

Further Particulars

The Project: This project is part of a larger 'Simple to Complex' theme within the ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD), looking at how children learn to use language structure to communicate effectively. In this particular project you will investigate how children gradually learn to pay attention to both lexical and contextual cues and how they coordinate these cues during sentence processing. For example, sentence subjects and agents tend to be (i) referents that have already been mentioned in the discourse context, and (ii) encoded by pronouns rather than full noun phrases. However, not all sentence subjects refer to entities already introduced in the preceding discourse, and not all subjects are expressed by pronouns. Thus, children need to learn how to integrate contextual information (e.g. who or what is the focus of the ongoing discourse) and lexical information (the form chosen to refer to a referent) to interpret sentences correctly.

You will carry out corpus analyses to investigate how adults and children coordinate lexical and contextual cues in their spontaneous speech and how this might change over development. You will also plan and conduct experimental production and comprehension studies (e.g. forced choice and visual world paradigm) to assess children's attention to and integration of lexical and contextual cues within and across sentences.

We are looking for a highly motivated and independent researcher with experience in psycholinguistic research and experience of working with young children. You must have a PhD (or equivalent) or have submitted your dissertation for a PhD in linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, or any cognate discipline before the start date. An understanding of sentence processing and information structure is desirable. You must also have excellent statistical analysis and academic writing abilities. And we are expecting you to contribute to scientific network and impact activities within the ESRC Centre (e.g., attending seminars and workshops, contributing to the webpage, disseminating results of the project widely to non-academic partners).

The ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD: www.lucid.ac.uk): The LuCiD Centre is a multi-million pound collaboration between the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster, and affiliated institutions abroad. The Centre studies how children learn to communicate with language, how the developing brain supports this process, and how it is affected by cross-linguistic, socio-cultural and individual variation. LuCiD's current Research Agenda contains three research streams in the UK and abroad that build on findings from the first phase (2014-2019).

STREAM 1: FROM VARIATION TO EXPLANATION: will take what we have discovered about word learning and grammatical development and use it to explain development in children with Developmental Language Disorder.

STREAM 2: FROM SIMPLE TO COMPLEX: will take what we have discovered about communicative development and use it to understand how different groups of children learn to use language to

communicate in the more complicated real-world situations that they will encounter when they enter school.

STREAM 3: BEYOND 0-5: will build on LuCiD's 0-5 project - a study of 80 children's language learning across the first 5 years - by a) using the 0-5 data to understand how children's curiosity-based exploration shapes their word learning; b) using the 0-5 data to build individualized computer models of how particular children perform across different experiments and across development; and c) following the 0-5 children into school and determining how their preschool language abilities impact on the beginnings of their literacy development.

LuCiD's Research Agenda is complemented by a Communication Agenda, a Technology Agenda, and a Capacity Building Programme:

In the COMMUNICATIONS AGENDA, we will work with our IMPACT CHAMPIONS to ensure that parents know how they can best help their children learn to talk, and to give healthcare and education professionals and policy-makers the information they need to create training and intervention programmes that are firmly rooted in the latest research findings.

In the TECHNOLOGY AGENDA, we will make the new tools and research designs that we have developed, and the new data that we have collected, available to other researchers and practitioners on an open access basis.

In the CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME, we will train new researchers in the range of different methods used across the Centre, and in how to communicate their findings to parents, educational professionals and policy makers. This will ensure the long-term future of language development research in the UK and of our approach to understanding how children learn to talk.

The Department: Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster (www.lancaster.ac.uk/linguistics/) is one of the largest and best-known Linguistics departments in the UK and internationally, with over 35 members of academic staff, and approximately 160 PhD students, 120 MA students (on campus-based and distance/blended learning programmes), and 300 undergraduates. The Department is currently ranked 12th in the world for Linguistics (QS World University Rankings 2019), and 3rd in the UK for Linguistics (The Times Good University Guide 2019).

The University: Lancaster University (www.lancaster.ac.uk) has a world-class reputation as a centre for excellence in teaching, scholarship and research. Lancaster was named University of the Year in 2018 by The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide, and it is ranked in the top 10 in all three major UK university league tables: The Times/Sunday Times, the Guardian, and the Complete University Guide. Internationally, it is ranked 131st in the QS World University Rankings (2019), and 146th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2019).

The University campus is situated near the Lune Valley and the Forest of Bowland – areas of outstanding natural beauty – and on the southern edge of the Lake District and the western edge of the Yorkshire Dales. More than £450 million has been invested in the campus since 2002, creating new academic facilities, student social facilities and improved teaching spaces.

The City: The campus is located a short distance from the vibrant and historic city of Lancaster. Lancaster is a city of about 55,000 people, with a largely Georgian and Victorian core of sandstone buildings, overlooked by a medieval castle and priory church. The city has independent shops, cafes, bars and restaurants, an alternative cinema and theatre, lively markets on Wednesday and Saturday, and there is easy access to the surrounding countryside on paths, bikeways and canals (for more information – watch Our Lancaster Story: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuZnPEZQAF4). Lancaster is easily accessible by road (M6 junction 33) and rail (west coast mainline). It is approximately one hour to Manchester International Airport, and about 2.5 hours by train to London, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Contact: For more information about the Department, see our web pages at <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk>. If you want to discuss the post, please e-mail Silke Brandt, lead of the work package, at s.brandt@lancaster.ac.uk.