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AAC and Voice-Activated Smart Speakers - Moving Beyond, "Tell me a Joke"

Patty Ashby, MNS, CCC-SLP

Moderated by:

Amy Natho, MS, CCC-SLP, CEU Administrator, SpeechPathology.com



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AAC and Voice-Activated Smart Speakers - Moving Beyond, "Tell me a Joke"

Patty Ashby, MNS, CCC-SLP-Speech/Language Pathologist
communicatepatty@gmail.com

Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe how to use voice-activated smart speakers with AAC users to increase syntax accuracy for genuine purposes.
- Describe how to use voice-activated smart speakers with AAC users to increase use of different sentence types for genuine purposes.
- Describe how to use voice-activated smart speakers with AAC users to make phone calls seamlessly.

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Genuine Purposes =

- AAC user cares about why she/he is using the target language

A true, authentic purpose of the AAC user– not one that the therapist brings in

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continued

Therapist's purpose:

"We are going to ask Alexa about extinct animals today."

Genuine purpose of AAC user:

The therapist asks, "What are you interested in talking to Alexa about today?"

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continued

Meet Hector and Vanessa

- Both are using an Accent 1400 with Unity
- Vanessa is eye gazing and Hector is direct selecting with his fingers/thumbs



8

continued

CONTINU^{ed}

- They both had Amazon Echo devices, but were not using them. (*Google Home can do the same thing....*)
- They started using them about 7 months ago..

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CONTINU^{ed}

Benefits of using smart speakers as part of therapy.....

- Almost everyone has one now
- The Echo dot and Google home mini can be purchased for low cost
- Very motivating
- Understands AAC speech output as well as verbal speech
- Provides a meaning purpose to focus on target language

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continued

Vanessa

- Has used AAC throughout her life (is in high school)
- I have been involved with her on and off since elementary school
- Started seeing again 7 mths ago... using device to express 2-3 word phrases for any purpose
- Strong receptive language skills
- Difficult time generating sentences with accurate structure
- Not using a variety of sentence types (basic statements and “wh” questions – without saying the question word)



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continued

Vanessa

- The Echo understood her Accent 1400 very well
- **Timing** was the biggest issue – had to adjust for timing

12

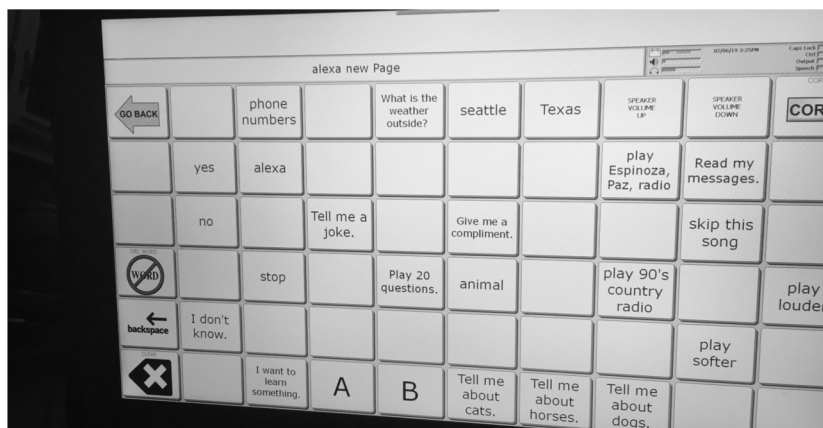
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In the Beginning...

- Developed a customized Alexa page for her device
- (Available now on many devices)

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continued



14

continued

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- Within a few weeks of practice and troubleshooting, she could independently:
 - Play her music
 - Ask for the variety of silly functions
 - make a dog bark
 - give me a compliment
 - tell me a joke
 - Etc...

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continued

VIDEO 1
Vanessa



16

continued

VIDEO 1A

She and her mom having fun....



17

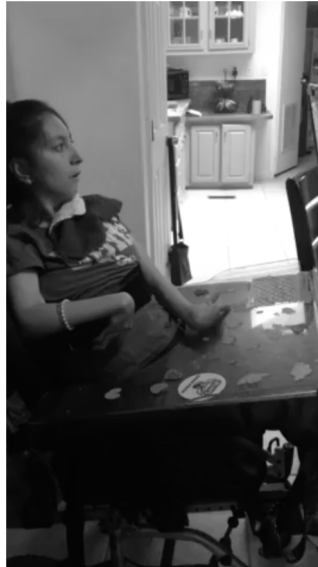
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She had to learn to adjust her volume so the Echo could hear her

18

continued

VIDEO 2



19

continued

Timing - You can add “Alexa” in the message to decrease timing.

- **IMPORTANT** - the user also needs to be able to alert at any time- **not always tied** to a message.
- *Novel Requests- Beyond “Alexa, tell me a joke”*

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continued

Alerting – message window and timing

- The user has to have a way to alert “Alexa” or “Hey Google” without adding this alert in the message window of the device.
- Again, TIMING: The user has to generate his/her message first, so ready to say message quickly after alerting - *Alexa/Hey Google will not wait!*

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continued

Need the ability to:

- Generate novel message, and then Alert
- Alert cannot “write” into the message window

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CONTINUED

Adding Alexa in the message window to a novel sentence after generating the message will not work:

- “Tell me about dolphins Alexa.” (will not work)
- “Alexa, tell me about dolphins” (preprogrammed-not novel generation)
- “Tell me about dolphins” (then alert “Alexa” with Alexa only being said, not inserting into the message window.)

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CONTINUED

- In Accent:
- Tool is “speech marker”
- This tool says the message, but does not insert into the message window. So user can generate novel request, then alert.
- ---Can be done with all common, robust language programs (some already have an alert Alexa programmed)

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continued

Easily Accessible

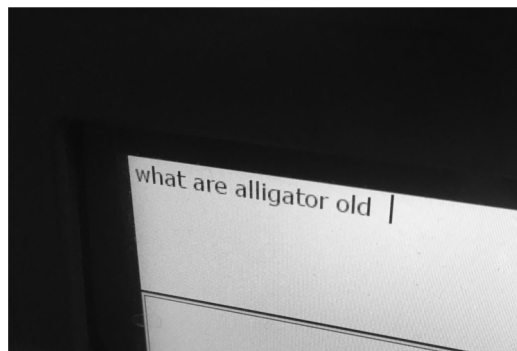
- Have Alert “Alexa” be readily available
- (We put hers in the activity row for quick access)

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continued

Novel Questions.....

- Vanessa wanted to research crocodiles/alligators
- She generated this question:



26

continued

continued

- She asked Alexa this question, it didn't work –
- Had a genuine reason to “fix” her question. She wanted to fix it!

27

continued

VIDEO 3

After some troubleshooting and discussion, she then came up with this....



28

continued

continued

VIDEO 4
Then, SUCCESS!!



29

continued

- Vanessa started to generate novel questions on her own
- She was able to “fix” sentence structure close enough so Alexa could understand her

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continued

VIDEO 5



31

continued

VIDEO 6



32

continued

- She just started to make novel requests for fun...

33

continued

VIDEO 7



34

continued®

VIDEO 8

- Notice errors I made...



35

continued®

Typical teenage humor.....



36

continued

VIDEO 9



37

continued

-Such a great tool for meaningful generation of questions

Get the drill without the kill!

LOTS of practice generating questions for genuine purposes

38

continued

Self-driven, genuine, meaningful generation of language =

stronger progress and generalization

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continued

ALL types of questions

- Who, what, which, when, where, why, how.....

40

CONTINUED

- Who is the tallest person?
- What do you eat for dinner?
- Which is heavier, an elephant or a moose?
- When is Easter?
- Where do gorillas live?
- How are crayons made?
- Why are dinosaurs extinct?
- Do you like music?
- ETC.....

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CONTINUED

VIDEO 10

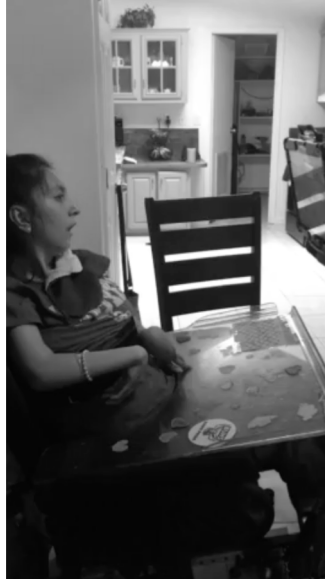
- Generating other sentence types:
- Commanding/Imperative
- Vanessa LOVED this



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continued

VIDEO 11



continued

Other examples Vanessa used:

- “Alexa, be quiet.”
- “Alexa, play Bruno Mars”
- “Alexa, stop it”
- “Alexa, play country music”
- “Alexa, call”
- Etc.

continued

continued

Exclamation/Exclamatory

- “Alexa, you are nuts!”
- “Alexa, you are funny!”
- “Alexa, I love you!”
- Etc..

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continued

Statement/declarative

- “Alexa, I feel tired.”
- “Alexa, I want to go to bed.”
- “Alexa, my stomach hurts.”
- “Alexa, I’m hungry.”
- “Alexa, I want to hear rain sounds.”
- “Alexa, I don’t like that.”
- “Alexa, I want to eat pizza.”

46

continued

Over past 7 months since she has been using ECHO and continuing to receive ongoing language therapy →

She is trying to generate more accurate syntax and different sentence types independently (*because she cares!*)

47

continued

Now:

- thinks about what she wants to ask/say
- *keeps working on the sentence until Alexa understands and responds to her.*
(*she will ask others for help if she needs it after trying*)
- Alexa is giving her feedback about accuracy 😊
(*Vanessa loves this- motivates her*)

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continued

Specific examples of progress...

Now seeing frequent, “Do you....” questions

- “Do you have boyfriend?”
- “Do you love boy?”
- “Do you have niece?”
- Also, asking others “Do you” questions

49

continued

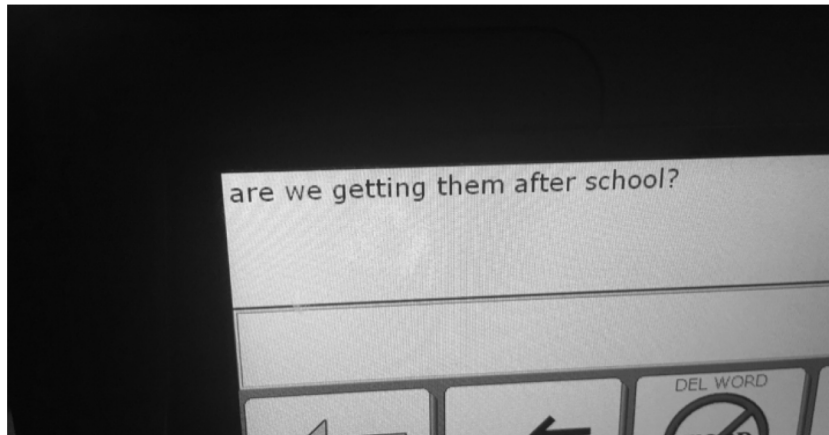
Asking Alexa “Are” questions...

- “Are you a girl?”
- “Are you married?”

50

continued

Her mom texted me this....



51

continued

She said first exclamatory sentence
about 4 weeks ago...

- "I love it!" while playing a game with me
and her sister

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CONTINUED

Just recently, started generating more accurate syntax with statements:

- January 2019:
 - “I went *to* school”
 - “I want *to* play *your* iPod.”
- PRIOR
 - “I went school”
 - “I want play iPad”

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CONTINUED

She used to ask “Wh” questions, but now sentence structure more complete..

January 2019:

“Hi, what are you doing?”

7 months ago.. “you doing”

54

continued

She continues to progress.....

55

continued

- Obviously, smart speakers can also be used with kiddos not using AAC. -great tool to motivate!
- School:
 - Circle time involves students asking Alexa about the weather, the date, etc...
 - Replacing single voice output switches to activate tape player with message to play songs on Alexa.
 - "Roll the dice" command
 - "The Name Game"
 - And more.....

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continued

Calling Others on Phone with ECHO/Google Home

WHY???

57

continued

- Ability to independently call someone for any reason
- Social communication skills
- Very inexpensive vs. buying a cell phone to connect to a communication device

58

continued

Echo HAS to be linked to a cell phone – Mom's phone in Vanessa's case.....

59

continued

What worked and didn't work

- Trying to call using contacts within Alexa app using Echo was hit and miss

60

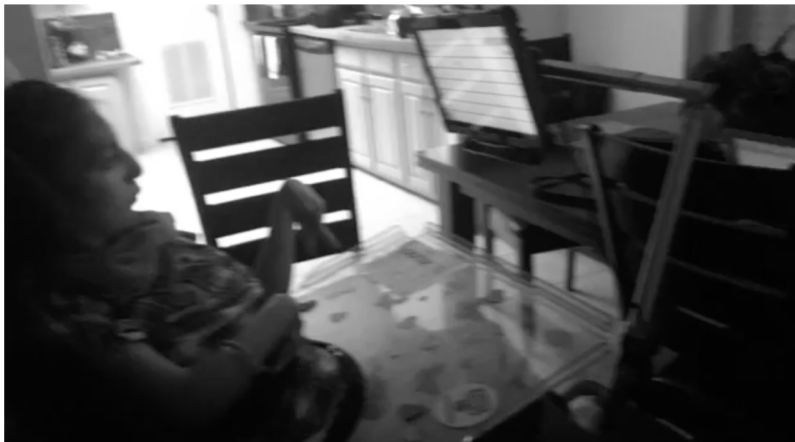
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Dad's name "Raul" was in contacts and we thought it was ready to go, but obviously not

61

continued

VIDEO 12



62

continued

continued

- Changed contact “Raul” to “dad” in Alexa app contacts, so tried calling....

63

continued

VIDEO 13



64

continued

continued

- Since using aug comm devices, we just used phone number - Very consistent
- “Alexa, call 123-456-7890”

65

continued

- After calling dad's direct phone number we had success....

66

continued

VIDEO 14

“Hanging up”



67

continued

Vanessa continued to become overwhelmed since she realized she just made her first phone call....

68

continued

VIDEO 15



69

continued

VIDEO 16



70

continued

Now that she can make phone calls...

She will be developing the language needed to make a phone call...

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HECTOR

- Graduated High School
- Living at home and starting to attend DTA
- **VERY social**
- Strong receptive language, a lot of difficulty accessing devices –
- Has decided he want to use his fingers/thumbs to access vs. eye gazing, head tracking, and/or two-switch scanning



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continued

Wanted to give him the ability to independently make phone calls-

-without having family members calling for him

73

continued

- Ran into same issues with trying to use contacts.
 - App had to be downloaded on sister's iPad, so iPad rang instead of mom's phone if used contact name (contacts are tied to app)
 - If asked Alexa to call mom's number directly, mom's phone rang

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continued

- Hector video
- First time making a phone call to his *Speech Therapist* independently.
- Practicing using preprogrammed phone phrases in his Accent 1400
(since his accessing is so slow, he wanted to use these-he could program phrases himself)

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continued

VIDEO 17

Hector – first phone call



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continued

VIDEO 18

Practicing using language to maintain conversation



77

continued

VIDEO 19

Practicing “How to end a call”



78

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VIDEO 20

Ending his call the way he wanted to....

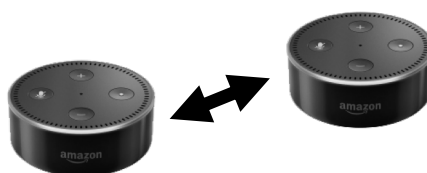


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• Receiving calls on Echo:

- Echo to Echo



- From Alexa app on phone (and linked to an Echo) to someone else's Echo

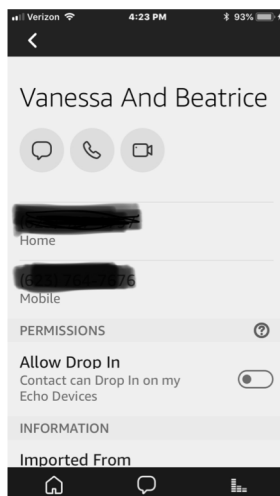


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- In Alexa contacts, Touch phone icon to call Echo and not the phone number (will call phone)
....lesson learned



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continued

- Leaving voice messages and texting messages
– have to use within Alexa app
- Within Alexa app, can text to a person's smart speaker
- AAC user can ask Alexa, "play my messages"
- Within Alexa app, and also leave voice message
- AAC user can retrieve voice message by "play my messages"

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continued

VIDEO 21

Retrieving a message...



83

continued

- Can send a voice message from your ECHO to another person ECHO/Alexa app, but have to use contact name, not phone number
- “Alexa, send a voice message to.....”

84

continued

continued

Reminder:

- Can use same/some/different/similar functions with Google Home

85

continued

Remember....

- The call/message will also go to whatever phone/ipad/tablet the Alexa app is downloaded on
- The message retrieved on the Echo/google home can be heard by others
- NOT private

86

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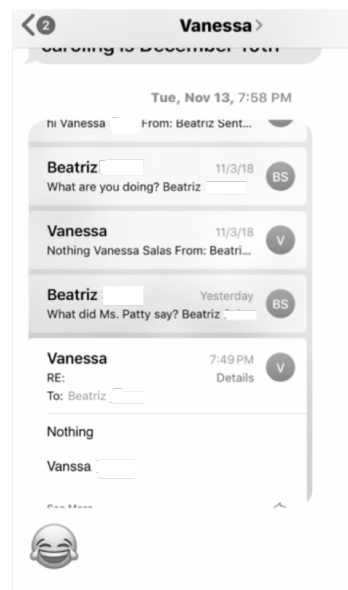
More privacy....

- Both Vanessa and Hector are using iMessage from their Facebook account
- Both are emailing now
- Both of these options are built into their Accent device

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continued

Example of privacy...



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continued

- Update- Where are they now?
- Hector is now enrolled in college and using Alexa to search the internet to assist. He is practicing calling/messaging/emailing to become more proficient.
- Vanessa is finishing up high school and is beginning to use Alexa to search the internet more independently. She is becoming a social media wizard.

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continued

- They are starting to communicate with each other via emailing
- Working on Echo calling.....

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