

PhD Studentship Position – Research project on the mechanisms of language production decline due to healthy ageing

We are inviting applications for a PhD studentship (start date between September and January 2022) in the School of Psychology at the University of Birmingham. This is a fully funded studentship which also covers fees for UK citizens (details below). The successful candidate will do their project at the University of Birmingham, under the supervision of Dr. Katrien Segaert (University of Birmingham, UK), Dr. Evelien Heyselaar (Radboud University, The Netherlands) and Prof. Linda Wheeldon (University of Agder, Norway).

Research focus: Research on language decline in ageing is important and timely: language is a core aspect of human cognition and our research has already demonstrated that healthy older adults experience decline in language function. The PhD project will focus on the effects of ageing on sentence production: older adults use shorter and simpler structures when speaking, resulting in less diverse language. The aim of the PhD project is to examine the mechanisms underlying this language decline. Theories of language production currently link the mechanisms for sentence production to implicit learning. When we speak, we tend to repeat recently experienced sentence structures; this ‘structural priming’ effect is argued to represent implicit learning in how to express ourselves. Current theories will be tested by comparing structural (or, syntactic) priming in young and older adults, investigating key features of the persistence and generalizability of learned (re-activated) sentence structures. Testing will be conducted using an online app we have already developed. For a representative paper on the theoretical background of the project, please see:

<https://psyarxiv.com/9gdqr/>

Essential skills: This studentship is most suited for a researcher with an MSc degree in psychology, though we will consider equivalent or related degrees. We are looking for someone with research experience (i.e. collecting and/or analysing data), a strong background knowledge on statistics, and a background in experimental psychology. Strong organisation and time-management skills, a positive problem-solving attitude, and strong teamwork skills are also important.

Desired skills: We would prefer candidates with some experience specifically with statistical analyses (preferably mixed models) in R, and/or experience with programming. These are skills that will be required to complete the PhD. However, we will also consider applicants who do not yet have these skills but are highly motivated to learn them during the project.

Funding: Funding is available from The Leverhulme Trust, to cover University of Birmingham PhD fees at £4500 per year (i.e. fees for Home/UK students only) for 3 years, as well as a stipend at the standard rate of £15,609 per year for 3 years.

To let us know you are interested, please email k.segaert@bham.ac.uk to send in: a cover letter, CV (including the names of two referees), and a piece of writing (e.g. your dissertation or a statement on your research interests).

For more information-Dr. Katrien Segaert: k.segaert@bham.ac.uk, Dr. Evelien Heyselaar: evelien.heijselaar@ru.nl, and Prof. Linda Wheeldon: linda.r.wheeldon@uia.no