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COMMUNICATIVE PARTICIPATION,
TEMPERAMENT,
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE
AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES
IN PRESCHOOLERS
WITH ATYPICAL SPEECH-LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT · *Communicative participation (CP) is a novel multidimensional construct in line with the bio-psycho-social model of health. It underlies not only functional communicative competencies (“performances”) but also formal linguistic abilities (“capabilities”) that are known to be interrelated with certain temperamental traits and with social-emotional abilities and behavioural problems, in both typically and atypically developing children. The research aims to explore the associations between CP, temperament, and social-emotional abilities in a group of preschoolers with atypical speech-language development, given the absence of studies on this topic. In addition, the different effects that individual nonlinguistic (temperament and social-emotional skills) and linguistic factors can have on the performance component of CP will be investigated. Thirty participants were recruited according to inclusion criteria for age (between 3.6 and 6.6 years), native language (Italian), and diagnosis (Speech Sound Disorder or Developmental Language Disorder). Both direct and indirect assessments were conducted to measure CP, temperament, social-emotional abilities and behavioural problems, phonology, lexicon, and morpho-syntax.*

The results showed that certain temperamental traits influence the CP of children with atypical speech-language development: in fact, children with a lower social orientation and a higher inhibition to novel contexts and situations show fewer levels of CP. In addition, those with low skills in the functional use of expressive language are rated by their teachers as also having higher levels of anxiety and social withdrawal. Overall, multiple regression analysis indicated that both language skills (morpho-syntactic ability) and social orientation predict the child’s functional use of expressive lan-

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guage in daily life. The findings can be interpreted by considering the reciprocal influences between constitutional predispositions, children's abilities and their functional use, and the environment.

KEYWORDS · Communicative participation, Temperament, Social-emotional competence, Behavioural difficulties, Preschool age, Atypical speech-language development.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE construct of communicative participation (CP) has been recently introduced in the scientific community since the progressive spread of a bio-psycho-social health model and the adoption of the International Classification of Functioning, disability and health: Children and Youth version (ICF-CY; World Health Organization 2007). Previous studies that examined this construct have mainly investigated how much the effectiveness of rehabilitation treatment could be determined through the measurement of variation in the degree of a child's communicative participation, focusing on paediatric populations with neurodevelopmental disorders (Cunningham *et al.* 2020; Kwok *et al.* 2020; Namasivayam *et al.* 2015; Pennington *et al.* 2013; Thomas-Stonell *et al.* 2016; Washington *et al.* 2015). Taking into account both the recent indications provided by the Delphi Consensus (Singer *et al.* 2020) regarding the operationalisation of the CP construct and the availability of an instrument already validated in multiple languages to measure it (Thomas-Stonell *et al.* 2010), this study aimed to deepen the understanding of CP in children with atypical speech-language development.

The ICF-CY perspective can provide a theoretical framework to conceptualise the assessment and management of children with communication disorders, thus requiring a focus on both the impairment of the individual and the functional limitations that occur in everyday life situations (McGregor 2020). Such a perspective highlights the need to consider language not only as a complex set of structural and formal skills, but as one of the main means by which children daily interact in their social context. The scientific community has proposed calling this construct "communicative participation" (CP) and one of the first definitions, formulated by Eadie and colleagues (Eadie *et al.* 2006), suggests considering it as "the ability to take part in everyday situations in which there is an exchange of knowledge, information, ideas or emotions/ feelings" (p. 4). Furthermore, according to the same authors, CP can assume heterogeneous forms of expression, including "speaking, listening, reading, writing, or using nonverbal communication". Since CP involves more than one individual and must include a communicative exchange, it must be measured within a social context.

Singer and colleagues (Singer *et al.* 2020) recently published the results of a research project based on the Delphi Consensus methodology, through which a panel of experts reached an agreement on the definition of CP specifically applied to children with language disorders between the ages of 2 and 8 years. These experts stated that, from the perspective of parents, speech and language therapists, teachers, and other professionals, CP "is understanding and being understood in a social context, by applying verbal and non-verbal communication skills" (p. 1801), and highlighted its positive attributes, such as independence, social acceptability, and effectiveness. Furthermore, the operationalization of the CP construct was proposed, selecting a set of 33 indicators reflecting a range of behaviours which can be related to three broad areas: understanding others (e.g. "The child under-