# Arabic Symbol Dictionary Research Project Progress

## Video of E.A. Draffan as an introduction

“The Arabic symbol dictionary team felt that it might be helpful to provide you with a short video to show you where we have reached with the research into this project and also to give you some links to the various aspects of the project that are on-line, such as the blog and the voting system that we are going to be using to make symbol set choices and to explain why we are looking at literacy skills and the issues of core vocabularies in Arabic as well as in English.

I would also like to take this chance to say thank you very much for all the help you have given us, without your participation this research would not be happening and I look forward to seeing you again in Doha one of these days. Thank you very much for your time today and in the future. “

## Slides with audio going through the project resources.

At the outset of the research we were very concerned about the lack of articles and papers around the use of symbols or pictograms in Arabic speaking nations for those who cannot communicate well or have poor literacy skills. It seemed that in order to learn more about the issues we needed to take a participatory approach to the research, hence our first meeting with everyone, and the idea of setting up an advisory group with some special ‘critical friends’ who would be able to give us some outside opinions throughout the life the project.

## Slide 2

The angle that we’ve taken on this idea of participatory research is one that involves symbol users, their carers and experts at the outset. The team may be initiating ideas but it is the participants who we hope will always be making the decisions as to how we adopt and adapt the various elements within the Arabic symbol dictionary project.

## Slide 3

Very early on in the project it became clear that this was a dictionary that should not only help functional communication skills but also literacy skills and we began to look at the research that is happening in America and the UK as to how we could include the features needed to increase awareness of sound combinations and segmentation in Arabic words and multiwords that encourage the acquisition of literacy skills.

### Slide 4

We looked at the core vocabularies offered by researchers in English – these contain the most frequently used words at various ages and stages and are often short pronouns, interjections, verbs, adverbs and adjectives that are most often used in conversation and in text rather than the easy to symbolize nouns. Gathering a corpus of the most frequently used words in Arabic is still something we need to research.

Its clear that when translating these words into Arabic it was not just the symbols that need to change due to possible cultural differences, lack of clarity etc but also the way we link words and multiwords to those symbols.

### Slide 5

We set up a system for collecting and comparing symbols from the various symbol sets available so that we can better understand the differences that might impact on our understanding of how this will work in an Arabic dictionary. Do the symbols just provide the user with communication phrases such as ‘a want’ or ‘a need’ like ‘I want an apple’; ‘I like football’ or do they allow for the expansion of a sentence in such a way that the user can choose parts of speech such as pronouns, verbs and prepositions to make up a sentence. So we took the English PCS symbols most widely used by the groups that Tullah visited; some of Arabic translated Widgit symbols, the ARASAAC symbol set and some from Sclera. Both the ARASAAC and Sclera are freely available with a creative commons licence which allows us to use them as long as it is not for commercial purposes.

### Slide 6

The initial idea is to ask everyone who has been kind enough to help us with this project to decide which is the best free set of symbols not only for the purposes of communicating and encouraging literacy skills but also in terms of cultural sensitivity and appropriateness for the word or phrase that is linked to the symbol. We really do not wish to create a new symbol set as ARASAA of many already available and we would like the symbols we develop to complement those already in use across the country. There’s no way we wish to have a detrimental effect on those already using a particular set of symbols to communicate and learn to read or to add to anybody’s work load! The Arabic symbol dictionary we are researching and developing needs to complement all the wonderful work that has already been achieved in this area of AAC in Qatar.

### Slide 7

So we now have a voting system that will allow you to choose which symbols or pictograms you feel are most appropriate for your users and for the users themselves to vote with their families or carers, where possible – everyone making choices that will allow the dictionary development to move forward. We would really like you to be able to tell us why you like or do not like a symbol and if we haven’t been given you a good choice in the check boxes for you to be able to write a comment as well.

### Slide 8

The more information you can give us for this research, the better the outcome and the greater the chance we have of the dictionary suiting your needs. We really want this research to help you and to make life easier for Arabic speaking AAC users. We have learnt that the dictionary needs to be available in English and Arabic and that there will be the challenge of providing a solution to the support of literacy skills.

### Slide 9

### Once again we really are grateful for all the help you can give us and please continue to collaborate in the coming months using our maillist, helping us with decisions and perhaps even commenting on our blog.

### Slide 10

Thank you again, Shukran