Language Representation
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Language may be represented through single meaning symbols, semantic compaction, or spelling-based systems. One or a combination of the latter methods may be used in an AAC device.

1. Single-Meaning Symbols:

When using single meaning symbols, each symbol represents one word or one phrase. A symbol will have to be included in the AAC system for every word that the user wants to use.

A system with 50 single meaning symbols will give the user access to only 50 words. The more words required the more pages will have to be added to the system. A typically developing three year old is expected to have around 1100 words in his/her vocabulary repertoire. To provide 1100 symbols in an AAC device at least 22 pages with 50 icons on each page will be required. Hence when using single meaning symbols, the size of the vocabulary, the layout of icons and the navigation through the pages have to be carefully considered.

Literacy skills are not required when using single meaning symbols.


2. Multi-Meaning Symbols (Semantic Compaction):
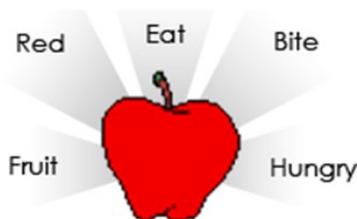
Semantic compaction was developed by Bruce Baker and is also known as MinSpeak®. It is an encoding system which requires individuals to sequence symbols to code words.

Users learn to sequence symbols by following rule-driven patterns. The symbol sequences are typically between one and two symbols per word. It uses multi-meaning symbols. Symbols may mean different things depending on how they have been combined and sequenced.
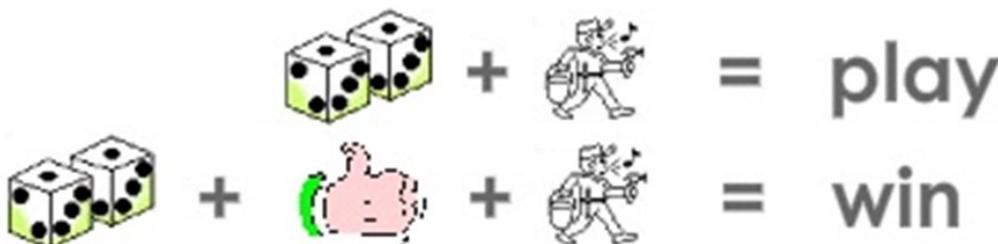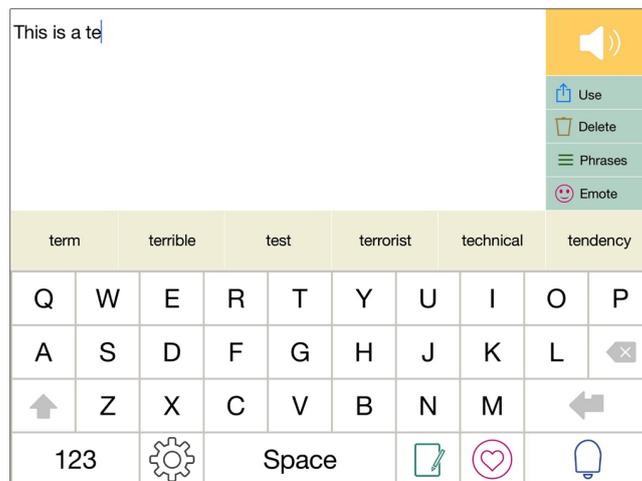

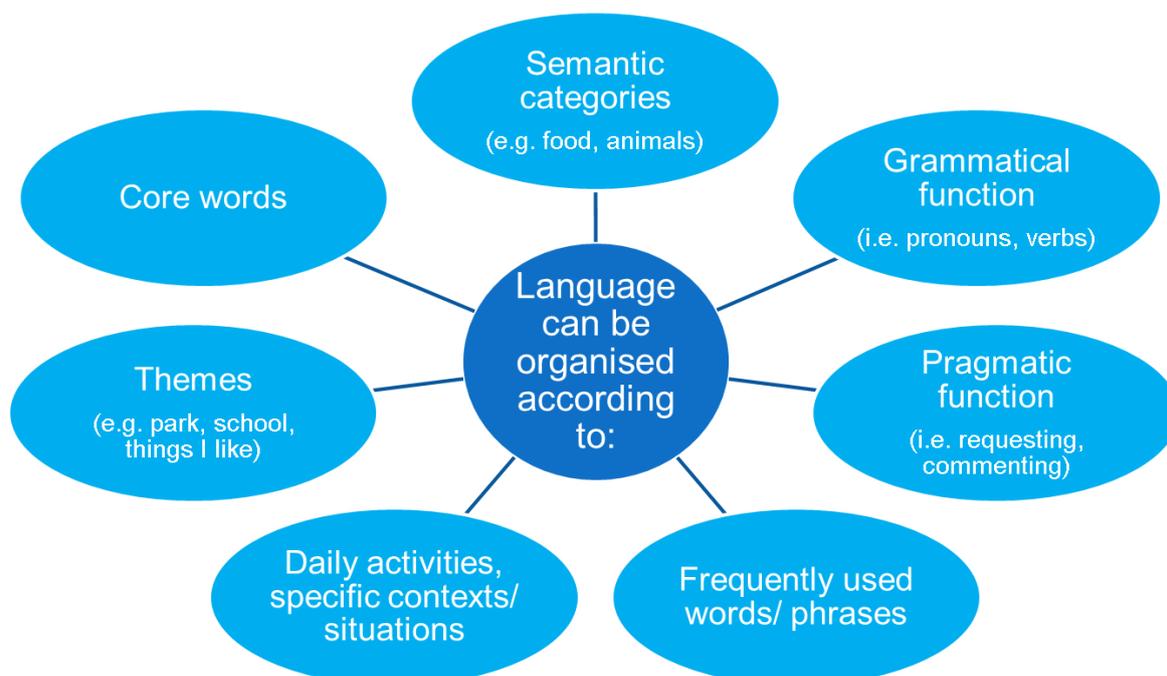Using multi-meaning symbols, a small set of symbols can be used to represent a large number of words.

Communication rate, measured in words per minute is significantly faster than spelling-based AAC language systems. Whilst literacy skills are not essential when using semantic compaction, many people acquire literacy skills as their communication using semantic compaction develops.

3. Alphabet-Based Systems:

Alphabet-based systems can be used with literate individuals. This systems allows them to generate spontaneous novel messages by spelling out words. Word prediction, stored whole words/phrases and abbreviation-expansion may also be used.

This is a te	🔊
	⬆ Use
	🗑 Delete
	≡ Phrases
	☺ Emote

term	terrible	test	terrorist	technical	tendency

Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P
A	S	D	F	G	H	J	K	L	⌫
⬆	Z	X	C	V	B	N	M		←
123	⚙	Space		📝	♡	🔔

Language Organisation

Semantic categories
(e.g. food, animals)

Core words

Grammatical function
(i.e. pronouns, verbs)

Language can be organised according to:

Pragmatic function
(i.e. requesting, commenting)

Themes
(e.g. park, school, things I like)

Daily activities, specific contexts/ situations

Frequently used words/ phrases

For more information, please contact:

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