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Jena, 12. August 2025

Invitation letter for the PRIME 2025/26-Fellowship for Dr. Christine Nussbaum

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am delighted to provide an invitation letter for Christine Nussbaum to accompany her application for the DAAD PRIME Postdoctoral Fellowship entitled “Hey Siri, let’s talk for real – *Variability and flexibility in the perception of synthetic voices*”.

Support provided by the host institution:

If the project receives funding, my department would be the primary host, with me being the scientific mentor. Furthermore, I anticipate that my department can provide co-funding for compensation of participants. As Dr. Nussbaum is already part of my department, she would keep her office including desk and technical equipment, access to all laboratory facilities, her university E-Mail address and access to all other internal resources of the Friedrich Schiller University Jena. At Jena we are equipped with all necessary infrastructure (e.g., voice and speaker recording facilities, extensive software, several EEG laboratories) for successful execution of empirical work, and we are already in regular and productive exchange with the host institution in London.

Potential of the research proposal:

The proposed set of studies are not only of high relevance to the field, they are also theoretically well-motivated, empirically sound and well-designed. Furthermore, they fit very well into the overarching research agenda that Christine Nussbaum is pursuing in the context of her planned habilitation thesis: the systematic understanding of the perception of naturalness in voices – a topic for which she just published a conceptual review in a high-impact journal (see below). I therefore expect this work to be of great impact, both within academia and beyond – for instance, this research directly informs fast-growing applied fields such as synthetic voice design. Having worked in the UK myself for many years, I am fully convinced that a research stay at the *UCL Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience* in London is an



ideal next step for Dr. Nussbaum's career development. In particular, the department of Prof. Carolyn McGettigan is an excellent choice as host, as they direct one of the world's leading research groups in the field of voice research. Overall, I express my strong and unreserved support for the proposed research project.

Potential of the candidate:

Dr. Nussbaum is an outstanding young scientist and has been an invaluable member of my department for several years already. She started her doctorate in my department at the beginning of 2019 and completed *summa cum laude* in summer 2023. She has just been awarded the 3rd prize of the Germany-wide Dissertation competition by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie* (DGPs), which puts her on the very top of German early career researchers in general psychology. She already has an outstanding list of publications and has successfully acquired third-party funding in her first few months as a postdoc. Further, she has been an invited speaker at several symposia at international conferences such as EPS (2023) or SPR (2022, 2024). As part of the EU-funded network 'Voice Communication Sciences' (VoCS), she will soon be supervising her first doctoral project as co-PI. In addition to her research activities, Christine Nussbaum is also involved in university teaching, the coordination of administrative tasks in my department and science communication performing far beyond expectations. One of Dr. Nussbaum's many strengths is her constant striving to acquire new skills and continually broaden her scientific horizons.

Most importantly, Mrs. Nussbaum is an independent and critical thinker. This is primarily evidenced by her habilitation topic "Naturalness in voices", which she has explicitly chosen on her own, and pursued with great dedication ever since, despite receiving some initial skepticism and critical feedback from myself about the topic's potential (which only prompted her to develop and sharpen her ideas for the next round). This persistence and refinement has culminated in this year's publication of a conceptual review on the topic of 'Understanding Voice Naturalness' in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, one of the most competitive and influential outlets in our field. In a nutshell, Dr. Nussbaum lays the conceptual foundation for her empirical work, which she also plans to pursue in the PRIME fellowship. By now, as judging from conferences and discussions with internationally leading researchers, I believe she fully convinced the field of the tremendous importance of the topic.

Long-term career perspectives:

Dr. Nussbaum is an essential member of my department and after the completion of the PRIME fellowship, she plans to return to her current research position to complete a habilitation thesis. She currently holds several crucial roles in my department: principal investigator of our high-resolution EEG-lab, co-supervisor of a PhD project on the topic "Neurocognitive processing of voice naturalness in human



and synthetic voices", coordinator of the Jena *Voice Research Unit*, and main organizer of the upcoming conference VoicelD (September 2-4, 2026). Furthermore, she is a valued member of the international voice research network and has recently been appointed to the executive board of the newly founded *Voice Communication Sciences Association* (VoCSA). These roles can be paused or covered by other team members during the PRIME Fellowship to allow Mrs Nussbaum to fully focus on this project, but I am delighted that she has agreed to take most of them back on upon her return.

With her portfolio, especially when complemented by successful work with the world-famous voice research team in London, Christine Nussbaum's prospects for a successful academic career in Germany and beyond are excellent, and I am dedicated to supporting her progress where I can. Should you have additional questions about the candidate or this research proposal, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Schweinberger'.

Prof. Dr. Stefan R. Schweinberger