The acquisition of reference: a cross-linguistic study
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Citation for published version (APA):

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When I arrived at the University of Amsterdam as a very young student of Swedish Language and Literature, I was interested in language, but did not know exactly what I liked about it. This I discovered at the end of my first year at university. The linguistics course in the Scandinavian department (including the infamous ‘phonetics week’), taught by Harry Perridon, and the Introduction to General Linguistics, taught by Kees Hengeveld, were real eye-openers. These inspired me to follow into my father’s footsteps and to concentrate on linguistics. I left the field of Scandinavian Languages and continued as a student of General Linguistics. Courses by Folkert Kuiken, Anne Baker and Jan de Jong fired my enthusiasm for language acquisition. While doing research for my MA-thesis, this enthusiasm grew even stronger. Therefore, I took on a PhD-project that combined the two aspects of linguistics that I had always been interested in most: morphosyntax and pragmatics. Now finally, my dissertation is finished. In spite of the proverbially blood, sweat and (true) tears, which inevitably accompany the writing of a dissertation, the past six years have been a wonderful period, not in the least because of the many people who have supported me.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Anne Baker. She taught me how to approach a research project, that is, step-by-step. Her comments helped me to structure my ideas about the acquisition of reference and our discussions strengthened my arguments. In German, a female supervisor is called Doktormutter. I think that this term perfectly fits Anne’s role. She not only educated me professionally, but also personally. When the project sometimes
became too much for me, Anne was there with comforting and stimulating words. I am infinitely grateful to her for being my supervisor.

I would also like to thank Ingrid van Alphen, Jeanette Gundel, Aafke Hulk, Jan de Jong, Elena Lieven, Elisabeth van der Linden and Frank Wijnen for accepting the invitation to be a member of the reading committee. A special thanks goes to Ingrid van Alphen for persuading me six years ago to stay on in my ‘natural habitat’ and to take on this project at the University of Amsterdam. I also thank her for the detailed comments on the manuscript version of this dissertation. These did not make life easier, but certainly helped improve the text.

Several people have helped me with the practical issues of doing research and writing a dissertation, and I am very grateful to them. Rob Schoonen provided me with excellent statistical advice. Nienke Stolk and Daniel Puccini were of great help in coding and counting the data. Elisabeth van der Linden and Petra Sleeman were always willing to help me with translations from, and into, French. Akke de Blauw, Marian Erkelens, Marcel Giezen, Česke Niewold, Esther Parigger, Judith Rispens, Niels Smit, Miriam van Staden and Gerry Wanders proofread parts of the final text after Claudia van Rouendal had taken care of the layout.

International conferences were stimulating environments from which I often returned with new ideas and renewed enthusiasm about my own research. Discussions with Eve Clark, Cecile de Cat, Tanja Kupisch, Danielle Matthews, Aliyah Morgenstern, Helena Taelman, Marlies van der Velde and many more international colleagues certainly contributed to that. In 2004, the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication (AcLC) was re-organized into research groups. I have enjoyed and benefited from the discussions in the groups Encoding Grammatical Information (Egi) and Language Acquisition and Executive Function (LexEF), especially discussions with Elma Blom, Antje Orgassa, Maren Pannemann and Daniela Polišenská.

Working days are much more pleasant with nice colleagues around. I want to thank my former roommates Margot van den Berg, Victoria Nyst, Martin Salzmann, Rachel Selbach, Gerry Wanders and especially Annerieke Boland and Česke Niewold for the good times we shared at the aio-kamer 502. Later on, Esther Parigger and I moved to room 525, where we suddenly found ourselves in the department of Slavonic Studies! Our neighbors there, especially Kees Mercks, Wim Honselaar, Radovan Lučić, Philip Westbroek and Eric de Haard warmly adopted us and made us psycholinguists feel at home. Descending from the fifth to the third floor of the Bungehuis, where most linguists have their room, always
resulted in nice chats with our secretaries, first Elly Borghesi and later Gerdien Kerssies and Elly van den Berge. Furthermore, I very much enjoyed the former ATW – now ACLC – borrel on Fridays with, amongst others, Suzanne Aalberse, Diana Apoussidou, Hans den Besten, Rafael Fischer, Arjen Florijn, Margriet Heim, Nivja de Jong, Marije Michel, Roland Pfau, Norval Smith, Hedde Zeijlstra and many other ATW and ACLC colleagues.

It is a good habit to actually take time for lunch instead of eating behind the computer. I want to thank Lotte Henrichs and Eva van Lier for initiating a lunch tradition at the Bungehuis, for the very pleasant lunches we had together and also for our friendship after working hours. Moreover, thanks to Eva for providing the opportunity to talk about long-distance running and for actually running together. It feels nice to have a colleague who does not raise her eyebrows if you mention that you are going to run 12km after work!

My paranimfen have been of great importance to me during these six years. I am grateful to Niels Smit for all our joint lunches and high-speed afternoon walks discussing life as a PhD-student, for proofreading parts of my manuscript, for shared cynicism and black humor and for almost ten years of friendship (to be continued). With Esther Parigger, I shared an office, a.k.a. the jungle, for more than four years. I have good memories of listening to the daily radio play Het Bureau, our discussions about language acquisition, cognition and methodology and also of the great times we spent together at conferences in Berlin, Newcastle, Lund and Edinburgh. Furthermore, I am very grateful to Esther for her patience and the never-ending moral support she gave me, especially halfway and at the end of my project, in the form of pep talks, tea and muesli-bars. It is great to have a psychologist as a roommate and family member, but most of all, as a friend!

I got lots of support from my family and friends in various ways. I thank Maartje Wierenga and Lovisa Hilwig for long-lasting and sincere friendship. My father assisted me in writing a summary of my dissertation in Dutch. Furthermore, I want to thank my mother, my father and my brother André for putting the writing of a dissertation in its right perspective when I sometimes had a hard time investigating child language.

Finally, I thank Luuk for being there when I need him and, above all, for love.

Amsterdam, October 2008