



Project title: Morphology and reading comprehension development

June 2014

Dear Parent,

We are writing to you because your child's school has agreed to help out with a research study that we are running, funded by the *Economic and Social Research Council*. The study concerns morphological awareness and reading comprehension development and will provide important information about how these skills are related and the factors that support the development of good reading comprehension skills.

Background

Morphemes are the smallest meaning units within (spoken) words, e.g., 'un' is a morpheme that when added to a base word indicates 'not', as in 'unhappy'. An understanding of morphemes is critical for understanding complex multi-morphemic words such as 'unhappy', 'happier', 'unhappiness', and how they are related. Our research will build on evidence that an understanding of morphemes is related to a child's reading comprehension level.

What assessments will your child be asked to complete?

We will be working with children in Year 2 and Year 5. Each child will be asked to complete the following assessments administered to children in their classroom:

Vocabulary knowledge. This is a 20-minute assessment of understanding of spoken words. Children work through a booklet. For each word, the assessor says it aloud and the child has to decide which of four pictures matches the word.

Nonverbal reasoning. This is a 20-minute assessment of reasoning ability. Children work through a booklet and, for each item, have to decide which pattern is the best continuation for a sequence of patterns.

Morphological awareness. These are three 5 to 10-minute assessments of morphological knowledge. In one task, the child will be asked to generate new compound words, e.g., "There is one type of oil made using peanuts; we call it peanut oil. What would be the best name for a type of oil made from mushrooms? Mushroom oil or Oil mushroom."

Each participating child will also asked to complete the following assessments administered to children individually outside of the classroom:

Reading ability. This is a 20-minute session in which children will read a list of words (to assess word reading ability). They will also read two stories and answer questions about each one (to assess reading comprehension).

Morphological awareness and phonological awareness. These are two 15-minute sessions. Each task is presented aurally to the child. In the phonological awareness task, the child will be asked to delete a sound from the beginning or end of a spoken word, e.g., *“What’s dream without the ‘ruh’ sound at the start?”* To assess morphological knowledge, we will use a range of tasks. In one task, the child will be asked to complete a sentence with appropriate inflection on a verb, e.g., *“My sister always walks to school. Yesterday she ----- to school.”*

These sessions are timetabled to suit the individual classroom teacher to minimise disruption to the regular curriculum and typically involve thinking about and using language.

If you give permission for your child to take part in this work, please complete and return the consent sheet that accompanies this letter.

What will happen to the results?

If your child participates in this work, his/her responses will be completely confidential: we cannot release any individual child’s scores. Our interest is in comparisons between age groups, not between individual children. You will receive a summary of the main study findings (through the school) and you will also be invited to a workshop of our findings, once the study is complete. You may also contact us by email or phone for additional information about our findings.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the principal investigator: Prof. Kate Cain, Email: k.cain@lancaster.ac.uk, Tel. (0)1524 593990

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research, please contact:
Prof. Charlie Lewis (Head of Department), Email: c.lewis@lancaster.ac.uk. Tel. (0)1524 593697

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

Prof Kate Cain
Professor of Language and Literacy

Ms Emma James & Dr Calum Hartley, Research Associates