



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

Annual report 2014 and 2015
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1. Changes in 2014 and 2015

In 2014 the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication (ACLC) ceased to exist as a research “institute”, and as per 1 September of that year the ACLC became one of the six research “schools” of the Faculty of Humanities (FoH). Together with the other research schools it was placed under the umbrella of the faculty’s only remaining research institute, the Amsterdam Institute for Humanities research [AIHR].

In spite of the fact that it has lost its position as an independent research institute with e.g. its more elaborate possibilities for funding members’ research costs, it has gained a sturdier position in the faculty’s research organisation. The ACLC director is now directly responsible for budgets pertaining to the costs of our members’ research time, and the restructuring has enabled the ACLC to welcome 3 new research groups in its ranks: *Adventures in Multimodality* (AIM), *Argumentation and Rhetoric* (TAR) and *Metaphor Lab*.

The present annual report covers a period of transition and for that reason it focuses on the ACLC’s changed structure and its (limited) financial means for research support. Above all, it points out some of the 2014 and 2015 research highlights and other memorable activities.

In September 2014, the new ACLC started its activities with a new academic director, who wants to thank Rob Schoonen, who served as acting-director during the first eight months of the year and who skilfully paved the way for the transition from ACLC as a research institute to ACLC as a research school.

Paul Boersma
Director ACLC

2. Mission statement

The scientific goal of the ACLC is to discover the underlying systematicity in verbal as well as non-verbal human communication and in spoken as well as signed language. To this end, ACLC researchers combine evidence from generalizations about data obtained from direct or indirect observation or elicitation, evidence from behavioral experiments executed under controlled conditions, and support from explicit abstract modelling and computer simulations. The societal goals of the ACLC are to improve the successful acquisition and use of language, to improve communication abilities in the population, and to develop better language and communication technologies.

3. Research Organization

All ACLC research is organized in research groups (see the accompanying document for brief group reports). This form of organization has been chosen in order to ensure maximal flexibility. Research groups exist for the duration of the research programme they carry out, and cease to exist when the job is done. Proposals for new research groups can be submitted continuously and are evaluated by the ACLC director and the Advisory Board. The ACLC director also actively explores new opportunities.

For the individual researcher, the major benefit of a research group is that it provides a highly stimulating environment to carry out research. Furthermore, when the group consists of senior and junior researchers, the group provides an important learning environment for the junior researchers. Thirdly, a number of research activities, such as collecting data or organizing a conference, are less time-consuming when they can be shared among the members of a group. Finally, for the institute as a whole the organization of the research in well-defined groups provides a way of presenting the activities of ACLC much more clearly to the outside world.

Since the beginning of 2009 the ACLC has participated in the interfaculty research priority area *Brain and Cognition* co-ordinated by the *Cognitive Science Center Amsterdam*, with which it later fused into *Amsterdam Brain and Cognition (ABC)*. The contribution made by ACLC researchers concerns the issue of *Learnability*.

4. ACLC management and support

Until September 2014 prof. dr. Kees Hengeveld was the academic director of the ACLC. As Hengeveld had been appointed head of the faculty's research organization, dr. Rob Schoonen, ACLC's vice-director took Hengeveld's place. In September 2014, prof. dr. Paul Boersma was appointed the new academic director. In this function, Boersma is a member of the Research Council of the faculty. This council consists of the directors of the 6 Research Schools and the AIHR director, who together develop the research policy and ensure its implementation. Boersma is supported by ACLC coordinator Marten Hidma and office manager Marijke Vuyk.

3.1. ADVISORY BOARD

The director consults with an Advisory Board on all matters important, such as research strategy, the evaluation of research group proposals, and the selection of PhD candidates. The ACLC Advisory Board consists of 7 to 9 senior staff members (not counting the director), a post-doc representative chosen by the post-doctoral researchers for a period of one year, and a PhD candidate representative elected by the PhD candidates also for one year. The members of the board represent the main disciplines of ACLC research.

In September 2014, the Advisory Board consisted of some members from the 2013 board as well as some new members who represent the new groups that had just joined the ACLC. The members of the board at the end of 2014 and throughout 2015 were prof. dr. Enoch Aboh, prof. dr. Olga Fischer, prof. dr. Folkert Kuiken, dr. Eric Metz, dr. Roland Pfau, prof. dr. Jeannette Schaeffer, prof. dr. Gerard Steen, prof. dr. Fred Weerman, dr. Eva van Lier (post-doc; succeeded by Vadim Kimmelman in May 2015), and Klaas Seinhorst (PhD candidate).

3.2. SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

The ACLC has an external committee, the Scientific Council, consisting of four members. This council has the task of advising the ACLC Management and Advisory Board on general questions of policy, quality control, staff development etc. The Scientific Council consists of prof. dr. Bencie Woll, prof. dr. Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm, prof. dr. Pieter Muysken, and prof. dr. Neil Smith. Due to the restructuring, the council did not meet with the Advisory Board in 2014 and 2015.

3.3. ORGANOGRAM

The overall organization of the ACLC is shown in Figure 2.

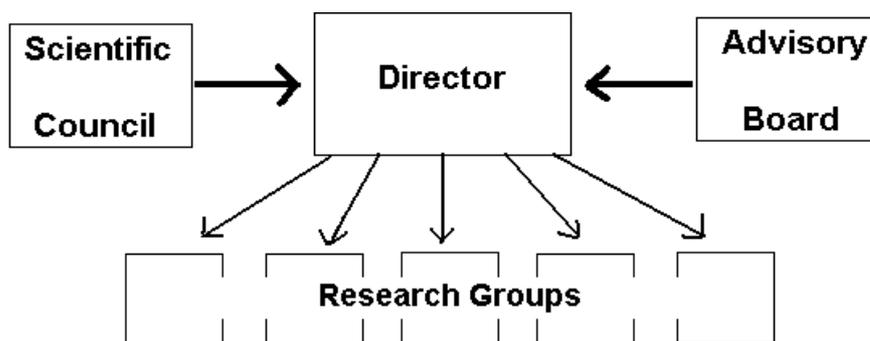


Figure 2. Organogram of the ACLC in 2014 and 2015

5. Scientific profile:

“Constraints on Variation in Language and Communication”

5.1. Variation. Human language and communication exhibit a tremendous amount of variation. Every language community maintains its own inventory of sounds or signs, its own word and sentence structures, its own ways of conveying meaning, and its own system of appropriate interactions between people. Every genre of communication maintains its own types of text elements and language varieties, and its own contextual system of appropriate use.

5.2. Constraints. Notwithstanding this enormous variety, languages and communication systems also show remarkable degrees of similarity. There are many possible languages and communication systems, but some types are much more probable than others. Thus, the variation among languages and among genres of communication is heavily constrained. The causes of these restrictions will at least lie in human biology (possible articulations of the speech organs or arms and face, possible auditory and visual representations filtered by the human ear and eye, mammalian brain structures, language-faculty-specific cortical structures, human-communication-specific cortical structures), and, at a higher level, in human psychology (cognitive limits on processing capacity) or human social interaction (the need to classify important human relations). ACLC researchers work together to identify as many sources of constraints as possible.

5.3. Evidence. The ACLC finds evidence for the constraints with at least two equally valid methods: making generalizations about spontaneous data observed and elicited in the field, and behavioral experiments executed under controlled conditions. The observations in the wild involve the study of the acquisition of language and appropriate communication by children and adults, the study of diachronic changes in language and communication systems, the comparative study of language structure and communication systems across the world (typology), and the description of typologically “different” languages, which are often underdocumented and endangered. Behavioral experiments are performed in the lab, in schools and sometimes in the field. The ACLC emphasizes the fact that in the end, the evidence from all sources must be compatible.

5.4. Modeling. The long-term scientific goal of the ACLC is to discover systematicities behind human language and communication, and their causes. As in other sciences, it may be possible to find a set of theories each of which is correct in its sub-area, and ultimately those correct theories will have to account for all sources of evidence at the same time, and also be compatible with each other. Those theories will probably be quite different from, but probably also share some aspects with, all current theories. As long as the correct set of theories still has to be discovered, various theoretical approaches with partly overlapping empirical coverage will continue to coexist happily in the ACLC, such as generative grammar, functional discourse grammar, usage-based approaches, optimality theory, cognitive grammar, construction grammar, pragmadialectics... Meanwhile, the main measure of progress in our field is the success achieved by explicit models that account for as many sources of evidence as possible at the same time.

5.5. How this profile helps choosing research projects

The ACLC makes sure that the profile plays a role in guiding future research, by being a criterion in internal research applications or in hiring scientific staff. Thus, a research proposal has a greater chance to be supported if it looks at its subject matter from more of the aspects mentioned. For instance, a proposal that aims to study the “DP” (Determiner Phrase) has a better chance of being supported if it aims to find the tree structures to represent the DP, *and* investigates how children and second-language learners acquire the DP, *and* investigates how the DP changes over the generations, *and* investigates what kinds of DP are processed fast and which ones slowly, *and* compares the DP across a variety of languages, *and* compares the success of various possible models of the DP, *and* performs computer simulations with these models.

5.6. How this profile influences the typology of research groups

The multi-faceted approach leads to an organization of research groups by subject, rather than by method. Thus, there is no research group called “psycholinguistics”, because the phonologists use psycholinguistic (as well as many other) methods to discover the processing of the English /æ~/ε/ contrast, and the syntacticians use psycholinguistic (as well as many other) methods to discover the processing of the DP. And there is no research group called “historical linguistics”, although many ACLC researchers investigate diachronic language change, usually with the goal of answering a typological question.

5.7. Learnability (part of the UvA Zwaartepunt of Brain and Cognition).

There is an explanatory relation between the observational sources of evidence mentioned above. If we want to know what possible and impossible languages are, we can notice that possible directions and sequences of diachronic change can help constrain this typological variation (if change has a bias against a certain feature, that feature will become rare or non-existent), and that possible acquisition paths and possible modes of interaction can help constrain both the possible changes (the order of features acquired may influence the end result of acquisition) and the typology directly (if a feature is representable in the brain but no acquisition path leads to it, the feature will never appear in adult language). These considerations are behind *Learnability*, which has been the ACLC’s implementation of the UvA Zwaartepunt of *Brain and Cognition* since 2008. In this Zwaartepunt the linguists of the ACLC collaborate successfully with psychologists and child development researchers.

6. Societal challenges

As it always has, the world keeps on changing. Present-day changes in language use and communication follow from a new wave of globalization. For instance, whereas a hundred years ago, the two languages that most people spoke in the Netherlands were the local dialect and the standard language, new migration streams into this country have again created a culturally and linguistically more diverse population, and the demands of international business, trade and education have created a new need for multilingualism, with English as a new lingua franca with a ubiquity that Latin or French never received. Modern social media tend to be faster than letters sent by coach, so the types of personal communication have changed. Language users and communicators ask us questions about how to proceed in this changing environment, and the ACLC helps answering them by applying outcomes of research to solving concrete societal demands. Institutions, too,

require support in this changing society. This holds for schools, institutions that treat children with language and communication disorders, hospitals that treat patients with throat cancer, and so on. The ACLC collaborates with many such institutions.

The ACLC communicates their societal relevance through the tab “Societal relevance” on its website.

7. Quality control

Every 10 months, the ACLC organizes a progress meeting with each PhD candidate, attended by the PhD candidate, his or her advisor(s), and the director of the ACLC or his delegate (typically, one of the ACLC’s full professors). Before the meeting, the PhD candidate writes a progress report according to a fixed template, where he or she writes up the progress in publications, conferences, and education, and in which she may assess aspects of her work environment and supervision and look ahead to her time after the defence of the thesis. One of the advisors writes a report on the meeting, noting especially the agreements (“afspraken”) that the candidate or her advisors or the ACLC committed themselves to during the meeting. The first of these meetings, approximately 9 months after the start of the project, is a true assessment on the basis of a written paper; the result of this meeting is a “go or no-go” decision about whether the candidate is allowed to continue her research (fortunately, a “no-go” is very rare).

The PhD candidates are also expected to meet approximately four times a year with each other and with the ACLC director and coordinator in the so-called “junioerenoverleg”. For details see below in “PhD candidate community”.

Post-doctoral researchers have a yearly meeting with the director of the ACLC (or his delegate), organized in much the same way as the 10-month meetings with the PhD candidates. The report of the meeting is written up either by the ACLC director (or delegate) or by the supervisor if a supervisor exists (for instance in the case that the post-doctoral researcher works in a larger project).

Most faculty members have approximately 40 percent pure research time and 2 to 9 percent “other research tasks”, and are “paid” (in hours) separately for the supervision of their PhD candidates. This time is allotted to the faculty members by the ACLC, whose director speaks every year with the relevant department chairs (“afdelingsvoorzitters”) about the research output and quality of the ACLC members who belong to those departments. If any problems occur, the ACLC and the department can take joint action, by adding comments in the report of the person’s yearly evaluation interview with the department chair (“functioneringsgesprek”) or organizing a meeting with the ACLC director.

8. PhD candidate community

The ACLC is home to about 60 PhD candidates, among whom there are a number of external PhD candidates. They have three-monthly meetings with the director and coordinator of the ACLC. This report summarizes the meetings that took place in 2014 and 2015.

At the meetings, the latest news and developments within the institute are announced, and PhD candidates can discuss matters that are also relevant to their peers. The meeting is concluded with round-table questions. All PhD candidates are expected to be present, and they take turns in chairing and preparing minutes. In 2014, there were four meetings, in

March, June, September and December; in 2015 there were three, in March, June and September. Attendance varied between 10 and 20 people.

Some topics on the agenda:

- PhD candidates: updates on research projects:
 - Five new PhD candidates started their projects at the ACLC in 2014:
 - Sanne Berends: *Cross-linguistic influences on the acquisition of nominal ellipsis*;
 - Hernán Labbé Grunberg: *Automatic, unconscious processing of Dutch morphosyntax in native and L2 speakers of Dutch*;
 - Anne Mercuur (Fryske Akademy): *Changes in modern Frisian verbal inflection*;
 - Patrick Schetters (joint doctorate with University of Zurich): *Accuracy in the written production of advanced learners of Dutch as a foreign language with German L1*;
 - Rosalinde Stadt (NWO grant for teachers): *The influence of English as an L2 on the acquisition of French as an L3*.
 - 10 new PhD candidates started their projects in 2015:
 - Hanneke Pot (Hogeschool Inholland): *Total Physical Response bij het woordenschatonderwijs aan jonge beginnende tweedetaalleerders in het basisonderwijs*;
 - Klaske van Sluis (Netherlands Cancer Institute): *Predicting substitute voice source characteristics after laryngectomy*;
 - Merel van Witteloostuijn: *Examining the contribution of procedural learning to grammar and literacy acquisition in children* (in Judith Rispen's Vidi project);
 - Imme Lammertink: *Examining the contribution of procedural learning to grammar and literacy acquisition in children* (in Judith Rispen's Vidi project);
 - Sune Gregersen Rygård: *De-auxiliarization in the Dutch and English modals: a comparative diachronic corpus investigation*; (in Olga Fischer's and Jan Nuyts' NWO/FWO project)
 - Manon van der Laaken: *The "Lastmeter" in out-patient cancer consultations: help or hindrance to physician-patient communication?*;
 - Katerine Bolaños: *A descriptive grammar of Kakua, a language of Northwest Amazonia*;
 - Marloes Oomen: *Argument structure in three sign languages: typological and theoretical aspects*; (in Roland Pfau's Free Competition project)
 - Vanja de Lint: *Argument structure in three sign languages: typological and theoretical aspects*; (in Roland Pfau's Free Competition project)
 - Eveline Boers-Visker (Hogeschool Utrecht): *Learning to use space: a study into the SL2 acquisition process of adult learners of sign language of the Netherlands*.
 - After the faculty had been restructured, the "new" ACLC welcomed seven PhD candidates into the Research Group *Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric*

(Merel Boers, Ingeborg van der Geest, André Juthe, Ahmed Omar, Eugen Popa, Roosmaryn Pilgram, Jacky Visser and Renske Wierda), and one into the Research Group *Metaphor Lab* (Gudrun Reijnierse).

- Also, a number of PhD candidates left the ACLC. In 2014, Marc Bavant, Kateřina Chládková, Hadil Karawani, Vadim Kimmelman and Joke Schuit successfully defended their dissertations; Janneke Verschoor discontinued her project. In 2015, Akke de Blauw, Sterre Leufkens, Karin Wanrooij, Aude Laloi, Natalia Aralova, Roosmaryn Pilgram, Jing Lin, Renske Wierda and Ingeborg van der Geest obtained their doctorates; Elin Derks discontinued her project, but Manon van der Laaken was found ready to succeed her.
- New structure of the research institute
 - The year 2014 saw the reorganization of the research structure within the Faculty of Humanities, and the impact of this operation was a recurring topic at the meetings. Although the changes for the ACLC were relatively small, some things were affected by the new structure: e.g. the way PhD candidates were to apply for funding, how money for new PhD candidates was to be divided across institutes, etc. The reorganization went hand in hand with tighter research and travel budgets, which led to heated debates as well.
- Education: GSH and LOT courses
 - Both the Graduate School of Humanities (of our Faculty of Humanities) and LOT (the National Research School in Linguistics) organize courses for PhD candidates. The former institute focuses on practical courses, e.g. to train academic writing and presentation skills, or to provide tips and tricks on how to write a postdoc proposal; the latter offers academic training. These LOT courses take place twice a year, during winter schools (in January) and summer schools (in June), which last two weeks each. The locations of these schools alternate between the participating universities: Groningen, Nijmegen, Tilburg, Utrecht, Leiden, Leuven, Amsterdam VU and Amsterdam UvA.
 - As of 2011, participation in both GSH and LOT courses is obligatory for new PhD candidates, and experiences with them are shared in every PhD meeting. Both institutes offer a wide variety of courses that get an equally wide variety of reviews: sometimes doubt is cast on the relevance of certain courses, sometimes courses are unanimously praised. The LOT Winter School in January 2015, to be hosted by the ACLC, was often on the agenda: PhD students were involved in both content (which lecturers would we like to invite?) and practice (who wants to volunteer during the winter school?).
- Reporting back to participants and parents
 - Many PhD candidates do experimental work, often with children. However, there was no standardized way to report back to participants, schools or parents about the aims and results of the experiments in which they had participated. A small group of PhD candidates volunteered to address this issue by creating the website www.taalonderzocht.wordpress.com.

- Other topics
 - The topics above were discussed on all four meetings, but a lot of other issues were treated as well, varying from serious matters such as options to visit universities abroad (with a presentation from Letje Lips, director of International Affairs of the faculty), the repercussions of the occupation of the Bungehuis in March 2015, and the new doctorate regulations, to more trivial topics such as PhD lunches and the time frame in which the minutes of a meeting should be available.

PhD candidates in the greater scheme of things:

- The PhD candidate pool supplies organisers and representatives for several occasions and organisational bodies. In 2014, the following people made contributions:
 - Friday drinks committee: Tiffany Boersma (together with David Weenink);
 - Graduate School representatives: Bibi Janssen, Jasmin Pfeifer;
 - Mailing list coordinators: Sophie ter Schure, Jelke Bloem;
 - NAP-dag organisers: Mirjam de Jonge, Caitlin Meyer, Klaas Seinhorst, Camille Welie (2014), and Jeroen Breteler, Matthias Passer, Jasmin Pfeifer (2015);
 - PhD mentor: Sterre Leufkens, Tiffany Boersma (Bungehuis), Margreet van Koert (P.C. Hoofthuis);
 - PhD representative on ACLC advisory board: Tessa Spätgens, Klaas Seinhorst.

9. Post-doctoral researchers

The ACLC postdocs were represented in the meetings of the Advisory Board by Eva van Lier until May 2015 and by Vadim Kimmelman from May onwards. They have also participated in the selection procedure for the new PhD candidates.

During 2015, Eva van Lier, Liesbeth Zack, Tuba Yarbay Durman, Jenny Audring, Nada Vasic en Lotte Hogeweg were post-docs, but apart from Eva's their projects have recently ended. Vadim Kimmelman has also been a post-doc in a project on argument structure. Margreet van Koert has started as a postdoc in an NWO PRO project headed by Judith Rispens studying learning of English in children. Marianna Bolognesi has started a Marie Curie IEF post-doc working on visual metaphors.

10. ACLC funds

The ACLC has approximately 2,500 euros a year to spend on sponsoring conferences organized by ACLC members, and 16,000 euros a year to spend on policy (“beleidsbudget”). In 2014 and 2015, the policy budget was spent on sponsoring the ACLC journal *Linguistics in Amsterdam*, sponsoring the science popularization website *Kennislink* via the national linguistics research school LOT, redeeming old commitments for budgets in ACLC-granted PhD projects, travel costs for speakers at ACLC seminars, and much more.

11. ACLC seminars

On slightly over half of all Friday afternoons, the ACLC organizes an ACLC seminar, in which a language or communication researcher from anywhere in the world (including Amsterdam) present their work.