INTRODUCTION

Message enhancement for persons with aphasia is a process by which their reduced capacity for communications in writing, speech, or signals can be increased or improved in value, quality, desirability, and attractiveness. The traditional approach to treating communication difficulties of a person with aphasia has been through the use of stimulation-type aphasia interventions in which the person is stimulated with various types of input to facilitate the quality of his or her comprehension and expression of language (Garrett & Lasker, 2005). As Garrett and Lasker pointed out, however, this approach is successful for some people with aphasia, but there are many people with severe aphasia for whom this approach is not successful. People with mild and moderate levels of aphasia may benefit from alternatives that support their natural abilities (Hux, Manasse, Weiss, & Beukelman, 2001). Additional alternative approaches, however, may be needed for people with severe aphasia to regain competency and functionality as communicators.

One alternative approach that can be considered for with persons with aphasia is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems.
The use of low-technology AAC strategies (e.g., communication boards, pictures, and written word choices) with persons with aphasia has been documented in case studies for the past 30 years (Beukelman, Fager, Ball, & Dietz, 2007). An increase in the recent use of high-technology AAC options has also been reported (Beukelman, Ball, & Fager, 2008). Thus, AAC approaches that could be considered for people with aphasia range from unaided gestures to simple graphic symbols and to computer-based AAC systems.

Hux et al. (2001) indicated that persons with mild aphasia may require only simple AAC supports, such as word lists, to aid in instances of anomia. People with a more moderate level of aphasia may, however, need to utilize AAC strategies (e.g., gestures, remnant books, letters, or written words) to not only support but also to take the place of natural speech to communicate adequately. Because of their highly reduced ability to communicate naturally, persons with severe aphasia will need a comprehensive AAC system to communicate.

Beukelman and Mirenda (2005) indicated that regardless of the severity of the aphasia or of the type and extent of AAC component(s) used, AAC is primarily about facilitating communication in people so that they are able to interact with others. The key concern for message enhancement then relates to how messages can be presented to and produced by persons with aphasia so that they can communicate functionally with others in their environments. This chapter focuses on issues that should be considered when aiming to increase the social value, quality, and desirability of the messages produced through the use of computer-based AAC systems.

CHARACTERISTICS OF APHASIA AND AAC INTERVENTION

Garrett and Lasker (2005) stated that “by definition, the disorder that is aphasia affects each of the levels of processing that AAC systems demand” (p. 501). While Blackstone (2006) emphasized the fact that there are no cognitive, physical, or situational prerequisites that need to be met before introducing AAC interventions to an adult with an acquired disability, there are “specific skill sets required to operate different types of AAC devices, techniques and strategies” (p. 6). Thus, in considering AAC message enhancement for persons with aphasia, clinicians need to be aware of