Minspeak in Action: Tools for Spontaneous Interaction

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Short Abstract

Minspeak is a powerful system that many AAC communicators are using effectively. But did you know that there is much more you can do with Minspeak to support interaction and inclusion?

Join us in this presentation as we delve into the efficiency of Minspeak and explore how this system can be used to maximise interactions with others for people with a range of AAC skills. Siobhan Daley (AAC communicator) will share her perspectives on the features she finds the most useful for everyday life.

We will provide an overview of Minspeak, including how language is represented, and how it supports language development, Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation (SNUG), and automaticity. We will also highlight key features to support social interactions with others, including computer access pages, photo albums, notebooks and more!

Long Abstract

Minspeak is a robust and versatile system widely utilised by individuals who use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) devices. While many users have discovered its utility, this presentation aims to uncover the full potential of Minspeak in enhancing interaction and fostering inclusion. We will explore how Minspeak's design supports Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation (SNUG), and contributes to effective communication and social engagement for AAC users across varying skill levels.

Siobhan Daley, an AAC communicator, will share her personal experiences using Minspeak, highlighting how this system enhances her ability to engage with others and participate in everyday activities. Her insights will provide valuable context for understanding how Minspeak features can be leveraged to support social inclusion and interaction.

Overview of Minspeak

Minspeak is a unique language system. Unlike traditional systems that rely on single meaning pictures and categories, Minspeak harnesses the power of multi-meaning symbols and consistent, predictable patterns to represent language. This enables efficient language development, retrieval and generation, which supports the development of automaticity in communication.

Communication partners may initially be apprehensive when they see Minspeak. Given that it is used independently by so many AAC communicators, it is important that

communication partners take the time to understand it's patterns, organisation and features. This presentation is designed to help you appreciate Minspeak as much as we do. Join us as we uncover the various language features and tools to support inclusion and interaction.

Supports Automaticity through Consistent Patterns and Short Sequences

A core strength of Minspeak lies in its use of consistent symbol locations, predictable patterns and short sequences to facilitate communication. Consistent symbol locations helps to increase the speed at which individuals can locate symbols over time (Thistle, Holmes, Horn & Reum 2018). By leveraging familiar sequences and consistent grid layouts, users can more readily navigate their AAC devices, making the communication process smoother and more intuitive.

Many AAC systems require navigation through multiple pages to find words which can be challenging for individuals (Light and Drager, 2007). A core strength of Minspeak is the use of short sequences. This reduces navigation and allows for quicker access to commonly used phrases and concepts. This is particularly beneficial for users who are still developing their communication skills.

This feature is particularly important for users who may experience cognitive or motor challenges, as it reduces the effort required to locate and select appropriate symbols. The result is that AAC communicators can quickly generate their message with minimal cognitive load, facilitating more natural interactions. This efficiency is crucial for fostering spontaneous and fluid communication, which is often a key barrier for AAC users in social settings.

Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation (SNUG)

Minspeak also supports Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation (SNUG). SNUG enables users to create novel utterances beyond pre-programmed phrases. This is essential in an AAC system as people communicate for a such wide range of reasons, and it is challenging to predict what they might want to talk about and the words they might use (Balandin and Iacono, 1998). Minspeak allows users to generate novel and contextually appropriate messages by having a robust vocabulary with full access to words, grammar, and typing. This flexibility is essential for effective interaction in social environments where conversation is so dynamic.

Range of Grid Sizes and Customization

Minspeak offers a range of grid sizes, so that AAC communicators can efficiently access a cell size that suits their motor/access needs. It is available in a 1-hit version, ranging between 4 to 144 buttons, and a sequenced version (Unity) ranging between 28 to 144 buttons. We will explore these different vocabulary options in relation to how they could suit particular individuals, and their strengths and limitations. We will in particular focus on the Unity 28 1-Hit Help Me Grow vocabulary which includes powerful tools to assist developing direct access.

Supporting Social Interactions

In addition to its core features, Minspeak provides tools that support social interactions and engagement. Some of these tools include computer access pages, photo albums, and notebooks. These allow AAC communicators to integrate personal and contextual

information into their communication. We will explore these features, highlighting how they can be used to create more meaningful connections with others.

Conclusion

The presentation on Minspeak will provide an in-depth exploration of how this powerful AAC system can be used to maximize interactions and foster inclusion. By focusing on consistent patterns, short sequences, Spontaneous Novel Utterance Generation, and the development of automaticity, we will demonstrate how Minspeak supports effective communication and engagement for individuals with a range of AAC skills. Attendees will gain practical insights into how Minspeak can be utilized to enhance communication, promote social inclusion, and support meaningful interactions in various contexts.