



### **Jury report VIOT/Anela thesis award 2019**

This jury report for the 2019 VIOT/Anela thesis award is in English for several reasons: one of the nominees does not master Dutch, the vast majority of the excellent theses that reached us this year had been written in English, and this award is targeted at a community of MA students that is increasingly international. As such, we felt it was most appropriate to let this report reflect that.

This year a total of 17 applied linguistics and discourse studies Master theses reached us that had been put forward by thesis supervisors at Dutch, Belgian and - for the first time - also German institutes. The German submissions were all written in Dutch. It was the hard but grateful task of the jury to select a shortlist out of those 17 submitted theses. The jury this year consisted of Chloé Lybaert (Ghent University), Maria Mos (Tilburg University; as the supervisor of last year's winner) and Merel Keijzer (from today's host institution, University of Groningen). The jury was fantastically aided by Guusje Jol as secretary on behalf of Anéla and we would hereby like to gratefully acknowledge her assistance and guidance.

All 17 theses were very deserving of the longlist: they are testaments of the strong applied linguistics and discourse studies onderzoek that takes place at Dutch, German and Belgian institutes and show a promising future for the field with young talent showing off their skills. All theses were carefully read and assessed on the basis of a number of criteria: scientific relevance, methodological rigor, discussion of and embedding in previous work, the discussion of the results within the context of earlier work, originality, social impact, and language use, but we considered the amount of work that the longlisted candidates delivered as set off against the number of thesis credits and whether this was written as part of a one-year regular MA or two-year Research MA degree. Employing these criteria, three theses clearly stood out for us. I would like to present them to you in alphabetical order.

#### **Niklas Frechen**

*Wait, Did I Do That? The Foreign Language Effect and Moral Compensatory Mechanisms in Highly Proficient Late Bilinguals*

Radboud University Nijmegen (supervisor: Susanne Brouwer)

The jury was very much impressed by the originality of the thesis but also the carefully designed method and sheer scale of the study: the thesis replicates the so-called Foreign-Language Effect (FLE) but augments this by an exploration of the extent to which moral decision-making is influenced by previous decisions. In two experiments, highly proficient Dutch-English ( $N=119$ ) and German-English ( $N=68$ ) late bilinguals read two-part moral scenarios in either their L1 or their L2 and made two consecutive (theoretical) choices of harming one person to spare multiple people (utilitarian action) or vice versa (deontological action) within the same narrative. The thesis reflects a level of professionalism that far exceeds what may be expected from students at the end of a one-year regular MA program.

It was a pleasure to read, raises interesting suggestions for follow-up studies and seems ready for publication.

### **John O'Leary**

*A Complexity Analysis of L2 English academic writing*

University of Groningen (supervisor: Rasmus Steinkrauss)

What stands out when reading this thesis is the careful and pleasant writing style and the methodological rigor and insightful justification of methodological choices. This thesis combines tracing the development of linguistic complexity in the writing of three advanced L2 learners and carefully examines what the best method to do so would be. The longitudinal design of the study is impressive: the three learners' writing products over the course of the three years of their BA degree were analyzed on the basis of no fewer than 12 complexity measures. These different measures are discussed and evaluated in detail, which makes the thesis a very useful resource for future research. All of this is done using a Dynamic Systems Theory perspective, a theoretical framework that befits the seemingly erratic developments in the advanced learners' writing. The twofold aim is laudable but at the same time means that the focus is less clear. John O'Leary's thesis is nonetheless of excellent scientific quality.

### **Anouk Scheffer**

*Difficulties in Sounds and Sentences: The relation between phonological and syntactic difficulties of toddlers with developmental language disorder*

Utrecht University (supervisor: Frank Wijnen)

All jury members agreed that this was a very strong thesis with a potentially very important social impact. At the basis of this thesis is the often poorly understood connection between impairments in phonology and syntax in children with a developmental language disorder (DLD). Through a concurrent and longitudinal examination of receptive and expressive phonological and receptive and expressive syntactic abilities of 45 toddlers with DLD, aged between 2;4 and 4;3 (M=3;6), this thesis tries to shed more light on that issue. The findings are important in terms of interventions targeted at toddlers with DLD. The jury did question the non L1 Dutch background of a subset of the toddlers that may have exerted a greater influence than is acknowledged in the thesis. No fewer than four different theories are introduced and then taken to task: to what extent can each of them explain the observed patterns in the toddlers language development? We have no doubt that this study is a valuable contribution to the larger research project of which it was a part and beyond that. The presentation of these three theses should have made clear the quality of each of the studies and the contribution that each and every one of them has made to the field of applied linguistics and discourse studies in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. We would like to wholeheartedly congratulate all three authors on their well-deserved nomination. But we were also unanimous in assigning a winner: we felt one of the theses was publishable almost directly in its current form. The topic, originality and writing style combined all made sure that we were captivated and wanted to continue reading. The winner of the VIOT-Anela thesis award 2019 is **Niklas Frechen**.

Chloé Lybaert (Ghent University)

Maria Mos (Tilburg University; as the supervisor of last year's winner)

Merel Keijzer (University of Groningen)