

## Peirce's universal categories: On their potential for gesture theory and multimodal analysis

Irene Mittelberg

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# Peirce's Universal Categories as the basis for gesture theory and multimodal analysis

## What is it about?

This paper presents an account of how Peirce's Universal Categories (UCs) of perception and experience may build the basis for gesture theory and multimodal analysis. Peirce's UCs – Firstness (possibility), Secondness (actuality), and Thirdness (law, habit) allow one to discern multidimensional facets of how coverbal gestures act as signs. The guiding assumption is that compared to linguistic symbols, gestures may exhibit the UCs to more strongly varying degrees and in different, modality-specific ways. The multimodal analyses discussed in the paper show how Firstness tends to draw attention to the articulatory qualities of gestural signs, Secondness to their experiential grounding and contextualized meaning, and Thirdness to embodied habits of perceiving, feeling, (inter-)acting, thinking, and communicating with others. I further suggest that particularly through interacting with embodied image schemata and force dynamics, such habits may give rise to flexible regularities and schematicity in gesture.

## Why is it important?

Most of gesture research has discussed Peirce's sign-object relations ICON, INDEX, SYMBOL. In this paper, the more fundamental universal categories Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness are brought into the picture, thus allowing to account for the multidimensionality, multifunctionality, and thus essential aspects of particular semiotic nature of gestures.

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