

## 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 day-care 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:

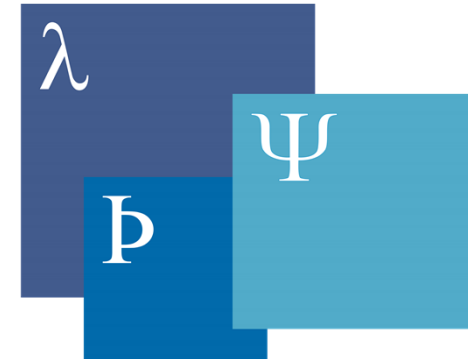
[www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers.html](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers.html)

### from the German Research Foundation:

[www.dfg.de/en/research\\_funding/programmes/index.html](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/index.html)



The team of the SFB 833 in February 2017






# SFB 833

## The Construction of Meaning: The Dynamics and Adaptivity of Linguistic Structures

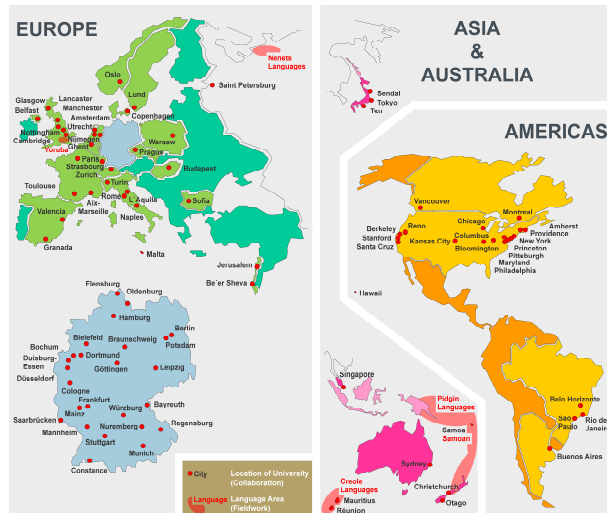
## Our work: An overview

The SFB 833 is an interdisciplinary research association: Linguistic disciplines (**general linguistics**, **computational linguistics** and **separate philologies**) as well as **psychology** all work together.

In our three research areas, we investigate how linguistic meaning comes into existence:

-  in context
-  during language processing
-  in the development of a single language

The SFB's work comprises **theoretical and experimental research**. We even go beyond Europe and carry out international **fieldwork** on endangered and little researched languages. All our findings are also integrated into our researchers' teaching duties.



National and international collaborations of the SFB 833

We collaborate nationally and internationally with other research institutions as well as non-academic facilities. For example, we have an additional **transfer project** which works together with a textbook publisher to produce an interactive workbook for English courses at German secondary schools.

## An example from our research

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.

## Our research questions



### Area A: Context

investigates how context information influences language comprehension. For example, the sentence “She saw her duck.” will be interpreted differently depending on the context.



### Area B: Cognition

investigates how meaning emerges during language processing. For example, in self-paced reading experiments we can exactly find out which word in a sentence creates problems in processing.



### Area C: Variation

investigates how meaning emerges and develops within separate languages and in comparison to other languages. Thus, the usage of a word and its changing meaning can be traced over centuries.

The individual projects within the three areas work **independently** (every project has got its own research plan) as well as **in close collaboration**, for example, with jointly organised workshops and publications. Various **Research Groups** offer the opportunity to exchange ideas and pursue research beyond individual projects.

