

Jury report VIOT/Anéla thesis award 2020

I would like to welcome you all to the Thesis Prize Award Ceremony. This year's committee consisted of Gudrun Reijnierse from Radboud University, who unfortunately could not be present today, Hannah De Mulder from Leiden University, who is among us, and my name is Susanne Brouwer from Radboud University. Together we formed the jury for the 2020 VIOT/Anéla thesis award. We were aided by Audrey Rousse-Malpat as secretary on behalf of Anéla and we would hereby like to thank her for her assistance and guidance.

But before we start announcing the current winner of the VIOT/Anéla thesis award, we would like to put the authors of the three nominated theses of last year in the limelight. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak the Juniorendag could not be held last year, and although the previous jury shared a celebratory video with the VIOT/Anéla community, the nominees did not receive a warm applause from an audience. We would therefore like to introduce last year's nominees and the winner once more.

- **John O'Leary** from the University of Groningen, supervised by Rasmus Steinkrauss, wrote his MA thesis entitled "A Complexity Analysis of L2 English academic writing". The jury praised John for his pleasant writing style and methodological rigor.
- **Anouk Scheffer** from Utrecht University, supervised by Frank Wijnen, wrote her MA thesis on the relation between phonological and syntactic difficulties of toddlers with developmental language disorder. The jury thought this was a very strong thesis with very important social impact.
- And finally, **Niklas Frechen**, from the Radboud University, who worked with me on the Foreign Language Effect and moral compensatory mechanisms in highly proficient late bilinguals. The jury praised the topic and its originality and thought that Niklas' thesis was publishable almost directly in its current form, which is why he became the unanimous winner of the 2019 VIOT/Anéla thesis award. Congratulations Niklas! As you know, it was and still is such a pleasure to work with you.

It is time to receive that well-deserved applause.

Let us now turn to the current nominees. This year, a total of six master theses reached us. Although this number is on the low side, probably as a consequence of the pandemic, it did not lessen the quality of the outstanding theses that have been put forward by supervisors from four different Dutch universities. We, as the jury, had the pleasure to consider and discuss these excellent, yet very different, master theses and we had to select a shortlist. In the respective endorsement letters, the authors and the quality of the submitted work were justly praised by their respective supervisors.

We read all the theses carefully and assessed them on a number of criteria: academic and societal relevance, scope and presentation of the theoretical framework, methodological rigor, presentation of results, reflection on results in relation to the literature, as well as originality of the approach and quality of the language. We also took into account the amount of work reflected in the thesis in relation to number of ECTS obtained. Employing these criteria, three theses clearly stood out for us. We will introduce the authors of these three theses in random order. Each of them will pitch their work in one minute, after which Hannah or I will read out the laudation.

- Our first nominee is **Jantine Wignand** from Utrecht University, who was supervised by Tessel Boerma, Frank Wijnen and Carlijn van den Boomen. Her MA thesis is entitled “*Serial Order Short-Term Memory and Vocabulary Acquisition in 3 to 7-Year-Old Children with 22q.11.2 (DiGeorge) Deletion Syndrome*”. Jantine, the floor is yours!

~ pitch by Jantine ~

On reading Jantine’s excellent thesis, I could not entirely suppress a feeling of jealousy towards her supervisors. Having a student deliver an MA thesis like this is every supervisor’s dream: not only does the thesis check all the boxes in terms of content and argumentation, it is also very well-written and clearly structured. It might need some small tweaks here and there, but I would be surprised if this piece of research does not make it into a respected journal. And I hope it does, because this investigation of the relationship between serial order short term memory and vocabulary acquisition in children with 22q11DS is not only of importance for advancing scientific knowledge on the matter, it is also relevant for clinical practice. Enhancing understanding of how the various cognitive difficulties that this population experiences relate to each other is fundamental in understanding the nature of cognitive development more generally and in creating targeted interventions to help children with 22q11DS.

So is there nothing negative to be said about this thesis? Well, if you really want to pick nits, you could say that what is presented as a ‘qualitative analysis’ is not a qualitative analysis in any conventional sense in which the term is used. While it definitely makes sense to investigate characteristics of children who cannot complete the testing battery, a qualitative analysis would involve observing these children, interacting with them and perhaps interviewing their care takers and teachers. As the data for this thesis were taken from an already existing corpus, this presumably was not an available option and, of course, you cannot do everything in one MA thesis. Good research always opens up directions for future research and this is no exception.

Jantine, I don’t know what your plans are, but if your future incorporates ‘future research’, I, for one, am looking forward to reading it!

- Our second nominee is **Joske Piepers** from Radboud University, who was supervised by Helen de Hoop and Ad Backus for her thesis “*Ziej is a woman and het is a girl. The role of referent characteristics in pronominal gender variation in Limburgian*”. Joske, we would love to hear more about your work.

~ pitch by Joske ~

Joske, you were born and raised in Limburg, the most southern province of the Netherlands, where people speak Limburgian next to Dutch. This probably explains your affinity with Limburgian. Limburgian shares characteristics with Dutch but also has the unique feature of being a tonal language, which gives it the melodious or singsong sound, very pleasing to the ear. And this is exactly the feeling that we got when reading your MA thesis in which you tested the hypothesis that, in Limburgian, younger women are referred to with neutral ‘het’, while older women are referred to with feminine ‘ziej’. Your writing style is flawless and made reading your thesis an enjoyable experience.

In your MA thesis you collected spontaneous speech data by using fairytales featuring both younger and older female characters. As we all know, academic papers can be quite dry and boring, but you, on the other hand, spoiled us with pictures of Cinderella, Snow White and The Little Mermaid. In your corpus data you found clear evidence for your main hypothesis which you nicely backed-up with the correct statistical analyses. If you had decided to call it a day at this point, this would have already been an outstanding MA thesis. But no, you decided to give an encore, an additional music piece, to remain in the Limburgian singsong style. You realized that by collecting additional, experimental data you would be able to draw stronger conclusions.

In your second study, a rating task, you investigated the role of grammatical agreement. This task was very carefully designed and executed, showing off your methodological rigor. These data, once more, confirmed your main hypothesis. Your research gained a clear scientific relevance but the societal impact was perhaps less clearly stated. All in all, the jury was impressed by the amount of work that you have conducted. Your MA thesis is well-written, methodologically strong, scientifically relevant and original. We are therefore not surprised that you already secured a PhD position at Tilburg University. *Proficiat mit dien nominasie!*

- And finally, our third nominee, is **Laura Vandendorpe** from University of Groningen, who was supervised by Merel Keijzer and Marjolijn Verspoor. Her thesis is entitled “*The impact of Dynamic Usage-Based and Structure-Based instruction on the development of chunks in L2 French learners*”. The floor is yours, Laura!

~ pitch by Laura ~

When I first read the title of your thesis, my heart jumped. A thesis on French linguistics – what a pleasure! Having studied French language and culture myself, I am always very delighted to find that there are still students who are interested in the French language, and who decide to write their MA thesis on a topic in French linguistics.

And what a thesis you wrote!

Your thesis constitutes a textbook example of how existing data can be used to conduct innovative research. For your research, you joined a PhD project which gave you access to a dataset of written examinations from two groups of Dutch pupils who had either learned French in the traditional way or by means of a usage-based method. Initially, your goal was to investigate how texts written by pupils from these two groups differed from each other on a number of CAF measures (complexity, accuracy, fluency). However, as your supervisor wrote in her motivation letter, you soon realized that another phenomenon might play an important role in the performance of the students: so-called chunks. These chunks then became the main topic of your thesis.

The jury truly enjoyed reading your work. And like every jury that takes their task seriously, we also critically assessed each and every part of your thesis. One of the issues we would have liked you to delve a little deeper into was the translation of chunk types from English to French. You now briefly mention that such a translation is possible because of the typological similarities between English and French, but given that chunks are the main topic of your research, a more thorough justification would have been appropriate.

As a jury, we think it takes quite a bit of guts and independence to deviate from an original research plan. But you did it! In fact, the results of your research are currently being elaborated into an article and will be included in the PhD research that I referred to earlier. For a non-Research Master thesis, that is very impressive! Your nomination for the Anéla / VIOT thesis prize is therefore more than deserved. Congratulations!

One conclusion we could draw from the work of the nominated theses is that the work is very heterogeneous and reflects the width of the field of applied linguistics. We would like to wholeheartedly congratulate all three authors on their well-deserved nomination. But of course there could only be one winner of the VIOT/Anéla thesis award 2020. We were unanimous in our decision. Her originality, the methodological rigor of her thesis, her writing style, and the enormous amount of work that she conducted, mesmerized us. The winner of the VIOT/Anéla thesis award 2020 is **Joske Piepers!** Congratulations!

Gudrun Reijnierse (Radboud University)

Hannah De Mulder (Leiden University)

Susanne Brouwer (Radboud University; as the supervisor of last year's winner)