



6601 Eastbrook Road | Columbia, SC 29206

Phone:8034296730 Fax:8037876889

[lingualperfection@usa.net](mailto:lingualperfection@usa.net)

[www.lingualperfection.com](http://www.lingualperfection.com)

## AAC in Action – At Work

*By Ronald C Kuebler, CCC-SLP, ABDA  
& Scott H Kuebler*

What do you do when you go to the grocery store and recognize that the individual you are talking to has a communication impairment and an electronic device for communication in view?

Don't retreat and look for someone else to help you. This is an opportunity for you to learn how to be a better communicator. At the same time you are validating the person's augmentative communication style and helping that person to be more confident with electronic and verbal speech. Many people don't know how to handle this situation because it happens inadvertently and because they don't have practice in carrying a conversation with someone who uses communication other than their voice alone. As more and more individuals with disabilities enter the work force and have jobs where communication with the public as well as co-workers is routine, the need for public awareness grows.

Scott Kuebler works as a bagger at the BiLo grocery store and uses his ChatPC as a communication device as well as a scheduling tool. Scott uses the ChatPC by Saltillo Corporation since 2002 due to an expressive/receptive language disorder resulting from Down's syndrome. He started communicating electronically late in life, 21 years of age, and used the Pegasus Lite by Words +. He will tell you with his Chat about where he lives and show you pictures of his family and friends. Scott's accomplishments include being an Eagle Scout, Cub Scout leader, Special Olympic swimmer medalist, Aktion Club Officer, Gold Congressional Award Medalist and BiLo bagger 4-8 hours per week. His Dad, Ron Kuebler, is a Speech Pathologist who runs Lingual Perfection and helps people become lingual perfectionists.

This topic complements titles listed in the bibliography in which different environments set the stage for use of electronic communication. The idea here is to increase your practical expertise in communicating with someone with a device while doing your grocery shopping.

Two scenarios will be complementing each other. One is an explanation by Ron with the projected image of the ChatPC on how a conversation might go. It includes suggestions for what to ask, how to ask and generally how to respond so that the augmented conversation is fun and rewarding. The other scenario involves Scott and he will have the real ChatPC and some grocery props to help things along. People who don't need the instruction can go straight to having a conversation with Scott and maybe telling him that they want plastic and not paper bags for their groceries. We can also share experiences and questions about this whole process.

The roles presented include the bagger and the customer so the interaction is fairly elementary. After you complete a conversation with Scott, you should have increased confidence to have conversations in your own community in a grocery store or in other places where you meet individuals who use augmented speech. For individuals who are service providers or caregivers, this practice can be very useful. If you are not a conversationalist, you will want to listen to the tutorial by Ron on how to begin and structure your conversation. The ChatPC is not limited to

conversation about bagging and is like a book with many chapters. There are chapters on family relationships, feelings, foods, travel, religious observances, holidays and many other areas. So go ahead and get started exploring the ChatPC with Scott and learning more as you converse. The amount of dialog you have may be limited in a line at the grocery store, but there are busy times and slow times in all business! If you are interested in more conversation, you might want to choose a time when the store is not so busy.

After the conversations are finished, we can discuss the things that we have learned from participating in an augmented conversation. Perhaps some of you have personal experiences to relate about conversations you have had in the past.

When you leave, the idea will be fresh in your mind and you will be mentally prepared to overcome some of the inhibitions that are part of having a conversation with someone who uses an AAC device.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY(excerpts-request details)**

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