A pediatric speech-language pathologist is qualified to address a vast array of concerns related to a child’s communication. Most often, these issues are directly tied to the child’s speech and/or language. These terms are not used interchangeably, they each have their own definition and each address a different aspect of your child’s communication skills.

**SPEECH**

Speech is the verbal piece of communication. It’s the mechanics of our sound production or how we produce sound to give us our voice. Speech includes the following:

1. **Articulation**
   
   How speech sounds are made. There are many different ways to produce speech sounds. For example, by putting your lips together and generating intraoral pressure (pressure inside the mouth) to produce the /b/ or /p/ sound.

2. **Voice**
   
   The use of the vocal folds and lungs (breath support) to produce sound. For example, hoarseness or vocal nodules may affect the quality of the child’s voice.

3. **Fluency**
   
   The rhythm of speech. For example, hesitations or stuttering can affect fluency.

**LANGUAGE**

Language is a shared set of symbols (words, images, gestures) that give meaning to speech. It includes the following:

1. **Semantics**
   
   The meaning of words. For example, “dog” refers to a domestic animal.

2. **Morphology**
   
   The grammatical structures of words. For example, adding an –ed to the end of a verb changes the meaning to indicate that action has now happened in the past. (e.g. walk - walked)

3. **Syntax**
   
   How we put words together. For example, “I went to the big park” instead of “I went to the park big.”

4. **Pragmatics**
   
   Our social use of language including gestures, body language, and eye contact.
These aspects of language can be further segmented into receptive and expressive language.

1. Receptive language is the understanding of language “input.” This includes the understanding of both words and gestures. Receptive language goes beyond just vocabulary skills, but also the ability to interpret a question as a question, the understanding of concepts like “on,” or accurately interpreting complex grammatical forms.

2. Expressive language, is most simply the “output” of language, how one expresses his or her wants and needs. This includes not only words, but also the grammar rules that dictate how words are combined into phrases, sentences and paragraphs as well as the use of gestures and facial expressions.

A language disorder is when the child has difficulty understanding others (receptive language) or sharing thoughts and feelings (expressive language).

A speech disorder is when the child is unable to produce, or substitutes, speech sounds; has problems with their voice; or has problems with fluency.

Speech and language disorders may exist separately or in conjunction with one another. If you have any concerns, seek out the advice of a Speech-Language Pathologist who can evaluate your child and determine if services are warranted.