

PhD Position in Experimental Linguistics | Ghent University

We invite applications for a four-year PhD position on a research project funded by the *Research Foundation – Flanders* (FWO) and the *Swiss National Science Foundation* (SNSF). The project is a collaboration between Ghent University, the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Trondheim) and is titled: *‘Do small words make a difference? Investigating the effects of gender-neutral pronouns on mental gender representations and perceptions of text quality in Dutch, French and Norwegian’*.

Project description

Although gender-neutral 3rd person pronouns (3PPs) are increasingly appearing in media discourse, studies of how readers interpret and evaluate them are currently still scarce. This project therefore aims at conducting a series of experimental studies in three languages in which gender-neutral 3PPs have recently been introduced, viz. Dutch, French and Norwegian. We will investigate three possible uses of gender-neutral 3PPs in these three languages: (1) for reference to nonbinary individuals, (2) for generic reference and (3) for specific gender-hiding reference. For all 3 types of usage we will investigate the effects of gender-neutral 3PPs on readers’ mental gender representations and on their perceptions of text quality. In assessing these effects, we will take into account respondents’ familiarity with gender-neutral 3PPs and their attitudes towards nonsexist language and the gender binary. We will also investigate the influence of cueing (i.e. explicitly drawing the reader's attention to the gender-neutral referential strategy in the text). In this way, we will assess the potential of gender-neutral 3PPs in Dutch, French and Norwegian. By comparing three different languages, we will get into view cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences that affect the chances at success of gender-neutral 3PPs. Our ultimate goal is to inform theories on language reform and prescriptivism, and to contribute to an empirical basis for debates on gender-inclusive language use.

This position

This vacancy pertains to the **French language** part of the project. The PhD student working on French will be based at Ghent University and will be responsible for the following tasks:

- the development and execution of the work packages pertaining to French
- conducting a literature review
- designing and conducting experiments with French as the object language
- analyzing the data in light of the research objectives
- presenting results at national and international conferences.
- reporting results in international refereed journals
- participating in regular research meetings with the other project members
- preparing a PhD thesis on the effects of gender-neutral pronouns on mental gender representations and perceptions of text quality in French

The PhD student is expected to do two research stays at the University of Fribourg under the supervision of Pascal Gygax and to collaborate closely with the other project members, in particular with the PhD student working on Dutch and the postdoctoral fellow working on Norwegian.

Profile

Applications are invited from candidates with the following qualifications:

- a master's degree in Linguistics, Multilingual Communication, Psychology or other relevant master's degrees. Final year students who will obtain their master's degree in January 2023 can also apply;
- an outstanding record of undergraduate and Master's level work;
- a curious, enterprising and critical mind;
- excellent analytical skills and a passion for research;
- an interest in and talent for working in the field of experimental linguistics;
- an excellent command of (written and spoken) French; a good command of (written and spoken) English; willingness to learn some basic Dutch
- the ability to present research results at international conferences and to publish in academic journals;
- a willingness and ability to collaborate closely with a team, as well as work independently;
- previous experience in experimental design is considered an asset.

Offer

The PhD student to be appointed on this project will be working under the supervision of Sofie Decock (principal investigator) and Sarah Van Hoof (co-supervisor). In addition, the PhD student will closely collaborate with the other team members of this project: Pascal Gygax (University of Fribourg), Ute Gabriel (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), a PhD student working on Dutch and a postdoctoral fellow working on Norwegian. Funding is available for 4 years. The appointment is initially for the duration of 1 year. The starting date will be March 1 or April 1, depending on the availability of the candidate and that of the PhD student working on Dutch. The initial appointment will be extended given satisfactory achievements. The salary is competitive with international standards.

Application procedure

Applications are to be sent by email to sofie.decock@ugent.be.

Please provide

1. an application letter detailing your motivation and experience as relevant to this job offer (in English or French),
2. your Curriculum Vitae (in English or French),
3. a list of your bachelor's and master's course grades
4. a single-authored piece of academic writing (e.g., student paper or master's thesis)

Closing date for applications: January 15 2023

Interviews with a selection of the candidates will take place between January 19 and January 24 2023. If you are not available in that period, please state that explicitly in your application letter and also mention when you will be available again. The interviews will be held in English.

For more information, please contact Sofie Decock (sofie.decock@ugent.be).