

3 postdoctoral positions in psycholinguistics

General

The FAU seeks to appoint three postdoctoral researchers in psycholinguistics. The researchers will be based in the Department of English and American Studies and will be part of an international research group funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and headed by Prof. Ewa Dąbrowska.

The group's research focuses on individual differences in first language (L1) and second/foreign language (L2) acquisition and attainment. In particular, we examine relationships between individual strengths and weaknesses in specific areas of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition, with a view to developing and testing hypotheses about which aspects of language depend on which aspects of cognition. Our research includes three main strands:

A. Explicit and implicit language aptitude

This strand examines the following research questions:

- How do we measure explicit and implicit language aptitude?
- How does explicit and implicit language attitude influence speed and accuracy of language processing (in both L1 and L2)?
- What is the relationship between these two types of aptitude?
- To what extent do adult second language learners rely on the same mental mechanisms as children acquiring their first language?

B. Fluency

This strand examines fluency in the broadest sense: not just phonological fluency (the ability to produce rapid speech with relatively few pauses and self-corrections) but also cognitive fluency (the ability to retrieve and integrate linguistic units rapidly and effortlessly during online processing). These are investigated using a variety of methods, including analysis of spontaneous speech samples, behavioural experiments, and ERP recordings. While there is a considerable amount of work on fluency in the field of second language acquisition, it is almost virgin territory in work on L1 development (except among researchers dealing with language pathology). This research strand is thus ground-breaking in many respects, and will give us a better understanding of the cognitive abilities underlying the development of fluency in typical first language acquisition as well as informing linguistic theory by exploring the similarities and differences in the development of fluency in first and second language acquisition.

C. Language and literacy

Modern linguistic theory is based largely on research on highly literate speakers of languages with a long written tradition – that is to say, hardly language in its “natural” state. This strand looks at how literacy affects language at both the developmental level (i.e., how becoming a skilled reader affects individual speakers' mental grammars) and at the historical level (the effects that a long tradition of literacy has on language structure). This involves

- Analyses of vocabulary richness (e.g. lexical density, lexical diversity) and grammatical complexity (e.g. use of subordination and complex noun phrases) in texts produced by highly literate and low-literate speakers;
- Analogous analyses of historical corpora;
- Experimental studies examining the relationship between print exposure and comprehension of complex syntax (focussing on subordination devices and discourse connectives);
- Comprehension experiments and elicited production studies comparing the linguistic abilities of adult literates and illiterates.

Selection criteria

Essential:

- PhD in linguistics, psycholinguistics or cognitive psychology
- Experience in designing and carrying out psycholinguistic experiments
- A strong research record, appropriate to the stage of the candidate's career
- Good IT skills
- Good knowledge of a variety of statistical methods
- Fluency in English
- Ability to work both independently and as part of a team

Desirable:

- Knowledge of German and/or Spanish
- Experience with eyetracking and ERP techniques
- Experience working with children and/or low-educated participants

Main Duties

- Design and carry out research relevant to one or more strands of the project
- Write up publications and present at conferences
- Teach at undergraduate and/or MA level (2-3 per week)
- Contribute to supervision of PhD students and part-time research assistants
- Undertake any other duties consistent with the level and nature of the post

Application process

Applications should be in English and should be sent to Ms Gabel-Cunningham (barbara.gabel-cunningham@fau.de) and should include the following:

- (1) a CV
- (2) contact details for three referees
- (3) a covering letter (about 2 pages) indicating which strand(s) you are particularly interested in and how you could contribute to the group's research
- (4) a work sample (in English, for candidates invited for interview).

Informal inquiries can be directed to Prof. Ewa Dąbrowska (ewa.dabrowska@fau.de).

Deadline for Applications: 5 October 2022

Salary: ~48,888 €-70,000€ per annum, depending on experience

Starting time: 1 January 2023 or as soon thereafter as possible

Length of appointment: 2 years in the first instance, with a possible extension for another year

It is anticipated that the interviews for the posts will take place on the 20th and 21st of October 2022.