THE ICONICITY OF SELECTED PICTURE COMMUNICATION SYMBOLS FOR RURAL ZULU-SPEAKING CHILDREN

by

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Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain…

Ps 127:1

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Summary

The existence of cross-cultural differences in the perception of pictorial material has long been established and documented. As the majority of graphic representational systems most frequently used for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is of a pictorial nature, the possibility of such differences impacting on the use of these symbol systems cannot be ignored. Knowledge about the nature and degree of such impact could serve to enhance AAC service delivery. This study constitutes a first step towards such an investigation.

Iconicity has been established as an important factor in the learning of symbols. Information about the iconicity of symbols supports clinicians in vocabulary selection and is especially valuable in South Africa because of widespread illiteracy.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the iconicity of selected Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) for rural Zulu-speaking ten-year-olds. 94 participants were each presented with 36 copies of a commercially available matrix-36 communication overlay from which the glosses had been removed. The participants were required to match a symbol with a spoken isiZulu label. It was proposed that this methodology offers a high degree of social validity since it tests iconicity of symbols in the context in which they are generally used.

With both strict (iconicity values ≥ 75%) and lenient (iconicity values ≥ 50%) scoring criteria applied, respectively 2,8% and 11,1% of the symbols on the communication overlay emerged as iconic for participants. It was further established that the position of symbols on the overlay, the total frequency of selection of symbols, and gender did not influence results. Those symbols classified as nouns were on average the most iconic.

An analysis of errors revealed that for some symbols many of the participants agreed on a single specific label, be it the target label or a non-target label; while for other symbols either many possible labels, or none, were indicated. The term 'distinctiveness' was coined to describe how well-defined or specific the evoked meanings were that a symbol triggered in the mind of a viewer. Results suggest that participants did not make maximum use of the information afforded them by arrows in symbols. This finding is ascribed to the opaqueness of arrows, as well as participants' lack of previous experience with conventional cues in pictures. Clinical implications and recommendations for additional research are discussed.

Key words: augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), communication overlay, cross-cultural, iconicity, isiZulu, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) and translation.

Opsomming

Dat kultuur 'n invloed het op die persepsie van prentmateriaal is lank reeds vasgestel en goed gedokumenteer. Aangesien die meeste grafiese simboolsisteme wat algemeen vir alternatiewe en aanvullende kommunikasie (AAK) gebruik word, prentagtig van aard is, kan die waarskynlikheid dat kultuurverskille 'n invloed op die gebruik van hierdie simboolsisteme moet hê, nie geïgnoreer word nie. Inligting omtrent die aard en graad van so 'n invloed kan lei tot die verbetering van AAK dienslewering. Hierdie studie is 'n eerste tree tot so 'n ondersoek.

Dit is bekend dat ikonisiteit 'n belangrike rol speel in die aanleer van simbole. Inligting aangaande die ikonisiteit van simbole steun terapeute in die proses van woordeskatseleksie en is veral in Suid-Afrika belangrik as gevolg van uitgebreide ongeletterdheid.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die ikonisiteit van geselekteerde Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) vir tienjarige Zoeloekinders vanuit landelike gebiede te bepaal. 94 deelnemers het elk 36 afskrifte van'n kommersieel beskikbare kommunikasiebord ontvang. Die bord het 36 simbole, waarvan die geskrewe benaming verwyder is, bevat. Deelnemers is gevra om telkens 'n simbool met 'n gesproke isiZoeloe-frase af te paar. Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie metodologie die sosiale herhaalbaarheid van resultate verhoog aangesien ikonisiteit getoets word in die konteks waarin die simbole normaalweg gebruik word.

Met streng (ikonisiteitswaardes ≥ 75%) sowel as matige (ikonisiteitswaardes ≥ 50%) bepuntingskriteria gebruik, het onderskeidelik 2,8% en 11,1% van die simbole op die kommunikasiebord ikonies geblyk te wees vir die deelnemers. Die posisie van die onderskeie simbole op die kommunikasiebord, die totale frekwensie van seleksie van simbole, en geslag het nie die resultate beïnvloed nie. Simbole uit die selfstandige naamwoordkategorie was oor die algemeen die meeste ikonies.

'n Foutanalise het onthul dat sommige simbole min of meer eenstemmig in respons op een spesifieke frase, hetsy die teikenfrase of 'n nie-teikenfrase, aangedui is. Ander simbole is óf nooit, óf in respons op 'n wye verskeidenheid van frases aangedui. Die term 'kenmerkendheid' is gebruik om te beskryf hoe goed-gedefinieer of spesifiek die betekenis is wat 'n simbool in die denke van 'n kyker ontlok.

Uit die resultate blyk dit voorts dat deelnemers nie optimaal gebruik gemaak het van die inligting verskaf deur die pyle in simbole nie. Hierdie bevinding kan waarskynlik toegeskryf word aan die feit dat pyle hoogs abstrak is, asook aan deelnemers se gebrek aan ervaring met konvensies in Westerse tekeninge. Kliniese implikasies en aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing word bespreek.

Kernwoorde: alternatiewe en aanvullende kommunikasie (AAK), kommunikasiebord, kruis-kultureel, ikonisiteit, isiZoeloe, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) en vertaling.

Table of contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.2 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 2
1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS 2
1.3.1 Communication overlay 2
1.3.2 Culture 3
1.3.3 Distinctiveness 3
1.3.4 Iconicity 3
1.3.5 Iconicity values 3
1.3.6 Learnability 3
1.3.7 Rural 4
1.3.8 Symbol 4
1.4 ABBREVIATIONS 4
1.5 SUMMARY 4
CHAPTER 2: ICONICITY, CULTURE AND THE PERCEPTION OF PICTORIAL MATERIAL 5
2.1 INTRODUCTION 5
2.2 ICONICITY OF SYMBOLS 5
2.3 PERCEPTION OF SYMBOLS 8
2.4 POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON THE PERCEPTION OF PICTURES 9
2.4.1 The material on which symbols are printed 9
2.4.2 Schooling 9
2.4.3 Previous experience with symbols 10
2.4.4 Thinking styles 11
2.4.5 An oral versus literate state of mind 12
2.5 THE ENCOMPASSING INFLUENCE OF CULTURE 12
2.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR AAC 13
2.7 PREVIOUS CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES 13
2.8 ICONICITY IN THE CONTEXT OF A COMMUNICATION OVERLAY 15
2.9 SUMMARY 16
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 17
3.1 INTRODUCTION 17
3.2 AIMS 17
3.2.1 Primary aim 17
3.2.2 Sub-aims 17
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN 17
3.3.1 Description of the research design 17
3.3.2 Research phases 18

3.4 PREPARATORY PHASE 18
3.4.1 Selection of a communication overlay *18*
3.4.2 Translation of symbol labels *21*
3.4.3 Development of test protocol and training of research assistant *29*
3.4.4 Pilot study *29*
3.5 MAIN STUDY 32
3.5.1 Participants *32*
3.5.2 Material and equipment *34*
3.5.3 Data Collection Procedures *35*
3.5.4 Data analysis and statistical procedures *38*
3.5.5 Consistency *38*
3.6 SUMMARY 38

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 39
4.1 INTRODUCTION 39
4.2 MISSING DATA 39
4.3 CORRECT RESPONSES 40
4.4 ANALYSIS OF ERRORS 42
4.4.1 Analysis per column *43*
4.5 POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON RESULTS 52
4.5.1 Total frequency of selection of symbols *53*
4.5.2 Position of symbols on communication overlay *53*
4.5.3 Gender *57*
4.6 SUMMARY 58

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 59
5.1 INTRODUCTION 59
5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS 59
5.3 CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS 60
5.3.1 The use of PCS *60*
5.3.2 The use of commercially available communication overlays *61*
5.3.3 Methodological concerns in the testing of iconicity *61*
5.4 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY 61
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 62
5.6 SUMMARY 62

REFERENCE LIST 63

List of tables

TABLE 1: A COMPARISON OF PROMINENT STUDIES ON ICONICITY OF AIDED SYMBOL SETS/SYSTEMS PERFORMED AFTER 1979 6
TABLE 2: A COMPARISON OF PREVIOUS CROSS-CULTURAL AAC STUDIES 14
TABLE 3: DESCRIPTION OF JUDGES / FIRST TRANSLATORS 20
TABLE 4: CONCEPTS QUESTIONED BY JUDGES 20
TABLE 5: FIRST TRANSLATION INTO ISIZULU 24
TABLE 6: FIRST BLIND BACK-TRANSLATION, REVIEW AND SUGGESTIONS 26
TABLE 7: SECOND BLIND BACK-TRANSLATION AND PRETESTING 27
TABLE 8: DESCRIPTION OF SECOND TRANSLATORS 28
TABLE 9: DESCRIPTION OF THIRD TRANSLATORS 28
TABLE 10: SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SIX PROBLEM PHRASES 28
TABLE 11: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH ASSISTANT 29
TABLE 12: DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILOT STUDY 30
TABLE 13: PILOT STUDY OBJECTIVES, PROCEDURES, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 31
TABLE 14: DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED SCHOOLS 34
TABLE 15: DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS 34
TABLE 16: MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT USED 34
TABLE 17: STATISTICAL PROCEDURES EMPLOYED 38
TABLE 18: MISSING DATA 40
TABLE 19: PRESENTATION ORDER OF THE LABELS 41
TABLE 20: RANKING OF SYMBOLS IN INTERVALS OF PERCENTAGE CORRECT RESPONSES 43
TABLE 21: DISTRIBUTION OF SYMBOLS ACCORDING TO ICONICITY AND DISTINCTIVENESS 45
TABLE 22: SYMBOLS CLASSIFIED AS DISTINCTIVE X LESS ICONIC 47
TABLE 23: SYMBOLS CLASSIFIED AS INDISTINCTIVE X LESS ICONIC 49
TABLE 24: DISTRIBUTION OF RECURRENCES 53
TABLE 25: SUMMARY OF TOTAL FREQUENCY OF SELECTION AND ICONICITY VALUES ACROSS WORD CLASSES 57
TABLE 26: GENDER DIFFERENCES 58

List of figures

FIGURE 1: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SELECTION PROCESS 19
FIGURE 2: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE TRANSLATION PROCESS 23
FIGURE 3: CORRECT RESPONSES PER LABEL 40
FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF RECURRENCES 54
FIGURE 5: TOTAL FREQUENCY OF SELECTION OF SYMBOLS 54
FIGURE 6: CORRECT RESPONSES PER SYMBOL 54
FIGURE 7: CORRECT RESPONSES AND TOTAL FREQUENCY OF SELECTION 54
FIGURE 8: TOTAL FREQUENCY OF SELECTION AND ICONICITY VALUE OF EACH SYMBOL AS POSITIONED ON OVERLAY 56
FIGURE 9: TOTAL FREQUENCY OF SELECTION 56
FIGURE 10: FREQUENCY OF CORRECT RESPONSES (ICONICITY VALUES) 56

List of appendices

APPENDIX A: COMMUNICATION OVERLAY AS USED IN THE STUDY 70
APPENDIX B: TRAINING OVERLAY AS USED IN STUDY 71
APPENDIX C: FIRST, SECOND AND FINAL CONSENSUS 72
APPENDIX D: TEST PROTOCOL 73
APPENDIX E: CHECKLIST FOR DETERMINING CONSISTENCY ACROSS SESSIONS 79
APPENDIX F: FIRST TRANSLATIONS 80
APPENDIX G: ORIGINAL AND MODIFIED SOURCE PHRASES 81
APPENDIX H: FIRST BACK TRANSLATIONS 82
APPENDIX I: SECOND BACK TRANSLATIONS 83
APPENDIX J: LETTER TO KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE 84
APPENDIX K: LETTER TO JUDGES 85
APPENDIX L: LETTER TO FIRST TRANSLATORS 86
APPENDIX M: LETTER TO SECOND AND THIRD TRANSLATORS 87
APPENDIX N: SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF PHASE TWO OF PILOT STUDY 88
APPENDIX O: INFORMATION TO TEACHERS 89
APPENDIX P: WORKSHEET 90
APPENDIX Q: ENTIRE BODY OF DATA 91
APPENDIX R: ANALYSIS OF ERROR PATTERNS PER LABEL 92