

Becoming an Aided Communicator

Gaining insight into aided language competence to inform practice

Post Conference Research Study Day

10th September 2025, University of Leeds



Communication
Matters

Summary

The Becoming an Aided Communicator (BAC) Project Study Day is based on feedback from participants of the first BAC Project Study Day in 2022, highlighting practical applications.

The BAC project investigated aided language skills in children and adolescents who had aided language as their main language mode. The Study Day will focus on development and use of the aided language BAC task and the implications of the project results for aided language interventions and everyday use.

All comprehension and production tasks will be presented, together with the BAC group's theoretical and practical discussions when developing the tasks, including information about the aspects of aided language development and competence that the tasks were designed to assess, experiences with administration of the tasks, and some project results.

The graphic materials, the presentations and the discussions and reflections from the study day will be collected in a booklet that will be available to the attendees.

Agenda

09.30 Registration

09.50 Welcome

10.00 Introduction

A small selection of case studies and information included about aided language competence and relevant skills – Reflections on the bases of aided language interventions

10.20 The purpose of language assessment in language intervention

Assessment of spoken and aided language comprehension in research and practice: Language skills and methods

10.40 The practical aims of the BAC Project: Concepts, rationales and methods

Understanding the competence of children developing aided language and the need for aided language descriptions and assessments to document strengths and weaknesses in children who develop language in the aided modality

11.00 Short break

11.15 Aided language comprehension: Aspects and BAC methods

1. Graphic vocabulary comprehension
2. Graphic sentence understanding, I, II, III
3. Grammatical competence: Evaluation of graphic word order
4. Story comprehension: Reading graphic story and answering questions

Relations between aspects and factors influencing individual differences in aided language comprehension

12.30 Lunch

13.15 Assessment of spoken and aided language use in research and practice

13.35 Aided language production: Aspects and BAC methods

1. Naming
2. Describing objects without naming
3. Describing scenes
4. Narrating events
5. Conversational meta-knowledge
6. Using aided language for instructing and constructing in activities
7. Conversational interaction

Relations between aspects and factors influencing individual differences in aided language use

14.30 Tea & coffee & networking

15.00 Discussion panel and attendees: Discussions of descriptions and assessment of aided Language; how to develop aided language tasks; norms, criteria and zones of proximal development; and variation between and within groups of aided language user

15.45 Summing up

Language competence: Integration of natural speech and aided language

BAC tasks, everyday use and clinical practice: Assessment and intervention as complementary.

Future-looking perspectives: Creating new tasks for assessing various aspects of aided language building on existing BAC tasks and more.

Presenters



Beata Batorowicz, Queen's University, Canada

Beata Batorowicz, PhD is an occupational therapist and Associate Professor at the School of Rehabilitation Science, Queen's University, Canada. She established and leads the Augmentative and Alternative Communication Interaction and Technology Lab (AAC-IT lab). Batorowicz's research focuses on enhancing participation, activity engagement, and autonomy of children with disabilities who use AAC. She has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed journal and conference publications and has been a keynote and invited speaker at leading conferences in the field.



Paulina Finak, Queen's University, Canada

Paulina Finak is a speech-language pathologist and PhD candidate in Rehabilitation Science at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. She has extensive experience working with children with disabilities. Her research focuses on literacy development for children with speech and motor impairments who use AAC and the application of artificial intelligence in AAC for written and face-to-face communication.



Anna Kawamura, University of Oslo, Norway

Anna Kawamura is a special education teacher with a Master's in Special Needs Education from the University of Oslo, supervised by Kristine Stadskleiv and Stephen von Tetzchner. Her research interest is the communicative environment of young aided communicators and their communicative competencies, particularly in home environments.



Kaisa Launonen, University of Helsinki, Finland

Kaisa Launonen, PhD, is a speech and language therapist and in August 2020 she retired from the University of Helsinki, where she was professor and director of the BA and MA programmes in logopedics. Her main research interests are early intervention, quality of life and intervention of people with the most severe communication disabilities, and augmentative and alternative communication, manual signing and other unaided communication forms, in particular. In her clinical work, Launonen has worked with people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Launonen has edited, together with Nicola Grove, "Manual Sign Acquisition in Children with Developmental Disabilities" (2019). She is the Finnish principal investigator in the "Becoming an Aided Communicator" (BAC) project.

**Elisabete Mendes, Polytechnic University of Portalegre Portugal**

Elisabete Mendes, is psychologist, master's degree in educational psychology and PhD in developmental psychology. For 15 years, she worked as a psychologist in different organizations, mainly with children and young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Since 2000, she has been Associated Professor at the Polytechnic University of Portalegre, where she teaches courses related with early childhood intervention, inclusive education, developmental disabilities, children and youngsters at risk. She coordinates the master's degree in special education and the Programme to support students with special needs at the university. Her main research interests are early childhood intervention, AAC, and intellectual disabilities. She has coordinated and participated in several European and international projects related to inclusive education, AAC, and self-advocacy.

**Kirsi Neuvonen, University of Helsinki, Finland**

Kirsi Neuvonen, PhD, is a clinical speech and language therapist and a university lecturer at the University of Helsinki. Neuvonen is currently working on her postdoctoral study in aided communication in rehabilitation. She is particularly interested in enhancing communicative participation of young children who rely on augmentative and alternative communication.

**Judith Oxley, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA**

Judith Oxley, PhD, CCC-SLP is a speech and language pathologist with extensive experience in the field of AAC. She holds the Harmon Roy Family Education Foundation/BORSF Endowed Professorship in Learning Disabilities (Memory of B. Blanco) in the Department of Communicative Disorders at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She has broad experience with teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, including all aspects of assessment and intervention related to communication and language disorders.

**Gregor Renner, Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Germany**

Dr. Gregor Renner is a Professor in augmentative and alternative communication and special education at the Catholic University for Applied Sciences, Freiburg, Germany. The participation of people with disabilities, especially those with complex communication needs is one of his areas of research and teaching. One focus is the role and impact of personal assistance and of assistive technology and technology in general in participation. His latest research addresses the participation of persons who use AAC in work and employment.

**Kristine Stadsleiv, University of Oslo, Norway**

Kristine Stadsleiv, PhD, is neuropsychologist and Professor at the Department for Special Needs Education, University of Oslo. Her research areas are AAC and cognitive development of children with various neurodevelopmental disorders. Her clinical work involves assessment of cognition and communication at the Department of Neurosciences for Children, Oslo University Hospital. She is in charge of offering systematic follow-up of cognition through the Norwegian Cerebral Palsy Quality and Surveillance Registry (NorCP). She recently published a textbook on AAC with von Tetzchner and Martinsen (Routledge, 2025)

**Hans van Balkom, Radboud University, The Netherlands**

Hans van Balkom is a psycholinguist and Professor Emeritus of Augmentative and Alternative Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen, specialising in people with severe speech and language disorders and multiple disorders. His main research interest is the relationship between brain and language in children with multiple disorders, and he has published extensively on psycholinguistic aspects of language disorders, including linguistic aspects of AAC.

**Stephen von Tetzchner, University of Oslo, Norway**

Stephen von Tetzchner is psychologist and Professor Emeritus of developmental psychology at the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo. His research includes a wide range of issues related to typical and atypical development in general, and communication and language development in particular. He addresses AAC from a developmental perspective, with a focus on the transactional processes that govern development. He has published a large number of articles and book chapters, and textbooks in several languages on typical and atypical developmental psychology, language development, AAC, habilitation, challenging behaviour, school psychology, juvenile neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis and autism spectrum disorder. His recently published a textbook on AAC with Martinsen and Stadsleiv (Routledge, 2025).

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