Call for Proposals

No. 44 **19 May 2021**

Priority Programme "Visual Communication. Theoretical, Empirical, and Applied Perspectives (ViCom)" (SPP 2392)

In March 2021, the Senate of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) established the Priority Programme "Visual Communication. Theoretical, Empirical, and Applied Perspectives (ViCom)" (SPP 2392). The programme is designed to run for six years. The present call invites proposals for the first three-year funding period.

The overall goal of ViCom is to investigate the special features and linguistic significance of visual communication. Central fields of interest are sign languages as fully developed natural languages and visual means that enhance spoken language such as pointing and other manual and non-manual gestures, as well as further visual strategies as in pictures, comics or films where the use of linguistic methodology seems promising.

With a focus on developing linguistic theory, ViCom strives to bring together different research foci and the joint expertise of communities which usually work on similar research objects, but without a great deal of interaction. The Priority Programme addresses researchers in linguistics, semiotics, psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, animal communication, visual studies, computational linguistics, didactics and related fields who seek to advance our understanding of the linguistics of visual and multimodal communication by

- formulating formally explicit models of the linguistic structures and cognitive mechanisms underlying visual communication, and
- testing these models using different empirical methods, or
- by developing new applications in technological, therapeutic, and didactic environments to improve the usage of visual communication in these areas.

Visual communication is a young and developing field in theoretical linguistic research and to date visual phenomena have been analysed by applying the linguistic vocabulary originally established for spoken languages. It is now becoming evident that the formal linguistic repertoire can fruitfully be applied to other fields and domains but that it also needs to be extended to meet the specific requirements of visual communication. This is due to the fact that visual phenomena are often different in nature from spoken language phenomena, which form the main basis of most linguistic research. Visual input, for example, is often more iconic than auditory material. ViCom bridges the gap from these new dynamics in theoretical linguistics to other disciplines, where the investigation of visual communication phenomena has a longstanding tradition.

All research activities within ViCom adopt the following three perspectives, which form the basic pillars of the Priority Programme and determine its main objectives:

- Theoretical perspective: ViCom aims at unifying recent theoretical research on all aspects of communication in the visual modality. The main aim is to develop new theories that are pre-pared to meet the specific needs of visual phenomena to cover different phenomena of gesture, sign language, pictorial linguistics, and other visual communication phenomena.
- Empirical perspective: ViCom aims at bringing together researchers from different fields to gather new comprehensive empirical knowledge about the different kinds of phenomena in vis-ual communication across disciplines. Empirical advances include multimodal corpus studies, motion capture studies as well as psycho- and neurolinguistic studies on the acquisition, pro-duction, and comprehension of multimodal communication in different settings.
- Applied perspective: ViCom aims at improving the utilisation of sign language and gestures in different therapeutic and didactic settings. Additionally, ViCom hopes to contribute to the devel-opment of multimodal corpora including the integration of motion tracking technologies, auto-matic annotation programmes, gesture and sign recognition/generation systems, and human-computer interaction systems.

Adopting these three perspectives in research has already yielded accounts for certain aspects of visual communication and there is clearly potential in these approaches which can be exploited in future work.

We expect ViCom to bring about major progress in the analysis of visual communication in the following respects:

- Developing new theories to capture multimodality in comprehensive models of human commu-nication as well as linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of visual communication, in particular cross-modal formal and cognitive theories that properly deal with gestural meaning contribu-tions and the modality-specific interaction of gestures and sign languages as well as gesture and spoken languages.
- Developing new formal tools and extending the existing formal apparatus to account for iconic, demonstration-based and sociolinguistic components of multimodal communication.
- Comparing different linguistic and non-linguistic domains of visual communication that rely on iconicity as one important component and crucially make use of certain management systems to regulate, for instance, viewpoint and co-reference.
- Designing and conducting new experimental studies on the syntactic and semantic interaction of language and gesture and the acquisition of the form and meaning of gestures.
- Designing and conducting new corpus-based studies on the interaction of gesture with typolog-ically different spoken and sign languages.
- Advancing empirical and experimental methodology to gain new empirical evidence to prove or challenge aspects of existing theories on visual communication in human and animal commu-nication.
- Integrating theories of animal communication to develop new formal models that can also ad-dress evolutionary aspects of human language by applying an innovative combination of differ-ent research traditions.
- Developing new didactic theories and tools as well as new computational systems which are capable of transferring research findings on visual communication to digital learning settings or virtual world environments.

The scientific ambition of ViCom is best met by a broad collaboration involving researchers from different disciplines such as linguistics, semiotics, psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, animal communication, visual studies, computational linguistics and didactics. To accomplish its ambitious scientific goals, ViCom implements a well-balanced, extensive suite of individual measures to support diversity, networking and dissemination, and to ensure the success of especially female, Deaf, and early career researchers. Early career researchers are explicitly encouraged to submit proposals.

Proposal instructions

Proposals must be written in English and submitted to the DFG by **3 November 2021**. Please note that proposals can only be submitted via elan, the DFG's electronic proposal processing system. To enter a new project within the existing Priority Programme, go to Proposal Submission – New Project/Draft Proposal – Priority Programmes and select "SPP 2392" from the current list of calls.

In preparing your proposal, please review the programme guidelines (form 50.05, section B) and follow the proposal preparation instructions (form 54.01). These forms can either be downloaded from our website or accessed through the elan portal.

Applicants must be registered in elan prior to submitting a proposal to the DFG. If you have not yet registered, please note that you must do so by **20 October 2021** to submit a proposal under this call; registration requests received after this time cannot be considered. You will normally receive confirmation of your registration by the next working day. Note that you will be asked to select the appropriate Priority Programme call during both the registration and the proposal process.

Further Information

The elan system can be accessed at:
https://elan.dfg.de/en

DFG forms 50.05 and 54.01 can be downloaded at:
www.dfg.de/formulare/50_05
www.dfg.de/formulare/54_01

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