

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER**PARTICULARS OF APPOINTMENT****FACULTY OF BIOLOGY, MEDICINE & HEALTH****SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES****RESEARCH ASSOCIATE IN THE ACQUISITION OF COMPLEX SYNTAX AND PRAGMATICS****VACANCY REF: BM&H-017193**

Salary:	£32,816 to £40,322 per annum, depending on relevant experience
Hours:	Full time
Duration:	Fixed Term, from 1 November 2021 to 31 October 2024
Location:	Oxford Road, Manchester

Enquiries about the vacancy, shortlisting and interviews:

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BACKGROUND

The LuCiD Centre is an ESRC funded, multi-million pound, ten-year research collaboration between the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, and Lancaster, and affiliated institutions in the UK and 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. The Centre was launched on 1 September 2014 and following an initial five years of funding, secured a further 5 years (from the ESRC and partner universities) to run until 31 October 2024. For details of our work to date, please visit our website: www.lucid.ac.uk

LuCiD is managed by the Centre Director (Professor Julian Pine, University of Liverpool) and the two co-Directors (Professors Anna Theakston, University of Manchester; and Gert Westermann, Lancaster University). The three directors are also the leads for the three research themes around which the Centre is organised:

1. From Variation to Explanation: Understanding development in different learners and different languages
2. From Simple to Complex: Scaling up to real-world language learning
3. From oral language to literacy: Beyond 0-5

The post-holder will join a work package led by Prof Anna Theakston and Dr Silke Brandt (Lancaster University) entitled *Understanding the factors influencing the comprehension and production of complex sentences* (under theme 2). They will also be part of the University of Manchester's Child Study Centre and the wider LuCiD network, which offers a range of career development activities and the opportunity to get involved in the Centre's outreach activities.

Project details

Children's ability to succeed in a formal educational environment is dependent on their ability to understand complex sentences that convey different temporal and causal relationships (e.g., *Before you draw a picture, finish your writing; The bird was cross because the monkey pushed him*). However, many children enter school without this ability, and make errors on complex sentences well into their school years (e.g., Emerson & Gekoski, 1980).

In this work package, we will test theories of sentence processing designed to capture the complexity associated with different types of adverbial clause. We will use a range of methods (e.g. corpus analysis, eye tracking, picture selection tasks, and picture description tasks) to determine how children learn to comprehend and produce complex sentences conveying different temporal and causal relations. We will also conduct training studies to assess the extent to which the comprehension and/or production of complex sentences can be boosted in disadvantaged children and children learning English as an additional language (EAL).

The precise direction of the research will depend in part on the skills and expertise of the successful applicant, but is likely to involve (i) extending our earlier work on children's comprehension of complex sentences (e.g. de Ruiter et al., 2018, 2020, 2021) to determine whether the findings generalise to a broader range of adverbial clauses, (ii) assessing the extent to which the factors that underpin comprehension also apply to complex sentence production, (iii) designing pilot interventions to assess the extent to which complex sentence performance can be boosted in classroom environments.

Overall Purpose of the Job

We are looking for a highly-motivated and independent researcher with experience in complex syntax/pragmatic language research, and experience of working with children. The job will involve detailed literature reviewing, preparation of ethics applications, experimental design, recruitment and data collection, analyses, and dissemination. The post offers an excellent opportunity for an experienced researcher to join the high profile ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) and work within the interdisciplinary team at the University of Manchester.

Key Responsibilities, Accountabilities or Duties:

The range of duties will include:

- Conducting analysis of English linguistic corpora, including child corpora
- Designing and implementing experimental studies

- Recruiting participants (schools, nurseries, families) for the study, and securing informed consent for participation.
- Administering standardised assessments of children's linguistic and cognitive abilities.
- Setting up and maintaining a secure database of the project data in line with data management best practice.
- Preparing and documenting data ready for upload to UK Data Service
- Conducting statistical analyses
- Writing up the findings in preparation for submission to high quality journals and international conferences
- Contributing to the LuCiD Centre's impact, knowledge exchange and training activities, working collaboratively with colleagues from across the Centre
- Contributing to the University of Manchester Child Study Centre's lab meetings, reading groups and outreach activities as necessary
- Supervising casual research assistants and interns as necessary
- Undertaking training and ongoing professional development
- Any other duties commensurate with this role

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential Knowledge, Skills and Experience:

- A PhD or equivalent (or close to completion – must be submitted prior to start date) in Psychology, Linguistics, Cognitive Sciences or any related cognate discipline
- Knowledge of, and/or research experience with a focus on, complex syntax and/or how information structure interacts with constituent/word order to convey meaning in language
- Experience in the design and implementation of experimental language studies with adults and/or young children (approx. 3-5 years)
- Experience of working with naturalistic corpus data
- Experience of working with preschool children, preferably in a research setting and the ability to conduct standardised language tests with young children
- Experience of participant recruitment, ethical considerations around research, and data management
- Proven ability to select and conduct appropriate data analysis (e.g. frequentist and/or Bayesian mixed effects models) using standard and advanced data analysis programs (Excel, SPSS, R)
- Ability to conduct and publish high-quality peer-reviewed research as evidenced by a beginning track record of conference presentations and publications
- Proven ability to work competently, both independently and as part of a team
- Excellent organisational skills and attention to detail
- Excellent command of English
- Ability to communicate effectively and politely with staff and participants, and to present information in a clear manner, verbally and in writing
- Willingness to contribute to science communication, outreach and capacity development activities

- The ability to convey an appropriate rationale and interest in applying for this particular post
- Please note that if not already issued and current, a Disclosure and Barring Service clearance (DBS) will need to be obtained

Desirable Knowledge, Skills, Experience and Qualifications:

- First class honours degree or Masters degree (or equivalent) in psychology, cognitive science, linguistics or a related discipline
- Experience of using programming languages (e.g. Python, R) and/or CHILDES to conduct corpus analysis
- Experience of using eye tracking methods to investigate language processing
- Experience of publishing high-quality peer-reviewed research into child language
- Experience of communicating research successfully to non-academic audiences
- Experience of supervising research assistants and/or students