

# 11 Communication participation of adults who are lifelong aided communicators

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## Introduction

This chapter explores social interactions of four adults with cerebral palsy (CP) who have a lifelong experience of aided communication. The data is taken from a larger qualitative research project involving ten adults, which formed the basis of a doctoral thesis (Parrott, 2014). This exploration shows how successful such users of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) are in achieving one of the ultimate goals of human life, namely favourable and effective interpersonal interaction (Schiffrin, 1994). Being a flexible and efficient communication partner, confident and successful across a range of different contexts (Smith & Murray, 2011), is often viewed as a long-term goal for aided communicators. One step of inquiry could be to consider how talk, specifically its content and processes, happens in adult interpersonal interaction involving aided communication. In light of this, the current chapter takes a discourse analytic approach to exploring the extent to which four adults participated in interpersonal interactions about their lives, opinions and experiences. The goal of this analysis is to contribute to the emerging knowledge of the natural history of aided communication skills with a view to considering how these findings may inform AAC intervention (Johnson, Beitchman & Brownlie, 2010).

An interactionist model of communication drives theoretical representation of communication beyond the discrete roles of the participants, the message and the medium (Bloom & Tinker, 2001; Schiffrin, 1994) to a point where all behaviours, whether intentional or unintentional, verbal, physical or paralinguistic, convey messages that are determined by contexts. The recipient of the information is as responsible for successful communication as the initiator. How adult aided communicators use multiple modalities to participate in talk-in-interaction, and how they manage intentional interpersonal interaction, is potentially more illuminating than trying to judge the isolated concept of their communicative competence (Light & McNaughton, 2014). Each modality contributes to a potentially rich interactional experience for both the aided communicator and their conversational partner. Participants' involvement in

communication is informed by their awareness of, engagement in and motivation to be effective social and cultural beings (Tetnowski & Franklin, 2003).

The social construction of communication participation is the process of individuals' engaging in talk-in-interaction (Kovarsky, Culatta, Franklin & Theadore, 2001), where interactional competence is consequently jointly generated, distributed and evaluated within this action of engagement (Duchan, Maxwell & Kovarsky, 1999). It can alternatively be described as the consequence of the participants' location of self and how others locate them through their respective contributions, reflecting their personal and moral attributes as speakers (Harfe & van Langenhove, 1991). Individuals can locate in conversations with different identities in real conversational exchanges and indeed are positioned by others as different kinds of people (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Davies & Harfe, 1990). How any communicator experiences and learns these variations of position has to be constructed at an interactional level (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This seems particularly critical in aided interaction.

Aspects of conversational style such as balance, pacing, humour, storytelling, and appropriateness of contributions vary according to the formality of the situation and location, and from person to person with reference to involvement, age, gender, interest and status (Fairclough, 2003; Tannen, 2005). The complexities and challenges involved in aided interaction require consideration of the components of both the natural speakers' and adult aided communicators' participation. In order to participate in an interaction and to subsequently organize and sustain the exchanges, an individual must have something to say or share, a response, a memory and interactional skill (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Given that the cumulative experience of conversational involvement will influence the participation of adult aided communicators in specific conversations, the question of how they create a "communion of reciprocally sustained involvement" (Goffman, 1967, p. 116) is posed as part of the focus of this chapter.

To explore the communication participation of adult aided communicators, it is helpful to collect and analyze extracts of authentic, unscripted communicative interaction (Schegloff, 2007). The transcribed extracts of data in this chapter were analyzed taking a Discourse Analytical (DA) approach, principally informed by the work of the social psychologists Potter and Wetherell (1987), to examine how talk and non-talk was *used* to locate, frame and maintain the interactants' own realities and identities within the conversations. Edwards and Potter (2001) state that "talk" is the medium through which perceptions, motivations and thoughts happen, and therefore the "real language that real people use in the real world" (Woods, 2006, p. 10) must be examined. This necessitates analysis beyond the linguistic elements of the aided communicators' utterances.

Adult aided communicators might wish they had access to vocabulary perhaps not represented on their communication devices (Dark & Balandin, 2007) (see von Tetzchner & Stadskeiv, Chapter 2, this volume), so it is helpful to know how they use the resources and communicative repertoires they do have. It is also informative to recognize how aided talk is used to create identities, relationships and social roles through interaction (Shadden, 2005; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Analyzing authentic interactions with a focus on the active nature of its construction can yield unique insights into participation and identity.

Identity, as a theoretical construct, has been extensively researched (Jenkins, 2014). In this chapter, the analytical process of how the conversational participants established notions of self and others is viewed through an ethno-methodological perspective. What participants do and what they know about interaction is studied, with talk and other communicative repertoires the vehicle for observation. Identity is described as a vantage point from which an individual views, experiences and interacts with their social world. In this regard, communicators actively learn and create identities through constructing and exercising various discourses (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Davies & Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 2001). In deconstructing interactions, it is possible to identify how the aided communicators positioned themselves in a category of an interactive other (Antaki & Widdicombe, 2008; Willig, 1999). An identity should be seen to be dynamic (Burman & Parker, 1993; Zimmerman, 2008) and therefore responsive to contextual variations. This has potentially significant implications for the aided communicator, who might be primarily reliant on the linguistic content of their voice output communication aid (VOCA) for such purposes.

Smith and Murray (2011) commented that “aided communication devices can obscure the visibility of people who use AAC” (p. 295), implying that we do not see the identity of the person beyond the device or communication aid. It is entirely possible that aided methods of communicating will not dominate as the preferred mode, but, for example the degree of agency and independence some adults might achieve by directing their personal assistants is unknown (Smith & Connolly, 2008). Additionally, information about when and how they might use unaided communication signals to emphasize their strength of feeling or the construction of an opinion is limited in the research literature. DA methodology is used in this chapter as a tool to explore multimodal discourse from the perspectives of four contributors with the aim of illustrating their participation during interpersonal interaction.

## Contributors

The four contributors of data in this chapter were a woman, Ellen, and three men, Harry, Jacob and Ian. They were aged between 22–55 years and were lifelong users of multimodal communication, for example voice output communication aids (or speech generating devices/SGDs), symbol boards and unaided communication systems. Table 11.1 presents details of the four adults in the form of their pseudonym, age

**Table 11.1** Contributors’ details, topics and utterances.

“name”	Age (approx.)	Illustrative quote
Ellen	20	<i>“Just a minute. I want to say something else. What time does it finish?”</i> [pre-stored]
Harry	25	<i>“Proud not see my dad Sunday.”</i>
Jacob	50	<i>“I have take over”</i>
Ian	40	<i>“Can you come again”</i>

(approximate) and quotations providing illustrative identity insights from one of their interviews. Specifically, each quote provides a single and brief insight into an aspect of their character or personality, hobby or interest, as well as their unique linguistic ability and message formulation style.

### **Data collection and analysis protocols**

In order to address some very specific challenges experienced by aided communicators, for example establishing and sharing mutually interesting or preferred topics of conversation, a multi-level analytical approach to the data was necessary. Conversation-styled interviews (Brown, Worrall, Davidson & Howe, 2010) between natural speakers and the four aided communicators were the focus of data collection. Protocols detailed by Taylor (2013) and Higginbotham and Engelke (2013) partially informed both the transcription and the data analysis of the interaction between the contributors. Additionally, the conversations were analyzed to reveal what the contributors talked about (topics) using a coding system reported by Tönsing and Alant (2004), for the identification of the occurrence and frequency of topics. Throughout all of this process, it is acknowledged that alternative discourses, and therefore topics for analysis, would be produced at different times with other partners in various settings.

Talk is the focus of DA. This approach is used by practitioners and researchers and, although it does not have a single definition or theoretical basis (Cheek, 2004; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Taylor, 2013), DA is commonly used to interrogate the practices and interactions of social life, cultures and identities. DA is thought of as an analytic mentality rather than a set of formalized processes (Schenkein, 1978; Smithson, 2015). Potter and Wetherell (1987) proposed that the core concerns or principles of DA are that talk is action-oriented and it enables people to perform social actions and to build meaning and beliefs. Within DA, the constructive process of the interaction is the focus of analysis, and any variation of the social context and interactional purpose is important to the construction of an individual's relationship with, or their identity within, the social world (Edwards & Potter, 2001; Taylor, 2013).

Previously-reported organizational features of conversations not involving aided communication (ten Have, 2007; Wooffitt, 2005) were selected to guide the analysis of how the interactions were accomplished, namely taking turns at contributing (that is, speaking) and topic, or conversation openings. These features acted as organizational markers for the initial readings of the transcripts. Following the initial readings, with and without accompanying video, extracts were selected for further study because they stood out for a particular feature (Taylor, 2013), for example, conversational openings. A further process was completed involving critical reflection on the similarities and differences across the speakers, as described by Wood and Kroger (2000).

This intensity of analysis permitted an understanding of how contributors used their multimodal resources to construct their contributions in the sequences of interaction, rather than analysis of purely linguistic features. For example, the identification of the knowledge and meaning being exhibited through the individualized interactions with different discourses between employer and employee became the critical focus in the current analysis. Finally, the variability in the presence and absence of topic

content, and the influence of this talk guided an understanding of the participatory involvement of the four aided communicators and their natural speaking partners (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

By looking at sequences of interaction, it was possible to consider how the conversational partners constructed identities. For example, an extract from Jacob discussing life, exemplifies persistence and moral agency (Extract 11.3). He is also positioned by his conversational partner as an individual with something valuable and important to say. An extract from Ian offers political opinions with moral consequences, as permitted through a co-constructed topic (Extract 11.5). In the extracts below, how the contributors have made their identities and participatory engagement relevant within specific conversational features is explored.

The following section is divided into three parts, using the following frameworks. Part 1: Getting into conversations, including politeness routines and social etiquette (Extracts 11.1 and 11.2 with Harry). Part 2: Sustained participation in conversations about preferred topics (Extracts 11.3, 11.4 and 11.5 with Jacob, Ellen and Ian). Part 3: Maintaining participation in a preferred conversation by managing others to speak on their behalf (Extract 11.6 with Jacob).

## Part 1 Getting into conversations: Politeness routines and social etiquette

### Extract 11.1 Harry – “*Would you like coffee?*”

Some aided communicators can find it challenging to assert themselves as initiators of conversations for a variety of reasons. In this first extract, Harry successfully demonstrates his conversation involvement in an opening sequence, asserting a conventional politeness routine. His positioning through ‘participation’ constructs his confident personal identity as *host*, being an active agent with social control. His communicative repertoire includes a voice output communication aid (VOCA) mediated response. In the transcription, the initials LP denote the researcher. Lines of particular focus in this discussion are indicated with an arrow.

A description of the interaction is necessary to fully illustrate the construction of his social positioning. Harry was heard laughing down the corridor whilst his personal assistant (PA) wheeled him to the sitting room in his shared occupancy bungalow. Harry began the interaction sequence immediately by spontaneously asking a question.

An important feature of this opening at line 01, comes from Harry’s ability to achieve social control as host using an utterance with non-standard syntax. There is no intonation to suggest it is a question. The two-word phrase “*coffee you*” is a short-cut and is effective in its transference of meaning through its similarity to a typical question format (e.g., *Coffee?*) and context can be drawn on to infer meaning and the implied question. Given this social context, the offer and subsequent interaction is therefore made successful by both host and guest.

Clearly, Harry is aware of the pragmatics of offers and requests. He ensures that, as guest, I understand that he is not simply requesting or demanding a coffee for himself from his PA, because he adds the pronoun “*you*” to indicate that he is offering *me* a drink. He indicates the pragmatic need to do this and that, as the host, it is his social

### Extract 11.1

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01→	Harry	<i>"Coffee you"</i>
02	LP	<i>Yes thanks – that's kind of you. Black please. [...] I've got a good shot of your knees ((PA goes off to kitchen))</i>
03	Harry	<i>Yuh</i>
04	LP	<i>All I am filming Harry is.....((Harry interrupts/overlaps))</i>

### Extract 11.2

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01→	Harry	<i>"How are you?"</i>
02→	LP	<i>(1.8) Not too bad thank you. I must admit I am a little bit all over the place.</i>
03→	Harry	<i>"Dentist"</i>
04	LP	<i>(3.8) Dentist ((requesting clarification))</i>
05	Harry	<i>Yeah. "you" + you</i>
06	LP	<i>Me? You remembered? Oh. You are so thoughtful. ((I had forgotten I had told him about my dental appointment.)) I am such a baby.</i>
07	Harry	Laughs
08	LP	<i>Don't laugh. + Laughs + I had to have two massive fillings. ((Harry laughs)) I had to hold my mouth open for a whole hour. I couldn't eat anything all day ((Harry laughs)) Go home to bed. I was a right sook about it.</i>
09→	Harry	Laughs + <i>"hahahaha"</i>

obligation, or right to act in this way. He takes the conversational and interactional lead with the initiation of the turn and its content positions him as active and in control. These actions could be interpreted as reflecting a motivation that by doing this familiar act, he is perhaps offering normality as a part of his identity. The immediate acceptance of his offer in line 02 reinforces his action as host, valuing its intent and reinforcing the chances of later reciprocation and positioning in the host–guest discourse frame.

On this occasion, the more formal and polite version, perhaps "Would you like a cup of coffee?" is not required. He uses his VOCA rather than his communication board, perhaps because he recognized that both myself and his PA were busy and therefore unable to read his selection from his board or, for this communicative act, using a voice was loud, instant, more assertive, powerful and typical. He thus positions himself strongly as the active and successful agent.

### Extract 11.2 *Harry – “How are you?”*

In this extract, Harry demonstrates successful participation by further developing his opening of the conversation using a conventional politeness routine. His positioning through participation with a *friend* discourse, constructs an empathic personal identity through his use and development of an emotional and health status enquiry. In terms of analysis, timed intervals with interpretative significance are coded with specific timings. His communicative repertoire includes a pre-programmed VOCA-mediated response as well as self-generated linguistic content. Joint laughter is also generated in this interaction, initially led by Harry.

In this extract, Harry overlaps with an interruption (Extract 11.1, line 04). His signalling for the conversational turn terminates my comment about the direction of the camera, to enquire after my health, using a politeness discourse based on health status (Hayes & Hannold, 2007) and friend frame, using a pre-stored phrase (Extract 11.2, line 01). A non-specific and informal two-part response (line 02) follows, with a hesitancy indicating an uncertainty about the nature of his question as a routine opening inquiry that was perhaps not meant to be taken literally. Harry seems to regard this first-part polite response as unsatisfactory. He disregards the second part of the response and develops his turn and inquiry by expanding and adding more personal and contextual information (line 03 and 05). The response at line 04, with its initial pause of a longer timed duration suggests further uncertainty until Harry's use of combined modalities finally achieves a shared topic of conversation of his preference. His persistence has been effective. Joint laughter follows realising social closeness and rapport.

Harry's expressions of concern for my welfare elicit a polite acceptance from me and also an evaluative comment, Extract 11.1 line 02 (*that's kind of you*) and Extract 11.2 line 06 (*you are so thoughtful*) perhaps acknowledges his identity as a compassionate adult. At the close of Extract 11.2, Harry chooses to add some double laughter where he not only laughs naturally with his voice but also by pressing the particular cell on this VOCA (line 09). Both expressions through laughter are compassionate and are interpreted as genuine and contributing impact. It also helps to reinforce his turn and his identity as a compassionate, yet cheerful person with a sense of humour. Both extracts show Harry constructing the positions of speaker-initiator and empathic conversation partner. His ability to take social command and agency when offering me a drink strengthens his powerful identity as a person who is able to establish control. Overall, the positions constructed by these conventional politeness routines for Harry, were of a confident and assertive adult speaker who was mindful of the needs of others (van der Bom & Mills, 2015). This created an atmosphere of engagement and congeniality, engendering shared participation.

## Part 2 Sustained participation in conversations about preferred topics

### Extract 11.3, line 02 *Jacob – “I am happy as I am”*

One of the main challenges aided communicators face is maintaining contributions over several turns, particularly when it takes a significant amount of time to create a

## Extract 11.3

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01	LP	<i>Is there an expectation do you think that we want more or (.) have higher expectations on what we can achieve? What are your thoughts?</i>
02	Jacob	<i>((vocalizing)) “No I am happy like I am” ((FT 2 mins 2 sec.))</i>
03	LP	<i>....basically happy but you have noticed that things are changing.</i>
04	Jacob	<i>Sighs</i>
05	LP	<i>mmmm... so that’s just generally.... to do with....just life and not just about um.....things for people with disabilities?</i>
06	Jacob	<i>Vocalizes=no</i>
07	LP	<i>No.... mmmm ((There a sharp intake of breath denoting that I was going to say something but I stopped for his turn))</i>
08→	Jacob	<i>((vocalizing))... “I had talk yesterday about this” ((FT 2 mins 25 seconds)) ((vocalising))</i>
09	LP	<i>Did you?</i>
10	Jacob	<i>Nods .... Vocalising</i>
11	LP	<i>laughs ah ↑↓ ((recognizing the coincidence))</i>
12→	Jacob	<i>Sighs..vocalizing... “I said you see I got a disability I still a person” ((FT 5 mins 2 secs)) ((vocalizing))</i>
13	LP	<i>muh..mm... yeh.. so for you...what sort of things (.) do you value then about your life that makes you feel happy and pleased with what you’ve got ... that makes you that content and happy?</i>
14→	Jacob	<i>...gulps... “I believe” looks at me ((as if expecting me to know what he is saying)) ... ((FT 41 sec))</i>
15	LP	<i>So that’s your faith that guides you. Are there other things that you also value highly?</i>
16	Jacob	<i>(4 secs) V=wuh (no) + shakes head</i>
17	LP	<i>No that’s it...that guides you &amp; gives you that happiness.</i>
18→	Jacob	<i>((vocalizing)) “I get to (deletes to) things wrong some time like all of us”. ((FT 2 mins 59 sec)) ((vocalizing))</i>

Interaction time taken – 10 minutes

contribution. In this extract, Jacob demonstrates participation through his conversation involvement in maintaining the topic and in the elaboration of a preferred topic. His positioning through participation constructs his personal identity with an emotional and moral stance and a shared identity. His communicative repertoire includes vocalizations and VOCA-mediated linguistic content. Jacob participates in both speaker and listener positions in a 53-minute discussion around the preferred topic of life, and specifically, his thoughts about what has been good and the challenges he encountered. Formulation times (FT) are included, timed from the first click of the communication device (activation of a cell) to the spoken transmission, in addition



to the overall timed duration of the topic exchange. Jacob uses many variations of vocalizations throughout the conversation, indicated in the lines.

Immediately (line 02) Jacob positions himself as feeling positive and as having an emotional and moral contentment with his life now. By using a personal pronoun and the present tense of the verb 'to be' he places himself firmly in the here and now. He replies instantly by vocalizing a negative to reject the first part of the question (line 01). He chooses to maintain the conversation and extends the topic (line 08). He does not reveal with whom he had been conversing or the context, but this demonstrates that he has other conversation partners and that he has opinions he likes to share through interaction with others.

On line 12, he continues talking assertively about his satisfaction with life by using a double complex sentence including an example of reported speech, "*I said*" which takes him 5 minutes to formulate. He positions himself unequivocally as a person regardless of his disability, thus asserting his construction of normality. His use of the adverb 'still' in relation to himself (I am), conveys the longstanding nature of him being a person, despite a disability. Jacob's subject+verb response at line 14, "*I believe*" is a direct reference to his faith, and takes persistence to generate, as evidenced by the timed duration of his holding the conversational floor. This emphasizes its importance to Jacob's wellbeing and quality of life. In the final turn (line 18) he modestly states that regardless of his faith he makes mistakes and in using the pronoun "*us*", aligns himself with the wider community and shares a common identity (van Langenhove & Harré, 1993), indicating a positive assessment.

#### Extract 11.4 *Ellen – "shopping"*

The opportunity to be a combative interactant in an interaction with a speaking partner can be problematic, partly due to the fast pace of the turns. The fourth extract, from Ellen, demonstrates participation through her elaboration of a preferred topic. Her positioning through participation constructs her assertive personal identity as a holder of knowledge and opinion that confronts one of her communication partners. Her unaided communicative repertoire includes vocalizations coupled with quick eye-

#### Extract 11.4

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01	LP	<i>What about things like shopping? Do you get to go shopping if you want?</i>
02	Ellen	(UpL) 'no'
03	LP	<i>No</i>
04→	Carer	((turns quickly to face Ellen)) <i>What do you mean no?</i>
05	LP	((pauses)) <i>Would you like to do more shopping than what you do?</i>
06→	Ellen	(UpR) 'yes' + V= <i>uhuh</i>
07	LP	<i>There you are</i>
08	Ellen	V= <i>ahhh</i> . ((In the background, carer is voicing displeasure)).

pointing, looking upwards and to the left (coded as UpL) for no, and upwards and to the right (upR) for yes. An interesting feature is when her male carer challenges (line 04) the accuracy and therefore integrity of her response (line 02).

The interactional challenge is unexpected as illustrated by the carer's surprise and request for clarification. The impact of Ellen's decisive positioning (line 02), is possibly demonstrated in the carer's responses (line 04), which seems to indicate that he perceives her challenge as a criticism of the institutional routine. Ellen manages his confrontation in line 06, by combining several communication modes to indicate depth of feeling, behaviours also reported by Hörmeyer and Renner (2013). This signals strength and confidence in her assertive position. Ellen chose not to assert any VOCA-mediated contributions, possibly because her device activation was unreliable and consequently, the message formulation times were too slow for such a combative exchange to occur. Importantly, this interactional contribution offers personal insight and knowledge, previously unknown to the conversational partners, despite the absence of any linguistic contribution.

### Extract 11.5 Ian - "I think it is rubbish"

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01	LP	[...] <i>I wondered if you ever follow the news to find out what the party's policies are...</i> [...]
02	Ian	shakes head "No thank you" ((FT 38 secs)) + still looking at VOCA
03	LP	Laughs <i>Is that too much too much</i> ((Ian smiles)) <i>political information?</i>
04	Ian	smiles + nods + still looking at VOCA
05	LP	<i>I would agree with you there. Ian clears screen and turns to me [...]</i> <i>D'you know, in Australia it's compulsory to vote</i> ((if you are over 18))
06→	Ian	"Why?" ((FT 16 secs)) + still looking at VOCA
07	LP	<i>Because em, I think it's because they want everybody</i> (Ian begins FR) <i>to have an opinion about the government because it's a democracy [...]</i>
08→	Ian	"I think it is rubbish". ((FT 36 secs)) + still looking at VOCA
09	LP	((Begins when Ian turns to me)) <i>You like the system that we've got?</i>
10	Ian	nods + looks at me ((atypical gaze shift – trouble?))
11	LP	[...] <i>Do you know in Scotland, they're going to lower the voting age I think it may be, sixteen. (.)</i>
12	Ian	"I think it is rubbish because them at school". ((FT 1 min 37)) + still looking at VOCA
13	LP	<i>Mm. I'd agree with you there. [...]</i> <i>But, it'll be interesting to see what happens in Scotland.</i> (Ian smiles and vocalises Q) <i>Cos I think (LP touches Ian arm) that David Cameron was also thinking about lowering the voting age.</i> ((Ian turns to VOCA))
14→	Ian	"If he do it I will off him". ((FT 1 min 11 )) ((slowly turns to me))
15	LP	<i>You'll what him?</i> ((Leans forwards)) <i>I didn't catch it.</i> ((Reads and sits down.)) <i>Oh you'll off him? You'll go off him?</i>
		Total interaction time – 9 minutes 22 sec

### **Extract 11.5 Ian - “I think it is rubbish”**

The opportunities for an aided communicator to maintain and elaborate a preferred topic of conversation can be limited. In Extract 11.5, the extent of Ian’s conversational involvement illustrates a depth of participation. Additionally he demonstrates reciprocity. His positioning through sustained engagement constructs an informed personal identity as a holder of an opinion. His communicative repertoire includes VOCA-mediated responses and facial expressions. Within the longer, 20-minute discussion about politics, the topical and potentially controversial subject of voting age arose. Formulation times (FT) are included, timed from the first click of the device (activation of a cell) to the spoken transmission; in addition to the overall timed duration of the topic exchange.

In this 9-minute extract, Ian positions himself as the active and curious speaker (line 06) and also interested listener. This assertive discourse presents him giving a view, (line 08) and offering an evaluative comment (line 12) with a possible political action or consequence (line 14). By using ‘I’ statements in lines 08 and 14 he signals unique and personal ownership (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) or a mental state. He is unequivocal about this and does not choose to use any hedging devices, for example, “I think maybe” an example used by him in a different conversation. Notably in this extract, a reflective and non-judgemental position is presented through the question “I wondered...”, and this elicits a response that is polite, clear and strong (line 01). The opener ‘Do you know...’ presents an invitation to comment (line 05 and 11), which he successfully accepts. The invitation positions him as a potential holder of knowledge and subsequent contributor.

Indications of agreement and engagement are noticed in lines 03 and 04. Ian’s smiling responses occurred infrequently in our interactions so their occurrence in this extract is notable and unusual. A particular instance of social closeness occurs (line 13) where he smiles, triggering physical contact to his response. This reciprocated closeness is unusual for our conversations but perhaps it is associated with this sequence of agreement around a preferred topic. The topic is sustained for about 10 minutes by both parties utilising a variety of strategies including eye-gaze, listener silence and respectful curiosity. Questions are asked of each other to elicit clarification and information. There was equality in the sharing of views and opinions; reciprocity was created and the discussion continued for a further 5 minutes.

## **Part 3 Maintaining participation in a preferred conversation by managing others to speak on their behalf**

### **Extract 11.6 Jacob - “iPad”**

Many aided communicators use others to provide support for a variety of purposes. Sometimes in interaction the positions of these “others” is unclear. However in this final extract, the interactions construct a discourse between the ‘employer’ and ‘employed’. Jacob participates by confidently managing a “conversational other” to guarantee the maintenance of his preferred topic. How Jacob makes this relevant, and constructs himself as an organiser of others is explored. Jacob asks a VOCA-mediated question

## Extract 11.6

Line	Speaker	Transcription
01→	Jacob	<i>“What I was going to ask you do you now ((corrects spelling)) anyone know about ipad?” ((FT 4 mins 23 sec))</i>
02	LP	<i>Huh...so not...not, you are not thinking about an OT?</i>
03	Jacob	<i>No</i>
04	LP	<i>No. um... what about the ipad? Just....</i>
05	Jacob	<i>Shouts for his carer</i>
06	Carer	<i>Alright?</i>
07→	Jacob	<i>Will you?.....</i>
08	Carer	<i>Well he was... you were looking at something that he can go on from programme to programme and can take photos and email.</i>
09	Jacob	<i>Yuh</i>

to help him pursue his interest in photography. Message formulation times (FT) are included in the double-brackets to indicate his strategy of holding the conversational floor. Additionally, he integrates usage of vocalizations here to expedite his request and to affirm his orientation to progressivity (Koole & Mak, 2014).

Jacob opportunistically questions me, changing from a previous and possibly central topic about the availability of therapy services. In line 01, he initiates asking this question by politely prefacing his request with a hedging comment. Again, the lengthy time duration conveys the motivation and importance he attaches to furthering his agenda. What is noticeable in line 01 is the absence of interruptions. A position of competence is attributed, indicating that he can talk for himself, that he is not helpless and does not need rescuing, despite taking a turn of almost four and a half minutes duration. Jacob shouts (vocalises with volume) for his carer to join us from an outside room, to speak on his behalf to explain the intricacies of the problem (line 07), demonstrating not only his multimodal communication repertoire but also his polite regard for our time-limited conversation. He acts with definite and normative purpose. The carer quickly complies and by switching from ‘he’ to ‘you’ demonstrates deference and confirmation of Jacob’s status.

## Discussion

### Part 1: Getting into conversations including politeness routines and social etiquette

Most interactions with the four adults emerged in an extemporaneous manner, reminiscent of typical interactions where both parties develop co-ordinated and shared contributions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2006). The management of verbal and non-verbal behaviours was variable and necessarily responsive to the individual contexts. Typically, after a welcome routine, small talk occurred (Coupland, 2003), whilst the

aided communicator and others settled, creating a relaxed environment. Opening sequences are important in establishing the tone of the interaction (Riggio, Friedman & DiMatteo, 1981) and here they were generally varied and often unpredictable. It was noted that some, but not all, contributors observed common and familiar rules of social etiquette, for example, by offering a drink, but many contributors' carers themselves executed the "would you like a cup of coffee/tea?" routine.

Although Collins, Markova and Murphy (1997) carefully described how conversations between aided communicators and natural speakers were brought to a close, conversational openings have received much less attention in the AAC literature, by contrast to its visibility in naturally spoken research. Sidnell (2010), for example, describes how conversations are opened between natural speakers who do not know each other. Greetings act to express a desire and an availability to interact, and an agreement to participate (Orr, 2008). Conversational partners move from unfocused to focused interaction by incorporating non-verbal devices such as eye gaze, smiling and appeasement gestures such as back-patting or handshakes (Riggio, Friedman & DiMatteo, 1981). They act to establish or reaffirm the type of relationship, and are learned behaviours.

The openings by Harry in Extracts 11.1 and 11.2 demonstrates some critical features of this type of discourse context; how they are organised, their vital function in the conduct of adult aided interaction and subsequent impression formation (Zimmerman, 2008), and also how they help create and maintain conversational partners' social identity (Read, Moreton & Ryan, 2015). For some contributors, the language used and interactions constructed could be seen to reflect a position of 'normality'. This construction of identity resonates with some of the conversations by adolescent aided communicators, reported by Wickenden (2011).

Generally, interactional greetings help orientate participants to the purpose of the interaction. Additionally they may be important for aided communicators to position themselves as socially motivated towards putting others at their ease (Coupland, 2003). Countering any negative stereotypes or judgements may be a concern for aided communicators. Indeed, some of the adult aided communicators in the research by Trembath, Balandin, Stancliffe, and Togher (2010) encountered negative judgements by typical speakers. One of the limitations for aided communicators (of both genders) may be their inability or reluctance to initiate or reciprocate approximated physical gestures, for example, handshakes or body contact of some type. Expressing social recognition and the social closeness that accompanies the act can be one of the most critical phases in interactions.

Variation in interactional openings by adult aided communicators exists, for varied reasons. The use of VOCA-mediated formal phrases (either novel or pre-programmed) can be associated with social etiquette and politeness routines. Another form of opening is a more casual, warming up style, with the aided communicator positioned with anticipation commensurate with the role of interviewee. These openings including the 'how are you?' inquiries that appear in ordinary interactions with natural speakers (Sidnell, 2010). One difference with aided communicators is perhaps the challenges in being able to respond flexibly and sensitively to the individual identity of the recipient. The 'how are you?' inquiry can portray the speaker as caring through conscious

engagement and awareness of the cultural rules of social etiquette. This opportunity to position oneself as socially aware is important because it creates a positive impression of communicative competence, and offers inter-personal expansion within the interaction (Orr, 2008) and may include friendship development (Rawlins, 2009).

Openings therefore appear to be an important facet of interaction. Considerable variation in interaction openings exists across the contributors that may be influenced by individual differences in control of voluntary movements, levels of physical dependency and individual social contexts. In reality, it may be that some aided communicators have neither used nor practised these opening sequences, and consequently noticed the possible impact and value on subsequent interaction.

## **Part 2 Sustained participation in conversations about preferred topics**

Extracts from Jacob, Ellen and Ian revealed their motivated involvement in conversations about preferred topics, and how these demonstrate reciprocity and personal commitment. For natural speaking conversation partners, an analysis of topic talk reveals what the interaction is about and what the talk does. Both facets are important for adult aided communicators and their partners in terms of participation in conversations and the validation of self and identity. The availability of appropriate vocabulary is only one feature of topic talk. Other features that help identify what topic talk does in an interaction includes how people orient to and organise themselves to talk about conversational themes and also how they finish a topic (Sidnell, 2010).

In addressing the first critical challenge for adult aided communicators of what the talk is about, topics of conversation were established by either of the contributors. When an aided communicator initiated the topic, it positioned them as assertive communicators with motivation to participate with equal authority to ask questions. On some occasions, unaided communication modes were used to signal disagreement or dissatisfaction with the speaker's choice of topic. Topics that were more agreeable to the aided communicator or demonstrated affiliation or like-mindedness between the two parties, generated increased performance or take-up, a finding in accord with Clarke and Wilkinson's (2013) analysis of interactions between children using aided communication and natural speech. This shared involvement promotes rapport and social closeness and is a common ability for competent communicators (Tannen, 2005).

An ability to talk about agreed conversational themes is important to demonstrate one's identity, knowledge and position in society. An aided communicator might be limited in their social interaction by many factors such as the availability of appropriate vocabulary (Dark & Balandin, 2007), opportunities to have practised talking about topics, or life-experiences (Milner & Kelly, 2009) that provide the "business of the social world" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p.283). It is therefore important to know what content is possible for adult aided communicators to develop, what strategies they use and also what the talk does in terms of positioning themselves with identities such as sporty and healthy, or as contributors to communities, as easy going, opinionated or assertive.

Topics were maintained by aided speakers, and using speaker self-references (Land & Kitzinger, 2007), they positioned themselves as opinionated and possessing personal

views that were passionate and informed. Participants reflected ownership of views and the perspectives of others. Speakers also positioned themselves with moral agency (Har e & van Langenhove, 1991; Krahn & Fenton, 2009). These all contributed to a free-flowing conversation maintained by mutual exchange of linguistic content and by the conversational partners' own interactional competence. An aided communicator's conversation partner can acknowledge the views, using a reflective questioning style or may need to respectfully invite elaboration or clarification depending on terms of agreement (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). The relatively short but complete sequences presented in the current chapter of collaboratively constructed conversation and interaction demonstrated the joint actions of both parties.

In Extract 11.4, Ellen's positioning as a communicator with moral agency, is made relevant by her novel contributions. Such contributions are recognised as personal, positive and authentic contributions that make an impact on the recipients, evoking an atypical response (line 04). Responses can be managed with humour, surprise, relief and other emotions, facilitating greater understanding and interpersonal involvement (Tannen, 2007). Novel contributions are either linguistic utterances (Todman & Rzepecka, 2003), creative vocabulary usage or interactional behaviours, for example as in Ellen's case through sequences of unaided signals.

### **Part 3 Maintaining participation in a preferred conversation by managing others to speak on their behalf**

Jacob, in Extract 11.6, constructs a position of 'employer' and therefore organiser of others. Many adults with cerebral palsy employ carers or personal assistants for a variety of purposes, and in some settings and interactions, the carers may assume the position of 'host' on behalf of the adult. Whether or not this is with the aided communicator's prior instruction, it seems that the carer's compliance with procedures and practices may be monitored by the aided communicators. For other aided communicators, this discourse positioning may not be a recognised or important aspect to their management of interaction and their identity.

An interactional feature described in the research on aphasia as "speaking for another" (Simmons-Mackie, Kingston & Schultz, 2004, p.116) highlights instances where the aided communicator had carers or family members who could or would speak on their behalf. It is interesting to note that the roles of the *others* are variable across and within the aided communicators who participated in this study, reflecting a critically important, dynamic and individual interactional need. The carers (*or others*), unilaterally or with permission, may assume roles as protectors, elaborators, spokespersons or facilitators. They may be employees with different status, parents or family members with different personality characteristics.

For the four adult aided communicators who participated in this study, there were no spouses or intimate partners acting as *others*, unlike in many of the studies with people with aphasia (Brown, Worrall, Davidson & Howe, 2010; Simmons-Mackie, Savage & Worrall, 2014). These *others* might be required to animate, assert, support or elaborate in a manner acceptable to their employer, daughter or brother, and importantly these positions will change. In the interactions with Harry for example, when he pointed

to his targeted communication-aid-mediated contribution (i.e., a written word) he was considered the author and speaker, whilst the partner who spoke out his targeted contribution might be classified as the animator (Clarke & Wilkinson, 2013) or the *voicer*, a term suggested by Pilesjö & Rasmussen (2011). These may be considered unimportant classifications, but there is evidence to suggest the positioning of *others* positively or negatively affects interactional competence, as evidenced in the example interaction of Purves (2011) within a family with a person with dementia.

The adult aided communicators employed different strategies to manage their *other*, by looking to invite in or by using a direct request. Some carers spontaneously offered to assist with topic development, for example, using phrases such as, “*Do you want me to...*” (implying, “I have information if you would like me to share it”) versus “*Can I share ...*” (implying ownership of information and “I want to share it”). Carers presented different roles, behaviours and limitations. Most demonstrated respect towards the aided communicator and the conversation-styled interview situation as a whole.

In some of the literature about adults with intellectual impairments, when a support worker or carer speaks for that person when in their presence (Williams, 2011) this is viewed as limiting and therefore positions the person with the communication impairment as dependent. The same could be said when carers or support workers physically act on behalf of their employer/client. Even though care and support are individual matters, many carers working with a diversity of clients, wrongly but sometimes correctly, assume the role of gatekeeper (Parrott & Pettit, 2012). One older adolescent with cerebral palsy in Egilson’s study (2014) reported having multiple assistants. This situation was described as messy because each assistant had different expectations of the adolescent. Although gatekeeping has been described by people with aphasia and their spouses as stigmatising and embarrassing (Gillespie, Murphy & Place, 2010), this opinion was not offered by the adult aided communicators, all of whom had many years of acclimatisation and acceptance of their different communication styles (Kraat, 1987). The employees (carers, personal assistants and keyworkers) or parents of these four particular aided communicators, largely acted as a communication assistant (Collier, McGhie-Richmond & Self, 2010).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, discourse analysis has facilitated an exploration of communication participation through conversation-styled interviews. This approach supports debate around communicative competence and its measurement. From the selection of extracts, it has been possible to identify positions of assertiveness, agency and status. This process of reflection on the discourse is a technique that allows practitioners to evidence the extent to which adult aided communicators use their communicative repertoires to construct identities through their participation in interactions with their natural-speaking partners.

Communication for any participant with a constrained linguistic repertoire inevitably presents challenges for conversational partners on both sides of the interaction. This chapter has presented some data that highlights how, by utilising DA, a unique



perspective about communication participation is possible, revealing authentic exchanges of knowledge, ideas and feelings. Harry, Ellen, Jacob and Ian do just that.

This discourse perspective contributes to the existing measures around communicative competences such as device-centric analyses, (e.g., Baxter, Enderby, Evans & Judge, 2012), or frequency counts and user/carer views. An understanding of the ordinary, and sometimes subtle but important interactional features between conversation partners where one participant uses aided communication may be illuminated through analysis of discourse. Whilst the time taken to formulate a turn might be regarded as a delay or an obstruction to the typical synchronisation of exchanges, both parties in the conversations analysed here demonstrated capacity to accommodate asynchronous conversational style to enable conversational progression. The importance and relevance assigned to the conversation participants' use of all communication modalities, from subtle non-verbal messages to sophisticated linguistic utterances, was highlighted by these selected extracts of data.

The four aided communicators presented in this chapter, tended not to be interrupted when they held the conversational floor as demonstrated in Extract 11.3 with Jacob (line 12). This role identity and behaviour is not extensively documented in the literature regarding adult aided communicators. It was unknown if this was a novel and/or powerful position for them or if it facilitated an easier turn, knowing that they would not be interrupted once they had started. The opportunity to contribute uninterrupted turns may have facilitated not only linguistic performance but also interactional competence.

Finally, I would like to conclude with an insight from another person, Polly, who participated in a larger qualitative research project on the communication participation of ten adults with cerebral palsy who used AAC (Parrott, 2014). Polly emailed me after her first interview to strongly assert that, "My communication aid [...] is my voice and not my Life".

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