

## **Gestural communication in apes – a comparative approach**

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In human communication, spoken language and gestures represent a complex and intertwined system (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992, 2002). This paper, however, does focus on gestures used while lacking the capacity of spoken language in species other than human beings, but in our closest living relatives, the apes. First it will summarize some recent findings on ape gestural communication (for an overview, see Call and Tomasello, 2007). Here it will point out similarities and differences between the gestural communicative systems in nonhuman and human primates (Liebal, Pika, Müller, 2007) referring to features such as referential use of gestures, the question of pointing in apes and how apes learn and ritualize their gestures. Second a new approach to study ape gestural communication will be presented focusing on structural properties rather than meaning of the gestures used by our closest relatives. Based on a description of gestures in human primates, ape gestures will be characterized using four form features, i.e. hand configuration, orientation of the hand, movement and position in the gesture space. It will be demonstrated how differences in these form features go along with changes in the context-of-use (Kendon, 2004). These findings will be discussed in the light of possible conventionalization processes of ape gestures. Finally these data will be interpreted from an evolutionary point of view addressing the question of what ape gestures can tell us about the evolution of human communication.