



CASLA research highlights 2010

CASLA Projects

In her project Accessibility of semantic networks in the mental lexicon of Dutch L1 and L2 children, PhD candidate *Marjolein Cremer* (first supervisor *Rob Schoonen*) found that individual differences in reading comprehension can (to a small extent) be accounted for by differences in accessibility of semantic word knowledge, beyond the variance accounted for by word decoding and availability of semantic knowledge. Furthermore, differences in reading comprehension between mono- and bilingual children disappear when differences in availability, and to a lesser extent accessibility, are taken into account.

Folkert Kuiken found (together with *Sarah Droge* and *Eva Suijkerbuijk*) that half of the more than 800 preschool teachers in Amsterdam do not have reached the language proficiency level in Dutch which is required for that function. As a consequence the Amsterdam City Council has started a vast training programme in order to improve their proficiency level.

In the framework of the NWO-funded project 'Studies in Listening Proficiency', *Rianne Hoek*, student in the research master cognitive science, conducted an experimental study. Participants (N = 66) were adult native speakers of Dutch (age range 16-35) with either higher education (HBO and university; n = 29) or lower education (NBO; n = 37). Participants were tested on their working-memory (WM) capacity (digit span), they filled out a questionnaire regarding the quantity of their reading and writing activities (linguistic experience) and they performed a self-paced listening task, using four different types of sentences that differed in syntactic complexity. On the basis of Hulstijn's language-proficiency model, making a distinction between basic and higher language cognition, Hoek predicted that complex sentences would be processed (paced) more slowly than simple sentences and that the variance in the pacing times of complex sentences would be explained by WM memory, linguistic experience and level of education. However, linguistic experience and level of education were not found to be associated with pacing times. This finding therefore potentially challenges Hulstijn's language-proficiency model.

For most projects, the year 2010 was a year of writing up the findings, briefly reported in last year's annual report, and submitting them for publication. The time span from date of submission to date of publication for journals in our field is long. For instance, the paper *Facets of Speaking Proficiency* (De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen & Hulstijn) was submitted in early March 2010, the revised version was accepted in October 2010, and it has been scheduled to appear in March 2012.

Quotes from papers published in 2010

"The way in which adults position children during spoken discourse has a strong influence on the nature of the conversation, and on the opportunities created for children's own creative contributions to the particular discourse. It seemed that when the social relationships were thus shaped, ample opportunity was created

for knowledge transfer and co-construction, and the content of the conversation (field) and the structure of the conversation (mode) followed accordingly." (p. 202)

Source: Henrichs, L. F. (2010). Academic language in early childhood interactions. A longitudinal study of Dutch monolingual 3- to 6-year-old children Doctoral dissertation: University of Amsterdam. (www.Boxpress.nl)