

Challenges to Gestalt Language Processing and Considerations for AAC

June 4, 2025
7:00-8:00 p.m. EDT

PRESENTED BY:

E. Cheryl Fletcher, M.A., CCC-SLP, BCBA and Tiffany L. Hutchins, PhD



ABOUT THE PRESENTERS:

E. Cheryl Fletcher is a licensed speech pathologist, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, holds a certificate in Assistive Technology Applications, and is a LAMP WFL certified professional (language and motor planning). She has over 30 years' experience working with autistic clients and individuals with complex communication needs. She is certified in the Hanen Parent training programs and has run numerous programs for parents of children with communication delays. She has published and presented nationally and internationally on communication issues in autism and on AAC. She also provides independent educational evaluations (IEEs) for students, assessing their speech, language, social communication and AAC needs.

Dr. Hutchins has researched the relationships from parent-child interaction strategies to child language and social-cognitive development. Her work is broadly concerned with the social origins of language with the goal of understanding and supporting communication in neurodiverse populations. She has developed and validated new measures of social cognition that are widely used in research and practice and has investigated the efficacy of story-based interventions to support social cognition. Most recently, Dr. Hutchins examined the role of autobiographical memory in social communication and has designed translational practices to support its development and expression in autism. Dr. Hutchins teaches courses in the development of spoken language, psycholinguistics, and language disorders.

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION:

In this presentation we review fundamental challenges to the notion of 'gestalt language processing' in spoken development. These include definitional and conceptual difficulties, assessment issues, theoretical problems, a lack of an empirical base, and the nature of the language support recommendations arising from the Natural Language Acquisition (NLA; Blanc, 2012, 2022) protocol. We then argue that the application of NLA to AAC demands caution: AAC must be respected as a different modality that presents different constraints and affordances compared to spoken language. This, in turn, gives rise to specific concerns for adding 'gestalts' to a device that may prove counter therapeutic. We will describe the considerations that drive our concerns while urging caution around the application of NLA protocol to AAC. We will also address those areas in which we may sometimes agree with the therapeutic techniques promoted by some NLA advocates.

MODERATED BY: Elizabeth Speaker-Christensen

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This course is offered for 0.10 ASHA CEUs (Introductory level; Professional area).

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Describe definitional and conceptual problems surrounding the term “gestalt” in its application to the NLA framework.
2. Discuss the impact of the NLA approach on AAC systems and possible consequences of proposed preprogramming of systems.
3. Identify evidence based therapeutic techniques that support language development in young AAC users.

TIME ORDERED AGENDA:

- 5 minutes: Introduction of Speakers, USSAAC and topic
- 10 minutes: What is GLP? What are some challenges?
- 10 minutes: Where is the theory? Spoken language? AAC use?
- 10 minutes: AAC as a different modality and the constraints
- 15 minutes: The issues with adding gestalts
- 10 minutes: Q & A

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) CEUs in speech-language pathology and audiology are awarded by the ASHA CE Registry upon receipt of the CEU Participant Form from the ASHA Approved CE Provider, USSAAC. CEU Participant Forms are available online at Registration or via the QR Code displayed during the presentation. ASHA CEUs are provided to full registrations. This program is offered for .10 ASHA CEUs (Introductory Level, Professional Area). Participants must stay for the entire presentation and complete the questionnaire at the end of the webinar.

ASHA Disclosures:

Speakers

Financial:

E. Cheryl Fletcher received an honoraria for a workshop on the topic of GLP and AAC
Tiffany L. Hutchins has no financial disclosures to report

Nonfinancial:

E. Cheryl Fletcher has no non-financial disclosures to report.
Tiffany L. Hutchins has no non-financial disclosures to report.

Moderator

Financial: Elizabeth Speaker-Christensen has no financial disclosures to report.

Nonfinancial: Elizabeth Speaker-Christensen is a USSAAC member and on the Membership Committee. She is a LAMP Certified Provider and an adjunct professor at DePaul University.

To register for this Webinar please go to the following link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_9tWneviLQAC8sZq_1mG6ug

PLEASE NOTE: Only the first 150 attendees to log into the webinar will be guaranteed spots.

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about USSAAC

The United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC) is the national chapter of the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC). As the United States' only non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the entire AAC community, USSAAC provides an invaluable role, working to ensure that individuals who could benefit from AAC have access to the technology and services they need.

Benefits of membership include, but are not limited to:

- *Free access to USSAAC webinar series with ASHA CEUs and USSAAC Twitter chats*
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