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

by

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

MASTERS DEGREE IN ALTERNATIVE AND AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION

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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Pretoria

November 2001
 Acknowledgements

I am extremely indebted to the following people for their patience and support throughout the development of this text:

- Mom and Dad, Cori, Nikki and Paula, who were simply always where I needed them
- Professor Erna Alant, who spent hours in reading and discussing my ideas
- Professors Stephen von Tetzchner and Lyle Lloyd, who inspired me tremendously
- Angela, Ingrid, Sylvia, Jabu K and Jabu R, who always listened and cared
- Tannie Esther, Marius, Hanna and the three younger Potolozis, who prayed for this project and opened their home to me
- Miss Newlands, the School Board and entire staff of DSS, who helped me out with transport and piles of leave and who filled the gaps I so often left
- Dudu, Musa and Uncle Warren, who kept me company and kept me safe in the ‘bundus’
- Uncle Arno and Uncle Kjell, Messrs Radebe, Mabizela (jr and sr), Cele and Khumalo, who gave valuable language and culture advice
- Dr Margaret Marggraaff, who checked my discussion on isiZulu
- Messrs Müller and Bulcock from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, who always replied speedily and efficiently on queries
- Mrs Rina Owen and René, who helped in statistical matters
- All the wide-eyed little people who participated in the study

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

Ps 127:1
The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.
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 simboolsistsme wat algemeen vir alternatiewe en aanvullende kommunikasie (AAK) gebruik word, prentagig van aard is, kan die waarskynlikheid dat kultuurverskille 'n invloed op die gebruik van hierdie simboolsistsme moet hê, nie geïgnoreer word nie. Inligting omtrent die aard en graad van so 'n invloed kan lei tot die verbetering van AAK dienslewing. 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 terapeutie in die proses van woordeskateleksie 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 kommersiëel beskikbare kommunikasiebord ontvang. Die bord het 36 simbole, waarvan die geskrewre benaming verwyder is, bevat. Deelnemers is gevra om telkens 'n simbool met 'n gesproke isiZoelo-frase af te paar. Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie metodologie die sosiale herhaalbaarheid van resulgate 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 naamwoordskategorie was oor die algemeen die meeste ikonies.

'n Foutanalyse 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, kruiskultureel, ikonisiteit, isiZoeloe, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) en vertaling.
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