Conversations using augmentative and alternative communication: More than just ‘talk’.

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Introduction

This three phase doctoral study acknowledges conversation as dynamic and pivoting on social conventions. Further, that the person supporting someone with complex communication needs (CCN) is often described as a communication partner, irrespective of their knowledge, skill and experience. The literature suggests that conversations with people with CCN show asymmetry and that the communication partner dominates the conversation floor (Koski & Launonen, 2012). This study aimed to explore the conversation strategies used by adult participants with some knowledge and skill in AAC. For the purpose of this research, these participants were called communication assistants. The three phase study collected demographic data from a survey (phase 1, n = 74), and descriptive statistics from observation-transcription analysis (phase 2), n=12), and analysis of written narratives (phase 3, n= 25). Overall, the data showed that adult communication assistants used over 70 conversation strategies and that some of these strategies were choreographed into seven distinct styles of conversation. This poster illustrates aspects of phase 2 – the analysis of six dyadic conversations.

Materials and methods

- Qualitative approach with descriptive statistics. Scoping review of the literature (Constantino & Bonat, 2014), with coding drawn from five interaction systems.
- Creation of a disability accessible website (www.conversationswithoutspeech.com) .
- Six adult participants in Queensland supporting someone with Down syndrome, Rett syndrome or Cerebral Palsy.
- Dynamic Systems Theory as Metatheory.
- Metaphor of Dance to aid visualisation.
- Six dyadic conversations filmed, transcribed and coded.
- Existing and new transcription codes applied in the analysis.
- Regular cross checking and review of coding strategies.
- Code book maintained that included a list of provocations raised in the research process.
- Data layered for depth of analysis e.g. to inspect nature of questions as the range varied from one question every 2.4 seconds to one question every 17.2 seconds with a mean value of one question every 11 seconds.

Results

Figure 1 Identifying hotspots that could accelerate or distract from conversation fluency and outcome.

Time of day:_____ **Duration of interaction:** _____ **Wellbeing (e.g. meds./nutrition)** _____	Primary interaction system				
	Language	Human agency	Relationship	Culture	Environment
Alignment - positioning for optimal **alignment** with the other person.			x		
Fusion - language representations used simultaneously.	x				
Environment - engineered e.g. posters of signs displayed on surfaces.					x
Pause - occurring sufficiently to enable uninterrupted turn taking.				x	
Base of support – where physicality of the interaction is hinged.		x			
 Analysis notes a positive alignment and fusion of key word signing with spoken language. Adult provides adequate support for language processing and response. The environment engineered to support interactions. Human agency needs identified as a priority for future communication partner training.					

Figure 2 Identifying hot spots in a segment of conversation to assist customising communication partner training.

Conclusions

Asymmetry in discourse may be necessary .

Asymmetry may reflect a choreography that aims to enable rather than hijack .

There is potential for a multidisciplinary approach to transcription to inform the design and delivery of interventions.

Conversation is identified as a basic human need (Turkstra, Brehm, Montgomery, & Erwin, 2006, p. 234) and therefore, Communication Partner Training should not stop at ‘communication’.

Supporting people in conversation demands the multifaceted nature of Time e.g. to train, to use technology and develop effective use of interaction systems, and strategies.

Sample notations in this study

Eye gaze:	< left	^> up right /**b**/ strong blink
Turn taking:	/q/ question	/rep/ repeat /ch/ challenge
Speech:	/°/ soft	/CAPS/ increased loudness
	/@/ laughter	nuclear <u>stress</u> underlined
Time:	(0.4) timed pause of 4 seconds	
Access:	/fh/flat hand	/rif/ right index finger
Tech.	/dm/ Speech generating device male voice	
	/d_/ device flat to surface	
	/d| / device perpendicular to person	
Language:	* code switching	

Provocations

How might conscious gate-keeping practices be distinguished from organisational road blocks.

How can research be used to better understand the demands on communication partners in their AAC journey?

Can a systems approach to interventions produce more effective and sustainable outcomes for all?

References

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Artwork shown in ‘results’ provided by Clare Cowley, clarecowleyart@gmail.com