Literacy Development in Children with English as an Additional Language and How It Can Be Supported in Primary School Years 4 to 6.
Supervisor: Dr Silke Fricke, Human Communication Sciences

Background to the Proposal
A large and growing number of children learn English as an Additional Language (EAL) and attend UK primary schools. These children face the dual challenge of reaching proficiency in spoken English while grasping the curriculum and developing their written language skills in English. Research indicates that children with EAL can develop cognitive skills such as rapid automatized naming and phonological awareness as well as word level reading skills comparable to their monolingual peers. English vocabulary knowledge, language as well as reading comprehension however have been repeatedly identified as areas of difficulty for children with EAL throughout the school years. Furthermore, national test statistics suggest that a lower percentage of children with EAL perform at the expected levels of educational attainment compared to children for whom English is the first language (L1). Although word reading skills and language comprehension have been confirmed as underlying processes for reading comprehension in monolingual children and children with EAL, relatively few studies have evaluated support programmes targeting vocabulary, language and reading comprehension for children with EAL. Furthermore, given that children with EAL form a population with considerable variance in background and socio-cultural factors such as amount of exposure to the L1 and English, home literacy conditions and Social Economic Status (SES), it has been suggested that future research should consider cognitive as well as socio-cultural factors.

The PhD Project
This proposal is therefore for a PhD study to investigate the cognitive, language and literacy skills of children learning EAL relative to their monolingual peers. It builds on previous funded research by extending the age range tested to children in Year 4 to Year 6 when they are 8-11 years old (with one testing point per year). Simultaneously, the study will examine other potentially influential background variables on these skills such as SES, length of residence in the UK, use of L1 and English. In addition to this longitudinal aspect, the study includes developing an intervention programme targeting oral language skills and reading comprehension in children with EAL based on our growing understanding of the components of comprehension and the development of comprehension skills. This part of the proposed project includes identifying a small group of 10-15 children with EAL and considerable reading comprehension difficulties from the study sample, monitoring their progress in cognitive, language and literacy skills over the first term in Year 5 receiving the regular classroom instruction, and implementing the developed support programme in the second term of Year 5. A maintenance test in Year 6 will allow evaluating if any progress made as result of the intervention is maintained.

Aims
1. To explore the developmental progression of cognitive, language and literacy skills in children learning EAL and their monolingual peers
2. To investigate the relationship between the developmental progression of these skills and other background and socio-cultural factors
3. To evaluate a support programme for children who learn EAL and show poor reading comprehension skills towards the end of primary school.

**Impact**
This PhD study will further advance our understanding of literacy development in children with EAL in comparison to their monolingual peers and the roles that linguistic and socio-cultural factors play in this development. Since reading comprehension is a central component of literacy instruction already in primary school, the findings from the intervention part of the study will contribute to recommendations for how it might be possible to support children with EAL in acquiring oral language proficiency and reading comprehension skills (leading to higher educational attainment) before leaving primary school.

**PhD candidates**
The PhD is suited to candidates with an academic background in Speech and Language Therapy, Psychology, Applied Linguistics, or Education. The following would be an advantage: a) knowledge of the development and disorders of language and literacy in bilingual children, b) knowledge of interventions for oral language and literacy, c) experience of working with children, d) experience of conducting assessments with children in school settings. The successful candidate would need to travel regularly to participating primary schools in the Sheffield area for data collection purposes.