

Lexical strategies in event descriptions between children who use communication aids and their speaking communication partners

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Abstract

Introduction: Event descriptions may be challenging to any young child, but children who develop little or no functional speech and rely on communication aids to communicate (aided communicators), may face unique linguistic, pragmatic and strategic challenges in conveying their thoughts with their available communication means. If they use graphic symbols, the limited number of lexical items in the communication aids may restrain possibilities in conveying information accurately. Moreover, the images of the graphic symbols may increase their ambiguity. Understanding the strategies that the children use in conveying meaning with their communication aids is important for understanding the development of aided language.

Participants and method: The present study is a part of an international project addressing aided language development and communicative problem solving in children and adolescents using aided communication (von Tetzchner, 2018). This presentation includes findings from interactions between 12 children (aged 5-15 years) who use graphic symbols as their primary means of communication and their communication partners. The children's task was to describe several short video events to communication partners who had not seen the videos. The interactions were video-recorded, transcribed, and analysed, providing a rich description of the children's use of lexical strategies and aided language use.

Findings: The children used a range of linguistic and multimodal strategies. Although the accuracy of the descriptions varied, the aided communicators portrayed creative and generative strategies in expressing meaning and overcoming potential limitations in their communication aids. The adapted use of lexical items and multimodal strategies was a strength of the children, but communicative success was dependent on how the communication partners interpreted these strategies.

Conclusion: The results provide insights into the achievements and challenges of young aided communicators, and highlights the importance of implementing appropriate intervention strategies to support all participants' shared competence in co-constructing meaning in interactions involving aided communication.