

Introduction

On October 1st, 2022 Steven Gillis retired after a long and rewarding career as a Professor at Antwerp University in the Department of Linguistics and as head of the psycholinguistics section of CLiPS, the Centre for Computational and Psycholinguistics. On the occasion of Professor Gillis' retirement it was decided to produce a special issue of Stem-, Spraak- en Taalpathologie to honour his achievements. This special issue is a collection of research papers which are directly or indirectly related to or inspired by the type of work that Steven has carried out during his career.

Throughout his professional life, Steven Gillis has been a very active researcher and promoter of research. He acquired funding and was Principal Investigator of a total of 51 research projects hosted at Antwerp University. At the moment, he has a total of 239 publications: articles in international peer-reviewed journals, book chapters and conference proceedings. These cover a wide range of research topics in phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax. But very fundamentally his main focus has always been on first language acquisition broadly conceived, including language development disorders. What stands out, are his studies on the speech and language characteristics of children with hearing impairment and their relationship to auditory support of these children by means of cochlear implants, conventional hearing aids and more recently brainstem implants. In this domain, Steven Gillis' research has always been at the forefront of technology. His research on children with a cochlear implant for instance was one of the first in the world on children who were implanted at a very young age. The same forefront role applies to his studies on children with a brainstem implant, which are still very few and far between. This has provided unique insights in the benefits of technological advances to the speech and language development of children with hearing impairment.

Four contributions in this special issue focus on language development disorders in children. Three of them relate to hearing impairment.

Odijk & Faes investigate the development of the place of articulation feature in children with a brainstem implant (ABI). The results show that the coronal place of articulation was most used in children's speech, except for one ABI child who showed a preference for labials. It was also found that the labial place of articulation was produced more accurately than the coronal place of articulation. It was also observed that incorrect productions of place of articulation often represented omissions rather than substitutions by another place of articulation. This study suggests that ABI children clearly benefit from their device, but still have a long way to go to catch up with their peers.

Genette & Verhoeven study the dynamic aspects of pitch in prominence realisation in children with typical hearing as compared to children with hearing impairment (conventional hearing aid vs. cochlear implant). It is found that prominence realisation in children with a conventional hearing aid is very similar to that of children with typical hearing. In children with a cochlear implant, however, the pitch contours associated with prominence are less dynamic than in the other groups. This is taken as an indication of more monotony in their speech.

Gary Morgan, finally, presents a much-needed reflection on the different approaches that have been taken in the study of deafness and raises debate regarding the medical approach (importance of screening and early implantation) vs. the sociological approach (recognition of variation between children and the right to sign language) in the study of language development of deaf children over the last thirty years.

A fourth contribution focuses on developmental language disorder (DLD). Boerma, Wi-jnen & Blom studied the performance and predictors in children with DLD after specialist educational provision was discontinued at the age of 7 - 8 years. It was found that the language and reading skills of these children are often poor and suggest that this group remains vulnerable with continued attention being required.

From Steven's publication list it is clear that he has always had an interest in the acquisition of morphological systems. This is, for example, illustrated by his work on the effect of morpheme boundaries on the syllabification of words, the acquisition of diminutives and the acquisition of verb inflection in Hebrew.

Colleagues who share Stevens' interest in morphology, are Tribushinina & Mak, who present a study on the acquisition of pronominal gender in Russian, a morphologically rich language. Their study addresses the question whether bilingual children acquire pronominal gender equally successfully as monolingual Russian children with and without developmental language impairment.

A second morphologically-inspired contribution to this special issue is Dressler, Mattiello, Korecky-Kröll, Noccetti, Dabašinskienė, Kamandulytė-Merfeldienė & Kazakovskaya, who study parallels in the use of diminutives in child-directed speech and pet-directed speech in German, Italian, Lithuanian, Russian and English. Their study illustrates, among other things, how diminutives are used to express emotions and familiarity.

Besides an interest in language development disorders and morphology, Steven has always been fascinated with spelling. For example, he studied the effect of spelling knowledge on intuitive syllabification. In this special issue, this theme is represented by a contribution of De Bree, Lammertink, Van Witteloostuijn & Rispens, who investigated to what extent spelling outcomes of children with dyslexia and DLD are related to literacy and/or oral language difficulties. The results indicate that both groups of children show spelling

difficulties, but these are most outspoken in children with DLD who have additional reading difficulties. The paper argues for intensive spelling intervention and for support of both literacy skills and oral language in children at risk of spelling difficulties.

Another common theme in Steven's research that should definitely be mentioned as well, is his concern with reliable research methodology and a judicious use of speech and language corpora. This interest in methodology and corpus use is clearly shared by the authors of the three remaining contributions.

Sijyeniyo, Hartsuiker & Bernolet conducted a norming study amongst Dutch children to investigate whether they correctly interpret a set of 208 drawings, developed for the study of transitive sentences (with some drawings having an active interpretation and others a passive one).

Haim & Ravid compiled a corpus of informative and expository texts of Hebrew-speaking students and adults to study the (evolution in) the complexity of their vocabulary and (morpho) syntax.

Finally, Swerts, Gu & Boerrigter go further than speech, language, reading and writing by studying gesture. This contribution investigated to what extent head gestures of children "correctly" support children's attitudes to objects that they may desire or not.

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We would like to wish Professor Gillis a long, active and satisfying retirement.

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