What is an SFB?

An SFB (Sonderforschungsbereich, Collaborative Research Centre) is an interdisciplinary, long-term research institution funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG). Through the focus of experts from different areas on one thematic field, an SFB allows for a strong research emphasis at the university involved.

The SFB 833 in Tübingen

The SFB 833 is currently one of eight SFBs in Tübingen and already the third linguistic SFB in succession – we can look back on a long and successful tradition. In 16 separate projects, about 130 researchers work and teach on various aspects of linguistic meaning.

We contribute to scientific discourse on a national and international level: Our researchers present their findings in talks and publications around the world.

We regularly invite renowned experts in their respective fields to our SFB colloquium series. Every year, we organise numerous workshops and conferences; among them there is the well-known Linguistic Evidence, which originated in Tübingen.

SFBs also serve to provide early career support. In order to promote doctoral candidates, the SFB 833 has got its own "Milestone Programme" as well as its own colloquium for doctoral candidates.

Another goal of SFBs is the achievement of gender equality among researchers. The SFB 833 has got its own Equal Opportunities Representative and extra funding for gender equality, which is used, for example, for child-minding outside daycare opening hours or to provide additional student assistants for members with family responsibilities.

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Information about Collaborative Research Centres at the University of Tübingen:
www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers.html

from the German Research Foundation:
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/index.html

The team of the SFB 833 in February 2017
A central topic in investigating language comprehension concerns the question whether, in processing and building a representation of meaning, we take all available knowledge into account from the outset, or whether we, in a first step, begin only with linguistic knowledge.

In an interdisciplinary project between linguistics and psychology, test subjects were asked to read sentences like (1) to (3), while their brain activity was recorded.

(1) Juices are liquid.
(2) Fears are liquid.
(3) Biscuits are liquid.

There is no objection to example (1). (2) and (3), however, are incorrect – in different ways. Example (2) is a violation of linguistic knowledge: The semantics of “liquid” requires a concrete entity, but the word “fears” is abstract and thus does not fulfil the requirement. The case of (3), however, is a violation of world knowledge: The word “biscuits” does refer to a concrete entity, so that the semantic requirements are fulfilled – but biscuits are not liquid in our world.

If language comprehension takes world knowledge into account from the outset, then both kinds of violation should be recognised at the same time during processing. However, the experiment did not result in any evidence for this, which points at a two-step-model of language comprehension.