

Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration

CFP: Panel “From Emblems to Memes: Gestures on the Move”

The 18th International Congress of the German Semiotic Association, **Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration**, the University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, from 28 September to 02 October 2027.

To achieve its goals, the German Semiotic Association organizes conferences, colloquia, workshops, courses, and lecture series in core areas of its research fields. Moreover, the association holds an international congress every three years.

As part of the 18th International Congress **Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration** (Schwäbisch Gmünd, 28 September – 02 October 2027), the sections “Linguistics” and “Digital Humanities” will organize a panel on the topic “**From Emblems to Memes: Gestures on the Move**” and invites paper proposals.

Call for Papers

Migration is not only a movement of people but also a movement of signs: gestures, emblems, and multimodal practices that carry cultural, linguistic, and social meanings across borders. This panel explores how migrants’ gestures function as semiotic resources in processes of adaptation, identity negotiation, and language contact.

This panel bridges semiotic theory and migration studies by focusing on the often-overlooked role of gestures as mobile signs. It offers a specific perspective on the congress theme (“Signs in Motion”) by demonstrating how migrants reconfigure, negotiate, or resist meaning through bodily and digital communication. The panel also provides a space for discussing methodological and empirical challenges (e.g., documenting ephemeral gestures; data protection rights and private languages) as well as potential theoretical gaps (e.g., how to model gesture meaning in contact situations).

We invite contributions that examine:

- The lexicography of emblems in migrant communities (e.g., how stable gesture forms are used, translated, or recontextualized).
- Gesture in language contact: How do migrants integrate, adapt, or shape gestural repertoires in multilingual settings?
- Migrant memes and digital gestures: The circulation of gestural signs in social media, memes, or digital communication as forms of cultural resistance, humor, or belonging.
- Semiotic gaps and misunderstandings: Cases where gestures lead to miscommunication or reveal power dynamics in host societies.
- Methodological innovations: Corpus-based, computational, or ethnographic approaches to studying migrant gestures (e.g., annotation schemes, motion capture, or AI-assisted analysis).

- Theoretical frameworks: How can semiotic or linguistic theories be applied to analyze the role of gestures in the context of migration? Might theories even need to be adapted to the specific characteristics of migrant gestures?

We welcome submissions on (but not limited to):

1. Lexicography and Documentation
 - Creating gesture dictionaries for migrant communities.
 - Challenges in translating or standardizing emblems across cultures.
2. Gesture in Language Contact
 - Code-switching between gestural and verbal modes in migrant speech.
 - The role of gestures in language acquisition or loss among migrants.
3. Digital and Pop Culture
 - Migrant memes, GIFs, or TikTok trends as gestural semiotic systems.
 - Virtual gestures (e.g., avatars, emojis) in diasporic communication.
4. Semiotic Conflict and Power
 - Gestures as markers of inclusion/exclusion (e.g., offensive vs. polite gestures in host cultures).
 - Institutional or legal semiotic regimes (e.g., how gestures are policed or misinterpreted in asylum procedures).
5. Interdisciplinary Methods
 - Combining semiotic analysis with computational tools (e.g., NLP, computer vision).
 - Ethnographic or auto-ethnographic accounts of gestural practices in migration.

Literature

Key words

gesture studies, emblems, multimodality, language contact, migrant communication, nonverbal semiotics, corpus linguistics, digital gestures, memes, intercultural communication, code-switching, social media, computational semiotics, ethnography of communication

Information regarding the congress organization

The congress will be held from 28 September to 02 October 2027 at the University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany.

Please send your proposals in German or English (20 minutes), along with a short academic CV, by email to Jana Bressemer (jana.bressemer@phil.tu-chemnitz.de) no later than 30 November 2026. The document should include title, name of the author, summary of the topic (max. 300 words), affiliation, email address, short bio, and a short list of publications (max. 5).

Talks should not exceed 20 minutes. Selected contributions will likely be published. The panel language is English.

Contact

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us: Jana Bressem (jana.bressem@phil.tu-chemnitz.de)

Panel organization: Jana Bressem, Ellen Fricke, Andy Lücking, Alexander Mehler, Martin Siefkes

Conference conception and organization: Prof. Dr. Daniel Rellstab (Chair of the DGS).

For additional information please visit <https://www.semiotik.eu/signs-in-motion-2027>. We also recommend the calls of the other sections.