Did you know…?
Current ACLC research concerns more than 70 languages covering all five continents and including more than 5 sign languages. A typological database system providing an intelligent access point to a series of existing typological databases has been created as a joint collaboration between the Universities of Amsterdam, Leiden, Nijmegen and Utrecht: see http://languagelink.let.uu.nl/tds/index.html
Hengeveld

**National Research Evaluation Exercise: excellent**

In the autumn of 2006 an international committee under the chairmanship of prof. Dr. D. Bosscher judged the ACLC research to be of excellent quality (grade 5). The committee commended the ACLC on its broad vision, energetic leadership and commitment of all researchers.

**The ACLC Blueprint**

The Amsterdam Centre for Language and Communication is a research institute for linguistic research within the Faculty of Humanities at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. The focus of ACLC research is variation - between languages and between different types of speakers - as formulated in the research plan *The Language Blueprint*. The approach is to take a linguistic phenomenon and approach it from many different angles - in terms of description and typology, modelling, variation and change, and acquisition and processing. The ACLC deals also with many socially relevant topics such as language learning in children and adults, multilingualism, language disorders, sign languages, and new and threatened languages.
Phonology remains the binding factor among my various research interests, although I have strayed a bit in the creole field. Of course it is best of all when my two first loves – phonology and creole studies – can be combined. An opportunity to combine the two came in the autumn when I was invited to deliver a plenary lecture on creole phonology at the 37th meeting of the North East Linguistic Society.

Some people might be puzzled to learn the title of my talk - Creole phonology: No such discipline, but what a lot you can learn from it! But actually the point I was making was there is no difference between creole phonology and contact phonology in general. Briefly, I showed that substrate and superstrate phonology could be elegantly manipulated by means of the relative ranking of pairs of markedness and faithfulness constraints within Optimality Theory.

This year, I got seriously involved in another kind of phonology – that of the Yokuts language group in South Central California. This is rescue phonology, but not of the fieldwork variety, as the variety that I am interested in – Delta Yokuts - has been extinct for about a hundred years. What is available is a dozen – mostly unpublished - sources of varying unreliability. These were mostly gathered in the 19th century by what in hindsight resembles a Who’s Who of Californian anthropologists. Unfortunately none of them had taken Paul Boersma’s phonetic transcription course!

Luckily, there are accurate descriptions of other Yokuts languages, so that much can be reconstituted by simple comparison. Amazingly enough, the errors made by the early fieldworkers are such that even some minor allophonic features can be recovered. My ambition is to do a “rescue” description, reinterpreting the available recordings.

www.home.medewerker.uva.nl/n.s.h.smith/
Learning to refer linguistically to persons and objects is a crucial part of language acquisition. Children need to make clear what they are talking about without having to resort to pointing gestures.

Children learn not only the relevant linguistic forms for reference but also how and when (not) to use them. For example, in English, to refer to a furry pet that needs taking out for a walk several times a day you can use the form ‘a dog’, ‘the dog’, ‘it’, ‘he’ or a proper name. That’s the morphosyntax. But the form you choose depends on semantic-pragmatic factors: the specificity of the referent, whether the referent is new or given to the current discourse, and whether the referent is familiar or unfamiliar to the listener. To label the pet or refer to a kind rather than a specific type, an indefinite determiner + noun is most commonly used. Indefinite nouns are also used to introduce the dog into the conversation, if the dog is not familiar to the listener. A pronoun, however, can only be used to introduce a referent in combination with a pointing gesture. Speakers favor pronouns over nouns to refer back to a referent that has already been mentioned in the immediately preceding discourse.

(1) Nina (2;3) and her mother are playing with a dog puppet
Child: That’s a doggy.
%act: picks up a dog and holds it near the man on the tractor
Child: A dog kissing him.
Mother: He’s kissing him?
Mother: Does he like the man?

(2) Nina (3;0) and her mother are playing with a dog puppet
Mother: He’s so cute.
Child: He can’t stand right here.
%com: Nina has put the dog on the carpet. He falls over.
Mother: Does he have a chair?
Child: Nope.
Child: He’s gonna sit on the shelf.
In (1) and (2) examples are given of how the English speaking child, Nina, and her mother refer to ‘a dog’. The younger Nina uses an indefinite correctly to label the referent, but incorrectly to maintain reference. At 3;3 Nina is consistent in using a pronoun to maintain reference to the dog.

How do young children acquiring the morphosyntax of reference use these morphosyntactic devices in relation to the semantic-pragmatic factors? Some linguists believe that the acquisition of these two aspects proceeds independently; others think that they develop together. To shed more light on these two positions, Dutch, English and French children (CHILDES database) were compared. Their use of nominal and pronominal forms for the (semantic-) pragmatic functions of non-specific reference, labeling, introduction, maintenance and shift were examined between 2;0 and 3;3.

The three languages are related but show small cross-linguistic differences in reference: for example in adult French, more definite determiners are used for non-specific reference. The speed of acquisition of the nominal morphosyntax also varies: French children are faster in acquiring determiners than English and Dutch children. Does this earlier acquisition of the morphosyntactic form lead to a different pragmatic application of this form? All two-year-olds incorrectly use definite determiners when the referent is unfamiliar to the listener, reflecting lack of sensitivity to the perspective of the listener. They do, however, show sensitivity to the specific / non-specific distinction in determiner use and also to whether a referent is new or given in both determiner and pronoun use. This sensitivity is related to age of acquisition of the determiner; the French children show this sensitivity earlier than the other children. The children are quick to learn the language specific patterns, which are found from 2;0 onwards.

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Did you know…?
Patients with Head and Neck Cancer often suffer from speech disorders after their treatment. A phonetically, evidence-based intervention program, developed together with the Netherlands Cancer Institute, and using the PRAAT software for analysis of these anomalous voices, appears to significantly improve the intelligibility of their speech.

Jongmans & Hilgers
In 2006 it was exactly fifty years ago that the famous Dutch linguist C.B. van Haeringen (1892-1983) published his book Nederlands tussen Duits en Engels (The Hague: Servire, 1956), to be translated as: Dutch between German and English.

This book is a classic in Dutch linguistics. Van Haeringen observed that with respect to its morphology and, in particular, its inflectional system Dutch is in between German and English. Gender, case, adjectival and verbal agreement are the most obvious examples. In all these aspects the pattern is the same: (standard) German is relatively rich compared to English, which in turn is relatively poor, and Dutch takes an in-between position.

For instance, German has a three-gender system, English has only one gender, and Dutch has a two-gender system, etc.

Fifty years later Van Haeringen’s observation is still relevant. Searching for an explanation implies a research strategy of the type advocated by the ACLC in the Language Blueprint, namely a strategy in which we combine several (sub) disciplines. What progress has been made in finding an explanation for Van Haeringen’s observation?

First of all there is an important historical dimension to his observation. In all the examples discussed by Van Haeringen it can be shown that the inflectional systems of Dutch, English and German were in fact (much) richer in earlier stages and also more similar to one another. In other words, although the starting point was comparable, it is the speed of deflection that has been apparently different in these three related languages. Generally speaking, they undergo the same changes, though at a different pace. Comparative historical linguistics make these developments clearer.

As an answer to the question why Dutch falls in between German and English, the speed of deflection is only a first step, since, obviously, the next question to answer is why the speed of deflection should differ at all. Here work on language contact offers an interesting
hypothesis, which in turn leads to research on both L1 and L2 acquisition. In short, the idea is that L2 learners may indirectly corrupt the inflectional system of a language due to their inability to acquire this system as easily as L1 learners do. If this system in the output of the L2 learners spreads throughout the population and if it is the input for new generations of L1 learners, loss of inflection will be the result. From this perspective, deflection must be explainable using only factors related to language acquisition since this is the mechanism of transferring language systems from one generation to the next. Children learning language are confronted with frequent and consistent positive evidence of a new system.

There is indeed historical evidence supporting the idea that language contact has played a much stronger role in the history of English compared to Dutch. In particular the Viking colonization is assumed to have had an enormous impact on change in English. Although Dutch did not undergo a similar influence, in particular standard Dutch came into existence in the northern region that was a linguistic melting pot. This in turn is rather different from the relatively conservative and isolated position of standard German, which derived more or less from the spoken language in the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

The collaboration of researchers from various linguistic (sub) disciplines in 2006 from within the project Variation in Inflection and the new ACLC research group Encoding grammatical information has proven to be very useful in finding an explanation for Van Haeringen’s observation fifty years ago. 

www.home.medewerker.wva.nl/f.p.weerman/

Did you know…?
Of people who complete their PhD at the ACLC 55% are successful in continuing with an academic career.
ACLC Statistics

Children learning a sign language learn also to combine signs and spoken words at the same time leading to complex messages in a short time
Baker & van den Bogaerde
What is the nature of the interface between discourse semantics/pragmatics and syntax? The intention of the speaker is to communicate certain information, and her assumptions about the state of the mind of the hearer constrain the form of linguistic units that she chooses to meet this communicative need. In the dialogue under (1), for instance, the interlocutors comment on possible candidates for a job. Speaker A singles out John as the best candidate. Speaker B reacts to this statement in proposing an alternative candidate. This, in turn, triggers the reaction of speaker C who contrasts the two candidates discussed.

(1) A: **As for John**, I would certainly hire him for this job.
B: Well, I would have preferred **Bill**, who has more experience.
C: No, no, **it is John** who fits best in our team; he has both experience and humour.

These statements display different morphosyntactic and prosodic properties that distinguish them one way or the other from unmarked declarative statements as in (2).

(2) John got the job because he was the best candidate.

Speaker A in (1) fronts the constituent involving **John** to encode a topic about which he provides a comment, speaker B keeps the new information **Bill** within the verb phrase, and speaker C employs a cleft construction to encode contrastive focus. Sentence (2), on the other hand, is neutral with regard to topicalization or expression of (contrastive) focus and therefore displays English canonical SVO order.

In traditional approaches to the study of language, whether generative or functional, the various discourse semantics assigned to the sentences under (1) are assumed to derive form pragmatics, not from structure. If it is true that the meaning of sentences is compositional, then there is nothing special
about the sentences in (1) that suggests that (A) can only be read as a topic in all contexts whereas (B) cannot. The distinction just observed must derive from some other component: pragmatics.

This research takes a radically different approach. We assume that certain discourse-related notions such as topic and focus are directly anchored in syntax and therefore force the discourse semantics in (1), only if licensed. Our first empirical motivation comes from languages where notions such as topic and focus are stored in the lexicon in the form of functional items, that is markers. These functional items in turn have a number of grammatical properties like position in the sentence that regulate their distribution in the sentence. A first survey shows that various languages from different typological families use such markers. The phenomenon is therefore not isolated. Adopting a uniformitarian approach to language, the question arises whether what occurs overtly in the syntax of such discourse configurational languages might not in fact be happening in all languages, even though in a very subtle way.

In order to answer this question and deepen our understanding of how information structure and clause structure interact we are conducting

(i) A typological study that permits a finer characterization of focus and topic structures and their discourse functions. This study will lead to the creation of a typological database to be made accessible to the linguistic community at the end of the project.

(ii) A micro-typology that consists of an in-depth investigation of the morphosyntax and prosody of focus and topic in relation to other discourse-linked constructions (e.g. question, scrambling) in a smaller number of typologically different languages.

In this way, we will reach a fine-grained analysis of the interaction between information structure and clause structure that the study of language in general can build on. www.home.medewerker.uva.nl/e.o.aboh/

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**Did you know...?**

Learning a second language can be made a lot easier, and a lot more fun, if attention is paid in language courses to building up fluency in word-by-word understanding. *Hulstijn*

Speakers only need to recognize the last word of an utterance to know when exactly they should take their turn. *Wesseling & van Son*
Some publications in 2006


Scientific output

- Articles in refereed journals: 52
- Refereed book chapters: 63
- Non refereed book chapters: 27
- Books: 7
- Books edited: 14
- PhD theses: 4
- Conferences organized: 29
- Other publications: 44
- Lectures, posters and reviews: 400

Staff in 2006 (in fte’s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tenured</th>
<th>Non-tenured</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
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<td>Senior lecturers</td>
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<td>Lecturers</td>
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<td>PhD candidates</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>Supporting staff</td>
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Finances

- Budget 2006: 2.8 million euro
- UvA contribution: 63%
- External: 37%
In 2006 the reorganization of the ACLC was implemented resulting in the emergence of 20 new research groups. The groups are approved for a limited period and regularly evaluated so that a flexibility of topic and approach can be attained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Research Group</th>
<th>Co-ordinator(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bidirectional Phonology and Phonetics</td>
<td>Paul Boersma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cognitive Approaches to Second Language Acquisition</td>
<td>Jan Hulstijn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. DP/NP: structure, acquisition and change</td>
<td>Petra Sleeman &amp; Harry Perridon</td>
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<td>4. Encoding Grammatical Information</td>
<td>Fred Weerman &amp; Elma Blom</td>
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<td>5. First Language Acquisition, Developmental Language Disorders and Executive Functions</td>
<td>Anne Baker &amp; Esther Parigger</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Franconian Tones</td>
<td>Paul Boersma &amp; Ben Hermans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Functional Discourse Grammar</td>
<td>Kees Hengeveld</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Iconicity in language use, learning and change</td>
<td>Olga Fischer</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Integration of information in conversations</td>
<td>Rob van Son</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Language Creation</td>
<td>Norval Smith &amp; Umberto Ansaldo</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Lexical Semantics</td>
<td>Wim Honselaar &amp; Fons Moerdijk</td>
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<td>12. Multiparty Discourse and Anthropology of Education</td>
<td>Anne Bannink &amp; Jet Isselt-van Dam</td>
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<td>13. Oncologically-related Communication Disorders</td>
<td>Frans Hilgers</td>
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<td>14. Parts of Speech</td>
<td>Jan Don</td>
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<td>15. Praat</td>
<td>Paul Boersma</td>
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<td>16. Revitalizing older linguistic documentation</td>
<td>Otto Zwartjes &amp; Norval Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Sign Language Acquisition and Processing</td>
<td>Anne Baker</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Sociolinguistics and multilingualism</td>
<td>Durk Gorter &amp; Lisa Lim</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Typological Database</td>
<td>Kees Hengeveld</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Typology of Focus and Topic</td>
<td>Enoch Aboh</td>
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