



CASLA research highlights 2012

The NWO-funded project *Studies in Listening Proficiency*, conducted by **Sible Andringa, Nomi Olsthoorn, Catherine van Beuningen, Rob Schoonen** and **Jan Hulstijn** was officially rounded off in 2012. The 'eindverslag' (final report) was submitted to NWO in December. Work on several project papers is still in progress. Two papers were published in 2012, one in *Language Learning* (August 2012) and one in *International Journal of Bilingualism* (preview, December 2012).

The NWO funded project *What is Speaking Proficiency*, conducted by **Nivja de Jong** (now at Utrecht University), **Margarita Steinel, Arjen Florijn, Rob Schoonen** and **Jan Hulstijn** was also officially completed. The 'eindverslag' (final report) was submitted to NWO in September. The main findings of the project were reported in last year's annual report. In 2012, project papers appeared in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, Language Testing*, and the Dutch online open-access journal *Internationale Neerlandistiek*.

In December 2012, Sylvia Bacchini defended her doctoral thesis *Eerste hulp bij tweede taal: Experimentele studies naar woordenschatdidactiek voor jonge tweede-taalverwervers* (First aid for young second-language-learners).

Summary: In this study three experiments were conducted to investigate which pedagogy facilitates the acquisition of words by preschoolers in the early stages of their second-language-development. In the first experiment, four experimental groups were distinguished with respect to frequency and mode of language input: (1) isolated words with moderate frequency, (2) words in ongoing speech with moderate frequency, (3) isolated words with high frequency and (4) words in ongoing speech with high frequency. All children (N=89) were randomly allocated to the control group or one of the four experimental groups. A computer program was developed for the learning of twenty target words. The experimental groups watched this program three times on three successive days, while the control group watched in the same way another program without the target words. The groups were compared with respect to the number of newly acquired words directly after the program as well as two weeks later. The results revealed that input of isolated words and high frequency of exposure make significant contributions to word learning. In a second experiment in which 106 children participated, the learning of words in a task-based activity was compared with learning words through picture story reading. Half of the children were repeatedly presented with the twenty words over a period of two weeks (distributed exposure). Before and after the program the children were tested on the acquisition of the words in the same way as in the first experiment. The results did not reveal any significant differences between the task-based condition and the read-aloud condition, but distributed exposure gave better results than one-time exposure. A third experiment was conducted to evaluate the effect of test format on word acquisition assessment. Results show that the isolated word program is most effective, even if a different test format is used.

In May 2012, the contract of PhD candidate **Mirjam Trapman**, working on a NWO-funded, longitudinal study *Literacy-related attributes of at risk students in grades 7-9* (supervisors **Jan Hulstijn** and Amos van Gelderen), reached its end. In the same month, Mirjam was hired as a lecturer at a teacher college in Ede. She expects to defend her thesis in the fall of 2013. The main results of her project were reported in last year's annual report.

PhD candidate **Marjolein Cremer** (supervised by **Rob Schoonen** and **Jan Hulstijn**) completed her project *Accessibility of semantic networks in the mental lexicon of Dutch L1 and L2 children*. She expects to defend her thesis on 21st of June 2013.

In her project *The bilingual language development of the Frisian child*, PhD candidate **Jelske Dijkstra** (first supervisor **Folkert Kuiken**) monitors the bilingual (Frisian/Dutch) language development of 91 preschoolers during three successive periods of six months. Results indicated that home language played an important role for Frisian with regard to (productive and receptive) vocabulary and mean length of utterance. Regarding Dutch, home language was a factor in productive vocabulary, but not in receptive vocabulary, nor in mean length of utterance. Therefore, it can be concluded that the acquisition of the minority language, Frisian, does not harm the acquisition of the majority language, Dutch.

Elisabeth van der Linden and **Folkert Kuiken** published a book about raising children in bilingual families, written for parents and other people interested in bilingual education. Its title is *Het succes van tweetalig opvoeden*. The book was nominated for the 2012 “publieksprijs” of the Dutch Association of Linguistics (NVT) and the Dutch Association of Applied Linguistics (Anéla). On February 9, 2013, the authors were awarded with this prize (along with the editors of the magazine ‘Onze Taal’).

Folkert Kuiken and **Ineke Vedder**, together with Alex Housen (Free University Brussels), published a book, entitled *Dimensions of L2 Performance and Proficiency. Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency in SLA* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company). The study addresses a number of theoretical and methodological questions related to the nature, the assessment and the development of complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) as basic dimensions of second language proficiency.

Quotes from papers published in 2012

“Investigating complexity, accuracy and fluency in L2 is a fascinating, but daunting, task: fascinating, because it addresses fundamental issues in language acquisition and language use and how they are affected by varying conditions; daunting, because of the complex, multidimensional nature of CAF, the interacting effects of both learner-internal and learner external factors, and the multiple challenges which these present. ... The heterogeneity of topics and methodology, however, does not contradict the homogeneity of purpose, which is to contribute to a fuller understanding of L2 knowledge, use and development” (p. 16-17).

Source: Housen, A., **Kuiken**, F. & **Vedder**, I. (Eds.) (2012). *Dimensions of L2 performance and proficiency. Investigating complexity, accuracy and fluency in SLA*. (pp. 16-17). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

“A single-resource account of working memory would predict separable effects of working memory capacity and the language predictors on listening, and it would probably also predict equal or stronger correlations for the non-native speakers on the assumption that listening comprehension would be equally or even more taxing for them. However, stronger correlations for the non-natives were not observed. These results make more sense from the experience-based explanation of working memory. Having much knowledge, being able to process linguistic information quickly, and scoring well on verbal working-memory tasks are probably all the result of one’s text processing experience, hence the strong correlations for the natives” (p. 72).

Source: S. **Andringa**, N. **Olsthoorn**, C. **van Beuningen**, R. **Schoonen** & J. **Hulstijn** (2012).

Determinants of success in native and non-native listening comprehension: an individual differences approach. *Language Learning*, 62 (Suppl. 2), 49-78.

"Tasks differ and language learners might respond differently to task features. However, the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' variability (Deville and Chalhoub-Deville, 2006: 12–13) is not for psychometrics to decide. G-theory is a very convenient tool to analyse variability, but it does not pass judgments on the meaningfulness of the universe of admissible observations. As a researcher we need to theorise about the universe of admissible observations, for example: What do we consider 'admissible observations' for writing proficiency? If in such a case the interaction between person and task is relatively large, we must be aware that generalising about a person's writing proficiency on the basis of a single task is 'ill-advised'" (p. 375).

Source: **Schoonen**, R. (2012). The generalisability of scores from language tests. In F. Davidson & G. Fulcher (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Language Testing* (363-377). London & New York: Routledge

"The paradox of science is that, in order to understand the phenomena that we are interested in, we have to do "un-justice" to them, as it were. We classify them into categories, disregarding differences between them. In the literature on bilingualism, people are categorized as native speakers, as monolingual and bilingual native speakers, as intermediate or advanced non-native speakers, or as balanced or unbalanced bilinguals. (...) This paper has attempted to make a case for the individual LP differences that exist WITHIN these conventional categories" (p. 430).

Source: **Hulstijn**, J.H. (2012). The construct of language proficiency in the study of bilingualism from a cognitive perspective. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15, 422-433.
