Social Validation of Vocabulary Selection: Ensuring Stakeholder Relevance

Diane Nelson Bryen (PhD)
Temple University

Juan Bornman (PhD)
University of Pretoria

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Why is social validation needed?

- The vocabulary resource lies at the heart of most AAC systems.
- Vocabulary needs of individuals who are unable to spell their messages (pre-literate and non-literate) continue to be a concern.
- Rarely does one team or individual have enough knowledge or experience to select vocabulary for every specific context, activity, or ethnic and language group.
- Selecting vocabulary for sensitive topics such as abuse, is even more difficult.

What methods can be used?

- Diary studies
- Inventories
- Conversational themes
- Commercially available vocabulary lists
- Using adults who use AAC
- Using familiar communication partners

Ethnographic approaches

Why do these methods fall short?

- Informants can have inconsistent responses – not always reliable and accurate.
- Not always applicable to individual circumstances.
- Not needs specific.
- Not culturally appropriate.
- Doesn’t take social factors (communication environment) into consideration.
- Sensitive nature of topics (e.g. abuse) makes it difficult.
- Issue of circularity: select topics that the person can already communicate about or which others wish them to communicate about.
What we did

- Focus groups
  - Professionals and people with disabilities
  - Generate needed vocabulary
  - Prioritize vocabulary - goal approx. 50 words
  - Select overlap between languages (English, Afrikaans, Sepedi, isiZulu)
  - Identify most commonly used symbol system in SA
  - Discrepancy analysis – developed board – 57 items

“Communication for All: You can tell and be heard”

What we did

- **Aim:** to verify the vocabulary by comparing similarities and differences in the evaluation of the importance of the items by literate individuals who use AAC.

- Developed questionnaire with 57 items in alphabetical order

- 5 point Likert scale
  - 5 = Very important to include
  - 1 = Not at all important to include

Participants (n = 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Medical diagnosis</th>
<th>Home language</th>
<th>Education Completed</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19 – 39 yr</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Fully</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27 yr</td>
<td>TBI</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Partly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Viral brain</td>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>infection 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Degenerative</td>
<td>isiNdebele1</td>
<td>Gr 8 – 11</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
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<td>Disease 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Setswana</td>
<td>Gr 7 or &lt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-disclosure of abuse

Have you ever been the victim of abuse?

- 38%
- 67%
- Yes
- No

Results

- 79.68% items were considered either as “very important” or “important” to include
- Not 100% agreement on any word
- 2 words: 91.7% forced, helped
- 10 words: 88.3% clothes, family, hurt, l ime, police, scared, touched, where, who, woman
- 18 words: 75% angry, doctor, friendly, hit, inside, look, man, mother, please, sad, stop, tell, toilet, touch, secret, shout, steal, work
- 24 words: 50 – 74%
- 4 words: < 50% car, get, school, they

Discussion

- Yes, there are limitations to this research
- Yes, this method of vocabulary selection does seem to have social validation:
  - Vocabulary was selected by focus group (rather than by individuals)
  - Only words that occurred in more than 1 language were included
- Stakeholders should be included in vocabulary selection processes; either from the start of the process or in validating, or in both

BUT

Questions remain...

- What degree of consensus is needed to ensure that vocabulary is socially valid for a group of individuals?
Download the boards...

- **Communication for All: You Can Tell and Be Heard** boards are available at:

  http://www.caac.up.ac.za

  http://disabilities.temple.edu/aacvocabulary/e4all.shtml#index

Contact Information

Diane Nelson Bryen  
Professor Emerita  
Temple University  
Philadelphia, PA USA

dianeb@temple.edu

Juan Bornman  
Professor & Director  
Centre for AAC  
University of Pretoria  
Pretoria, South Africa

Juan.Bornman@up.ac.za