

3rd Heinz von Foerster-Conference / Nov. 16 to 18, 2007

How to Chat with an Ape: An Introduction to the Yerkish Language

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this lecture is to introduce to some important issues and concepts related to Yerkish, an artificial language created by Ernst von Glasersfeld for use by apes in computer-mediated communication (CMC) with machines and humans. In the first part we will begin with a short outline of the context in which the Yerkish language originated (the original LANA project) and then present the language itself - its "lexigrams" and its "correlational" grammar - and its use by the chimpanzee Lana in formulating sentences. In the second part we will give a brief introduction to the foundation of Yerkish in Silvio Ceccato's Operational Methodology, particularly his idea of the correlational structure of thought and will then conclude with the main insights that can be derived from the Yerkish experiment seen in the light of Operational Methodology. This lecture will provide insights on how Ernst von Glasersfeld by his design laid the foundation of the unbroken success of Yerkish over the last 30 years.

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