TITLE: ADJECTIVAL INTENSIFICATION IN ENGLISH (AND/OR ANOTHER WEST GERMANIC LANGUAGE)

PROJECT REFERENCE: VanOlmenTRINITY

SUPERVISOR(S): Dr Daniel Van Olmen

DATE(S): Project will run in Term 2.

JOB DESCRIPTION: This project is part of a comparative study of adjectival intensification (e.g. by the adverb really in really interesting) in West Germanic (i.e. English, German, Dutch and Afrikaans). It aims to examine whether:

- speakers of these languages intensify adjectives to the same extent;
- they all tend to amplify (e.g. very exciting) rather than downtone (e.g. fairly exciting);
- in line with a more general hypothesis about grammatical differences in West Germanic, English – as well as Afrikaans – uses more “analytic” strategies (e.g. adverbs like very and fairly but also constructions like as dry as a bone) and German – and, to a lesser extent, Dutch – more “synthetic” ones (e.g. compounds as in Dutch straatarm ‘really poor’ (literally ‘street-poor’) and affixes as in urgemütlich ‘really cozy’ (literally ‘primal-cozy’)).

The present project will focus on English (although another West Germanic language is possible too if the candidate is familiar with it) and the main duties are:

- extract the data from a corpus and filter out any irrelevant instances (e.g. the adjective singular should be excluded because it cannot normally be intensified, as in ?very singular);
- code and analyze the data (e.g. is the adjective intensified or not?; is it amplified or downtoned?; is intensification expressed by an adverb, a compound, an affix, ...?);
- present the results to the supervisor.

PERSON SPECIFICATION: The ideal candidate would have the following characteristics:

- willingness to learn how to extract and code corpus data;
- interest in grammar and semantics;
- enthusiasm for the meticulous analysis of grammatical and semantic details;
- (knowledge of German, Dutch or Afrikaans is NOT required).

NOTES: Full training in the necessary corpus linguistics tools and data analysis will be provided.
TITLE: What makes language(s) easier or harder to learn? Experimental approaches to language learning and cognition

PROJECT REFERENCE: RebuschatMonaghanTRINITY

SUPERVISORS: Professor Patrick Rebuschat and Professor Padraic Monaghan

DATE(S): Project will run in term 2.

JOB DESCRIPTION: We are studying the cognitive processes involved in language learning in children and adults. In doing so, we aim to characterize the learning mechanism(s) underpinning our ability to rapidly learn novel sounds, words and grammar, to explain what makes some of us better at learning new languages than others, and to develop methods of supporting language learning in adults.

This work is conducted collaboratively within the Lancaster Language Learning Lab (4L), which is co-directed by the two supervisors. The lab is a cross-departmental initiative, involving researchers and students from Linguistics and Psychology.

The purpose of our current experiments is to investigate how adult learners acquire the sound system and the morphology of a novel language. We use artificial languages (based on Japanese, Portuguese, German and other natural languages) as learning targets in lab-based experiments. In a typical study, participants are first trained on an artificial language, then they are tested to determine what they have learned. We find that adult learners can rapidly acquire words and grammar (without intending to and without awareness of what learned) by unconsciously tracking information across multiple learning trials, a process called “cross-situational statistical learning.”

The following recent papers illustrate our type of research.


As an intern, you would join our research group and receive training in experimental design, data acquisition and analysis. Your main duties would include the following:

- Attending the weekly lab meetings for the duration of the internship
- Setting up the experiment(s), e.g. by creating stimuli, tasks, etc.
- Recruiting and testing participants, either on campus or online
- Coding and analysing data
- Presenting results at lab meetings

PERSON SPECIFICATION: The ideal candidate would have the following characteristics:

- Interest in joining a cross-disciplinary research group, involving researchers and students from Linguistics and Psychology
- Interest in learning how to run psycholinguistic experiments
- Ability to recruit and test participants in a timely and efficient manner
- Good overall time-management skills
- A background in psycholinguistics, psychology or cognitive science is desirable but not essential
TITLE: THE DISCOURSES OF MENTAL HEALTH ON TWITTER DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

PROJECT REFERENCE: HardakerTRINITY

SUPERVISOR(S): Dr Claire Hardaker

DATE(S): Project will run in Term Two (2022)

JOB DESCRIPTION: Within the CASS Health research remit, one project is focussed on investigating Twitter discourses around mental health – particularly depression, both before and then during the Covid pandemic. This project aims to better understand how global crises and issues such as lockdown affect mental health. In Phase 1 of this project, we coded and launched a Twitter tool to interact with Twitter’s Research Track API to collect the data we need. Phase 2 will now involve: (1) identifying the ideal keywords from which we can build our Twitter target corpus; (2) retrieving and organising the Twitter data; (3) creating a comparable reference corpus from the year prior to Covid; and (4) undertaking meaningful analyses of the dataset. The successful candidate will help to launch Phase 2 in that you will:

- Learn how to use the Twitter tool to collect small amounts of pilot data
- From this pilot data, begin to synthesise a list of viable and non-viable mental-health-related keywords
- Create (and if there is time, start to undertake) an organised corpus collection regime
- Present ongoing results to supervisor

PERSON SPECIFICATION: The ideal candidate would have the following characteristics:
- Strong interest in Twitter and/or mental health
- Strong interest in corpus linguistics and working with large dataset
- Willing to learn to use new tools and solve problems
- Excellent organisational and documenting skills to ensure that all steps taken are properly recorded for future replication