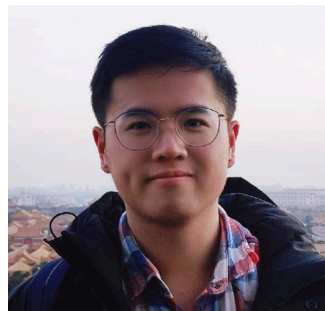


Research Internships in Times of a Global Pandemic

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In this special edition of intern-extern, three students tell their experience doing an internship during the global pandemic. From left to right: Lianne Stolte, Lieke Hendriks, Zhou Yang

Every November, the second year students of the Research Master Linguistics start their individual research internships. For many, the research internship is an exciting time of exploring individual research interests, doing practical research, joining a research group, and often leaving Utrecht for fresh perspectives and once-in-a-lifetime learning experiences. This section of LingUU usually portrays one particularly interesting internship experience, often of a student who went abroad. As the global Covid-19 pandemic dragged on into the fall, the 2019-21 cohort had to adjust to the situation. Some students travelled back to their home countries, others started internships in new cities that they would not set foot in for the entirety of their internship, and most were not able to meet their supervisors in person even once. How did the pandemic affect the students' internship plans? What are the difficulties of doing an internship from home? And what can the next cohort learn from this cohort's experiences? The Intern Extern section of this issue of LingUU will be dedicated to capturing what it was like to do a research internship in times of a global pandemic.

Lianne Stolte did her internship at the UU Coloring Book project.

I explored how a Dutch vocabulary assessment tool – called KleurenSchat – could be adapted to make it fit well for children who learn Dutch as their second language. To this end, I took interviews with professionals who work in newcomer

education. I compared the qualitative data from the interviews to the theoretical background of early second language learning. Because of the pandemic, I did everything from home: interviews and other meetings took place via MS Teams. The interviews gave me the opportunity to still meet new people, even in the midst of a lockdown. I met my supervisors once in real life (“we never knew you were this tall!”), which was nice, but not at all necessary for solid cooperation. Online communication with my supervisors worked out perfectly fine for me. If you are planning to do an internship during the pandemic, I would recommend you to schedule regular meetings with other people, whether it’s with your supervisors, participants, or peer students. And try to slip in a little coffee machine chit-chat, even (especially!) online.

Lieke Hendriks was an intern at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam for three months.

Despite never actually getting to visit the institute and doing my entire internship online, I can safely say that I very much enjoyed being an intern and that I got as much out of it as possible. I had weekly meetings with my supervisors, I attended the meetings organized by the Meertens Institute, and there were meetings with other researchers that either focused on linguistic topics or on general social contact. Since online meetings do limit the possibility of getting to know people personally, it would of course have been much more fun to have all of these meetings face-to-face.

During my internship, my main task was to gather data on gender marking on adnominal modifiers in Brabantian dialects. Just like all of the meetings, data gathering took place online. This was not the original plan, as I initially had planned to interview participants in their own homes. The online format thus placed a burden on the original plan by forcing me to conduct the interviews via Microsoft Teams. In the end, everything luckily turned out to be less difficult than it seemed to be in the first place.

The one thing that really helped me through the internship and its online format was social contact. I often spoke with my supervisors and shared my feelings with them. They were able to reassure me whenever I needed it, because I did not keep my frustrations to myself. So, if I may give one piece of advice to future interns, whether or not your internship is online, I would say that you should make sure to always talk to your supervisors or someone else about everything: the good things, but especially the hard things.

Zhou Yang had a supervisor at UiL-OTS, but travelled back to China

My internship was to examine how the magnitude of the McGurk effect differs across languages. Due to the pandemic, I could not conduct experiments in the UiL-OTS laboratory and instead I tried to design web-based experiments. My supervisor later told me that it was fine to just write a research proposal for my project, which was a big stress relief, because designing McGurk experiments online is

extremely labouring. It also gave me the opportunity to come back to China, my home, as it meant that I could do my internship remotely. I changed my plan from doing empirical research to a theoretical approach, dividing my research project into three stages: 1) criticize previous theories and apply my current proposal to previous empirical findings (term paper), 2) write a research proposal on the adult study of cross-linguistic differences of the McGurk effect (internship), 3) synthesize the work done in term paper and internship and incorporate the development trajectories of audio-visual speech perception (master thesis). I was highly independent with my internship and I consulted my supervisor only when I encountered some difficulties or when I finished some turning-point work. Unlike other internships where interns are assigned jobs and deadlines regularly in an existing project, my supervisor required me to come up with my own research topic and gave me total freedom to work at my own pace. Although coming up with a well-planned research topic is a big challenge that involved a lot of self-criticism, frustration and more reading, I grew a lot from it. To overcome such difficulties, my advice is to: 1) do some exercise, 2) communicate with friends, 3) drink water, and 4) bear in mind that your health - both mental and physical - must always be your first priority.

The second part of our - hopefully limited - internships in times of a global pandemic series will be published in the next issue of LingUU in November 2021. ■