



AMSTERDAM CENTER
FOR LANGUAGE AND
COMMUNICATION



Annual report ACLC 2016
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1. Introduction

The present annual report describes the scientific profile of the ACLC and records the research highlights from 2016.

In October 2016 the criteria for membership of the Advisory Board changed: the board now consists of all research coordinators (in addition to the representatives of the post-doctoral researchers and PhD candidates). This move aims to strengthen the commitment of all research groups to the ACLC's research policy and activities.

In autumn, the ACLC underwent a mid-term assessment, together with the other research schools in the Faculty of Humanities. The report of this review will serve as a basis for further optimization of the ACLC's strategies and activities. An official national review of linguistics institutes will take place in 2018.

Paul Boersma
Director ACLC

2. Mission statement

The scientific aim of the ACLC is to discover the underlying systematicity in verbal as well as non-verbal human communication and in spoken as well as in 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 modeling and computer simulations. The societal goals of the ACLC are to improve the successful acquisition and use of language, to improve communication in everyday and institutional settings, and to develop language and communication technologies.

3. Organization of research in the ACLC

Whereas many comparable institutes in the Netherlands are organized by method (e.g. theoretical versus experimental linguistics), such an organization would not be appropriate for the ACLC, which strongly encourages investigation of subject matter from multiple angles (see “Scientific Profile” below). All ACLC research is therefore organized in **research groups**. Research groups exist for the duration of the research program they carry out, and cease to exist when the program is completed. 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 opportunities for new groups.

Research groups are the hubs around which research is carried out: the members typically organize a meeting every week. For the individual researchers, the major benefits of membership are therefore the stimulating research environment, the learning environment for junior members, and sharing of activities. For the ACLC as a whole, the organization in well-defined groups makes it possible to present activities clearly to the outside world (as in the annual reports) and to stimulate the multiple-angled profile among the researchers. Once a year, the ACLC organizes an inter-group meeting; in April 2016 this was a meeting where the ACLC profile was discussed in the light of recent developments in linguistics and outside, leading to the confirmation of “Constraints on Variation” as the ACLC’s policy.

The research group is also the level on which the ACLC collaborates with other parties. Some groups contain members of the ILLC, or of other universities (such as the VU), or of other institutions (such as the Netherlands Cancer Institute NKI).

The formal tasks of the research groups are the following.

- Each research group is committed to writing an annual report, which contains the group description, lists the members and projects, and highlights the major research findings and societally relevant activities of that year.
- Each group chooses a “coordinator” from among its members, who will be the group’s point of contact for the ACLC director and management.
- The coordinator represents the group during the ACLC board meetings, which take place approximately six times a year, thus ensuring the group’s influence on the policies of the ACLC.

- The coordinator represents the group during the annual selection round of PhD proposals, thus ensuring the group's influence on appointments within the ACLC.

In 2016 the ACLC consisted of the following groups (the coordinators are mentioned here; see the [websites](#) for details):

- *Adventures in Multimodality* (coordinated by Charles Forceville)
- *Amusia and Language* (coord. Silke Hamann)
- *Argumentation and Rhetoric Group Amsterdam* (coord. by Francisca Snoeck Henkemans)
- *Bidirectional Phonology and Phonetics* (coordinated by Paul Boersma)
- *Cognitive Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (coord. by Sible Andringa)
- *Comparative Slavic Verbal Aspect* (coordinated by René Genis)
- *Cross-Linguistic Semantics* (coord. by Lotte Hogeweg [ACLCL] and Maria Aloni [ILLCL])
- *Functional Discourse Grammar* (coord. Kees Hengeveld)
- *Grammar and Cognition* (coord. Judith Rispens)
- *Iconicity* (coord. Olga Fischer)
- *Institutional Discourse* (coord. Anne Bannink)
- *Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Translation* (coord. Eric Metz)
- *Metaphor Lab Amsterdam* (coord. Gerard Steen)
- *Oncology-Related Communication Disorders* (coord. Rob van Son)
- *Revitalizing Older Linguistic Documentation* (coord. Otto Zwartjes)
- *Sign Language Grammar and Typology* (coord. Roland Pfau)
- *Talking about Learners* (coord. Enoch Aboh)

Since 2009 the ACLC has participated in the interfaculty research priority area *Brain and Cognition*, co-ordinated by the *Cognitive Science Center Amsterdam*, now together called *Amsterdam Brain and Cognition* (ABC). The contribution made by ACLC researchers concerns the issue of *Learnability*.

4. ACLC management and support

In 2016, prof. dr. Paul Boersma was the academic director of the ACLC. In this function, he is a member of the Research Council (Onderzoeksraad) of the faculty. This council consists of the directors of the six Research Schools and the AIHR director; together they develop research policies and ensure their implementation. Boersma is supported by ACLC coordinator Marten Hidma and office manager Marijke Vuyk.

4.1. ADVISORY BOARD

The director consults with an Advisory Board on all important matters. These include research strategy, evaluation of research group proposals and the selection of PhD candidates. The ACLC Advisory Board consists of the coordinators of the research groups, a post-doc representative chosen by the post-doctoral researchers for a period of one year (in 2016 this was Vadim Kimmelman), and a PhD candidate representative elected by the PhD candidates also for one year (in 2016 this was Jeroen Breteler, with Sanne Berends as a back-up).

4.2. 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. In 2016 the Scientific Council consisted of prof. dr. Bencie Woll, prof. dr. Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm, prof. dr. Pieter Muysken, and prof. dr. Neil Smith. The last two stepped down in December 2016, and a replacement is currently sought in the form of one person specialized in Communication. The task of the council in 2017 will be to give advice to the ACLC on the basis of the report of the mid-term review committee.

5. Scientific profile:

“Constraints on Variation in Language and Communication”

5.1. Variation. Human language and communication exhibit huge variation. All language communities maintain their own inventories of sounds or signs, their own systems for word and sentence structures, their own ways of conveying meaning. 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. On the other hand, languages and communication systems also show remarkable degrees of similarity. The variation among languages and among genres of communication is heavily constrained. The causes of these restrictions lie in human biology (anatomy of speech and signing organs, 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 the many sources of these constraints.

5.3. Evidence. The ACLC acknowledges at least two equally valid methodological sources of evidence for variation and constraints: generalizations about spontaneous data observed and elicited in the field, and behavioral experiments executed under controlled conditions. Observations of naturally occurring language 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), the study of the relations between language and social context, and the description of typologically “different”, often underdocumented and endangered, languages. 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 (the causes of) systematicities behind human language and communication. As in other sciences, sets of

theories may be found that individually make sense in a particular sub-area. Ultimately, however, those theories will have to account for all sources of evidence at the same time, and also be compatible with each other. These unifying 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 in the ACLC, such as generative grammar, functional discourse grammar, usage-based approaches, optimality theory, cognitive grammar, construction grammar, pragmadiactics and interaction grammars. Meanwhile, the main measure of progress in our field is the success achieved by explicit models that simultaneously account for as many sources of evidence as possible.

5.5. How this profile helps choosing research projects

The ACLC profile plays a guiding role in decisions about future research projects and directions. It is the yardstick for internal research applications and staff appointments. Ideally, a research proposal should investigate a particular subject matter from more than one of the angles mentioned above. To give an example: a proposal that aims to study the “DP” (Determiner Phrase) has a better chance of being supported by the ACLC 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 organization into research groups

The ACLC’s multi-angled 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 e.g. the processing of the English /æ~/~/ε/ contrast, and the syntacticians use psycholinguistic (as well as many other) methods to discover e.g. the processing of the DP. Neither is there a research group called “Historical Linguistics”, although many ACLC researchers investigate language from a diachronic perspective, usually with the goal of answering typological questions.

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

Linguists of the ACLC collaborate successfully with psychologists and child development researchers on the topic of *Learnability*, which has been the ACLC’s implementation of the UvA Zwaartepunt of *Brain and Cognition* since 2008. Learnability offers explanatory relations between the observational sources of evidence mentioned in 5.3. Possible directions and sequences of diachronic change can help constrain typological variation (if change has a bias against a certain feature, that feature will become rare or non-existent); possible acquisition paths and modes of interaction may 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).

5.8. Maintenance of the profile.

The multi-angled profile of the ACLC is strengthened by all ACLC-wide activities, because members will interact in discussing methods and viewpoints outside their direct area of expertise:

- The ACLC seminars, which take place every two weeks on Friday afternoons.
- The *NAP-dag* in October, an event in which first-year and fourth-year PhD candidates present their future or past work, respectively.
- The *OAP-dag* in December, an event in which approximately six senior researchers present recent work.
- The *junioerenoverleg*, a six-weekly meeting of the PhD candidates (see §8).
- The ACLC board meetings, six times a year.
- The annual round of PhD applications (December through March).
- The annual meeting of the research groups.
- The cultural and social event in June.
- The SMART lectures, as far as the **Learnability** profile is concerned.

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 the societal relevance of its research through the tab “Societal relevance” on its website.

7. Quality control

The ACLC monitors the progress of each of its PhD candidates through a series of meetings that take place roughly every ten months. These meetings are 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 or associate professors). Before the meeting, the PhD candidate writes a standardized progress report on publications, conferences, education, aspects of their work environment, supervision and plans for future careers. 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 takes place approximately 9 months after the start of the project; at this point the

candidate receives a “go or no-go” decision about whether they are allowed to continue the project (fortunately, a “no-go” is very rare) on the basis of a written paper.

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”.

Each post-doctoral researcher has a yearly meeting with the director of the ACLC (or his delegate), organized in much the same way as the 10-monthly meetings with the PhD candidates. Either by the ACLC director (or his delegate) or the supervisor (for instance in the case that the post-doctoral researcher works in a larger project) writes a report of the meeting.

Most faculty members have approximately 40 percent pure research time; a further 2 to 9 percent is allocated for “other research tasks”; the supervision of PhD candidates is funded separately. Faculty members are funded 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 by organizing a meeting with the ACLC director.

8. PhD candidate community

The ACLC hosts about 50 PhD candidates, among whom a number of external PhD candidates. The PhD candidates organize a three-monthly meeting (“junioerenoverleg”), in which they discuss the latest news and developments within the institute (the director and the coordinator of the ACLC are present) and in which they can bring up matters that are relevant to themselves and to their peers. The meeting is concluded with round-table questions. PhD candidates are expected to attend, and they take turns in chairing and preparing minutes. In 2016, there were five meetings, in January, March, June, September and December. Attendance varied around 20 people.

Some topics on the agenda:

- PhD candidates: updates on research projects:
 - Sixteen PhD candidates successfully defended their dissertations in 2016:
 - Mirjam Trapman (13 January)
 - Brendan Costello (29 January)
 - Margreet van Koert (5 February)
 - Konrad Rybka (26 February)
 - Sophie ter Schure (7 April)
 - Femmy Admiraal (3 June)
 - Merel Boers (15 June)
 - André Juthe (28 June)
 - Eugen Popa (7 September)
 - Ahmed Omar (21 September)
 - Smadar Cohen (27 September)
 - Katherine Bolaños Quiñones (12 October)
 - Jacky Visser (18 November)

- Bibi Janssen (24 November)
 - Pierre Winkler (24 November)
 - Matthias Passer (15 December)
- Eleven new PhD candidates started their projects at the ACLC in 2016:
 - Eveline Boers-Visker (lecturer at Hogeschool Utrecht; on a HU voucher for doing PhD research);
 - Ulrika Klomp (EU project “SignHub”)
 - Andreas Bilstrup Finsen (NWO Vrije Competitie grant to Gerard Steen)
 - Kiki Renardel de Lavalette (NWO Vrije Competitie grant to Gerard Steen)
 - Dunya Wackers (NWO Vrije Competitie grant to Gerard Steen)
 - Marieke Olthof (Promoties in de Geesteswetenschappen)
 - Fu Jie (Chinese Research Council)
 - Natalia Rivera (Conicyt grant, Chili)
 - Sybren Spit
 - Thom Westveer
- 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.
 - 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.

PhD candidates in the greater scheme of things:

- The PhD candidate pool supplies organisers and representatives for several occasions and organisational bodies. In 2016, the following people made contributions:
 - Graduate School representatives: Bibi Janssen, Jasmin Pfeifer;
 - Mailing list coordinator: Jelke Bloem;
 - NAP-dag organizers: Hernán Labbé Grünberg, Rosalinde Stadt;
 - PhD mentors: Tiffany Boersma, Jelke Bloem;
 - PhD representative on ACLC advisory board: Jeroen Breteler, Sanne Berends.

9. Post-doctoral researchers

The post-doctoral researchers during 2016 were Vadim Kimmelman, Margreet van Koert and Marianna Bolognesi. They were represented in ACLC meetings by Kimmelman.

10. ACLC funds

The annual budget for conference organization is approximately 2,500 euros; 16,000 euros a year can be spent on policy (“beleidsbudget”). In 2016, the policy budget was mainly spent on the sponsoring of the ACLC journal *Linguistics in Amsterdam* and the science popularization website *Kennislink* (through the national linguistics research school LOT), on bonuses for PhD candidates finishing within four years or publishing their theses in the LOT series, on the annual ACLC-wide cultural and social event in June, and on travel costs for speakers at ACLC seminars.

11. ACLC seminars

Nearly every other Friday afternoon the ACLC organizes a seminar. During these sessions researchers from anywhere in the world (including Amsterdam) present their work.

12. Research highlights

The highlights of the research in the ACLC research groups in 2016 are described in an accompanying document called “Annual Report ACLC Research Groups 2016”, and are publicly available on the websites of the groups.