Project 10:

Contemporary naturalistic theories of linguistic comprehension can be classified along two dimensions: The first one regards the extent to which semantic comprehension involves embodied brain processes. Here amodal-symbolic and embodied-emulative views compete over the question whether the meanings of a sentence and its parts are mental symbols largely decoupled from sensory, motor and emotional processes or whether sentence meaning consists in the sensorily, motorily and emotionally grounded emulation of a model of the sentence (Werning, 2005a, 2005b, 2010, 2012; Mroczko-Wąsowicz & Werning 2012). The second dimension concerns the extent to which contextual factors influence the intuitive truth-conditions of sentences and, more precisely, whether the compositionality of language has to be accounted for in a stricter or more liberal way (Werning, 2004, 2005c; Werning & Haase, 2015; Werning et al., 2013; Werning et al. eds., 2012). Whereas semantic minimalism claims that intuitive truth-conditions are fully determined in a bottom-up compositional manner where only indexical and anaphors may carry a context argument, truth-conditional pragmatics holds that context factors can freely modulate the intuitive truth-conditions at any stage of sentence meaning composition (Kompa 2010a). The two dimensions are closely intertwined with each other and with the viability of a situated theory of linguistic meaning. Taking into account recent empirical results and abiding by the rigorous standards of semantics, this PhD project develops an embodied-emulative and context-sensitive theory of meaning and will thus contribute to a comprehensive theory of situated cognition. There will be two foci: (i) the interaction between telic lexical components and contextually induced ad-hoc affordances (Cosentino, Baggio, Kontinen, Garwels, & Werning, 2014) and (ii) the interaction between empathy and the understanding of emotion words (Rak, Kontinen, Kuchinke, & Werning, 2013; Cosentino, Werning, & Reuter, 2015); the latter invites for collaboration with PhD projects in part 3.