

Iconicity – embodiment – image schemas

Towards a spectrum of different sources and levels of gesturally enacted schematicity

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Iconic aspects of communicative body postures and hand movements have always been a central issue in gesture research (e.g., McNeill 1992). A speaker's body may become a living, viewpointed *icon* (Peirce 1960) of someone or something else; or hands may trace or otherwise form iconic signs (e.g., Müller 1998). However, largely due to varying understandings of *similarity*, iconicity in gesture is not uncontested, and questions of what exactly gestures are iconic of are not trivial (e.g., Mittelberg 2014).

Starting from an understanding of iconicity in gesture that goes beyond what is generally understood by *iconics* (McNeill 1992), this paper suggests that through combining Peirce's semiotic theory with concepts central to cognitive linguistics, one may distinguish between distinct, yet typically interacting, sources and levels of iconicity in gesture. Peirce's semiotics and cognitive linguistics share certain premises concerning the fundamental role of experience and embodiment, e.g., habits of thinking, acting, and intersubjective meaning-making. I present a first version of a spectrum of modality-specific manifestations of iconicity that spans from gestures metonymically derived from physical actions and organism-environment interactions, e.g., evoking embodied scenes and semantic frames, to highly schematic gestural patterns predominantly motivated by image schemas, force gestalts, and diagrammatic iconicity (e.g., Mittelberg 2018, 2019a; Müller 2017; Wehling 2017; Zlatev 2014).

Narrowing in on deeply embodied conceptual structures, I will highlight some flexible structural correspondences between image/force schemas and certain gestures (e.g., Cienki 2013; Mittelberg 2018). This is to account for the fact that gestures often only consist of evanescent, metonymically reduced hand configurations, motion onsets or movement traces that suggest, for instance, the idea of a PATH, CONTAINMENT, BALANCE, or RESISTANCE. Such rather schematic semiotic gestalts have the capacity to vividly convey essential semantic and pragmatic aspects of high relevance to the speakers. In doing so, they typically participate in more complex construal operations involving, for instance, metonymy, metaphor, frames, and constructions (e.g., Mittelberg 2019b; Müller 2017).

Examples of the different gestural patterns are enriched by motion-capture data stemming from American English and German multimodal discourse. It will thus be shown how numeric kinetic data allow one to visualize otherwise invisible movement traces and thus provide augmented, 3D insights into the dynamic, gestalt-like nature of bodily enacted icons exhibiting various degrees of schematicity.

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