

# DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

Monday / Tuesday, 10-11 December 2018, Fribourg

Multilingualism: Acquisition, Education, and Society  
University of Fribourg | Institute of Multilingualism

## Defining and Operationalizing Constructs in (Applied) Linguistics: the case of CAF

Prof. Dr. Alex Housen, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Chair: Prof. Dr. Raphael Berthele, University of Fribourg

### Programme

#### Monday, 10 December 2018

Public lecture by Prof. Dr. Alex Housen

#### Defining and Operationalizing Constructs in (Applied) Linguistics: the case of CAF

(abstract and suggested reading: see next page)

15:15-16:45h, University of Fribourg  
MIS 10, Rue de Rome 1, room 1.16

#### Tuesday, 11 December 2018

Individual PhD counseling sessions

(approx. 60 minutes per PhD project)

with Prof. Dr. Alex Housen (in English)

8-13h & 15-18h, University of Fribourg  
MIS 10, Rue de Rome 1, room 2.09

### Participation

Doctoral students of the programme's partner universities (Fribourg, Berne, and Lausanne) are eligible to participate. Students from other Swiss universities may participate depending on places available.

### Registration

To register for the **public lecture and/or an individual counseling session**, please contact Naomi Shafer ([naomi.shafer@unifr.ch](mailto:naomi.shafer@unifr.ch)) by Nov. 20. For the individual counseling session, a **summary of the PhD project** (in English, max. 1 page in length) is to be sent by mail by Dec. 01.

👉 [www.institute-multilingualism.ch](http://www.institute-multilingualism.ch)

### PhD programme on Multilingualism

The event is part of the doctoral programme Multilingualism: Acquisition, Education, and Society. It is organized by the Institute of Multilingualism and the study domain Multilingualism and foreign languages at the University of Fribourg and carried out in close collaboration with the Center for the Study of Language and Society of the University of Bern and with professors from the University of Lausanne.

**Prof. Dr. Alex Housen**

## **Defining and Operationalizing Constructs in (Applied) Linguistics: the case of CAF**

### **Abstract**

Theory construction in applied linguistics and second language acquisition research has been said to be problematic for various reasons, including the fact that central constructs are poorly defined and operationalized (Gregg 2003; Norris & Ortega 2008, 2009). I will illustrate this state of affairs by taking the case of the constructs of Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency (CAF), which have figured prominently as research variables in the applied linguistic and SLA literature since the 1990s. I will discuss how these three constructs have been defined, operationalised and measured and show the often critical mismatches between the interpretations that researchers want to make about these constructs (esp. about Complexity) and the measures that they use to make them. Students will be asked to think about the key constructs in their own PhD research and explicate how they have defined and operationalized them.

### **About Alex Housen**

Alex Housen received his Licence degree in Germanic Philology from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, an MA in Applied Linguistics & TESL from UCLA and a PhD in Linguistics from the VUB. From 1996 till 2002 he was a post-doctoral research fellow of the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research. He is currently Professor of English Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in the department of Language and Literature of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. His research interests include second language acquisition, (second) language teaching, bilingualism and bilingual education, and English linguistics (esp. morpho-syntax).

➤ More on Prof. Housen: [www.vub.ac.be/en/people/alex-housen](http://www.vub.ac.be/en/people/alex-housen)

### **Recommended literature in preparation for the lecture**

Housen, A. & Simoens, H. (2016). "Introduction: Cognitive Perspectives on Difficulty and Complexity in L2 Acquisition". *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 38:2 (pp. 163-175).

### **References**

Gregg, K. (2008). "SLA Theory: Construction and Assessment". In Doughty, C. & Long, M. (Eds), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. London: Blackwell (pp. 830-865).

Norris, J. & Ortega, L. (2009). "Measurement for understanding: An organic approach to investigating complexity, accuracy, and fluency in SLA". *Applied Linguistics* 30:4 (pp. 555-578).

Norris, J. & Ortega, L. (2008). "Defining and measuring SLA". In Doughty, C. & Long, M. (Eds), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. London: Blackwell (pp. 716-761).