

# Semiotic Agency Within a Framework of Cooperative Semiosis

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Using as data videotapes of interaction in the home of a man, Chil, with severe aphasia this talk will examine some of the interactive frameworks that make it possible for him to act as a powerful speaker, despite a vocabulary restricted to three words. These include gesture, prosody, and most importantly his ability to use signs that lead others to produce the words he needs to both say something relevant, and accomplish consequential action. His agency as speaker is organized within, and made possible by, interactive frameworks of cooperative semiosis, in which his limited signs are elaborated by the actions of others. Despite his almost complete lack of linguistic syntax, Chil has the power to combine signs in complex ways to build actions far beyond his own abilities as an isolated speaker. For example by attaching relevant prosodic contours to the linguistically rich talk of others he can position himself as the co-speaker, and sometimes the primary speaker, of an utterance that he is literally unable to construct by himself. Particular attention will be paid to the constraints on Chil's possibilities for action that arise from the nature of the indexical and iconic signs that constitute his primary semiotic repertoire, how his action both emerges from, and transforms relevant epistemic ecologies, the combinatorial resources provided by his rich prosody, his ability to systematically construct meaning through the progressive decomposition and transformation of language structure produced by others, and his ability to construct phenomena central to the representational power of language, such as iterative aspect, without the use of linguistic signs. It will be argued that the processes of cooperative semiosis within which Chil's actions are lodged are central to the organization of human language, culture, cognition and social life.