

PUBLIC LECTURE

Thursday, 10 October 2019, 5:15 – 6:45 pm

Institute of Multilingualism | University | HEP Fribourg
Rue de Morat 24, 1700 Fribourg, room K0.02

Explanations of individual differences in language use and language acquisition. The perspective from Language as a Complex Adaptive System

Prof. Dr. Jan Hulstijn
Universiteit van Amsterdam

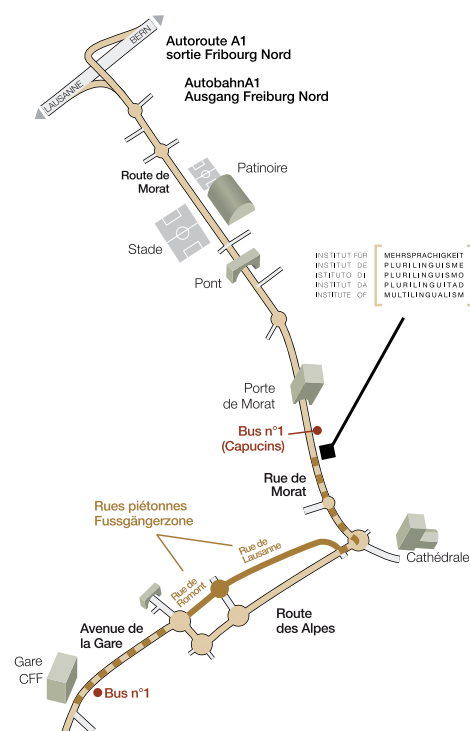
Abstract

In the first part of this presentation, I present a very brief historical overview of three schools in linguistics (structuralism; generative linguistics; usage based linguistics) and psychology (behaviorism, first-wave cognitive psychology, second-wave neural-network psychology). Currently, there is an increasing awareness in linguistics that theories (providing so-called proximate explanations) must match meta-theories (providing ultimate explanations), in particular Darwinian thinking and Complex Adaptive Systems. The purpose of this overview is to give young researchers some 'beacons' to help them make sense of the immense literature in linguistics and philosophy of science.

In the second part of the presentation, I will address some questions concerning the explanation of individual differences in language use, language acquisition, and general cognitive functions (e.g., working memory and executive functions). In the light of Darwinian thinking and Language as a Complex Adaptive Systems, unequal frequency distributions of linguistic elements in language production constitute a necessary and defining characteristic of language use and language acquisition, which impact on individual differences. I argue that these differences emerge differently in the spoken vernacular and in the written standard language. Explaining individual differences also implies explaining commonalities (cognition shared by people) (Hulstijn, 2015). From a usage-based perspective, this means that the empirical domain of a theory of language acquisition and language use consists of observations of language production and language understanding/comprehension, more so than of observed grammaticality judgments. I will then address the crucial question to what extent, and with which methodological tools, we can establish the content and boundaries of shared linguistic cognition, in a population of language users as well as in individual language users, given the assumption (of usage-based linguistics and neural-network psychology) that cognition is fundamentally probabilistic.

👉 Lecture in English

Access to the Institute of Multilingualism



From the main train station: 15 min by foot or by bus (no.1 to Saint-Léonard/Portes-de-Fribourg, code no. 10 to buy a ticket), get off at "Capucins" (3rd stop after the station), walk back about 100 meters.

👉 map: www.institute-multilingualism.ch

References

- Hulstijn, J. H. (2015). *Language proficiency in native and non-native speakers: Theory and research*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hulstijn, J.H. (2019). An individual-differences framework for comparing nonnative with native speakers: Perspectives from BLC Theory. *Language Learning*, 69:S1, 157-183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12317>
- Kidd, E., Donnelly, S. & Christiansen, M. H. (2018). Individual differences in language acquisition and processing. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 22, 154–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2017.11.006>

Short bio statement

Jan Hulstijn is professor emeritus of second language acquisition at the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication (ACLC) of the University of Amsterdam.

He has been affiliated with this university (full professor) since 1998. Before that he held positions at Leiden University and the Free University of Amsterdam. He was associate post-doc researcher at the University of Toronto, Canada (1982-1983) and he was visiting professor at the University of Leuven, Belgium, (2002) and at Stockholm University (2005). His main research interests are concerned with (1) language proficiency in native and non-native speakers; (2) explicit versus implicit accounts of first and second language learning and (3) theories of second language acquisition and philosophy of science. With others PIs, he received a number of research grants from the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO) between 1982 and 2007 (see webpage). In 2018 he received the 2018 distinguished scholar award from the European Second Language Association (EuroSLA). In 2015, he published a book presenting his theory of basic language cognition (BLC). His publication list can be downloaded from his webpage: <http://www.uva.nl/profile/j.h.hulstijn>.