



St John's College
Oxford

Job title	Post-doctoral Research Assistant
Location	St John's College
Grade and salary	Grade 7: £37,694-£46,049 per annum(Plus £1,730 Oxford University Weighting)
Hours	Full time
Contract type	Fixed-term (12 months)
Reporting to	Professor Elizabeth Wonnacott
Vacancy reference	1002

Principal Investigator/Supervisor	Elizabeth Wonnacott
Funding Partner	St John's College
Recent publications	Viviani, E., Ramscar, M., & Wonnacott, E. (2026). Go above and beyond: does input variability affect children's ability to learn spatial adpositions in a novel language?. <i>Royal Society Open Science</i> , 13(2), 1-57.
Project Team	Language Learning Lab

Overview of Role

A position is available for a highly motivated Post-Doctoral Research Assistant to work on a research project at the University of Oxford. The project is led by Professor Elizabeth Wonnacott.

The project investigates how AI-powered tools can be used to optimise foreign language learning. As learners increasingly turn to such pools, there is an urgent need to understand not simply whether these technologies are effective, but how they can be designed to maximise learning. This project brings together insights from cognitive science, psycholinguistics and AI to investigate how the structure of language input influences vocabulary learning.

The focus of this initial project is on adult learners of Mandarin Chinese. Using a bespoke AI-powered language learning platform, we will investigate how different types of linguistic input – ranging from decontextualised vocabulary practice to exposure in diverse sentence contexts – affect vocabulary learning, retention and the ability to use words flexibly in new situations. The project will also develop novel computational methods using large language models (LLMs) to generate, control and quantify language input, enabling a level of experimental precision not previously possible in this area.

The successful applicant will contribute to both the computational and experimental aspects of the project. They will help develop AI-assisted methods for creating experimental materials, design and run behavioural studies with language learners, analyse learning data, and contribute to publications and dissemination. The project offers an exciting opportunity to work at the intersection of language acquisition, cognitive science and artificial intelligence within a collaborative research environment committed to open science.

The project is funded by St John's College and the appointee will be a member of the College. The post is for 12 months with a proposed start date of 1st October 2026 or soon after.

Main Duties and Responsibilities

1. Work collaboratively with the Principal Investigator and other members of the research team.
2. Bring research expertise in language learning, language processing, corpus analysis and LLMs.
3. Develop and implement computational pipelines for AI-assisted stimulus generation, validation and analysis, working with large language models and other natural language processing tools.
4. Set up and run behavioural studies with adult learners of Mandarin Chinese using an AI-powered language learning platform.
5. Analyse complex behavioural and computational data, including use of mixed effect models and Bayes Factors in R.
6. Prepare reports, reviews, publications and presentations detailing findings.
7. A commitment to open science, including preregistration, sharing of materials, data and reproducible analyses scripts
8. Contribute to the day-to-day supervision of students and project interns.
9. Assist with general administration within the research group.

The selected candidate will be required to present documentation demonstrating the Right to Work in the UK.

Selection criteria

1. A PhD (or a PhD close to completion) in Experimental Psychology, Linguistics, Cognitive Science or a closely related discipline, with a strong focus on psycholinguistics.
2. Native-speaker proficiency (or equivalent) in Mandarin Chinese.
3. Demonstrated experience conducting corpus analyses of Mandarin Chinese.
4. Demonstrated experience designing, programming and conducting psycholinguistic experiments investigating language production and/or comprehension.

5. Demonstrated experience working with large language models (LLMs) and modern natural language processing techniques, particularly embedding models and their application to language research.
6. Excellent statistical, programming and data-handling skills, including expertise in mixed-effects modelling and Bayesian data analysis in R.
7. A strong publication and dissemination record, commensurate with career stage and opportunity.
8. A commitment to open science and reproducible research practices.
9. Excellent communication, organisational, problem-solving and decision-making skills

Terms and Conditions

Salary: Appointment will be made on Grade 7 of the University's pay scale, currently starting at £37,694 per annum.

Place of work: The post holder will be provided with a desk in a shared office within the college. The arrangement may be hot-desking, subject to availability.

Hours of work: Normal office hours are 37 hours per week. The post-holder will be expected to work such hours as are reasonably required to carry out their duties to the satisfaction of the Principal Investigator.

Holidays: Annual entitlement is 38 days inclusive of 8 Bank Holidays (pro rata for part time staff) and is to be taken by agreement with the Principal Investigator. The holiday year runs from 1 January to 31 December.

Pension: The post holder will be entitled to join the Universities Superannuation Pension Scheme.

Probationary and Notice Periods: The appointment is subject to satisfactory completion of a three-month probationary period, during which time the notice period will be one week on either side. Once the appointment has been confirmed, the notice period on either side is one month.

Meals: The post holder is entitled to free lunch in Hall on days when working at the College site and some meals in the SCR during term time.

Application Procedure

If you consider that you meet the selection criteria, please send your application (as a single pdf) containing a covering letter explaining your suitability for the post and a full CV with your complete education and employment history by email to vacancies@sjc.ox.ac.uk. Please include the name and contact details of three academic referees who are willing to be contacted, should you be shortlisted for the post. Please indicate whether you have Right to Work in the UK, and whether this is subject to any visa stipulations.

Your application should arrive no later than **22nd August 2026 12 noon**. We anticipate that interviews will be held within the following two weeks.

If your application is successful, your appointment will be subject (i) to the provision of an original document, which indicates your right to work in the UK, (ii) the completion of the initial 3-month probation period.

Equal Opportunities Statement

St John's College is committed to providing equality of opportunity and avoiding unlawful discrimination. The policy and practice of the College require that all staff are afforded equal opportunities within employment and that entry into employment with the College and progression within employment will be determined only by personal merit and the application of criteria which are related to the duties of each particular post and the relevant salary structure. In all cases the ability to perform the job will be the primary consideration. Subject to statutory provisions, no applicant or member of staff will be treated less favourably than another because of his or her sex, marital status, sexual orientation, racial group, age or disability.

Data Protection

All data supplied by candidates will be used only for the purpose of determining their suitability for the post and will be held in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the College's Data Protection Policy and recruitment monitoring process.

About St John's College

St John's College is one of the larger colleges within the University of Oxford. Founded in 1555 by Sir Thomas White, the College is a long-established member of the thirty-eight colleges of Oxford University. Like all colleges, it is an independent, self-governing establishment, which functions both as an academic institution and as a social and residential centre for its members. The College has around 650 students and 100 Fellows. For further information about the College, please visit our website at www.sjc.ox.ac.uk.

About the University of Oxford

Welcome to the University of Oxford. We aim to lead the world in research and education for the benefit of society both in the UK and globally. Oxford's researchers engage with academic, commercial and cultural partners across the world to stimulate high-quality research and enable innovation through a broad range of social, policy and economic impacts.