



The ISAAC Research Symposium

The Research Symposium for the 16th Biennial Conference of ISAAC will be held in Lisbon, Portugal on July 25-26, 2014. Following the main part of the ISAAC Biennial Conference, the Research Symposium is an important forum for development of research in this field. Augmentive and alternative communication (AAC) comprises a set of complex phenomena, involving a wide range of communication modes and systems, and the users have a wide range of abilities and disabilities and require diverse individual adaptations. Also the research field is complex, comprising the same myriad of issues as research on spoken language as well as many issues not usually addressed in relation to spoken language. Although research in the field has advanced considerable since the first steps in the beginning of the 1980s, there are many theoretical and methodological issues that are still not well understood or even sufficiently discussed.

The complexity of the phenomena necessitates the multidisciplinary which includes linguistics, psychology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, developmental science, speech pathology, special education, computer science, cognitive science, neuroscience, and several branches of engineering. The ultimate purpose of work in this field is to improve the communication prospects of those who rely on non-speech communication modes. However, it also has the potential to add insight into issues related to communication and language in general. When sign language began to emerge as a language phenomenon relevant for linguistic and psychological research, many discourse issues related to language changed significantly. Studies of aided language development and discourse also have the potential of shedding light on human pragmatic and grammatical strategies. Similarly, work on joint attention, lexicalization, and lexical strategies (to say words not present as individual items on the communication board or device). Many other examples, in different fields, could have been chosen to illustrate the potential contribution of AAC research to human knowledge in general.

The aim of ISAAC Research Symposium is research talk, to have several conversations with room for creative speculations as well as stringent analyses. It allows researchers with different research backgrounds to discuss a particular topic in depth over a period consisting of one afternoon and one morning session (often continuing over dinner and into the early hours of the night between). In this respect it is unlike most academic conferences, which consist of short presentations of particular research projects, with limited time for discussion. The symposium is divided up in several seminars and during the course of each seminar, there will typically be a number of presentations on particular aspects of the topic under discussion, but the emphasis is on extended, structured discussion. This structure allows a degree of reflection that is rarely attained in academic meetings, and permits participants to lift their heads from the immediate practical issues involved in their work to focus on longer term research objectives. The extended discussion at the symposium also allows time to establish communication across the boundaries of different disciplines and traditions.

In Lisbon, as in previous symposia, there will be a range of different research topics addressed, reflecting the breadth of the field. The Proceedings of recent symposia show that topics for discussion have ranged from language development in AAC to the effects of ageing on AAC use; from the use of artificial intelligence to the discussion of family training; and from discussion of theoretical models of communication to the descriptions of subjects in AAC research. The specific topics vary from one symposium to the next, reflecting the ideas and interests and the perceived needs to discuss particular ideas and phenomena, but the opportunity for reflection and discussion is always valued, and leads to a continual refreshment of the research process and issues in the field.