



To: UCITE

From: Todd Oakley

Re: Nord Grant Application

Date: 13 June 2013

COGS 314/413: Special Topics in Cognitive Linguistics.

Spring 2014: *Autism, Intersubjectivity & Language*

Grant period: 1 January 2014 – 31 December 2015

I seek funding to support the primary research to be conducted in an upper-level course for undergraduate cognitive science majors and graduate students in cognitive linguistics. This course explores discourse and interaction from a cognitive linguistic perspective, with special project emphasis on language and interaction within high-functioning, verbal autistic (ASD) populations. The overarching purpose of the course is to give students first-hand research experience in the process of recording, transcribing, and analyzing interview data between autists and their caretakers as they view short video clips. Below is a brief intellectual rationale for the approach taken in the course, followed by a rationale and proposed budget.

Background & Rationale

Cognitive linguistics (CL) is a paradigm of language study that seeks to understand language structure, acquisition, and use as a function of embodied conceptualization. This means that it seeks to describe and explain language as a symbolic activity involving general cognitive processes, such as perception, attention, memory, categorization, framing and sensory-motor activities. Another burgeoning area of interest among cognitive linguists is social-cognition, gesture, and interaction. In each of these endeavors, the goal is to explain as much about language without having to posit autonomous, language-specific faculties or modules.

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by restrictive and repetitive behavior, as well as impaired social and communicative interactions. While much research into the linguistic deficits displayed by ASD subject, much of this work is conducted in clinical and educational settings, much of it adopts a formalist, words & rules, approach to language acquisition, structure, and use.

What is more, most ASD subjects are children. Little research has been conducted on the burgeoning adult population. A research program that combines Cognitive Linguistics with ASD research has yet to be developed. Students in this course would therefore be in on the “ground floor” of a new field of research.

Students in the course will gather and code spoken discourse by adult members of the ASD community according to a standard protocol developed by the instructor (IRB proposal in process). We will then analyze the data according to the methods and tools in CL. Successful graduates of this seminar will gain experience transcribing spoken language, while learning how to apply CL methods to the study of discourse and interaction. Successful graduates will also gain experience and expertise in relating Autism research to theories of language and discourse. The aim will be to collect interviews from approximately 10-15 ASD participants and their caretakers, and approximately 2-5 normally developed adults and normally developing children. The interviews will be video recorded using three cameras and are to take place the Mind and Language Lab on the 6th floor of Crawford Hall.

All enrolled students will have the status of Co-Investigators on the project.¹ This means that each Co-In will be eligible to serve as co-authors on future articles, chapters, conference presentations, and grant applications.

Respectfully Submitted,

Todd Oakley

Respectfully Endorsed,

William Deal,
Acting Chair of Cognitive Science

¹ The first assignment is for each student to receive certification by the CASE Social/Behavioral Science IRB Advisory Board.