Juryrapport Anéla/VIOT-scriptieprijs 2015

This year the jury for the Anéla/VIOT-thesis award received only a limited number of theses. All of these, however, were of very high quality. The jury was impressed by the originality of the subjects, the theoretical embeddings that were presented, the methods that were applied, the diligence in data collection, and the transparancy of the final reports.

After having read the six theses that were submitted, a shortlist of three theses was made. In a second round, these three theses were carefully studied again.

These are the three nominees, in alphabetical order of family names:

1. Daria Agata Boruta (Utrecht University; supervisors Emmeline Besamusca and Jan ten Thije)

Born and raised in Poland, Daria Boruta studied Dutch Linguistics and Literature in Poznan and in Leiden, and then went to Utrecht for the Master programme International Communication. In her thesis, entitled ‘En toch is Polen niet verloren..’ and written in outstanding Dutch, Daria reports on her analysis of image formation of Poland in the Netherlands - not from a traditional historical or literary perspective, but from a linguistic point of view. The focus of her study was on the representation in Dutch newspapers of two important Polish politicians from different decades: Walesa and Tusk. Not only does this thesis present a clear and convincing picture of the changes that have taken place in the Dutch image formation of Poland, Daria’s work also takes this type of research a step further by advancing the available linguistic analytical framework.

1. Anna Pochynok (University of Groningen; supervisors Merel Keijzer and Marjolijn Verspoor)

The study by Anna Pochynok, born and raised in Ukraine, focuses on Dutch primary education, more specifically on settings where efforts are undertaken to teach English to children in grade 1, aged 4 and 5. Central question in this thesis is if these childrens’ skills can improve when taught English only 60 minutes per week - but with the help of specific methods of storytelling and finger play. Anna herself developed six lessons based on these methods and implemented the children’s training. The results she reports are astonishing. Within two weeks, there was a radical improvement in both receptive and productive skills, and, four weeks after the end of the intervention programme, the childrens’ skills had improved even slightly more. Evidently, these outcomes are not only valuable from an academic point of view; they may also have an important impact on the way English is taught in Dutch kindergartens.

1. Elianne de Ruiter (VU University; supervisors Monique Lamers and Kasper Kok)

In a comparative study, Elianne de Ruiter concentrated on the perception of phonological contrasts that exist in one language but not in another. More specifically, Elianne de Ruiter wanted to find out if the categorical perception of the typical Spanish contrast between /fa/ - /θa/ would be different in Spanish mother tongue speakers versus in Dutch mother tongue speakers without any proficiency in Spanish. The advanced methods that Elianne de Ruiter used, including the building of a phonetic ten-step continuum from /fa/ to /θa/ and the use of eye movement registration, plus the careful analysis of her data revealed that even when differences between phonemes are very small, categorical perception on a continuum can be measured. This applies both to speakers of a language in which there is a phonological contrast between such phonemes, and also – be it in a different way - to speakers of another language where no such phonological contrast exists.

After careful consideration of these three excellent theses, the jury unanimously decided to rank one of these theses as first.. The winning thesis is very well written, includes an extensive literature study and a very competent, detailed and well-thought out method and analysis. Her work is an inspiring example of high quality research bridging applied linguistics and psycholinguistics. We congratulate Elianne de Ruiter and her supervisors with the results of her study and with the Anéla/VIOT award 2015!

The jury for the Anéla/VIOT award 2015 consisted of Hans Rutger Bosker (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics), Tessa van Charldorp (Utrecht University), and Carel Jansen (University of Groningen; chairman). The jury was supported by Guusje Jol (Radboud University Nijmegen).