

Minspeak with Individuals with Different Cultures & Languages

AAC users, including Minspeak users, come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Minspeak systems can and do cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Two questions generally arise when discussing Minspeak and cultural and linguistic diversity.

- How do you make a Minspeak system culturally relevant?
- How do you implement a Minspeak system when the person is bilingual?


Cultural Diversity

Minspeak Applications Programs (MAPs) are being used around the world. For example, one program, called Unity128, is a MAP that was authored in English in the United States. When English-language speakers in Australia use the Unity128 program, they use a variation of the program that is unique to the linguistic and cultural variations in Australian-English. Similarly, when American speakers use a program that was authored in the United Kingdom, they adjust the vocabulary and icons to reflect cultural and vocabulary differences.



In a study by van der Merwe & Alant (2004), Minspeak icons were assessed in terms of their cultural relevance in a South African context. What they found was consistent with anecdotal reports.

First, many of the icons and the concepts they represent in a MAP cross cultural boundaries. We may speak different languages and come from different cultures, but we are all human – with the same human needs.

beds  are for **sleeping** because all people get **tired**

money  is for **buying** things because all people need to **have** things

A Minspeak system can accommodate our differences and cultural variations. A

US style bed  can be replaced with a European style bed  without losing the significance of the Minspeak codes. The US dollar can be replaced with a South African Rand or British Pound.

Second, a MAP developed in one culture can be used in another culture; however, that MAP should not be used without considering and adjusting it for a range of multicultural and multilingual factors.

When using a Minspeak system that was not specifically authored with you in mind, you can personalize the system to meet your needs.

- Adjust the vocabulary - *trunk* (of the car) becomes a *boot* (of the car).
- Change icons that are culturally bound – the US Dollar on the overlay becomes the South African Rand.
- Change some icons of people to your ethnic and gender needs.

- Add new vocabulary for activities and events that are important to your culture and country.

Bilingual Language Use

Harrison-Harris (2002) wrote “research supports the notion of education for limited-English-proficient children, including those relying on AAC systems, to be introduced in their first language, providing a transition to stronger second-language usage.”

Generally, individuals who use AAC systems, are provided with a Minspeak device which speaks their native language, whether that is English, Spanish, German, French, Mandarin Chinese, etc. However, in a culturally diverse world, the person’s native language may not always be the language used in the educational setting or in the community at-large. The person using a Minspeak system might be bilingual and need to speak two or more languages with the AAC device.

If you or I were a tourist taking a vacation in a foreign-language speaking country, we could get by with minimal skills in that foreign language and be “forgiven” for using improper words, word order, or word endings. However, if we were planning on becoming a resident living and working in a foreign-language speaking country, we would need to find ways to become proficient in that new language.

The same is true for the bi-lingual individual using a Minspeak device.

- Is that individual a *tourist* or a *resident* in the second-language?
- How much does he/she need to be able to simulate the vocabulary, word order, and word endings of multiple languages?

How are Minspeak system users able to be bilingual with their AAC device?

The two main AAC device issues that must be addressed are (1) voice output options and (2) language programming considerations.

Voice Output System - There are different devices that use Minspeak, some that use synthetic speech output and others that use digital speech output. When using a device with synthetic speech output, the synthesizer in the device must be able to speak the desired language(s). As an alternative, the person could use a Minspeak device that offers digital (recorded) speech output. When using the feature of digital speech, you simply record the words, phrases, and sentences using someone who can speak that language.

The MAP - Currently available Minspeak Application Programs are for a single language. However, bilingual Minspeak-system users have developed customized programs that allow them to speak two languages with one Minspeak device.

The following options have been used when designing customized bi-lingual Minspeak systems.

Option 1: Multiple User Areas and Multiple MAPs

Put the native-language Minspeak Application Program in one user area of the device and the second-language Minspeak Application Program in another area of the device. For example, a person speaking Spanish at home might have a Spanish MAP in user area 1 of the ECO (with the synthesizer set for Spanish) and an English MAP in user area 2 of the ECO (with the synthesizer set for English).

The advantage of this option is that it saves a lot of TIME. You simply put in an alternative MAP and you are ready to go. But the disadvantage of this option is that the words in the MAP might be similar, but the codes for those words very different. This would require the person to learn two Minspeak coding systems and could be quite confusing, especially during the early stages of language learning.

Option 2: Multiple User Areas and Adapted MAPs

Put the native-language Minspeak Application Program in two user areas of the device. In the second user area, adapt the MAP for the second language. Keep the same overlay of pictures, but re-code in the vocabulary with the person's second language. The advantage of this approach is that it keeps consistency (as best as possible) in icon sequences and motor patterns. However, the disadvantages are (1) that it takes time to program in the new vocabulary and (2) that the grammar of the two languages will not be a perfect match.


For example, English MAPs have 6 keys for the different verb forms (e.g., eat, eats, eating, ate, eaten, to eat); however, Spanish has 10 forms. Plus, some languages have feminine and masculine forms of nouns, or attach their adjectives to the noun. It will require someone proficient in both languages to help customize and adapt the MAP for both languages. It is a challenge, but can and has been done (Herrmann, 2009).

Option 3: One User Area with a Second Language Theme



















Individuals who want to have access to a limited amount of vocabulary and grammar of a second-language have used this option. Think of it as a quick strategy to speak another language while on vacation.

Put your native language in one user area. Program in new vocabulary for the second-language in the same user area. Start ALL the new vocabulary with the same 1 or 2 icons (that are used to code the category of NEW LANGUAGE), and then select the same icon sequences that you use in your native language.

For example, imagine you are using the Unity144 English-language program in the ECO-14. You decide that you also need to speak some Spanish. You choose 2 icons to represent the Spanish language. Selecting an available DOUBLE HIT on an icon is a simple way to reduce keystrokes. You choose

 because that key is not used as a first icon in very many sequences and was available as a double hit.

Then you start to program in the new vocabulary.

English word	Unity144 Code	=	Spanish word	New Themed Code
eat	 	=	comer	   
drink	 	=	tomar	   
sleep	 	=	dormir	   

The advantage of this approach is that it allows you to have fast access to your native-language and second language. But the disadvantages are (1) the programming time, (2) the longer icon sequences, (3) and the inability to accommodate all the variances in the grammar of the second language.

References

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