



Comments on terminology

Lyle Lloyd

To cite this article: Lyle Lloyd (1985) Comments on terminology, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 1:3, 95-97, DOI: [10.1080/07434618512331273581](https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618512331273581)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618512331273581>



Published online: 12 Jul 2009.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 43



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Comments on Terminology

Lyle L. Lloyd

West Lafayette, Indiana

There is a lack of agreement as to terminology among those of us concerned with communication by the more severely handicapped. We do not use a single common term to describe our use of communication symbols in place of or in addition to spoken symbols. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Position Paper on Nonspeech Communication (ASHA, 1981) partially addressed the issue, but still did not suggest a term upon which we could all agree. I therefore offer the following comments to stimulate further discussion.

Many of us working in this area do not yet consider any of the commonly used terms as ideal descriptors. Even "nonspeech communication"-a term we at Purdue feel describes reasonably well what we're doing-doesn't quite define it. In using this term we know we are not always talking about communication taking place with no speech at all. (In fact, we frequently use other symbols with speech such as manual signs, Blissymbols, etc.) Still, many of the books specifically on the topic or with portions devoted to it use the term "nonspeech".

"Nonvocal" and "nonoral" are other terms frequently used. But again, quite often oral or vocal aspects are involved in the communication, sometimes not in the form of speech, but in what are called nonverbal (or para-linguistic) aspects of communication, with the more precise symbolic representation being by manual or graphic symbols. So, "nonvocal" is not an appropriate descriptor, either.

Although "nonverbal" has been used in the past, it is not currently used to refer to the use of augmentative

and alternative symbols. The term has been, in fact, somewhat confusing. It has been used by some professionals to mean linguistic communication other than speech, while other professionals have limited its use to non-linguistic forms of communication-more typically at the signalling rather than symbolic level. Non-verbal communication has more recently referred in large part to what laymen and popular psychology literature refer to as "body language," while "verbal" has been frequently used as a synonym for speech. In fact, the ambiguity associated with the term "verbal" is the reason why most of us have limited our use of the term "nonverbal".

Professionals, however, frequently use the term to relate to works, language or linguistic aspects, as in "the verbal aspects of measured intelligence". Even if we cannot agree on a single acceptable term for all to use in talking about our activities in this area, I personally feel that "nonverbal" is the one term we should *not* use for our general area of activity (though it may be appropriate in its more restricted or pure sense when related to para-linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of communication).

The term "augmentative communication" is frequently used, and some think it the ideal term. It is a reasonably good term, I agree, but we also have terms like "assistive" and "alternative" (although many tend to feel that neither of these is a very good descriptor for the broad area we are dealing with). We can, however, accept terms like augmentative or alternative, providing people don't believe either of these to be the only acceptable term.

As we consider the terms "alternative" and "augmentative," it is important to keep in mind the three goals of nonspeech communication: (1) provision of a temporary means of communication until spoken communication is re-established to the point that it is (or becomes) adequate; (2) provision of a lifelong means of communication where spoken communication does not become functional; and (3) provision of a means for facilitating development (or re-establishment) of spoken communication (modified from Fristoe & Lloyd, 1979, p.403).

Thus, for some individuals we are talking about *augmenting* speech, and in other cases we are talking about *alternatives* to speech. Clinicians, teachers and

Reprinted with permission from *Communicating Together* (1984) Vol. 2, pp. 19-21.

Dr. Lloyd is Professor and Chairman of Special Education, and Professor of Audiology and Speech Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. Having recently been awarded a Fulbright grant, Dr. Lloyd is presently conducting research on augmentative and alternative communication in the United Kingdom.

The presentation of this paper by Dr. Lloyd was partially supported by a Nonspeech Research Personnel Preparation Grant from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, United States Department of Education (No. G008300868). However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of that agency, and readers should not assume endorsement by the U.S. federal government. Early draft comments of Dr. Lloyd's faculty and student colleagues, George R. Karlán and Jane E. Doherty, are gratefully acknowledged, but the author takes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

researchers all have to be as realistic as possible about these things. That is why we tend to use the term “nonspeech” (as in Second International Conference on Nonspeech Communication), rather than “augmentative” even though there are obvious inadequacies in that term as well. This is not to say “nonspeech” is best, but it is operational for us at Purdue.

The other option is to use both terms, as we chose to do in founding the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) in May 1983, but using both terms can become awkward in many communication situations.

In addition to not agreeing on what we call our use of communication symbols in place of and/or in addition to spoken symbols, we have not reached agreement on our use of terms within this area (e.g. sign, symbol, etc.). However, we at Purdue have been using a set of operational terms and definitions. These were recently presented as follows:

- *Speech* is the spoken—voiced and articulated—output of the communication system.
- *Language* is a conventional set of arbitrary symbols, and a set of rules for combining these symbols, to represent ideas about the world for the purposes of communication.
- *Communication* is the transmission of meaning from one individual to another whatever the means used (verbal, with and without speech; nonverbal, with and without vocal output). Communication implies a process of social interaction.
- *Symbols* are spoken, graphic or manual representations of objects, actions, relationships, etc. While spoken symbols are temporal and are conveyed through the auditory-vocal modality, graphic and manual symbols are spatial or spatial/temporal and are conveyed through the visual modality.
- *Gestures* and *signs* are two related types of manual symbols used in nonspeech communication. Signs and gestures that have been conventionalized and conform to certain rules or are constrained in their formation and usage; gestures have no such linguistic constraints, but do have cultural interpretations. Most signs—the linguistic elements of meaning in sign language—are relatively abstract, while gestures tend to be concrete. The meaning of most gestures can often be guessed while the meaning of most signs cannot.

Gestures and manual signs may also be referred to as unaided symbols because they do not require any aids or devices, but use only the sender’s face, head, hands, arms and other parts of the body. (They are also frequently referred to as manual.) “Unaided symbols” are what are called nonenduring, and frequently involve movement or change. In many instances, the change carries much of the meaning and, therefore, the symbols may be thought of as dynamic. Examples of unaided symbols are listed in the right column of Table 1.

We refer to the other group of nonspeech symbols and systems as “aided” since they require some type of external assistance, or an aid or device such as

TABLE 1: **Communication Symbols and Symbol Systems**^a (This overview is based on a table developed and previously presented by Lloyd and his colleagues [e.g., Goossen’s & Lloyd, 1981; Karlan & Lloyd, 1985; Lloyd, 1980, this paper; Lloyd and Karlan, 1983, 1984; Romski, et al., 1985])

Aided	Unaided
Objects	Pointing
Pictures (photographs & drawings)	Yes/no gestures
Simple (basic) rebus	Mime
Sigsymbols	Generally Understood Gestures
Picsyms	Amer-Ind
Pictogram Ideogram Communication (PIC)	Other gestures
Blissymbols	Esoteric signs
Graphic representation of manual signs and/or gestures (e.g., HANDS Sign Writer, Sigsymbols, Worldsign)	Gestuno
Complex (expanded) rebus	Natural Sign Language, (e.g., ASL, BSL, CSL, FSL, JSL, KSL, SSL, TSL, etc.)
Other logographs	Manually coded English (e.g., Signed English, PGSS, SEE-I, SEE-II), Manually coded Swedish, etc.
Lana lexigrams	Manual alphabets
Premack-type symbols	Gestural Morse code
Traditional Orthography (TO) i.e., written and printed words	Eye blink codes
Modified orthography and other symbols	Vocal Codes
Braille and other vibrotactal codes	Tadoma
Linear printing (e.g., write)	Hand cued speech (e.g., cued speech, Danish mouth)
Synthetic speech (e.g., SAL, SPEEC)	Speech

^a These are “formal” or conventionalized symbols and systems; informal nonverbal behaviors or ritualized behaviors have not been included.

paper, pencil, pictures, charts, communication boards and in some cases even electronic devices. With the exception of objects, they all involve graphic symbols and frequently are relatively fixed or permanent (i.e. remain available in the same form). They may be thought of as more static than unaided systems (Lloyd & Karlan, 1982). Examples of aided symbols are listed in the right column of Table 1.

It should be relatively easy for us to agree upon most of the above operational definitions, but in doing so it should be recognized that different authors in such areas as cognitive and language development, linguistics, pragmatics and speech act theory may use “sign”, and “symbol” differently. Some may use “sign” as a general representational term having either three levels (icon, index and symbol), or two levels (signal and symbol). Others use “sign”, “signal” or “index” for a basic, concrete level of communication, in which the

referent is present, and "symbol" for a higher or representational level of communication. In our operational definitions we would use "signal" (or "index") for the basic (and clearly non-linguistic) level, and symbol for the higher representational level. This avoids confusion of "sign" as the general representational term, with "manual sign" as in the sign languages of the deaf and the pedagogical sign systems.

REFERENCES

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1981). *Position paper on nonspeech communication*. *Asha*, 23, 577-581. (Also an earlier draft requesting input published by the ad hoc committee. (1980). *Asha*, 22, 267-272.)
- Fristow, M., & Lloyd, L. L. (1979). Nonspeech communication. In N. Ellis (Ed.), *Handbook of mental deficiency: Psychological theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 401-430). Hillsdale, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Goossens, G. A. & Lloyd, L. L. (1984). Clinical experience in research: Implications for teaching nonspeech communication. *Asha*, 23, 697 (abstract-A short course presented at the 56th annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Los Angeles, CA, November 1981.)
- Karlan, G. R., & Lloyd, L. L. (in preparation). *Communication intervention for the moderately and severely handicapped*. Baltimore, MD: University of Park Press.
- Lloyd, L. L. (1980). Non-speech communication: discussant's comments. In B. Urban (ed.), *Proceedings of the 18th Congress of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (Vol. II)* (pp. 43-48). Washington, DC: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (An invited presentation.)
- Lloyd, L. L., & Karlan, G. R. (1982, August). Nonspeech communication symbols and systems: Where have we been and where are we going? *Journal of Mental Deficiency Research*, 28, 3-20. (An invited plenary presentation at the VIth Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency, Toronto.)
- Lloyd, L. L., & Karlan, G. R. (1983, August 14-18). Nonspeech communication symbol selection considerations. In the *Proceedings of the XIX Congress of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics*, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Romski, M.A., Lloyd, L. L., & Sevcik, R. (in press). Augmentative and alternative communication issues. In R. L. Schiefelbusch & L. L. Lloyd (Eds), *Language perspectives II*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.