**Background and Aim**

Many aided communicators use graphic sentences at a level below their comprehension of spoken language (Udwin & Yule, 1990; von Tetzchner & Martinsen, 1996; Light, 1997; Nunes et al., 2003). Their graphic utterances are often described as reduced or different when compared to spoken sentences produced by peers, and number of elements are reduced and there is variation in order of symbols in multi-symbol utterances produced by children (Udwin & Yule, 1990; Smith, 1996) and adolescents and adults (Kelford-Smith, et al., 1989; Soro & Toro-Zambrana, 1995; Sutton et al., 2000), although the studies have included aided communicators with different abilities and graphic systems. Many aided communicators do not seem to make the transition to multi-symbol utterances with the same ease as naturally speaking children. They produce few utterances with more than two elements.

According to von Tetzchner (2003), the transition from one-word or one-symbol utterances to utterances with two or more words, gestures or graphic symbols is a milestone in the language development process. The expansion of utterances enables the individual to relay more complex meanings and makes a foundation for acquiring the functional vocabulary that is needed to tell and retell stories. The expansion of utterances is also a characteristic feature of child-directed language and a common strategy in intervention with children who have language disorders. However, von Tetzchner points out that, due to the fact that the available vocabulary in communication aids is generally limited, it is important that adults (whose speech is a model for children developing spoken language) use the aid vocabulary when they expand the utterances of aided communicators. Only then can the aided communicators benefit from the expansion when producing new utterances. The aim of present study was to investigate the strategies used by young aided communicators to relay events they had seen on videos.

**Method**

This study is part of the international project “Becoming aided communicators” which involves 16 countries. The Brazilian ethics committee approved the project under number 615/2008 and CONEP under number 14968. Eight aided and eight naturally speaking communicators, aged 5–15 years, used language to describe events presented to them on video, to different communication partners: parents, teachers and peers. The interactions were video-taped and transcribed for analyses.

**Results**

The utterances of the aided and the naturally speaking communicators were categorized as: 1) Expressive modalities [a) symbolic gesture, b) eye pointing, c) graphic symbol, d) vocalization, and e) tangible object], 2) Number of elements [a) simple statement and b) compound statements], 3) Organization of syntactic elements subcategories [a) subject, b) verb and c) object]; 4) Grammatical word classes [a) noun, b) article, c) verb, d) adjective, e) adverb, f) number and g) preposition] and 5) Narrative elements [a) characters, b) place of action, c) action and d) other elements]. The aided and the naturally speaking communicators used different modes of expression, and this was most pronounced in the aided communicators. The structure of utterances produced by the aided communicators were simpler and relayed the main idea of the narrative less precisely. They most frequently used graphic symbols were nouns, followed by verbs. When preparing more complex meanings, they often combined expressive modalities. The naturally speaking children used mainly complex utterances.
Conclusions
The findings indicate that there are significant differences in the strategies applied by aided and naturally speaking communicators. Aided communicators may not be used to produce the complex utterances needed when narrating events and may benefit from more aid-based expansions by communication partners in story telling.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest
The authors disclose they have no financial or other interest in objects or entities mentioned in this paper.

References


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