The Research Group Variation and Distance

presents in the CLS Colloquium Lunch Series:

Variation and Distance

by Stef Grondelaers, Frans van der Slik & Roeland van Hout

The PI group Variety and Distance defines and uses distances between language varieties and variants to explain patterns of variation in linguistic systems, in language evaluation and knowledge, and in language proficiency. We present the outcomes of two recent studies.

The first study investigates the role of morphological complexity in predicting the learnability of Dutch as an additional language. Using speaking proficiency scores of 9,000 adult learners of Dutch, complexity distance measures are defined in order to compare 33 different L1s (spoken in 67 countries) with Dutch. Our approach reveals which morphological features constitute the most important learning problems. We propose a reduced asymmetrical measure which aggregates over no more than eight morphological features. In addition, we found cognitive ageing effects (on the basis of information on length of residence and age of arrival) that corroborate the construct validity of the morphological measure we applied because of their interaction with complexity.

The second study recommends twitter data as an empirical basis for the study of “non-canonical phenomena in spoken language” (Rehbein 2014:20). Tweets are conveniently available in enormous quantities, and they feature informal written language use with many features of orality. It is in this capacity that we rely on tweets to investigate the stigmatized but highly vital dissemination of the object pronoun hun “them” in subject position (as in Als je zo speelt krijgen hun natuurlijk altijd kansen “If you will play like that them will always get chances”). In earlier work, we have uncovered a language-internal trigger and a prestige motivation for hun’s unstoppable spread, but whereas these factors were previously verified with different empirical tools – corpus analysis and socio-psychological experimentation – we will demonstrate that Twitter offers a rich data source for the validation of both internal factors and prestige motivations.

When: Tuesday 22 November, 2016
12:45-13:30
Lunch is provided! To register, please send an email to:
clscolloquium@let.ru.nl

Where: E2.54 (Erasmus Building)
For more information, see www.ru.nl/cls