



# Meaning in contact

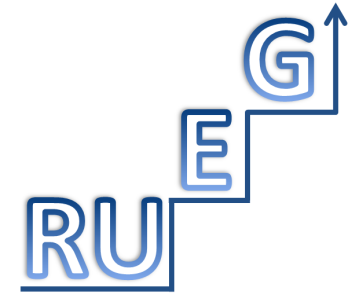
*Heike Wiese*

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin



# Research Unit “Emerging Grammars in Language Contact Situations”

15 projects, 7 locations; RUEG 1: 2018-2021; RUEG2: 2021-2024



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**Mercator fellows:** Maria Polinsky, Shana Poplack (RUEG1); Cristina Flores, Jeanine Treffers-Daller (RUEG2)





## Register perception in a multilingual context of German

PIs: Heike Wiese, Antje Saueremann

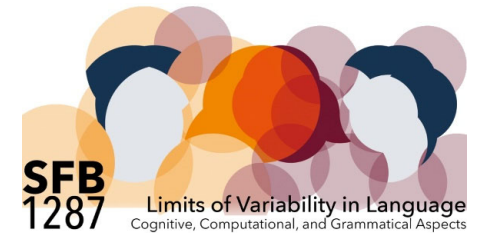
PhD: Britta Schulte



## Integration of linguistic resources in highly diverse urban settings

PIs: Heike Wiese, Ulrike Freywald

Postdocs and PhDs: Kathleen Schumann, Serkan Yüksel, İrem Duman, Britta Schulte



## The dynamics of German in the multilingual context of Namibia

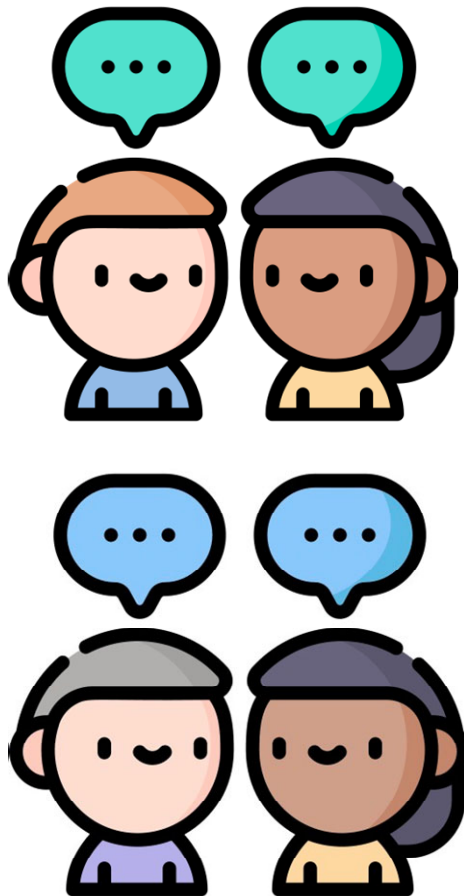
PIs: Horst Simon, Heike Wiese

Postdocs and PhDs: Christian Zimmer, Janosch Leugner, Laura Perlitz, Yannic Bracke

# Meaning in **contact** is Meaning in **flux**



# Meaning in crosslinguistic interactions



underlying assumption of semantic and pragmatic patterns crossing borders of **distinct, bounded languages**

# Sociolinguistic findings on linguistic fluidity

Bound “languages” are a social construct based on European nation-state building (and part of the colonial project).

- ▶ relatively recent invention that cannot capture the dynamics of language in settings of linguistic diversity

“languages were, in the most literal sense, invented, particularly as part of the Christian/colonial and nationalistic projects in different parts of the globe”

(Makoni & Pennycook 2006)



# Variatio delectat

*free-range  
language*



# Doing away with ‘languages’

“we have to **abandon the traditional notion of separately structured languages**”  
(Canagarajah 2018)

“we **challenge** one of the most widely held views of language as a social, human phenomenon, namely **that ‘language’ can be separated into different ‘languages’**, such as ‘Russian’, ‘Latin’, and ‘Greenlandic’”  
(Jørgensen et al. 2011)

“Translanguaging [...] **challenges the conventional understanding of language boundaries between the culturally and politically labelled languages** (e.g. English, Chinese).”  
(Li Wei 2016)

“There is now a substantial body of work on ideologies of language that **denaturalizes the idea that there are distinct languages [...]. Named languages – ‘English’, ‘German’, ‘Bengali’ – are ideological constructions**”  
(Blommaert & Rampton 2011)



# Com-sits

*A com-sit* (‘communicative situation’) is the setting of communication, understood as a social activity, typically centered around language production and perception, through which meaning is (co-)constructed.

*Wiese 2023*

# Grammar without bound ‘languages’

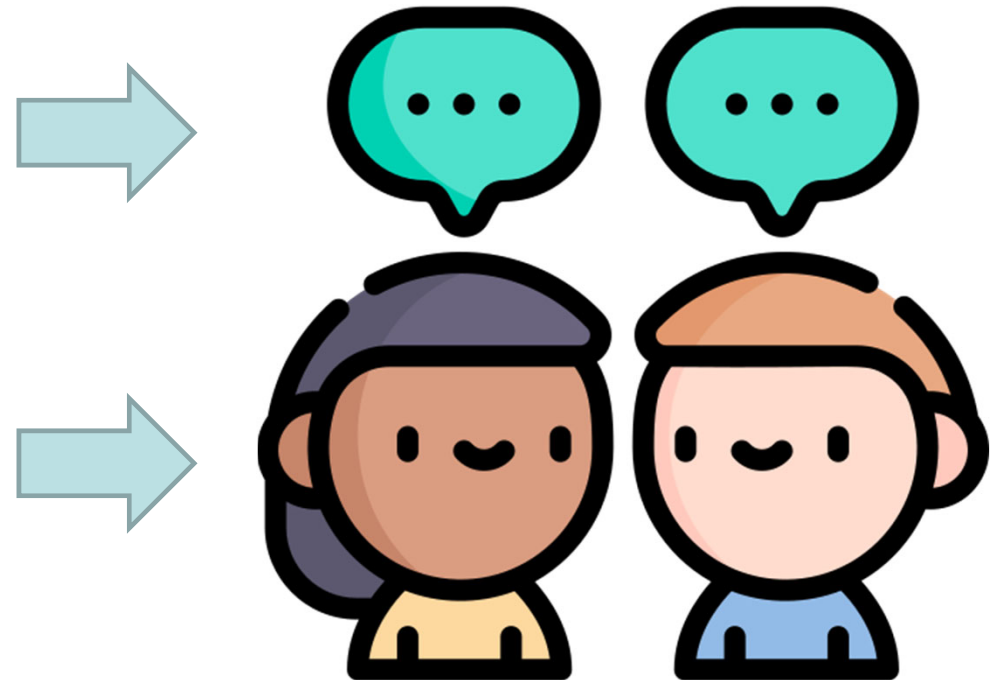
**Named languages:** optional social indices

## Registers

linguistic practices in different com-sits;  
differentiation supports systematicity

## Com-sit

different com-sits are distinguished by  
their different situational characteristics



# Com-sits and languages

## not primarily:

Elements are used in one com-sit rather than in another because they belong to different languages.

## but:

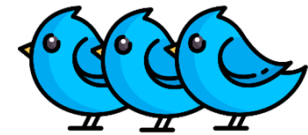
Elements are represented as belonging to different languages because they are used in / associated with different com-sits.



central: speakers' choice of resources for different com-sits

→ unified perspective on multilingualism, bidialectalism, register choice, style shifting, code switching etc.

~~*Birds of a feather  
flock together.*~~



*Those who flock together  
become birds of a feather.*

# Com-sits and language

Com-sits can generate semantic structure even in the absence of bound languages.



*Language-agnostic*  
representations as part of  
'market grammar'



# An urban market

C: How much is it?

S1: Ehm, sechs fünfzig. Six Euro fourty cent.  
ahm six fifty

C: Six Euro, six Euro ...?

S1: Sechs Euro fifty cent, sechs fünfzig. Italiano?  
six Euro fifty cent six fifty Italian?

C: Nein, Israel.  
no Israel

S1: Was?  
what

C: Israel.

S1: İsrail ehm [Name] abi Arapçada altı elli neydi?  
Israel ahm S2 brother in.Arabic six fifty what.is?  
Arapçada altı elli ne?  
in.Arabic six fifty what?

S2: ستة Euro نص  
six Euro a.half

S1: ستة Euro نص

C [laughing]

S1: Auch nicht?  
also not?

C: Wir haben nicht Arabisch.  
we have not Arabic

S1: Nicht Arabisch?  
not Arabic?

C: Hebräisch  
Hebrew

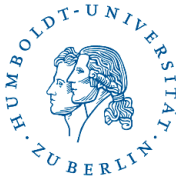
S1: Hebräisch, ah, noch schlimmer. Das könnwa nicht.  
Hebrew ah even worse that can.we not

C: Hebräisch ist eh שש וחצי  
Hebrew is ah six a.half

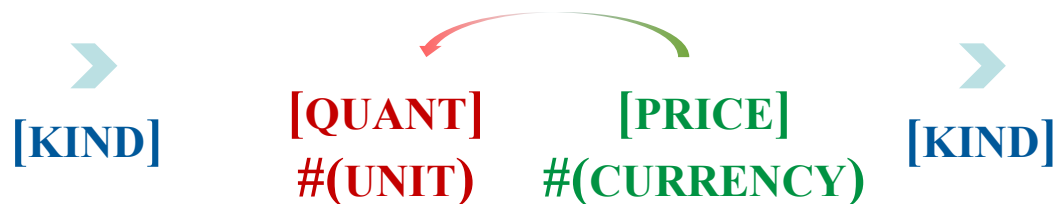
S1: שש וחצי



# Semantic patterns without language index

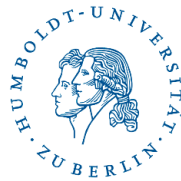


Brokkoli	zwei Stück	eins fünfzig	
	zwei Stück	eins fünfzig	Brokkoli
Mango	Schale	ein Euro	
	Kiste	drei (Euro)	Mango
	zwei Schale	drei (Euro)	Cherimoya
roka	kasa	dört Euro	
	one Stück	fifty cent	
	fünf Stück	zwölf Euro	
	ein Euro	(ein) Stück	





# Semantic patterns without language index



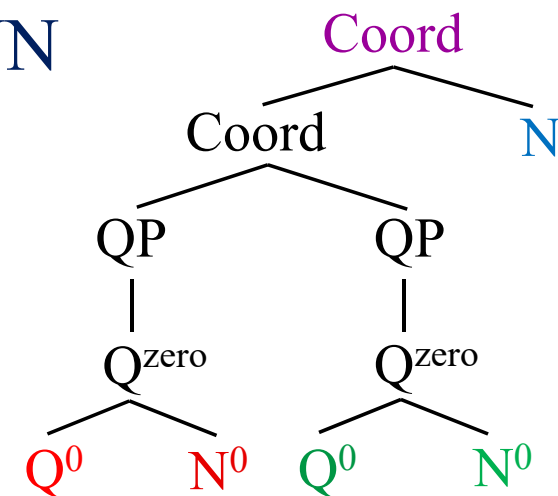
SEM

TRADE ( #(UNIT(KIND)), #(CURR))

COM-SIT  $\in$  *market*

agnostic wrt to language(s)

SYN



Wiese (2022)

# Com-sits in the dynamics of meaning

Com-sits can have an impact on

- propositional semantics: coercion, semantic transfer
- pragmatic enrichment
- social meaning
- conceptual structure

# The coercion of 'Chicken'

**PHON**

/'tʃɪkɪn/

**SYN**

$N_{\text{COUNT}}$

**SEM**

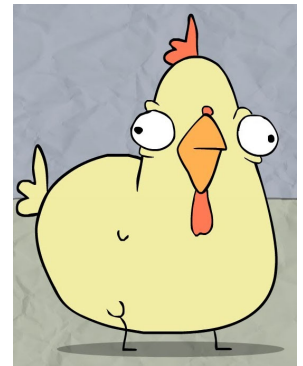
CHICKEN

**COM-SIT**

∈

$E$

*chicken*<sup>E</sup>



# The coercion of 'Chicken'

<b>PHON</b>	<i>/'ʃikən/</i>
<b>SYN</b>	$N_{\text{MASS}}$
<b>SEM</b>	GRINDER(CHICKEN)
<b>COM-SIT</b>	$\in \text{diner}^D$

*chicken*<sup>E</sup>

**com-sit:**  
fast-food  
chain (US)

*Chicken*<sup>D</sup>



Source com-sit causes coercion

# The semantics of pain in Namibian German

DE-German: *weh tun* (lit. ‘painful do’)

CAUSE(PAIN) (x) (y)

source

locus [patient]

*Das tut (mir) weh.*

(lit. ‘That does (me) painful.’)

*Mein Bauch tut (mir) weh.*

(lit. ‘My belly does (me) painful.’)

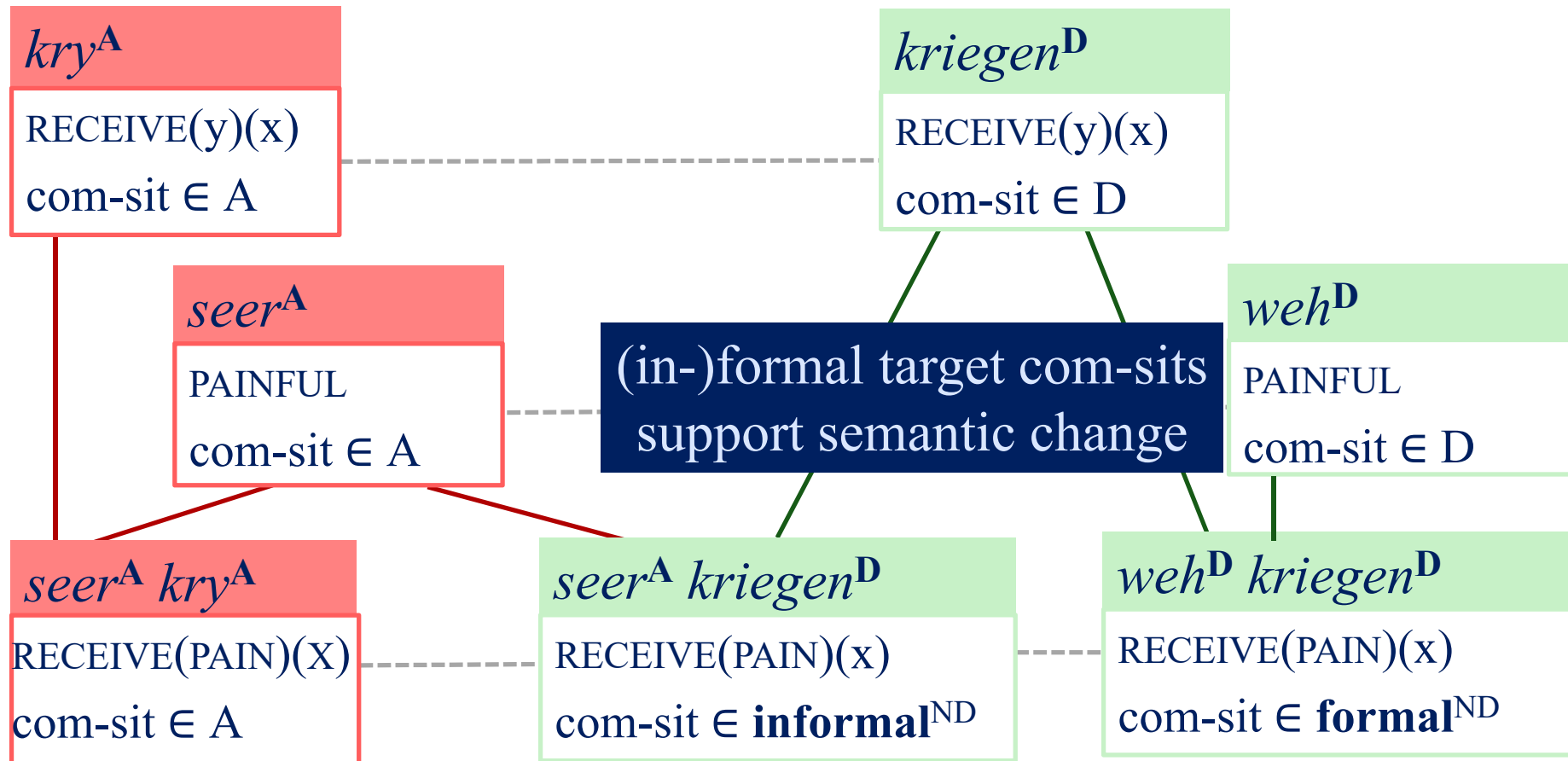
NAM-German: *weh kriegen* (lit. ‘painful receive’)

RECEIVE(PAIN) (x)

patient



# The semantics of pain in Namibian German





# Being chilled-milled in Kiezdeutsch

Die essen **Chips Mips**.  
*they eat crisps misps*

dismissal  
 ‘cool’, ‘chilled’, ‘easy’

Dotor hastanın **gözüne mözüne** baktı.  
*doctor patient's eyes meyes checked*  
 ‘The doctor checked the patient’s eyes etc.’  
 (Göksel & Kerslake 2005)

amplification

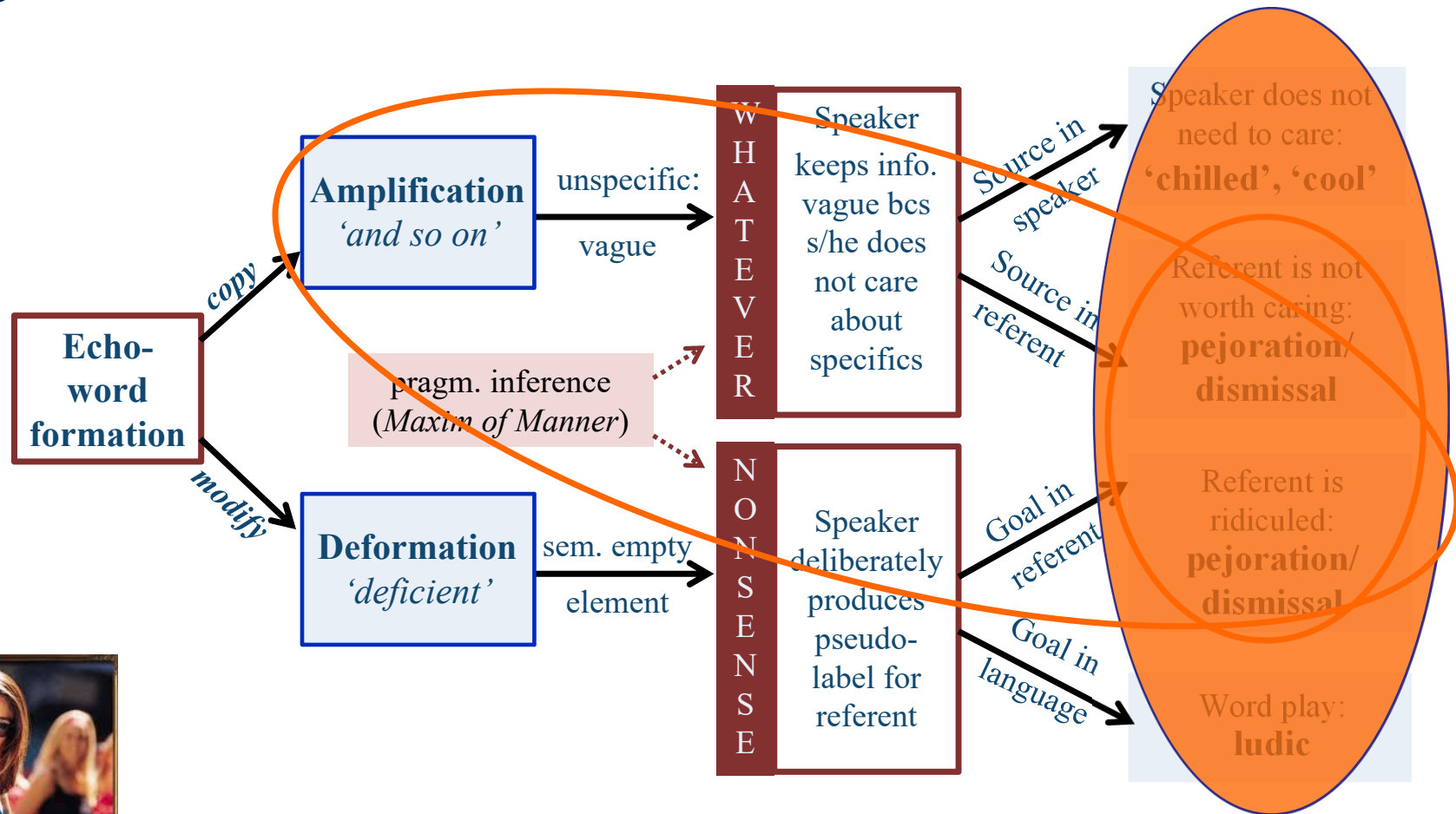
**Twitter, Mwitter** hepsinin kökünü kazıyacağız  
*Twitter Mwitter all.GEN root.POSS.ACC chip.off.FUT.1PL*  
 ‘We will eradicate Twitter and so on.’  
 (Wiese & Polat 2016)

pejoration/dissmissal

Libe-**smibe**      consommé-shmonsommé  
 Gelt-**smelt**      pretty shmetty  
 (Spitzer 1952, Feinsilver 1961)

pejoration/dissmissal

# Being chilled-milled in Kiezdeutsch



# Being chilled-milled in Kiezdeutsch

PHON	O	O	[ONSET := /m/]		—[ <i>m</i> -reduplication] <sup>T</sup>
SYN	N	N			
SEM	<i>e</i>				
PRAG	p . p ∈ { < speaker I <sup>n</sup> e >, C(speaker) }				

**com-sit:**  
informal

I: expressive interval; n: negative; C: chilled  
(Potts 2007)

COM-SIT      *kiez*<sup>D</sup>

Source com-sit contributes pejoration,  
target com-sit contributes pragmatic enrichment

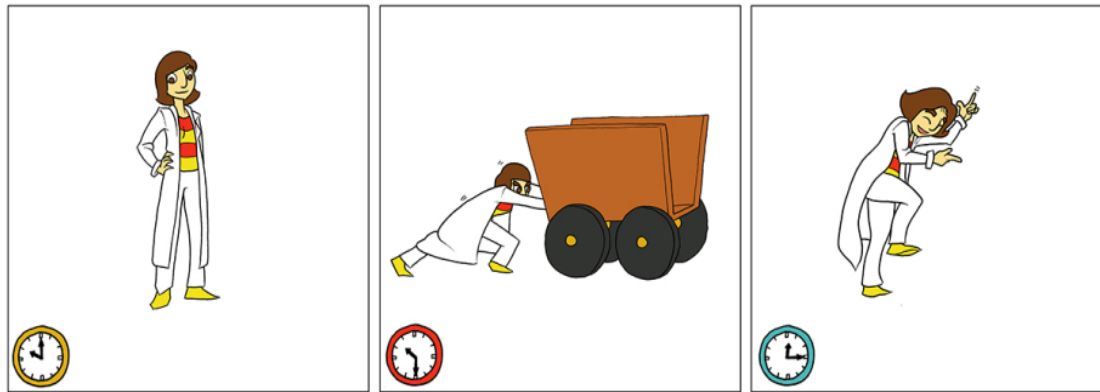
# Whorfian effects of V2

## V3 options in a V2 language:

Einmal isch **war** alleine drin. [KiDKo]  
*once I was alone inside*

- com-sits: informal and/or spoken; multilingual advantage
- systematic pattern: **FRAME/ADV** > **TOPIC/SUB**

# Whorfian effects of V2



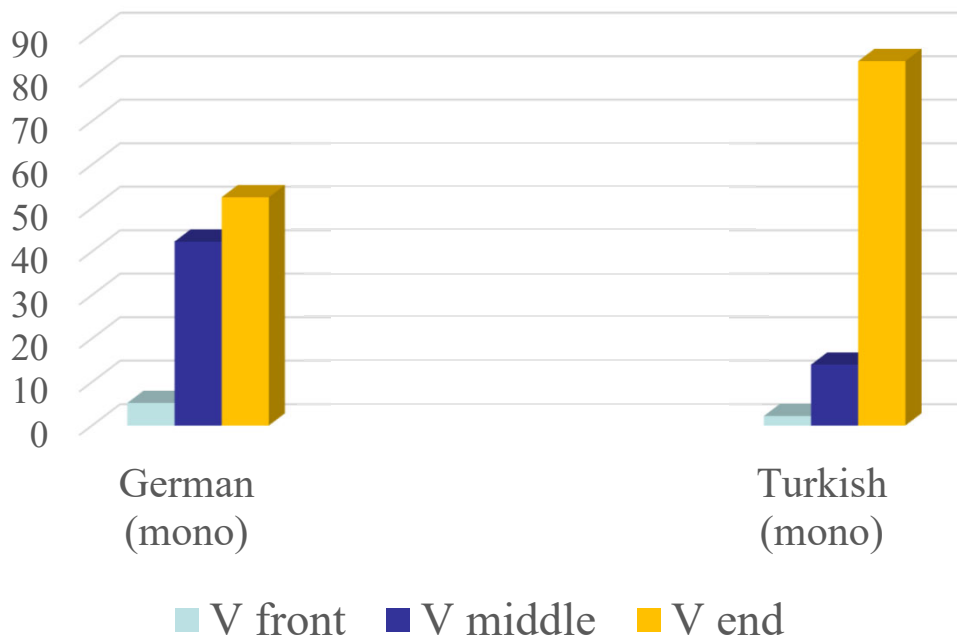
## Information-structural patterns:

What is the preferred order of *topic* and *frame* wrt *action* in an extragrammatical task?

monolinguals (Turkey and Germany)  
and bilinguals (heritage-Turkish/Germany)  
in Turkish and German set-up

# Whorfian effects of V2

Position of frame and topic wrt action (V)



## Information-structural motivation of V3:

overall preference for  
framesetter and topic > action (*V end*)

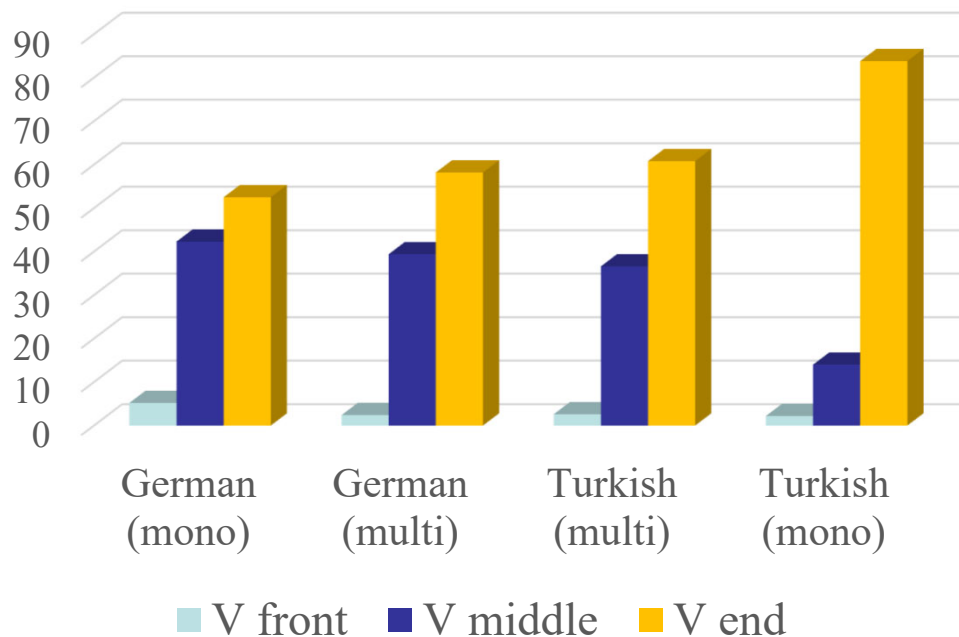
## Language-specific effects in extra-grammatical tasks:

boost of V2 language for  
either framesetter or topic > action (*V middle*)



# Whorfian effects of V2

Position of frame and topic wrt action (V)



## Information-structural motivation of V3:

overall preference for  
framesetter and topic > action (*V end*)

## Language-specific effects in extra-grammatical tasks:

boost of  
either framesetter or topic > action (*V middle*)  
**in German and Turkish setting in Germany**

Com-sit distribution impacts conceptual structure:  
default: com-sit  $\in$  D (dominance of majority language index)

# Conclusions

Meaning in contact: How can we capture the impact of different linguistic systems, given that named languages and their borders are ideological constructs?

**Com-sits as organising domain for linguistic structure,** with named languages as an optional add-on (sociolinguistic indices depending on broader social and societal context).

The com-sit architecture allows us to capture dynamic patterns of semantic and pragmatic variation and change, and to analyse how

**com-sits impact propositional semantics, coercion and semantic transfer, pragmatic enrichment, social meaning, and conceptual structure.**

# Conclusions

## The power of com-sits:

- *Language-agnostic market semantics*: Com-sits can generate semantic structure even in the absence of bounded ‘languages’.
- *Coercion of ‘Chicken’*: Source com-sit contributes ‘grinder’ function.
- *Semantics of pain in Namibian-German*: (In-)formal target com-sits support semantic improvement through transfer.
- *Chilled Kiezdeutsch*: Source com-sit provides *m*-reduplication with pragmatic pejoration, social meaning of the target com-sit adds pragmatic enrichment.
- *Whorfian effects of V2*: Com-sit default affects conceptual structure.