

23. April, 13-15 Uhr, R. 403

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How people use iconicity to create words from scratch

Iconicity clearly played an important role in the formation of many of the signs of signed languages. But how were the first spoken words created? Can people use iconicity to create words from scratch? I present a series of experiments demonstrating: 1) people can innovate iconic vocalizations to express a wide variety of meanings; 2) these vocalizations are understandable to naïve listeners; and 3) through repeated interactions – and even just rote imitations – the vocalizations become more word-like in form and function. Taken together, these studies show how iconicity can play a vital role in the creation of spoken symbols, comparable to its function in the creation of many signs. Thus, I speculate that the use of iconic vocalizations was fundamental in the formation of the first spoken words.