

# KAT- BLAD

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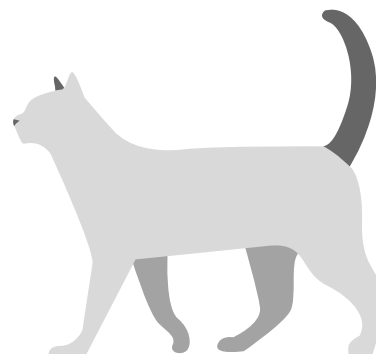
# Dear language lover,

We are all born with a tabula rasa – or so Locke said – with infinite possibilities to shape our minds, thoughts, and habits. And we are constantly reshaping these thoughts, by things that happen in our lives, both good and bad, sudden or gradually. All of these thoughts are eventually put into words – spoken, signed, written. But according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, it also goes the other way around: the language we speak affects our view on the world. Many articles in this issue managed to find its way back to this famous idea.

Even though the theory has received some criticism, it is still widely used and frequently applicable. Recently, a new language has been discovered that has very few words for possession, you can read more about it on page 3. On page 4, you will find an article written by Lara Scipio, about the implications the ‘Word of the Year’ has for our society.

On page 10, Dora Peterfay tells us what it’s like to be blind and study linguistics in an unknown city. But it is not all humans and their languages – Laurens Kemp tries to find a bridge between human and non-human communication, an intriguing story with talking dolphins, monkeys, and parrots. So sit back, relax, and take in your half year dose of language news – in a different language than the previous editions, perhaps it will shape your thoughts.

Emma Kemp



KAT-blad is the magazine for students and professors of the study Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam. The magazine is published twice a year.

Any suggestions, comments, or would you like to write for the magazine?

Contact us at [katblad.uva@gmail.com](mailto:katblad.uva@gmail.com).

We are always looking for contributors.

You can find previous editions of the magazine at [vosweb.nl/katblad](http://vosweb.nl/katblad).

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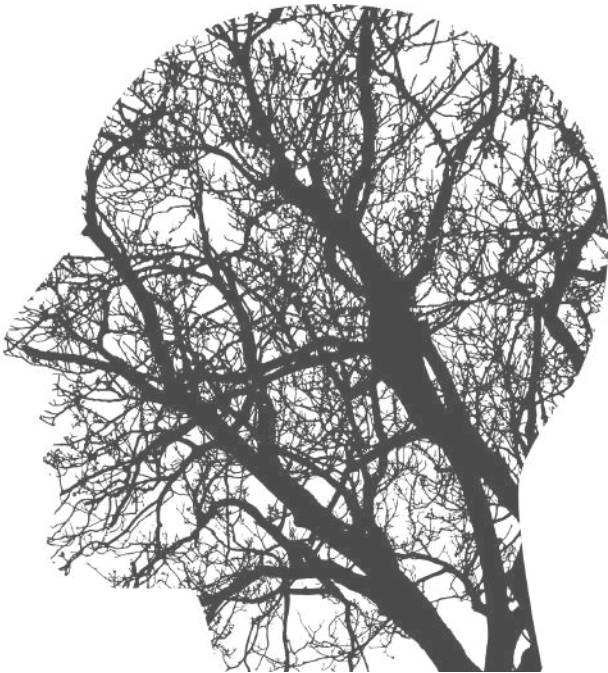
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# LINGTASTIC NEWS

## An endangered language saved by Minecraft players

Minecraft is helping preserve the language of Elfdalian. Officially still a dialect, this language is a descendent of old Norse and is spoken in the middle of Sweden, with only 3,000 speakers left. The American Chris Pennington and his Swedish wife Emilia Stjernfelt, fanatical Minecraft players, are using Minecraft to build a virtual world, incorporating the ancient Scandinavian language. The only way to move forward in the game, is by improving your knowledge of Elfdalian. The release of the Minecraft modification is planned at the end of this year.

*Source: Trouw & Motherboard*

## NT2-app

Three linguists at the department of *Talen, Literatuur en Communicatie* at the Universiteit Utrecht (Jacomine Nortier, Sterre Leufkens, and Marjo van Koppen) are developing an app to improve the education in Dutch as a second language. It focuses on the differences between Dutch and the first language of the learner. The app provides crucial knowledge about these differences, for both teacher and student, including training exercises.

*Source: Universiteit Utrecht*

## Linguists discover new language: Jedek

The village on the Malay Peninsula where Jedek is spoken, was not unknown to researchers, but was previously studied by anthropologists, not linguists. The language is spoken by 280 people and the community seems to be more gender-equal than Western societies. Their way of life is reflected in their language: they have no laws or courts, and also no words for these concepts, and there are no verbs that denote possession of property. By contrast, the number of words for exchanging and sharing are extensive. Niclas Burenhult, Associate Professor at Lund University: “There are so many ways to be human, but all too often our own modern and mainly urban societies are used as the yardstick for what is universally human. We have so much to learn, from the largely undocumented and endangered linguistic and cultural riches that are out there.” *Source: ScienceDaily*

## *What does the chosen Word of the Year say about our society?*

BY LARA SCIPIO

Culture and language: as you may know, these two are almost inseparable and therefore have quite a big influence on each other. According to the theory of social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), human knowledge is based on social and cultural constructions. In other words, the way we see the world depends on the environment we grow up in. This "environment" might be seen in a bigger perspective nowadays, as the world around us is easier accessible than ever due to modern technology. Especially the bubble in which the Western world used to live, seems to have popped. Nevertheless, there are still many nations and communities that are rather isolated, and therefore did not influence or got influenced by the Western society.

So, back to language. I believe, as well as many scientists, that language is mostly formed by social-cultural constructions. Words exist because we need to express abstract concepts in a more concrete and clear manner. Due to language we can communicate in a way that is comprehensive for everyone within the social-cultural construction. Communicating through language is a rather easy way, at least if the person standing in front of you is speaking the same language as you do.

A good example of culture leaving its traces in a language is the national Word of the Year contest, a contest organised by Van Dale where Dutch speakers can vote for the most appealing/representative/used word of the year. I would take this all with a grain of salt, but there is something interesting about the words that were nominated. They are all highly related to an event or phenomenon that occurred within the year. Although these words wouldn't be the first to come up in my mind, apparently a lot of people suggested and voted for these words.

The winning word of the year was \*drum rolls\* 'appongeluk'. For non-Dutch speakers, this word could be translated as 'app accident', although I don't know if it is an existing word in other languages, in English it isn't. It is the very word that describes an accident caused by the behaviour of a driver who is busy sending text-messages on his smartphone.

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Now, it is not the most exciting, inspiring, breathtaking word you have ever heard of, but it is a word that perfectly fits our modern society: a society that draws a thin line between the online and offline world. It is also a rather negative word: an 'appongeluk' causes pain, panic or maybe even death. What does that say about how we are approaching this whole social media thing that is taking over our lives? Are we coming to the point where we want to put our online world on hold, because it is affecting our real lives? It could be. This winning word is an indication for an upcoming change in social media: we might become more aware of our time in both the online and offline world.

In 2013, the winning word was 'selfie'. Originally an English word, like a lot of other words in the Dutch language. 2013 seems like a long time ago, a time when Twitter was up and coming and Instagram was still a newborn baby. Everything about social media was new and exciting and only the cool people (or media-geeks) were using it. 'Selfie' sounds like the grandfather of Snapchat. It sounds fresh, as if there certainly was a lot left to discover in social media.

There still is a lot left to discover, as I do not think we are ever done chasing progress and new ideas, but as the word 'appongeluk' suggests, it may take another direction. I think we have crossed a line when unnecessarily accidents happen because of text-messaging. Imagine texting your child while driving, asking if he got home safe and at that same time causing an accident that involves someone else's child.

Social media can be really useful in our busy lives, but perhaps we need to remind ourselves to focus, on something that either needs all of your attention, or none at all.

I personally loved the word that came in third: 'regenboogtaal'. The word describes gender-neutral language, and literally translates to: 'rainbow language'. The word itself already looks pretty, but the more interesting is its engaging meaning. An example of this particular type of language is the discussion about a gender-neutral greeting to the passengers in the subway or train that appeared in the news last year. Instead of saying "Dear ladies and gentlemen", the representative now says "Dear travellers". The NS, the national train company of the Netherlands, made this change to ensure that every passenger feels addressed.

'Rainbow language' sounds like a language without boundaries, a language that could be used to approach anyone, without regard to their race, gender, or role in society. We need words like that in our multi-cultural and diverse society, more than a word like 'appongeluk' will ever be useful. So, to me, 'regenboogtaal' made it to my word of 2017.

# LANGUAGE ACROSS THE DIVIDE

BY LAURENS KEMP

*What position does human language occupy in the family that encompasses all animal communication? The common belief is that humans are totally unique in their language ability, and no animal even comes close to being able to express and understand the variety and complexity of communication that we do. Animal communication, vocal or otherwise, is thought to be unable to convey more than basic messages, such as 'I am angry', 'mate with me', 'give me that food', and so on. Even a basic indication of a future event, such as 'I will be there tomorrow', seems totally beyond any animal's capability, but is trivial for a human. In spite of this, could we find a bridge between human and non-human communication?*

If we want to examine the sophistication of non-human animal communication, the best place to look is in the ocean, where we find the ceta-ceans, which include dolphins, orcas, and whales. Each of these can produce vocalizations that are important to interpersonal communication. In the case of whales, which live alone or in small families of a mother and calf, their 'singing' lets them broadcast over long distances.

Orcas travel in large families of a mother and her offspring, both young and mature. Their vocalizations have dialects, which allows them to gauge relatedness and prevent inbreeding. Dolphins form large interfamilial groups, and maintain complex social relationships within them. They each have a unique 'whistle', akin to a name, which they use to identify themselves, and broadcast their location within the group, which allows them to

coordinate hunting strategies. Some imitate the unique whistles of their family member or close friend, to get their attention, just like humans do. Very few animals are capable of vocal communication as complex as that of the cetaceans. As impressive as their use of vocalization is, it cannot accurately be called language. But this should come as no surprise.



Humans have taken tens of thousands of years to develop hundreds of languages, and we most likely started out just like dolphins did: by using vocalizations to develop social relationships and coordinate hunting strategies. Over the centuries we have used the advantages that language provided us to develop different forms of government and coordinate construction projects, growing our culture on what is essentially the same bedrock of language. It is not so strange, then, that the rest of the animal kingdom is comparatively impoverished in their communication.

Culture is an incredible force that drives our species, but are humans themselves, cognitively speaking, really so fundamentally different from other animals that have strong communication abilities, but no language? Our language is not hardwired into our brains. We are receptive to it in childhood, just as songbirds are receptive to learning their parents' song when they are in the nest, but both songbirds and humans cannot produce any meaningful sounds if they grow up in isolation. Perhaps if we studied a languageless human like we study non-human animals, we would come to the same conclusion: that they do not possess the ability to convey complex ideas like future events or how many friends they have, much less ideas like what the best system of government is or how to build a suspension bridge. But is this their limitation, or ours?

### **Like riding a bike**

When we look at whether or not animals have language, we tend to overlook that the hard part of inventing the language is already done. We can compare it to a bicycle: many fundamental discoveries were necessary before the creation of the bicycle was even possible, such as the wheel and the sprocket. However, once the bicycle is made, anyone can learn to ride it and reach places much faster than if they were walking, even small children. Even animals! Of course, if you don't know which part of the bicycle is up or down, or how to get on it, you're going to have trouble riding it. But with a good teacher, and a hand on your shoulder, you should be able to pick it up soon enough.

It's possible that the same is true for language. We look at all these animals and their bicycleless existence and conclude they are obviously far too slow to keep up with humans. Even when we examine the dolphin, which is (metaphorically) faster than every other animal, a human is still immeasurably faster. However, provided they have the cognitive equivalent of arms and/or legs, these animals can probably make a good effort at riding a bicycle if one was provided to them.

Many researchers have, in fact, made an effort to teach animals human language, either directly by teaching them to mimic human sounds, or indirectly by teaching them sign language or using other symbolic representations.

The former method tends to be less effective as the latter, as even the animals mentally capable of perceiving a sound and then attempting to replicate it do not have anything resembling human vocal chords. Generally, the sounds they produce are almost, but not quite, entirely unlike speech. This is exemplified by Margaret Howe Lovatt, who taught Peter the dolphin to produce English words, which he did by whistling through his blowhole. Apropos to the metaphor, he did this about as well as if she put him on a bicycle and told him to start pedaling.

### **Signing for primates**

Obviously, tailoring the language to the animal is important if two-way communication is to succeed. Subsequent dolphin communication research focused more on teaching them whistles that correspond to objects or concepts, rather than the words we use for those things. Other semi-successful attempts at two-way communication include teaching chimpanzees to communicate with a board of pictographs or a touch-screen to indicate what they want to say. However, none of these come close to the level of success and fame of Koko the gorilla, who was taught from a young age to communicate with her caretaker, Penny Patterson, through sign language. Gorillas in the wild use a limited set of gestures to communicate with each other, which meant that Koko was well-suited to learning a modified version of American Sign Language. ►



According to Penny, Koko has a vocabulary of over 1000 signs, about half of which she uses regularly. Koko also shows that she understands spoken English, and she is aware of how spoken words map to signs. She regularly expresses her emotions through signs, and she has invented many compound signs to describe things she hasn't learned the specific sign for. Koko's life is covered in the documentaries *A Conversation With Koko The Gorilla* (1999) and *Koko: The Gorilla Who Talks To People* (2015).

To her caretaker, it is evident that Koko has a rich inner life and a sound understanding of the world around her. Critics, however, point out that we only have Penny's interpretation of Koko's signing to base these claims on. Since Koko does not use syntax or grammar, some of her messages can take some creative thinking to interpret, leaving the possibility of overinterpretation. The most cynical interpretation is that Koko does not understand what she signs at all, and is merely imitating the signs that she is taught to get food, or hugs. This is a very uncharitable position, though it is not uncommon. Other attempts at teaching sign language to primates include Project Washoe and Project Nim, which both had chimpanzees (Washoe and Nim Chimpsky) learning sign language while living among humans.

These projects caused fierce debate among researchers, who argued about methodology, the socialization effects on the chimps, and that the syntaxless signing they used had nothing in common with language.

Eventually, the leader of Project Nim himself, Herbert S. Terrace, admitted that Project Nim was a failure and that the chimp exclusively used signing to get what he wanted. Nim met a tragic fate, and his story is covered in the documentary *Project Nim* (2011).

All in all, the data on sign language in primates is dubious, but encouraging. While many attempts at establishing sign language communication are highly flawed, there are strong indications that the chimpanzees and gorillas involved use language in a similar way to humans, like the use of compound words, referring to abstract concepts like age, self, emotion, and relaying memories.

## *The chimpanzees and gorillas involved use language in a similar way to humans.*

However, the lack of syntax in primate signing means it is inherently uncertain whether or not their signing is indicative of deeper meanings. Using a more rigorous method of instruction, it may be possible to teach primates to use more disciplined signing, rather than the scattershot communication they tend toward. In the absence of this, primate signing studies have nevertheless provided an intriguing and humbling perspective on the minds of our closest taxonomic relatives, which is a major accomplishment by itself.

## **Advanced parroting**

It is perhaps surprising that the other great success stories in two-way communication occur so far outside our taxonomic family tree. These are the birds: 200 million years ago was when we last had a common ancestor, yet some species can learn to speak intelligibly with just a little encouragement. The best of them have vocal mimicry skills that no other animal, including humans, can rival. How convenient for us, then, that we can put those skills to use to learn how they think.

Parrots have a longstanding reputation for being convincing mimics (hence the term 'parroting') and so they are frequently studied for their vocal abilities. Most of what we know about communication with parrots is from experiments by Irene Pepperberg, who trained many African grey parrots, but most famous among them is Alex. Alex developed a complex repertoire with Irene and other experimenters, which included answering questions about the color, shape or material of an object and saying what food he wanted to eat or where he wanted to go (as he could not fly). He also displayed irritation when he would get different food than what he asked for, and said "I'm sorry" when an experimenter was irritated with him. Sometimes, he got bored with the experiments, and started giving wrong or nonsensical answers on purpose.



Alex’s communication abilities weren’t just limited to him and the experimenters either. During other parrots’ training sessions, he would tell them to “speak clearly” if they didn’t articulate well enough, as he used to be told the same if he didn’t speak clearly. By far his most noteworthy utterance, though, was when he asked “What color?” after seeing himself in the mirror. After being told six times that he was grey, he learned the word and could identify grey things. This is incredibly significant, because no other non-human animal is known to ask a question, let alone learn from the answer, including those that we’ve taught to speak, sign or otherwise communicate with us. Alex was a very special parrot, and more on his communication abilities can be read in the book *The Alex Studies: Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots* (2000).

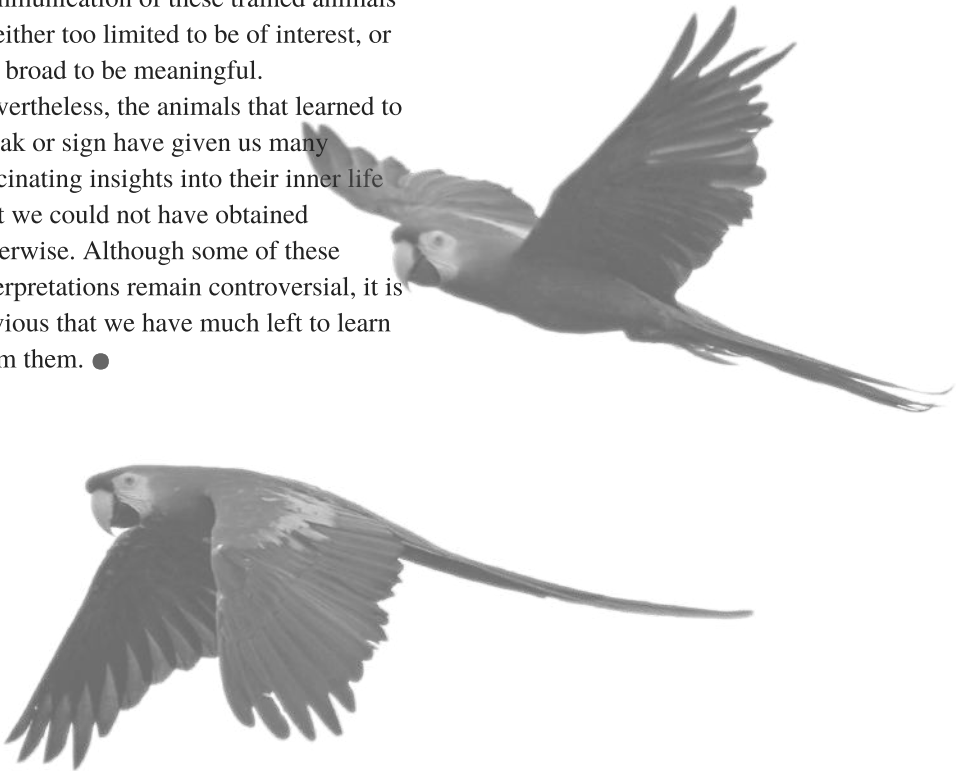
No more questions?

Asking questions is a fundamental part of how humans learn. Even if a chimpanzee, a gorilla or a dolphin could speak a human language perfectly, without asking questions they could never interact with a human on the same level. It indicates a kind of curiosity that is essential to the human mind; perhaps other animals’ minds simply don’t function in a way that makes questioning possible. Alex, however, proves this wrong. Even though he never asked more than that simple question, it indicates that he at least has the ability and intrinsic motivation to gain information from language.

The fact that no parrot has done this since suggests that he may be a particularly unique individual, but it does not preclude the possibility that other parrots, or even other animals, have that curious streak that pushes them to learn from not just practice and observation, but direct ques-tioning as well.

To summarize, the gap between our communication abilities and those of other animals may be too wide for us to ever be able to truly converse with them. Their native speech, so to say, is limited and highly specific to their ancestral environment, making it infeasible to communicate with them in ways they already understand. Attempting to teach them our language is an approach rife with pitfalls, and it is easy to dismiss the communication of these trained animals as either too limited to be of interest, or too broad to be meaningful. Nevertheless, the animals that learned to speak or sign have given us many fascinating insights into their inner life that we could not have obtained otherwise. Although some of these interpretations remain controversial, it is obvious that we have much left to learn from them. ●

*Laurens is a graduate of the research master Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the UvA.*



# An interview with Dora Peterfay

## **We arranged our meetup via Facebook in Dutch. How does that work on your computer?**

"If I read in Dutch on my computer, I have to use an English synthesizer to read Dutch, as my screen reader's "Dutch" is even worse than listening to Dutch pronounced in English."

## **So you use a program that reads Dutch with an English accent?**

"Yes, that is the reason I didn't dare to speak Dutch in the beginning. I wanted to study linguistics in Dutch, but I choose the English program in Amsterdam. Otherwise it would have been very difficult for me to choose between the universities that offer linguistics in Dutch. Besides, the rooms are cheaper there."

It's a shame I'm not studying linguistics in Dutch. I'd love to know the Dutch equivalent of certain terms, but most of them are easy to figure out: morphology is *morfologie*, phonetics is *fonetiek*. However, I do hope to study Dutch language and culture as well, which is in Dutch."

## **Why did you decide to study linguistics in Amsterdam?**

"Linguistics is what I've always wanted to study. But three years before I moved here I was absolutely convinced I wouldn't be able to study linguistics, because it's quite visual. It's more a science than a humanities subject. So I tried to find something I'd still enjoy, which was not linguistics, like English literature, something I have been interested in from a very young age."

As I had never studied English literature before, I would have needed an A-level in the subject in order to study it at university. Which is why I applied to a college in England, a sort of college for adults. But it seemed they did everything to not accept me."

## **Did they see many obstacles?**

"I felt like the English didn't know how to deal with blind people. I really wanted to go to England, I wanted to study and live there. Against my mother's advice, against everyone's advice, I booked a room in a bed & breakfast in Cornwall. I had to pay 150 pounds a week for a cold room with duvets that were so heavy I got a stomach ache, but as I had no permanent address and couldn't start college that year because there was no support available, I had to go back home."

At that time I still wanted to study English literature and I was absolutely convinced linguistics was impossible. I spent two years at a university in Hungary studying English, but I didn't like it, although I did have two inspirational professors. With my level of English, I was wasting twice 90 minutes of my life a week on language practice sessions. I made three more attempts to study in England and this time I got accepted into four universities, but they didn't offer scholarships or extra help. That would have had huge financial consequences for me."

I didn't get into Cambridge where I could have gotten a scholarship. There, it is not enough to apply, you have to do an interview in which your knowledge of the subject you applied for is assessed. And I didn't know as much about literature as candidates from England or international schools, where English literature is taught."

*Dora Peterfay is a 23-year old student from Hungary. Her mother tongue is Hungarian, but she is also fluent in English, German and Dutch. Dora has been blind from birth, making it very impressive for her to come to a city like Amsterdam and study linguistics. In this interview, she will tell us a bit about how she ended up in Amsterdam (and not in Nijmegen, where the rent is a lot cheaper), and she will also correct some myths about being blind.*

Honestly, I'm glad I didn't get into Cambridge. I never thought I'd ever say this, but if I had got that offer from Cambridge, I would be struggling through a course where I had to write critical commentaries, which can be really enjoyable and fascinating, but not for me. I love reading English literature for pleasure, but writing critical commentary on it is a completely different story."

***In hindsight I think I should have tried to think outside the box and strive for what I really want.***

My Cambridge rejection made me realize I was striving for something I didn't really want. If that weren't so, I wouldn't be feeling uneasy every time someone talked about "practical criticism".

**So you decided linguistics was what you wanted to do?**

"Three years ago I would never have thought I'd end up here. In hindsight I think I should have tried to think outside the box and strive for what I really want. Next year I wish to start a second degree program in Dutch. I do need two Dutch for it, which is an equivalent of the A-level I wanted to take in English. So I get to take a similar exam to the one I wanted to take in English, but in a different country and language. And for the job market, it's also more 'useful' than plain literature, in the eyes of some people, of course. Language is something we all use."

**But you still weren't sure it was possible.**

"I could have applied for linguistics at Cambridge, but I feared I would not get enough help with the visual side of it. I did apply for linguistics at UCL and Edinburgh and some others. They didn't accept me because I didn't have a qualification for math, through no fault of my own.

I didn't know what to do. I wanted to leave my course in Hungary, because I was very dissatisfied. And then in December 2016, I wondered why I had never thought of learning Dutch. It's close to German, and if Dutch universities offer high-quality linguistic courses, why should I insist on studying in the UK? So in half a year, I managed to learn Dutch just by talking to people on Skype, helping them with English, German or Hungarian.

I asked them never to switch to English or German. If I didn't know a word, I put it into brackets in German or English and then they used it in their answer. Or if I made a grammar mistake they just corrected it in their answer, without correcting me. For me it was quite easy, because I speak German. It's so awfully close to German."

**Have you been blind since you were born?**

"Yes, but I do have light perception. Other than light and darkness, I can see nothing."

**Was there a moment you realized you couldn't see, as a child?**

"Oh that is a funny story. Of course I've been blind since birth, but it was my 5-year-old classmate who told me "You're blind! What does that mean?" That's when I heard the word "blind" for the first time."

**What is the biggest obstacle for you, being blind?**

"Well of course, getting around independently. I have to learn the route from and to university, for example. For a blind person, orientation and mobility is a school subject, just like maths."

**Did you consider having a dog?**

"No, not every blind person has a dog. I wouldn't want to have to clean their... If they do their business... and I don't like dog hair either. I do like the animals, they are very cute and they can be very loyal, but it's just everything you have to put up with."

**How do you feel most people respond to you being blind?**

"Here I am considered as a normal person. In Hungary most people actually have a really old fashioned opinion – they still think we work in factories, or if you're blind you're also stupid. They try to guess where you're going if you have a stick in your hand, and they point somewhere and say: "There!"."

In England, my experience was very different compared to the Netherlands. My landlady once said: "Why should a blind person get a job if there are hundreds of sighted candidates"."

**Are there other misconceptions you would like to correct?**

"Yes, a lot! First of all, not everyone is completely blind. It's not completely true that blind people live in darkness. Another thing is that we don't all work in factories or sit at home knitting all day."

We're not stupid, just because we're blind. And not every blind person has a dog! But it depends on how people ask, 'Where's your dog?' is not a very charming way to ask."

Many people think that if you're blind you always need help getting around. But once you learn the routes, it's easier. Some people think blind people are depressed because they can't see. People who are newly blind can be of course. But people like me, who have been blind since birth, don't know what it is like to see. I am curious about it, but I don't wish I could see."

**What about colours?**

"I have associations with red. If I hear red, I think of blood, fire, or berries. If I hear white, I think of snow. Grass is green, that's what I know about green. And I usually associate it with immaturity."

**So, it's mostly a reference, and not that different from how sighted people see colours. When I think of blue, I think of the sky.**

"The sky, yes, so do I, but I don't know what the sky is or what it looks like. They are just words or feelings. I know how blood feels, what it tastes like, how it smells. But it could be useful to be able to know if the food in my fridge is still edible."

**What would you like to do in the future?**

My favourite topics are phonetics and phonology. I would like to do research in this field and perhaps do practical work with either children with speech impairments or language difficulties, or I might help design a better screen reader for blind people. Phonetics and phonology play a crucial role in this. I would like to do a PhD as well. ●



*Yaël Latuny is currently in her third year of Linguistics. Last year she decided to look for an internship on speech therapy to explore the possibilities of working as a speech therapist. It turned out to be quite difficult to find a place that didn't require any pre-education on speech therapy, but at the Afasiecentrum in Goes, they were very happy to have her.*

# Internship: Afasiecentrum

For six months, Yaël has been helping patients with aphasia between the age of 40 and 90 're-enter' society. People who are diagnosed with aphasia, after suffering brain damage, often have issues finding words. Sometimes they do not have the ability to write or speak at all. Speech therapists help them to improve their language skills, but the recovery sometimes has to continue for years after the first therapy is completed.

After therapy, people often struggle to find their way back into society. This is when they come to the Afasie-centrum. Many people stay here for months or even years. In a way, a community is formed, making the centre a social place where people facing the same problems on a daily basis understand each other. This can be a warm welcome for people whose family members might sometimes be unable to deal with the circumstances.

During Yaël's time at the Afasiecentrum, it came to her attention that it is not that easy to put people into one 'aphasia category', with the most common types known as Broca's and Wernicke's aphasia. Many patients often have a mix of symptoms. Yaël offers some interesting anecdotes: "when you ask someone whether they want to have coffee or tea, they can answer 'tea', but actually mean coffee. Or patients might tell stories about their sister, when in fact they mean their mother, and they don't even have sister."

At the Afasiecentrum, patients are divided into three groups, depending on their level of speech. However, for par-ticular practices, patients can pick any level of group they like. If someone is already an expert at using the computer, he or she can also decide to focus on writing. An important part of the therapy is to focus on what the patients can do, and not on what they can't. Every six months, the patients write down their goals on a 'doelen-kaart', to indicate what they still want to learn. Goals can include making a grocery list, or improving phono-logical knowledge. During her internship, every Monday afternoon, Yaël would help her group practice connect-ing sounds to letters.

Yaël believes doing an internship can be a valuable addition to your curriculum: "Especially when you don't want to become a researcher. Working at the Afasiecentrum is very rewarding, but can also be difficult at times." Because of their aphasia, some patients also suffer from a depression. For the employees, this can be hard to deal with, considering that they're not psychotherapists. Luckily, the employees can discuss these matters with each other. "When it comes to the patients, we try to be understanding and focus on what the patient is still able to do. It's important to pay attention to positive things such as improvements, and acknowl-ed it when goals are achieved."

Next year, Yaël wants to start an education as a speech therapist. After this, she hopes to be working with people suffering from a form of speech impairment, preferably an audience that is a little younger.



# Linguistics on the silver screen

## Arrival

In *Arrival*, a professor of linguistics is trying to interpret an alien language by using the program *Praat* to deconstruct the language. This program is developed by our university's own professors Paul Boersma and David Weenink. In the movie, Louise Banks, a professor of linguistics, begins to have visions during the same time she is learning the alien language. An inevitable reference is made to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: learning the alien language is changing Louise's way of thinking. Despite the impressive storyline, the movie did receive some criticism for taking too much fiction with its science.

## The Shape of Water

Elisa, a mute woman working as a janitor at the Occam Aerospace Research Center, falls in love with a captured humanoid amphibian. Elisa and 'the amphibian man' communicate through body language, music, and eventually make short sentences in sign language.

Aside from illustrating how easily people can misunderstand each other, the movie also establishes clear known cultural differences (America and Russia). When Elisa signs 'fuck you' to the colonel – who is only after killing the creature, and doesn't know sign language – she is deliberately creating a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, it is wonderful to see how Elisa and the creature ultimately find their way of communicating, without initially having a common language. Except for, of course, the language of love.

## **The Imitation game**

This movie that came out in 2014 ponders over the (im)possibility of cracking German intelligence code during World War II. Now you can say *The Imitation Game* has more to do with math, but two linguists as well as a team of mathematicians, are working on breaking the Enigma. However, after getting Churchill's approval to take charge of the code cracking team, the first thing Alan Turing does is fire the two linguists: "You're mediocre linguists and positively poor codebreakers", he said. Let's hope cracking codes was just not in their line of work.

## **Embrace of the Serpent** (*El abrazo de la serpiente*)

In this movie at least ten languages are spoken, including German, Spanish and four indigenous languages from the Amazon: Cubeo, Huitoto, Ticuna and Wanano. The Colombian-Venezualian-Argentinian movie from 2015 is based on the stories of the German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünber (performed by a Flemish actor, but you'll have to forgive his accent). Around 1904, he travelled around the Vaupes region in Colombia, studying the people, their cultures, and mythical plants. He meets Karamakate, an Amazonian shaman and the last survivor of his tribe, who helps him find *yakruna*, a plant with healing powers.

The name of the plant is essential in the connection to linguistics, meaning 'language that is lost'. The shaman as the last survivor of his tribe, is also the last one to speak its language. The movie shows the shaman struggling to remember rituals and important locations from his past. As Arno Adelaars knew to describe so on point: 'when the language dies, a way of thinking will die with it.' Bringing us back to Sapir-Whorf.

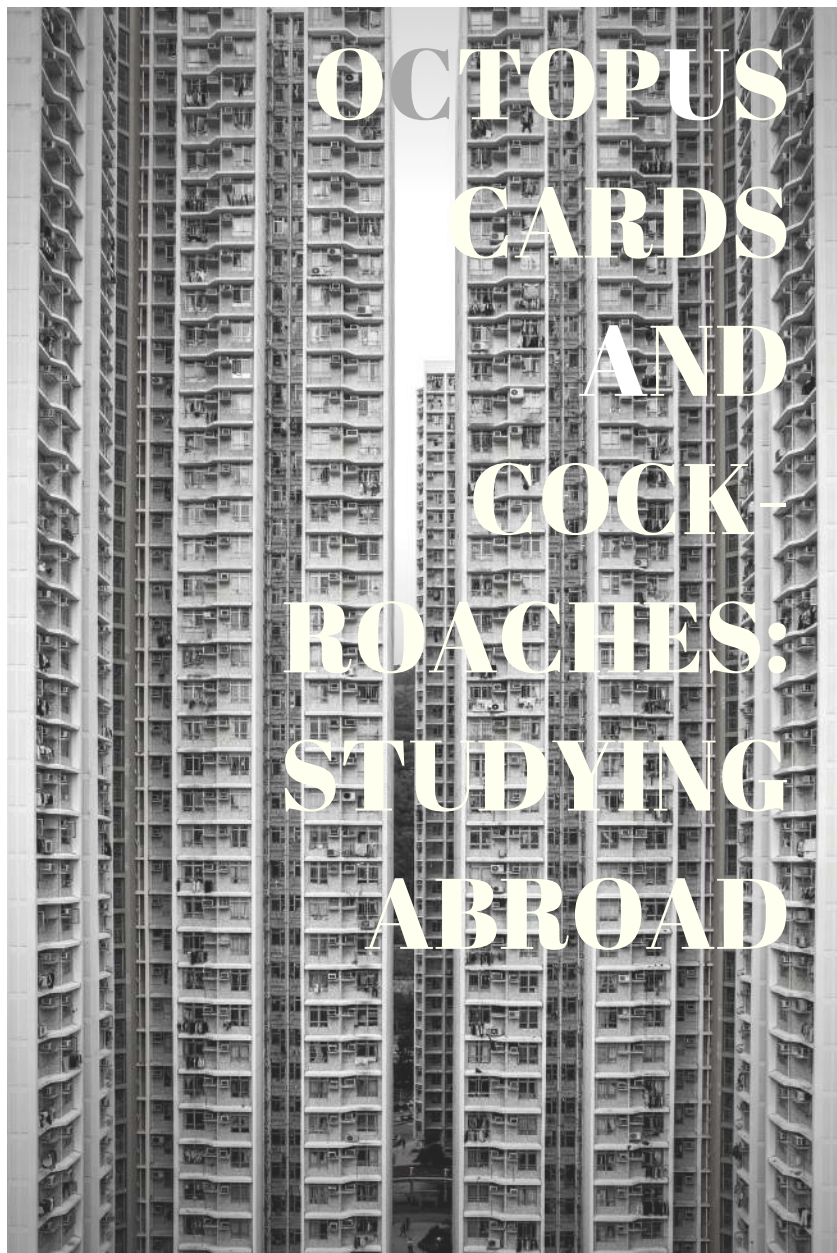


*Linguistics student **Luisa Homburg** went for a Global Exchange from August 2017 until December 2017: she studied in Hong Kong for one semester. Before coming home, she also travelled in Asia for another month. In this interview she will tell us something about her experiences in a city with over 7 million inhabitants.*

**Why did you decide to spend a semester in Hongkong?**

Hong Kong wasn't my first choice, actually, I wanted to go to New-Zealand, but I discovered that studying there is really expensive and I didn't have a lot of time to save up money (around 4 months), so I had to choose a different place. After the idea of New-Zealand was off the table, I considered Thailand, but the university in Bangkok only offered technical courses, which isn't really my thing.

I decided to browse the other possible places the UvA offered for an exchange, and that is when Hong Kong caught my eye. I did a bit more research on the city and it really appealed to me – I thought that studying in Asia would be much more of an interesting experience than studying in a Western-like country. I also noticed that Hong Kong is located quite centrally in Asia, so it's easy to travel to other countries in Asia.



# OCTOPUS CARDS AND COCK- ROACHES: STUDYING ABROAD

**Did you manage to find a nice place to stay?**

I was lucky to receive a room at the university campus, the dorms were only 600 euros for an entire semester – which is really cheap considering Hong Kong is the most expensive place in the world when it comes to housing prices. I shared a small bedroom with one roommate, the bathroom is shared with four people. It sounds pretty intense to share a room with someone, but I got used to it very quickly. Most of the time I was not even in my room, since I was eating out for (almost) every meal, studying at the university, or exploring the city in my free time.

**What type of courses did you take?**

I took three courses during my four months in Hong Kong: conversation analysis, Japanese, and Chinese for non-Mandarin speakers. I liked Japanese the most; conversation analysis was the least interesting. My intention was to follow five courses, but I didn't get into one course and the other one turned out to be the same as a course I already did in the Netherlands.

**How is your level of Chinese right now?**

I've learned a bit of Mandarin in Mandarin class, but I didn't really use any of it during my time in Hong Kong, since they speak Cantonese there. I did learn a few Cantonese words, but most people speak English with foreigners. I befriended a few Hong Kong natives, but most of my friends were other exchange students.

**Was there anything you disliked during your exchange in Hong Kong?**

First of all, cooking for yourself is barely possible. We had to share a kitchen with 30 people and let's say it wasn't very hygienic (cockroaches ...). Moreover, the super-markets were super expensive, because almost everything is imported. Also, being a vegetarian proved to be hard sometimes. However, after a few weeks of living in Hong Kong, my friends and I discovered lots of nice restaurants where we would go weekly. We mainly ate a lot of really good Indian food! *Dim sum* is of course a Hong Kong essential, and I really liked the steamed egg cake and the vegetarian dumplings. Since I'm a vegetarian, I did have to do some research before going to a new restaurant, making sure there would be a vegetarian option. Most places in Hong Kong don't offer any veggie meals.

Another thing that bothers almost every foreigner is that the people in Hong Kong walk very... very... very slowly, mainly because they stare at their phones a lot.

**Was there anything you missed from Amsterdam?**

I definitely missed my bike and the freedom that comes with owning one. It's really annoying to be dependent on public transport and grumpy taxi drivers. Moreover, I was missing proper cheese, nice vegetarian food, and to be able to eat FEBO after a drunk night out. Sometimes I also missed a bit of privacy – there were people around all the time, except for the rare moments my roommate and I wouldn't be in our room at the same time.

**What will you miss from Hong Kong?**

I'm really going to miss the extended opening hours of many shops – lots of places are open 24/7. You could stay at the university, studying until early in the morning with many other people, which was really motivating. Of course I will also miss the 7-Eleven! Another thing I will be missing is *ladies night* – every Thursday ladies could drink for free. First, we would go to the Skybar for free unlimited prosecco, and afterwards we could go to several clubs and bars for more free drinks. (Keep in mind that one drink easily costs more than 12 euros, including beer!)

Anyhow, there's so much more I'll be missing, the octopus card (public transport card), the MTR system (public transport), the weather, the nature and just life in general there. ●



# Seating arrangements in Game of Thrones

BY EMMA KEMP

*King Arthur used a round table to create an equal status among all knights at the table. Using a round table instead of a rectangular table, he established a setting with no head, creating a lack of positions of prominence, giving each seat equal importance.*

Another tale based on the Middle Ages, is Game of Thrones. A famous fantasy tv series with extensive plot lines and well-built characters. For those who are not familiar with the story of Game of Thrones – The Guardian describes it as "a dark and bloody fantasy drama set in a quasi-medieval world". The "good" guys are the Stark family (of which only four out of eight are still alive in the last season). On the other side, we have the wealthy Lannisters. (Spoiler alert if you haven't seen season four yet:) The father, Tywin, gets killed by his dwarf son. His other two twin children are in an incestuous relationship, and have three miraculously healthy children.

Many cues in the show have more or less been hidden that have a predictive value on the outcome of the show. For example, a lot of attention is paid to all pieces of clothing Margaery Tyrell is wearing (for those who know her) to show her mood or position towards other characters. Among these cues are also the locations of the characters at the tables.

In this article, the seating arrangement of the characters in two scenes will be discussed. The clues in the scene could give you an idea about where the story is going from there on.



The first picture shows Cersei and Jaime Lannister, the twins and incestuous lovers, sitting at a large, rectangle dining table with two of their children. In spatial arrangement theories, the difference between rectangle and round tables is already very interesting, since round tables are more often used for family arrangements, according to Kendon (1973). Not in this case. Cersei is occupying the middle of the table, next to her daughter, and opposite her son, and brother. When Tyrion arrives, he lifts up his nephew, moves him to the left, and takes over his seat. He could have taken any other empty chair, but by taking this position, Tyrion is facing his sister.

Source:  
Kendon, B. (1973). The Role of Visible Behaviour in the Organization of Face-to-Face Interaction. In: *Social Communication and Movement: Studies of Interaction and Expression in Man and Chimpanzee*, pp. 29-74. London: Academic Press.

His brother is sitting on his right side. Gesture theories state that people facing each other at a table are most likely to be opponents. We might say that Tyrion and Cersei are definitely not friends, but considering that Jaime and Cersei are lovers, it's odd to have them seated opposite each other in this scene.

And what do we know after six seasons? Besides the fact that the two children are dead, Jaime and Tyrion remain to be good (and even better) friends. Cersei and Tyrion however, have never hated each other more. In addition to this, there are rumours about Jaime being the one killing Cersei one day.

All well and good, but this is just speculation. Let's take another example from season three. Tywin Lannister summons five people for a meeting, among them are Cersei and Tyrion, his daughter and son. See both pictures on the right.

Tywin has taken the seat at the head of the rectangular table, a common place to sit for a leader. On the right side of the table, there are five chairs available. After the first three chairs have been occupied by three other men, Cersei takes the fourth, and moves it to the other side of the table, as close to her father as possible. After all, choosing the fourth seat at its previous location would have her too far away from her father.



She is eager to point out how important she is to her father – or how important her father is to her – more important than the three men across the table.

Then Tyrion makes a bold move – he takes the last available chair to the other head position of the table, and suddenly the roles change. The other end of the table becomes a leader position as well. This is confirmed by the response of the other participants. Especially Cersei judges her brother by her gaze. The competition between Tywin and Tyrion cannot be more confirmed by their opposition. And what happens in season four? Tyrion ends up killing his father, Tywin.

I wouldn't suggest that you start basing anyone's intentions by their position at a table, but you might want to reconsider taking the other end of the table when you meet your father in law next week.



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