

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERACTION

As Co-ordinator Mila Vulchanova and Steering Board member Friederike Voss explain, the LanPercept project is developing the researchers of the future on language and perception

The LanPercept Marie Curie network is a unique interdisciplinary collaborative initiative funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme. After a successful kick-off event in March 2013 hosted by the co-ordinating institution NTNU in Trondheim, the network saw a first training school at Aston University (Birmingham) and a first scientific conference on language and perception in developmental deficits in Seville. The network provides a unique approach to understanding the interaction between two central cognitive systems: language and perception. Traditionally these systems have been studied independently, with training provided from a single discipline perspective. The LanPercept training concept offers an interdisciplinary approach to the examination of the bidirectional relationships between language and perception for the first time, bridging the translational gap between basic and applied research, both in clinical settings and in industry. Our main aim is to produce a new generation of integrative language and perception scientists with the technological, theoretical, and entrepreneurial skills necessary to make breakthroughs in the understanding of language-perception interactions and associated applications.

Novel constellations

The LanPercept network builds on the synergy across traditional disciplines, such as psychology, linguistics, cognitive science, clinical and rehabilitational work, as well as technology development in the private sector. The senior researchers involved all have strong profiles in one of these disciplines and contribute their expert knowledge to the training and research and development component. During a successful early stage researcher recruitment process, which attracted significant interest in the scientific community, the network hired young scientists with equally varied academic profiles ranging from language acquisition research, linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics to neurorehabilitation and neuroscience. For the early stage fellows this has been a valuable and exciting year of coming to grips with interdisciplinary perspectives in the field.

We asked them what being part of the LanPercept network has meant for them. Here are their voices:

Harmen Gudde, University of East Anglia, UK

"LanPercept is a great opportunity for me because there is a major focus on personal development in the project. Therefore I am not only doing a PhD in my subject of interest, but I have also extended possibilities to develop myself as a researcher.

The network combines authorities in different fields of psychology and linguistics in 11 different projects. This provides multiple perspectives, so that you don't only see the specific area you are researching yourself, but you also see the development of other projects. This all prevents tunnel vision and enhances development."

Alba Rodriguez, Bielefeld University (UNIBI), Germany

"It is one of the greatest opportunities ever given to me. Linguistics has become an important aspect of my life since I started university, but the experimental part was somehow hidden to me until very recently. Now I know that language is a valuable device on its own, but it goes hand in hand with many aspects of perception. The LanPercept programme provides us with access to invaluable knowledge and tools to develop our abilities. It further contributes to our personal growth, through its interdisciplinary and international nature. I don't think I could ask for anything else."

Eliana Mastrantuono, University of Seville, Spain

"I am really proud to be part of this project that offers the opportunity to develop research skills, being in contact with experienced investigators from leading institutions."

Anna Wrega, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands

"I am very excited to be part of the LanPercept programme, as the aim of the project is to examine the interaction between visual information and language comprehension across the life span within typical and atypical populations. It is a novel and unique approach, which will definitely add to the current understanding of the visuo-linguistic dynamics. I feel proud to be a part of such cutting-edge research."

Dietha Koster, University of Southern Denmark

"This is a great opportunity to do incredibly interesting research with possibilities to learn from and collaborate with members from a wonderfully internationally orientated group of researchers."

Martina Micai, University of Seville, Spain

"To be part of the LanPercept programme for me means 'sharing'. I feel part of a team and it is very important to be confident about my academic learning. I can share opinions and ideas with people who are highly competent in the field and with students who are learning about my own field of research."

Sobh Chahboun, NTNU, Norway

"This network is made up of excellent professionals who can teach us many interesting and useful tools and strategies and contribute in our educational and academic training to reach what



every researcher aims at: being a researcher that makes a difference.

“The international nature of the network is also something I consider very positive in the study of language and perception. I think that social differences and language itself influence perception

as well, and having different projects in different countries will allow us to compare the results we obtain and probably consider language differences as a variable in research in general.”

Yoanna Vergilova, Universität des Saarlandes (USAAR), Germany

“To me the programme is a great start of a (hopefully) future career in science. But LanPercept is not only a stepping stone; it’s also a network of great people, opening so many doors to exciting ideas and places. I consider myself extremely lucky to be a part of it.”

Friederike Voss, NTNU, Norway

“This is a great opportunity to work with and learn from very qualified people in my area of research. Furthermore, I will broaden my horizon and receive additional knowledge from other fields that are closely linked to mine. Since the LanPercept network is internationally orientated, I have the opportunity to get to know researchers from all over Europe with whom I will collaborate and exchange ideas – a chance to receive an excellent education and to have the opportunity to enhance my skills in many ways.”

Dorota Wohlrapp, Aston University, UK

“Being accepted to a programme like LanPercept is an amazing opportunity and we are all very lucky to be part of it. We not only extend our knowledge and expertise in the field, and work on our future careers, but also get the chance to attend interesting workshops and conferences, and meet fascinating students and researchers from all over Europe. I am also very happy to be able to live in a multicultural and vibrant city like Birmingham and to be based at Aston University, which has excellent research facilities and remarkable people working there.”

Future opportunities for the young researchers

The main goal of the LanPercept network is to provide the affiliated early stage scientists with better academic, as well as technical and generic skills and to improve their chances of a successful career not only in academia, but also in the private sector.

We asked them what they think the future holds for them in respect of their careers.

Anna Wrega, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands

“Joining the LanPercept programme gave me an opportunity to collaborate with researchers from various fields and industrial partners at a very early stage of my research career. This means that I will gain extensive research experience and knowledge in working on projects investigating interactions between major cognitive systems (visual perception and language in this case).”

Dorota Wohlrapp, Aston University, UK

“We get many training opportunities for professional development, while also gaining experiences in working in a multidisciplinary environment and presenting our work to different audiences, thus making us attractive candidates for future employers.

“I plan to apply for a postdoctoral position after the PhD and continue my research and hopefully contribute more important findings to the discipline. I also hope that I will have the opportunity to use my skills and knowledge and help people with autism not only through my contribution to theoretical knowledge but also in practice when working with them.”

Dietha Koster, University of Southern Denmark

“The training, conferences and support provided by the LanPercept network over the next three years will shape us as internationally orientated researchers with broad knowledge and establish a firm basis for doing quality research in the future.”

Alba Rodriguez, Bielefeld University (UNIBI), Germany

“It is pretty early to be able to see what it all leads us to, but I hope I can find challenges all the way. Research and academia need to be handled with patience, wisdom and responsibility. My aim at this point is to acquire and retain those virtues.”

Friederike Voss, NTNU, Norway

“I hope to be able to continue my research career in a way that combines high quality research and teaching. I think the LanPercept network provides an excellent basis for this since I will receive training in various interdisciplinary skills.”

Ioanna Markostamou, University of East Anglia, UK

“Being part of the LanPercept network is an amazing opportunity for fulfilling my future goals in pursuing a career in research by providing me with the foundations to become an independent researcher.”



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