The Structure of Blissymbolics

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**Blissymbolics** is a graphic AAC which allows to express language. Bliss-words are based on the meaning of concepts. The derivation of the included characters in a Bliss-word explains the meaning. The grammar is mainly expressed by indicators over the Blisswords.

But all this will be explained in the workshops.

Blisswords may look difficult:

![Blissymbol]...

But are they really difficult?

After these workshops I hope that you easily will be able to derive the meaning of this Bliss-word.

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Bliss - words in use as AAC are always accompanied with the translation (the gloss)

In this presentation however all Bliss-words are given without the translation to a spoken language in order to give you the chance to derive the meanings yourself.
Also - In the presentation all Bliss-words are drawn on a grid to clearly show the proportions of their included elements.

Bliss-words in use as AAC are without a grid, and can therefore easily be drawn by hand.
**Blissymbolics, workshop nr 1**

A Bliss-character is a basic “building block” of Blissymbolics.

Each Bliss-character has a semantic meaning or function.

Examples of basic Bliss-characters which are also **one-character Bliss-words**:
Basic Bliss-characters can be superimposed forming compound Bliss-characters
Bliss-characters can be sequenced forming multi-character Bliss-words

Skyline

Worksheet Bliss-words 1
Blissymbolics, workshop nr 2

More examples of basic Bliss-characters which are also one-character Bliss-words.
More superimposed characters forming compound Bliss-characters

Use of pointers
It is important to note that the original associations paired with each shape/component in the Bliss-words are those assigned by Charles K. Bliss. In some instances, persons new to Blisssymbols might believe they could improve on these associations. However, to maintain the internal integrity of the language of Blissymbolics, BCI decided from the beginning, to retain the meanings assigned by the originator of Blissymbolics, C. K. Bliss.
More sequences of characters forming multi-character Bliss-words

Worksheet Bliss-words 2
Blissymbolics, workshop nr 3

Bliss-characters: pictographic, ideographic, international

So far most Bliss-characters have been more or less pictographic. They have not depicted a specific thing, like a specific house or a specific animal, but shown the shape of some important features of a concrete referent e.g.,

\[ \text{car and tree} \]

Many words in a language refer to an abstract concept. In Blissymbolics many Bliss-characters are ideographic which means that a well-recognized shape is given an abstract meaning.

\[ \text{feeling} \]
mind, thought

past

future

present

ago

then

now
action
activity,
male(gender)
creation  making, production (gender)

protection, shelter
evaluation

cause, reason

effect, result

enclosure

opening

limitation
International characters used in Blissymbolics

question imperative multiplication addition subtraction division

arrows and arrow-heads in four directions

numbers

Worksheet Bliss-words 3 abstracts. Worksheet Bliss-words 4 more abstracts
Blissymbolics, workshop nr 4

“Big and little meaning”

Full-sized and half-sized Bliss-characters have different but related meanings

\( \) \( ) \) \( ) \) \( ) \)

\( past \) \( future \) \( present \) \( ago \) \( then \) \( now \)

\( \) \( \) \( \)

\( place \) \( on \)
earth, ground, land  
ground – (little meaning, “surrounding”)

action

activity, male (gender)

creation

making, production

female (gender)
Multiplication

Much, many

Addition

And, also, “positiv”
subtraction

minus, without

life

being, existence

possession

to have
Small frequent words:

question words, conjunctions, prepositions

when, where, what, who, which, that, which (relatives)
of, by, for, against, so, but, that

on, to, from, into, out of

before, after, in, inside, out, outside
**Blissymbolics, workshop nr 5**

Blissymbolics has a grammar of its own, but in communication the grammar is mostly adjusted to the grammar of the spoken language in the area.

Indicators placed over a symbol express word classes or grammatical forms.

Indicators are ¼ sized and placed at a ¼ distance above skyline.

**Word classes**

**Action indicator, verbs**

- action
- activity
- ind. action (verb)

- sun
- to shine
Descriptive indicator, human evaluation, Adjectives and adverbs

evaluation

ind.description
(adjective, adverb)

sun

sunny
Sometimes the distinction between before and after fact is needed to be expressed. The point denotes the meaning.

\[ \text{ind.description before fact} \]

\[ \text{ind.description after fact} \]

\[ \text{breakable, fragile} \]

\[ \text{broken} \]
**Thing indicators** differentiate between concrete objects and abstract nouns.

- **enclosure**
- **thing**
- **ind. thing**
- **feeling**
- **heart**
- **measurement**
- **ruler**
## Pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Person Icon]</td>
<td>![Man Icon]</td>
<td>![Woman Icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Person Singular</th>
<th>2nd Person</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, me, myself</td>
<td>you, yourself</td>
<td>he, him, himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![1st Person Icon]</td>
<td>![2nd Person Icon]</td>
<td>![3rd Person Icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Person Plural</th>
<th>2nd Person Plural</th>
<th>3rd Person Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>we, us, ourselves</td>
<td>you, yourselves</td>
<td>they, them, themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![1st Person Icon]</td>
<td>![2nd Person Icon]</td>
<td>![3rd Person Icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite</th>
<th>Definite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>any/someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Indefinite Icon]</td>
<td>![Definite Icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
See the logic 1. Some common concepts.
Blissymbolics, workshop nr 6

Plural

Plural indicator

- multiplication
- much
- ind.plural

- day
- days

- lake
- lakes
Adjectives. Comparatives and superlatives are expressed by “more” and “most” as the first character.

![Diagram showing the correct use of adjectives with and without symbols]

- Much
- More
- Most
- A plus sign
- A heart symbol
- An upward and downward arrow

Correct use:

- \( \checkmark +! \)
- \( \times \checkmark +! \)
- \( \times \checkmark +! \)

Incorrect use:

- \( \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \checkmark \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \checkmark \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)

or

- \( \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \checkmark \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
- \( \checkmark \times \checkmark \uparrow \downarrow \)
**Possession.** The possession modifier, belongs to, is generally positioned as the final character of the Blissword to indicate possession.

- *mother* → mother
- *dog* → dog
- *house* → house
- *I* → my, mine
- *she* → her, hers
The position of the possession modifier can be changed to better accommodate the linguistic environment.
Verb. Present, past and future tense are expresses by ¼ sized indicators of present, past and future. The action indicator which denotes the verb can also be used for present time.

Past present future

ate eat will eat

have eaten
**Passive form.** The indicator of passive form points at the “acted on”.

Music is played in all homes.

The book was read by many persons.

The song will be rehearsed tomorrow.
**Conditional.**
Indicators of past, present and future conditional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>past cond.</th>
<th>pres cond.</th>
<th>future cond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ɨ^</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**to hammer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>would, may have hammered</th>
<th>would, may hammer (now)</th>
<th>would, may hammer (in future)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ɨ</td>
<td>Ɨ</td>
<td>Ɨ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**to see**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>would, may have been seen</th>
<th>would, may be seen (now)</th>
<th>would, may be seen (in future)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ɨ</td>
<td>Ɨ</td>
<td>Ɨ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bliss has a grammar of its own  
The syntax of Bliss grammar includes a few simple rules.

1 Subject before verb

2 “not” before the verb

3 Questions start with question to make the reader aware
4 Commands start with the exclamation mark

! $^\wedge$

5 Place and time start the sentence

← ⬇️ $\bigcirc$ $\Lambda^3$ $^\circ$
Bliss has a grammar of its own, but for educational purposes to teach reading and to express at a high linguistic level in connection with other languages a large number of grammatical indicators have been developed. Language structures have different needs of indicators to be linguistically precise. (see www.blissymbolics.org, library exports, search for indicators)

In communication focus should be on the message, e.g.,

one word expressions:

\[ \uparrow \]

telegram expressions:

\[ \downarrow 1 \quad \uparrow \quad \Box \]

or as a sentence:

\[ !\heartsuit \quad \square \rightarrow \downarrow 1 \quad \uparrow \quad \square \quad \cdot \quad \Box \]
Blissymbolics, workshop nr 7

Position, orientation, size and distance.

**Position** in relation to earth line and skyline can be relevant to the meaning of a Bliss-word.

- **earth**
- **subtraction**
- **sky**

- **belong to**
- **and**
- **with**

- **start, beginning**
- **end, stop**

**Orientation**, relevant to the meaning

- **mind**
- **bow**
- **container**
Size, relevant to the meaning:

- **sun**
- **mouth**
- **body**
- **roll**

- **big**
- **little**
- **long**
- **short**

Distance, relevant to the meaning:

- **high**
- **low**
- **far away**
- **near**

- **to come**
- **to stop**
- **thick**
- **thin**
The first character in a multi-character Bliss-word is the **classifier**, which tells the category of the concept. The following characters are **specifiers**.

(a type of building..)   (a type of person..)
**Blissymbolics, workshop nr 8**

**Modifiers** are used as prefixes or suffixes to modify the meaning of a Bliss-word, some examples (indicators are never used above modifiers)

- \( \times \)  
  *group of*

- \( \bigcirc \)  
  *generalisation*

- \( - \)  
  *minus, without*

- \( > \)  
  *pointers*
![intensity]

opposite meaning

old

slow

similar, almost the same as
Similar to an airplane?  Almost the same as glasses

be connected with, belong to

part of

Sounds similar to

Sounds similar to glass?
(coULD BE=CLASS)
Combinations are used to create new Bliss-words to express a new concept or a not available Bliss-word in a quick and easy manner.

1. A combination starts and ends with a combine character.

2. The first character is always the classifier.

3. Specifiers follow the classifier.

4. The combine characters are placed at the level of indicators, ¼ of a distance before and after the Bliss-word.
When a Bliss-word is missing:

1. Try to find a synonym e.g., get, receive

2. Find another word - class and change it.

Secret

She           works   secretly      with   information

3. Exchange classifier

4. Add, change or delete a specifier.
5. Use a modifier

E.g., Visa card

Well

**Blissymbolics, workshop nr 9**

Bliss as an educational tool

- For exploration of meanings

The logic structure is visually supported and contribute to the learning and exploration of the meanings of the Bliss-words.

**Protection**

**Arrows**
Professions
Supporting sequential thinking

Today we will talk about water
Associations to meanings

My Bliss-word:

\[ \text{Sleeping bag} \]
Enables word-formation.

Word-formation is a stage during language development, typical for 3-5 years old children.

E.g. children’s expressions:

Swe: bröd+hålla-re (eng: bread+hold-er)

Swe: väsk+fast+sätt (bag+fastened+put/thing =package rack)

Swe: is+varmt (ice+hot]

Swe: lammi-ig (lamb-y)

Verbs

Swedish: sax-a (scissors-inf = to cut)
English: *to scissors*

Turkish: “*scissors+do*”

German: *zu sheren* (shere-inf=to cut with scissors. Schere = scissors)

^  

\( \bigcirc \) 

Swedish: *deg-a* (deg-inf = to bake)

German: *zu teigen* (Teig=dough)

Turkish: ”*Dough+do*” (to bake)

\( \bigcirc \) \( \bigotimes \) \( \ldots \) \( \sim \)

English: *to knife*

\( \times \)

German: *zu computer*

\( \bigcirc \) \( \circlearrowleft \)

German: *zu blauen* (paint blue)

\( \bigcirc \)
Bliss has a vocabulary to grew with for society knowledge

advocate (legal, speaking)

prosecutor

ethnic group
culture

A group of persons sharing the same view of life

The view of life shared by a group of persons
The logic structure - in teaching

solar energy
wave energy
wind energy
hydro energy
geothermal energy
bioenergy

Indicators are used to express grammar

∧ ) ( ( ) ( )
Action present time the past the future
∧ ) ( ( ) ( )
activity now ago then

Verb - tense
∧ \ ʻ ʻ ʻ ʻ ʻ ʻ
\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \to break, breaks, broke, will break, was broken,
An educational tool to teach reading
Blissymbolics visualizes the structure of written language.
Texts and books can be written in Blissymbolics.

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Bliss and language development

Some personal reflections
All spoken words are abstract symbols. The meanings and definitions of the words are what we all have agreed on through experience and use (a chair is something to sit on). This means that the baby is open to receive, manage, analyze and store symbols.

Important for children when naming things is: similarity in shape, the function and the creator’s intention (German & Bloom, 2000). Interestingly it is not photographic similarity or other depicting or representational images. (Think of how easily young children can get a pile of pine needles to be minced meat when they play in the forest, and see that two rings on a drawing may be a car if you tell them so, and how the sky at the top of a page is a blue line). Thus images which are not photographic or depicting might stimulate the children’s fantasy and form their representation of concepts. Language helps children to develop their imagination as a dancing Mr.
Cucumber or a banana house. They want to be able to express and tell about things which have never been seen.

All children 3-5 years old are small linguists who create their own words, for example: to needle, to scissor (Swedish examples are: dega = to dough, pärla = to pearl, kolvit = pitch-white as there is a pitch-black) a trafikig street = an self-made adjective form of traffic, he springde home (a regular inflection for an irregular verb). It seems that children use their language to experiment and be linguistically creative during language development.

Words for abstract concepts, time concepts, legal concepts are used all the time when talking. Could it be so that these concepts change and will get a narrowed meaning if representing images are used for example for feelings, opinions.

From the time when children are small, superordinate concepts are used when talking. (Eg cars, animals, houses, boats, color). During development, children's way of organizing concepts gradually develop and at about 8-10 years of age the concepts of the children will resemble adults' concept hierarchy. Depicting images will always resemble a certain type of car, boat or color. Does this affect the children's ability to form superordinate concepts?
As an adult and as a teacher there are many occasions when you need to explain concepts and the meaning of words. Bliss can be an *educational tool* in teaching situations. The Bliss-words include distinctive features of the meaning. Also the Bliss-words are easy to draw while discussing.

**References**

Blissymbolics Communication International. www.blissymbolics.org


Gelman, S., & Bloom, P. (2000). Young children are sensitive to how an object was created when deciding what to name it. *Cognition, 14*, 91-103. doi: 10.1016/S0010-0277(00)0071-8


The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM in Swedish), www.spsm.se www.blissonline.se
