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Questions in context: the case of French wh-in-situ

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Acknowledgements

“Are you sure you want to hire someone like me”, I asked during my informal “job interview” for the Ph.D. position. “I completed my BA here, but my MA was on language education. I didn’t study syntax, semantics or prosody there, and I don’t know anything about intervention effects.” Lisa said something like: “Yes, that is true. But we think you can learn.” I want to thank Lisa and Jenny for the great opportunity and the vote of confidence. It is rare for an employer to hire someone because they think the person will learn to do the job in the future.

The beginning was difficult. After being a teacher for five years, I felt like a master student again, and maybe I was. I took many courses: Lisa said that I should not only conduct my research project, but become a linguist. My first task was to set up a prosody experiment (now Chapter 4); I started by looking up the word ‘prosody’. This experiment also proved more complex than expected, and I ended up designing a new elicitation paradigm for it.

While the job was difficult, the social side felt like a warm bath. My BA teachers welcomed me back. I enjoyed the interactions with Ph.D. candidates and senior staff:

- Xander, Gulnaz, Anne, Qiong, Astrid, Marieke, Andreea, Daan, David, Chams, Cesko, Arum, Renzi, Hanna, Elly, Bobby, Kate, George, Alex, Evelyn, Tingting, Menghui, Nastya;
- Crit, Victoria, Anikó, Marie Carmen, Janet, Jos and especially Claartje.

I gained new friends: Han/Hannah, Maaïke, Lena, Saskia, Jenny. Yang Yang was my sister in the project. We studied papers, shared difficult moments and tried to teach each other Dutch and Chinese words.

From the time my first results came in, I really enjoyed the work. I liked the feeling of pushing your brain to its limits, of creativity when coming up with new ideas, of writing and discovering how your text continues. I worked with Claartje Levelt, Floris Roelofsen (University of Amsterdam) and Stefan Glasbergen (Applied University of Amsterdam)

on various side projects. I went to Nantes for parts of my experimental work. I thank Hamida Demirdache, and later also Elisabeth Delais-Roussarie, for making me feel so welcome there and inviting me back to give presentations. I am grateful to Eric Quézin for giving me access to his lab. Elizabeth Heredia Murillo was a great assistant; thank you, and I really enjoyed working with you. A special thanks also goes to Sylvie Cuchet and Romane Pedro, who assisted in designing my experimental studies. I thank Cesko, for writing scripts, and Chams, for always being ready to help with my French test items. I further thank Yannick Gloanec, Marion Bracq, Thomas Jansen, Mohammad Abuoudeh, Roxanne Casiez, Marie Pedro, Antoine Cochard, Sophie Heinis and Marguerite Blaque for their assistance with the experimental research.

Then my mother got ill. During the year of her illness and the period following her death, I was not myself. I thank all members of my project team – Jenny, Lisa, Stella, Leticia and Yany Yang – for being so understanding. Jenny was both supervisor and coach in this period and was wonderful. I am grateful to LUCL, in the person of Maarit van Gammeren, for giving me a generous extension of my contract to compensate the time I could not work full time. It allowed me to write the dissertation in its current form. This period made me feel fortunate to still have my other parents, as well as Tamar, Frans and Francien and my other in-laws and my close friends.

When the reading committee approved my dissertation in October 2020, the pandemic made a live defence, a proper closure of my time at LUCL, impossible. I postponed it and focused on moving house and starting my new job at Delft University of Technology.

In closing, I thank the people who made this dissertation possible. Lisa, I think it is very special for someone with your work record to always be ready at short notice if your Ph.D. candidate needs you; I really appreciate it. Jenny, you are the best supervisor anyone could wish for. Because you are such a people person, you can supervise not only the Ph.D. project, but also the person executing it. Stella and Leticia, I learned most of what I know about experimental linguistics from you. I could not have done this without you; thank you. NWO funded this project.

The most important person for me is Stefan. Without you there would not have been a dissertation (written by me) either, because you encouraged me to leave a good job where I wasn't happy to do a job that I liked (despite the drop in salary). You have always supported me through the ups and downs of a Ph.D. project and life. We make a good team.

Curriculum vitae

Aliza Glasbergen-Plas was born on 24 April 1984 in Rotterdam. She obtained a BA degree in linguistics from Leiden University (2007, *cum laude*) and an MA degree in linguistics, specializing in language education, from the Free University of Amsterdam (2009, *cum laude*). During her BA studies, she spent a semester as an Erasmus student at the University of Nantes (France) and worked as a student-assistant for prof. dr. Lisa Cheng. As part of her MA studies, she conducted research as an intern at the SCO-Kohnstamm Institute in Amsterdam and the CED-Group in Rotterdam, after which she worked at the CED-Group for another year.

Following her graduation, Aliza spent five years working in language education. She taught literacy and Dutch as a second language in adult education ('inburgering') at both Sagènn re-integratie and Ttif.company, where she was the team coordinator. She also worked as a trainee educational advisor at HCO, advising teachers on the topic of language education for minority students. Finally, Aliza taught Dutch/communication at the Applied University of Rotterdam (Hogeschool Rotterdam), where she developed and taught integrated language courses (in which language learning is integrated with learning content).

Aliza conducted her Ph.D. research within the NWO project 'Understanding questions', which investigated the topic of questions from the combined perspective of different disciplines (syntax, semantics, prosody and processing). She was also involved in several projects outside of her dissertation topic, including studies on the language skills of secondary school minority students and on improving language skills within the context of history education.

Aliza currently works as a lecturer of communicative skills at the Delft University of Technology, where she also conducts research about teaching writing skills at the university level.