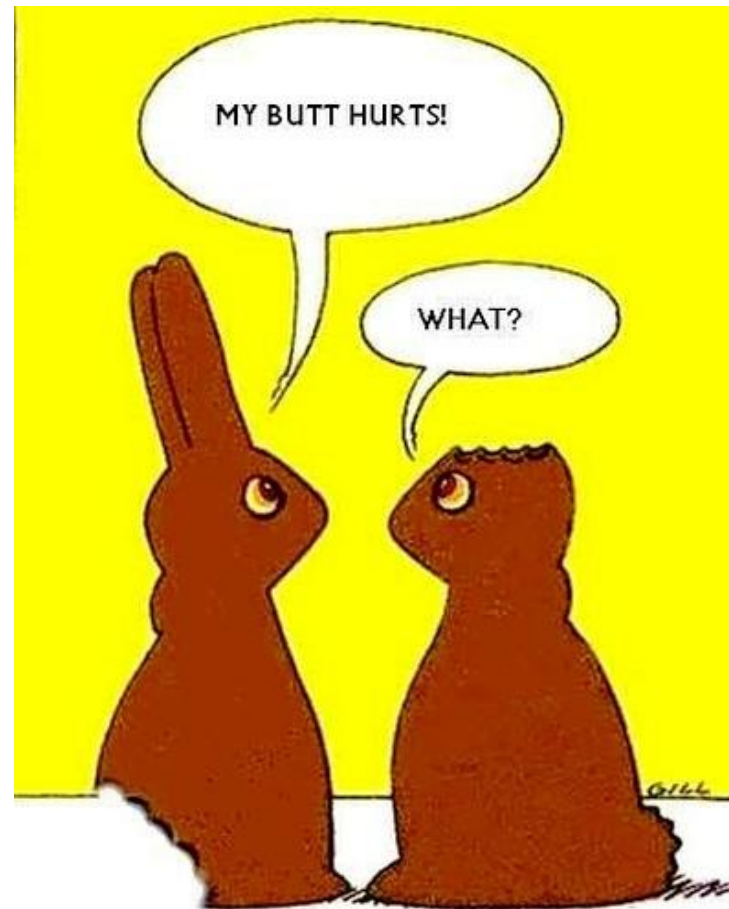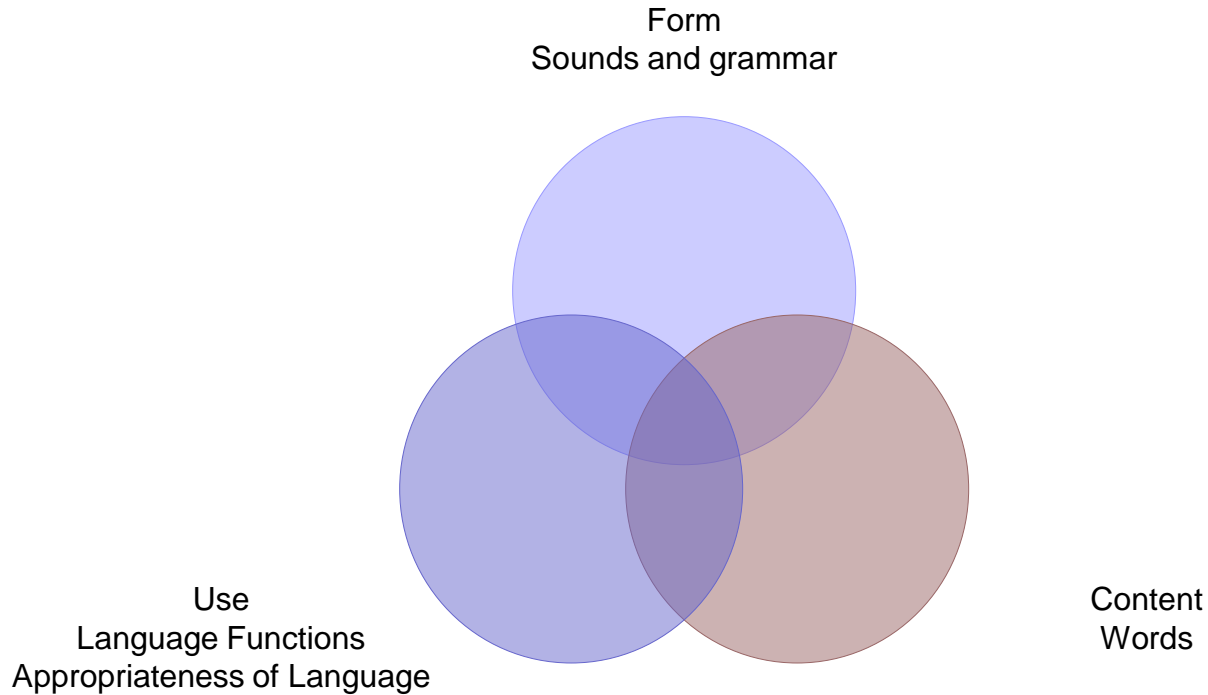
Communication in Context

- Bloom & Tinker (2001) add **effort** – cognitive development – and **engagement** – social & emotional development – as a broader framework for considering language development

- Language-learning occurs within the context of the child's abilities

The Intentionality Model – Bloom and Tinker (2001)
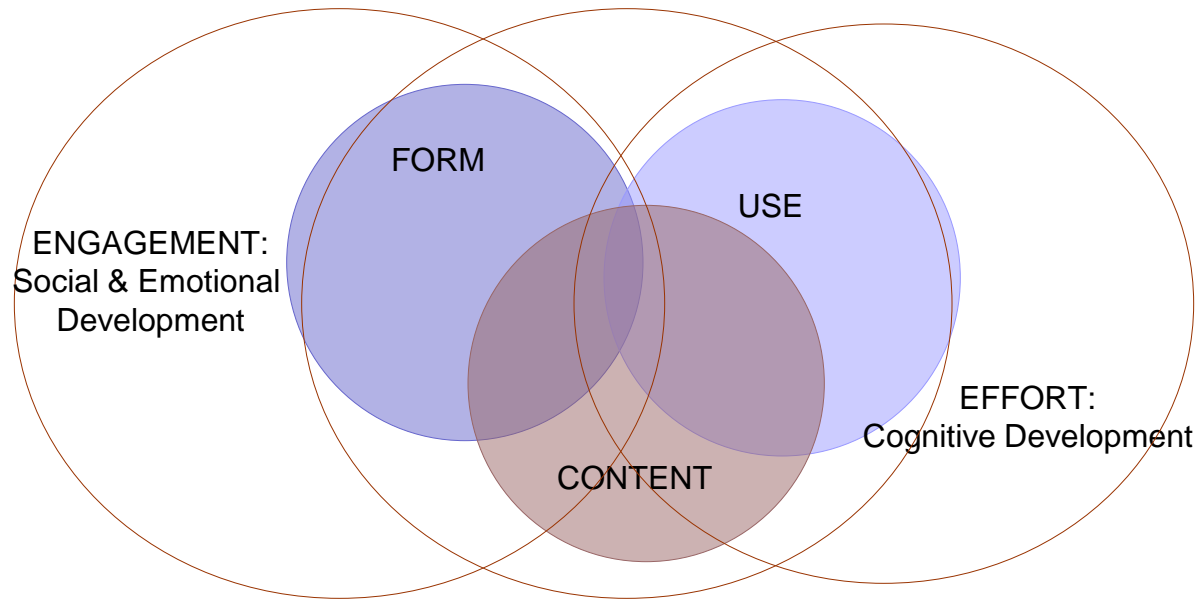
Learning Language is Interactive

- **Content:** children must be repeatedly exposed to new words in context in order to map them into their lexicon
- **Form:** children must be repeatedly exposed to grammatical structures to map the rules of their native language
- **Function:** children must have opportunities to try, succeed, and fail at communication attempts in order to learn what is appropriate

Learning Spoken Words

- The child must connect the sound sequences he/she hears with the object or idea – the meaning

- Child's system of sound production develops to match adult system

Delay vs. Disorder

Delay

- Child's language or speech sound system is developing in the expected sequence, but is behind that of his or her peers
- Child's language or speech reflects that of the chronologically younger child

Disorder

- Child's language or speech sound system is not developing in the expected sequence

The Child's Needs

- Physical
  - Hearing
  - Structure of oral-motor mechanisms
  - Breath support, lung capacity
  - Muscle tone
- Cognitive
- Social-Emotional
  - Models
  - Partners

Input: From Adults

- Language-learning occurs in context
- Caregivers:
  - structure the environment to facilitate language development
  - model language and pair verbal input with visual cues to help child make connections between words and objects/events
  - create opportunities throughout the day

Input: From Peers

- Language-learning occurs in context
- Peers:
  - Model language at a level similar to where children are speaking now
  - Engage each other in social interactions and pretend-play sequences
  - Frequently refuse or ignore others' attempts at communication and joining in play

Communication Partners

- Two roles: as receiver and as sender of messages

- Always within context of the environment

Activity and Participation

Sender

Message

Receiver

Communication Environment
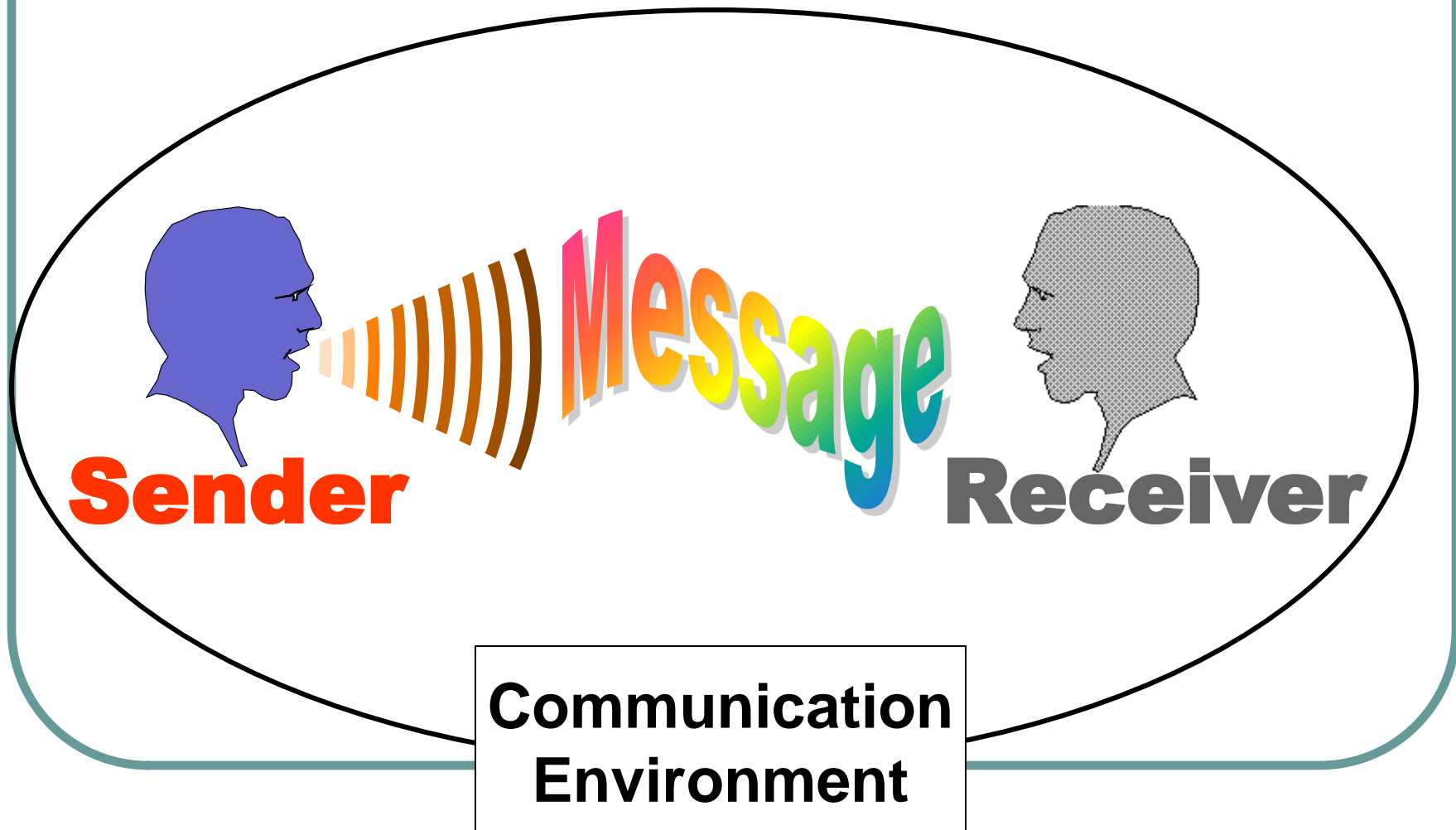
Scene 1: Child & Teacher A

Teacher: What do you have?

Child: Car

Teacher: What colour is it?

Child: Blue

Teacher: Did you get it at the store?

Child: No mummy

Teacher: Mummy gave it to you?

Child: Yes
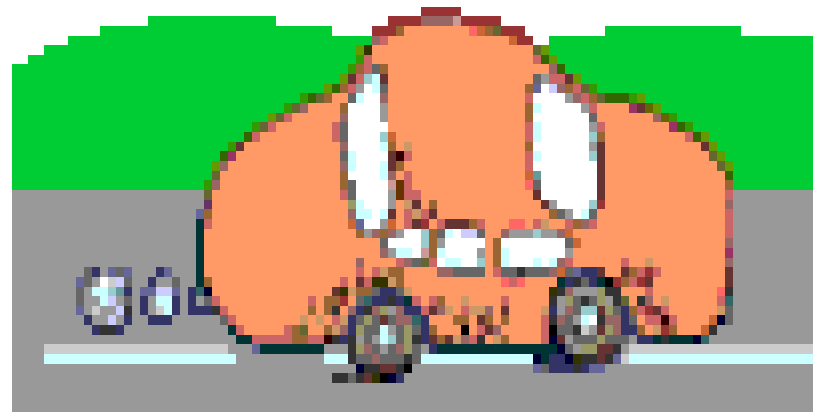
Scene 2: Child & Teacher B

- Teacher: What do you have?
- Child: Car
- Teacher: Oh, it's a blue car!
- Child: Blue car. Fast!
- Teacher: A fast blue car! A racecar.
- Child: Racecar. Blue racecar.
- Teacher: Can you show me how it races?
- Child: Races fast. Vroom.

Scene 3: Child & Child B

- Child: Car
- Child B: My car!
- Child: Car
- Child B: My car!

… and so on!!!

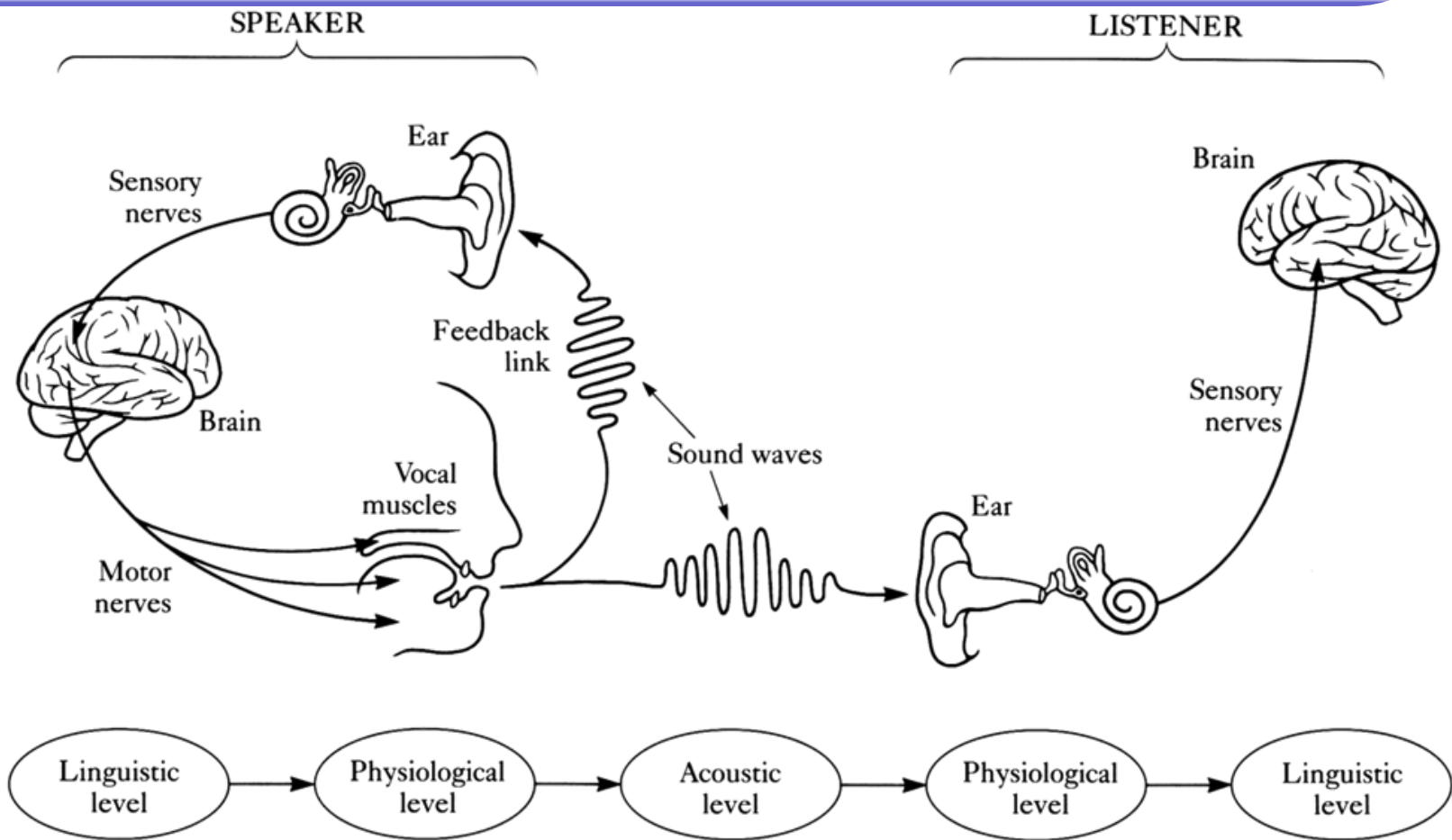# Importance of Interaction

- Dickinson (2002) showed that improved interactions between teachers and preschool students leads to greater academic success in the later years, including in literacy

- Hart & Risley: The Early Catastrophe

The Speech Chain

FIGURE 1.1 The speech chain: the different forms of a spoken message in its progress from the brain of the speaker to the brain of the listener.

International Classification of Functioning, Disability & Health (ICF)

- A model that helps bridge the worlds of funders, families and clinicians to explain our assessment, intervention goals and outcomes

- Common language for all

- Health-based
  - inclusive of all of us,
  - not just those with 'disabilities'

Child Abilities & Communication Environments

ICF

To improve child functioning:

- a disability model emphasizes changing or mitigating individuals' deficits as a way of improving their functioning

- a health and social model which emphasizes changing the environment around the individual, to support their improved functioning and participation

ICF

Health Condition
(disorder/disease)

Body
function&structure
(Impairment)

Activities
(Limitation)

Participation
(Restriction)

Environmental
Factors

Personal
Factors

ICF

**Health Condition
(disorder/disease)**

Body function
and structure
(*Impairment)*

Activities
(*Limitation)*

Participation
(*Restriction)*

Environmental
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Personal
Factors
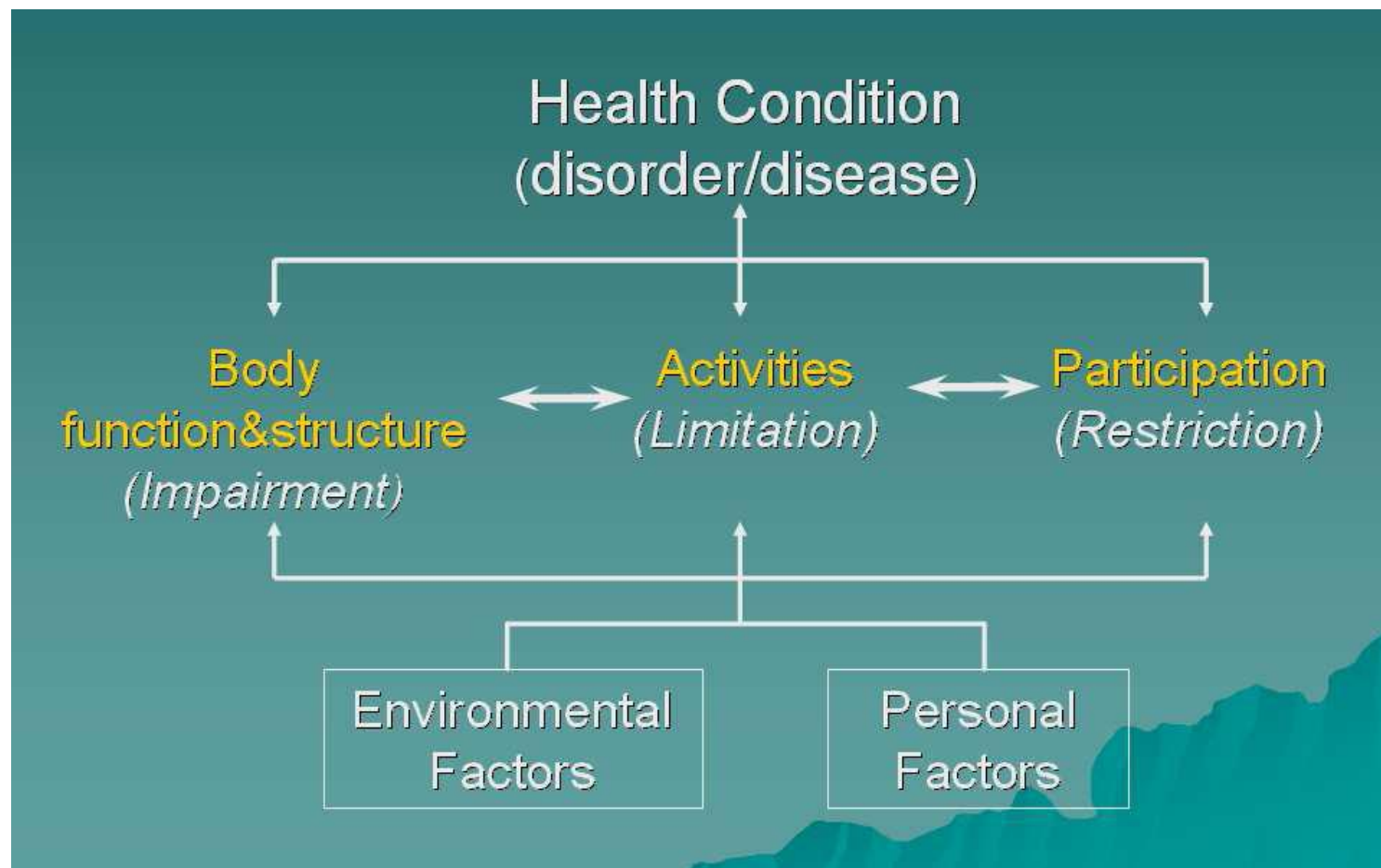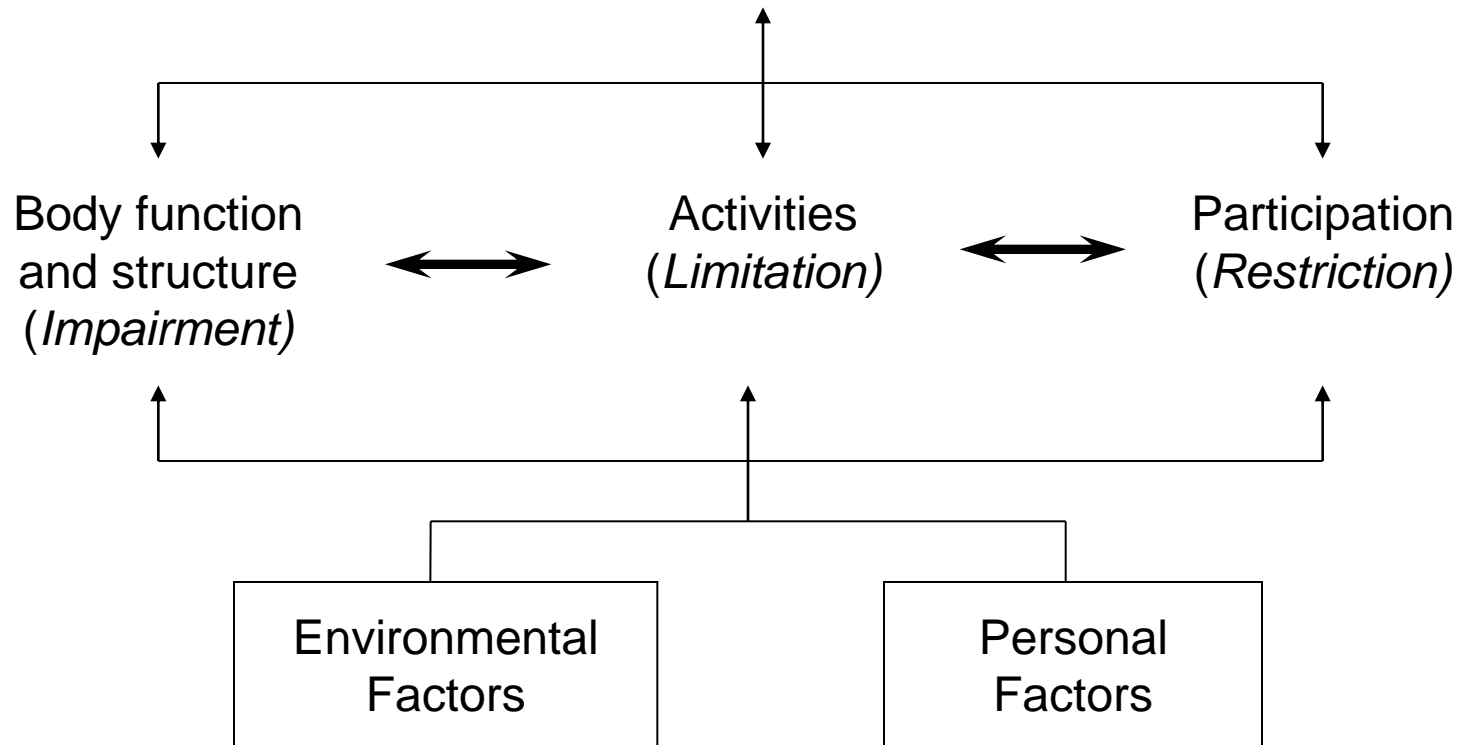
The Speech Chain
ICF Body/Structure Function Level
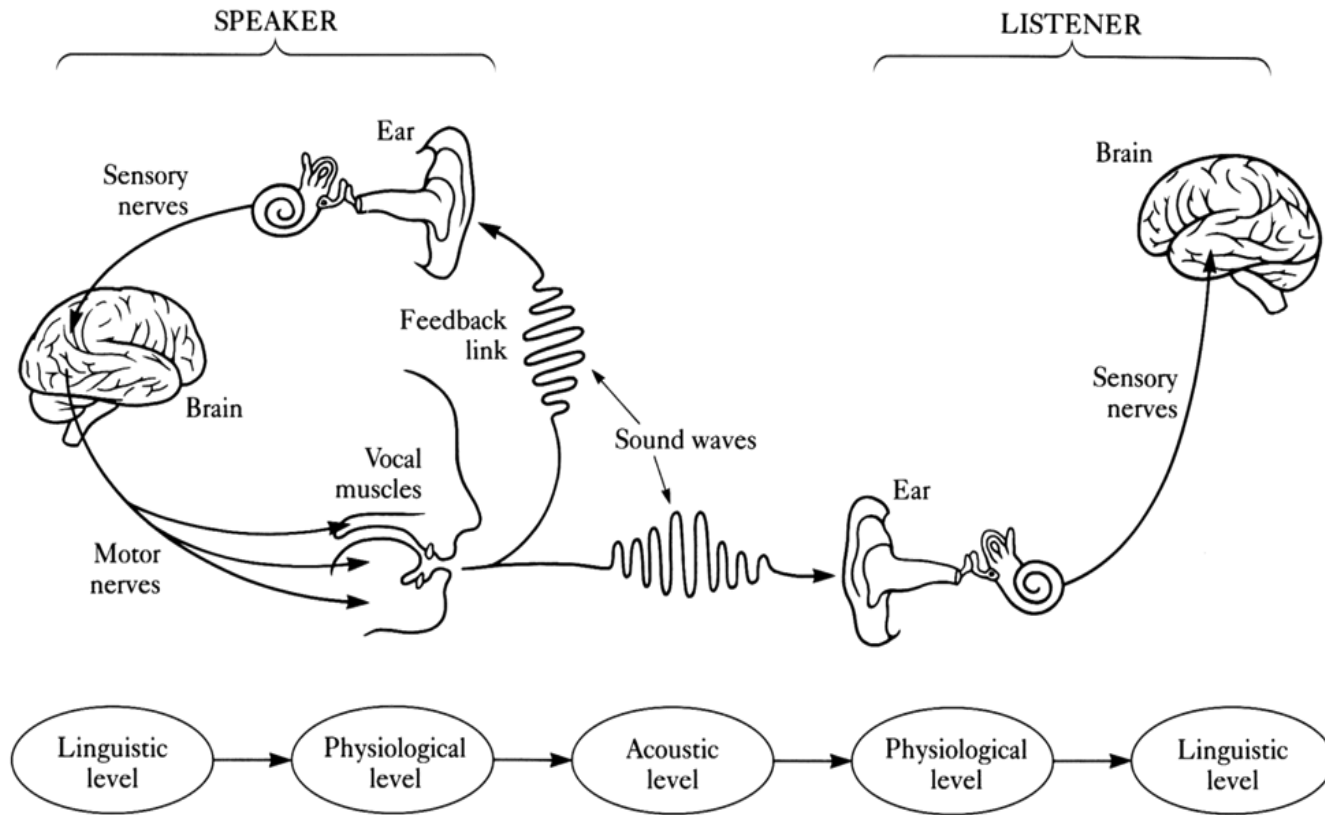
FIGURE 1.1   The speech chain: the different forms of a spoken message in its progress from the brain of the speaker to the brain of the listener.

Body Functions (Impairment)

- Improving oral motor control

- Producing new sounds

- Improving eye gaze

- Improving pointing

- Jenny will identify objects by colour and size

- Joseph will use grammatical markers

- **Body structure?**

- **Body function?**

- **Activities?**

- **Participation?**

Communicative Participation

- **Performance** in actual life situation

  in contrast to

- **Capacity** in controlled activities such as clinic or therapy

WHO, 2007, pp. xvi, 12

Activity

'Capacity' – optimal ability to perform a task in a standard environment, such as the speech clinic.

➢ Increased vocabulary

➢ Increased sentence length

➢ Use of grammar in structured tasks

➢ Increased fluency

Participation

'Performance': what someone typically does in all of their environments

➢ More sociable

➢ Starting to play with other children at child care setting

➢ Talking more to other people in the stores or at family gatherings

➢ Taking more communication turns when playing at child care

➢ Following the teacher's instructions at school

Personal Factors

Biological preparation for language.

- perceptual,
- attention,
- memory
- cognitive capacities
- motivation
- individual child traits
  - personality
  - Interests

Environmental factors

- Linguistic factors
- Parental communication
- style
- Language input
  -quantity
  -quality
  Attitudes of family, peers, society
    - beliefs
    - values
    - customs

Community participation and life satisfaction of individuals with disabilities

- *People with disabilities are just like everyone else."*

- *"Remember the person is an individual first and disabled second."*

- *"We are people. We have feelings, hopes, desires, and needs like everyone and what we need most is acceptance and support, financially and emotionally."*

King, G., Cathers, T., MacKinnon, L., Havens, L., Smith, L., Brown, L., Specht, J., Miller Polgar, J., & Willoughby, C., *CanChild* Centre for Childhood Disability Research

Standardized assessments: where do they fit?
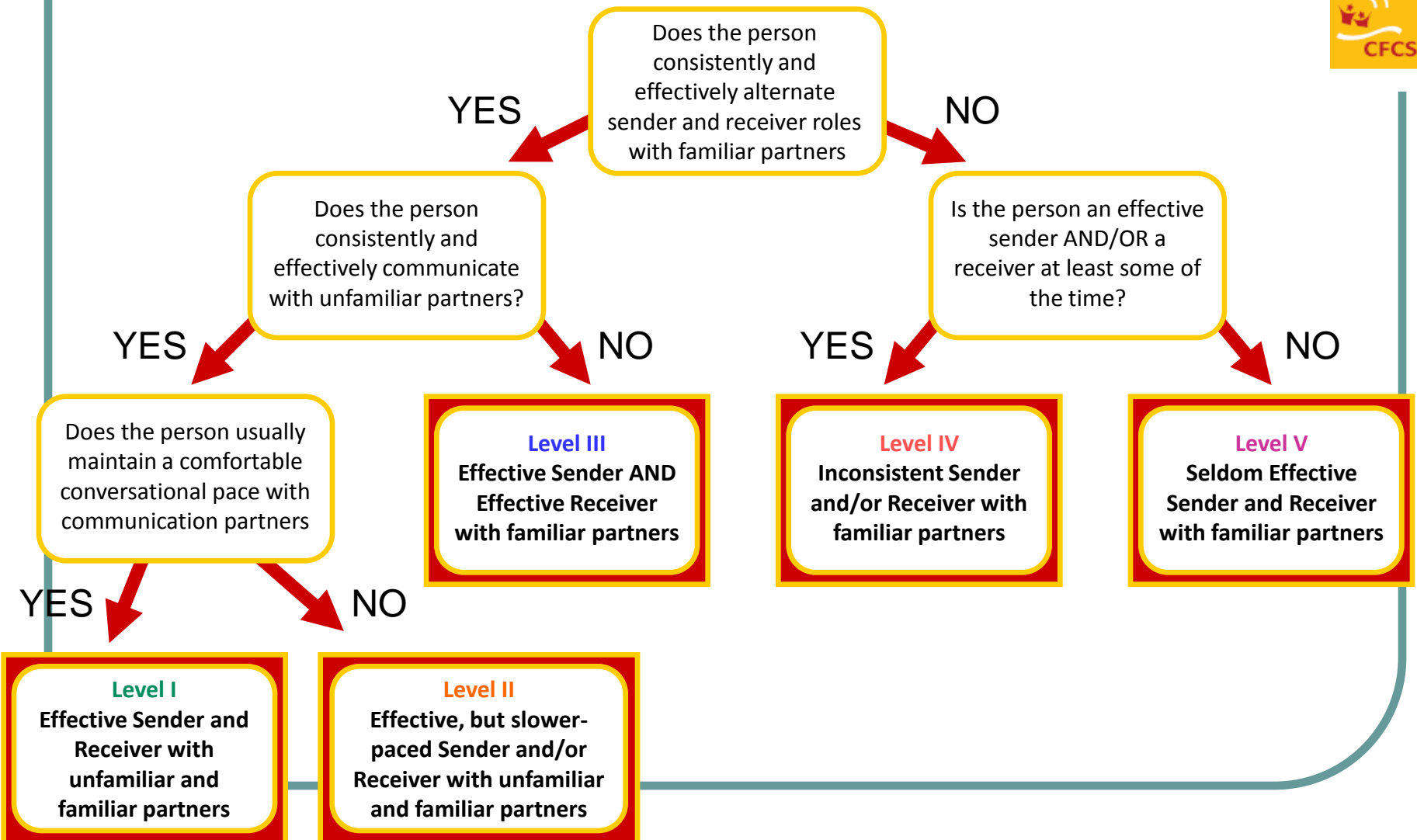

Communicative Capacity

Communication Performance

CFCS

- Communication Function Classification System for Individuals with Cerebral Palsy

- Classifies the **everyday communication performance** of an individual with cerebral palsy into one of five levels

- Focuses on activity and participation levels

http://www.cfcs.us/

CFCS Level Identification Chart

CFCS

Does the person consistently and effectively alternate sender and receiver roles with familiar partners

YES →

NO →

Does the person consistently and effectively communicate with unfamiliar partners?

Is the person an effective sender AND/OR a receiver at least some of the time?

YES → **NO** → **YES** → **NO** →

Does the person usually maintain a comfortable conversational pace with communication partners

Level III
Effective Sender AND Effective Receiver with familiar partners

Level IV
Inconsistent Sender and/or Receiver with familiar partners

Level V
Seldom Effective Sender and Receiver with familiar partners

YES → **NO** →

Level I
Effective Sender and Receiver with unfamiliar and familiar partners

Level II
Effective, but slower-paced Sender and/or Receiver with unfamiliar and familiar partners

FOCUS

F ocus on the

O utcomes of

C ommunication

U nder

S ix

- A new outcome measure for preschool children that identifies 'real world' changes associated with speech therapy.

http://www.bloorview.ca/research/scientistprofiles/thomasstonell.php

FOCUS

- Measures changes in 'participation-level' real-world communication skills

- 50 item questionnaire

- Completed by clinician and parent

- Takes 10 minutes to complete

*   Thomas- Stonell, N, Oddson, B., Robertson B., Rosenbaum, P., (2009) Predicted and observed outcomes in preschool children following speech and language treatment. *Journal of Communication Disorders,* 42, 29-42

Participation –every child's goal

Participation in activities is the context in which children form friendships, develop skills and competencies, express creativity, achieve mental and physical health, and determine meaning and purpose in life.

- The child

- The family

- The environment

Law, M., & King, G. (2000), Participation! Every child's goal. Today's Kids in Motion, 1, 10-12

Stumbling blocks: Speech/language delay and participation in physical activities

Child

- Understanding of language – rules
- Ability to express ideas
- Social communication
- Processing

Environment

- Noise level
- Activity level
- Needs of others in environment
- Abilities of others in environment

What does this mean for intervention?

- Consider:
  - Where we do treatment
  - How we do treatment
  - How we frame goals of treatment
- Increased role of family and other caregivers in treatment
  - Increased role of teachers
  - Increased role of peers

Thank You