

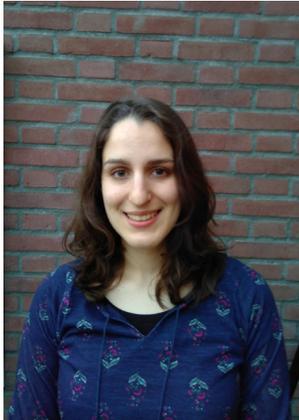
# Cross-Atlantic cross-linguistic adventures

## An internship abroad

E.K.A. (ELLY) KOUTAMANIS

*Centre for Language Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands.*

*Report written during their RMA Linguistics, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands.*



Elly went to Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI, USA for an internship on English-speaking children's acquisition of the indirect object passive.

“It helped me grow as a beginning researcher, both in knowledge and in confidence and independence.”

My name is Elly Koutamanis and I recently graduated from the Research Master Linguistics at Utrecht University. I would like to use this opportunity to tell you about my research internship at the Language Acquisition Laboratory of Michigan State University. This internship lasted ten weeks, the length of a block at Utrecht University, and focused on English-speaking children's acquisition of the indirect object passive.

In regular passives, the direct object becomes the subject, see (1). Ditransitive verbs have two objects, a direct object and an indirect object, and, in English, both can become the subject, see (2). However, this is not possible with all verbs, see (3).

- |     |                                  |                           |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) | a. I touched him.                | [active]                  |
|     | b. He was touched.               | [direct object passive]   |
| (2) | a. I gave him the book.          | [active]                  |
|     | b. The book was given to him.    | [direct object passive]   |
|     | c. He was given the book.        | [indirect object passive] |
| (3) | a. The money was donated to him. | [direct object passive]   |
|     | b.* He was donated the money.    | [indirect object passive] |

The goal of my internship was to develop an experiment testing how English-speaking children learn when the indirect object passive is possible and when it is not. This would then form an important part of my master's thesis, in which I would compare the English-speaking children's acquisition patterns with Dutch children's acquisition of similar constructions containing ditransitive verbs.

I was lucky that I could choose my own internship topic within the expertise of the Lab supervisors, dr. Alan Munn and dr. Cristina Schmitt. This is not very common in internships, as you will usually take part in an ongoing research project, with different amounts of freedom for your own research questions. For me, important advantages of doing my own project were that I could completely focus on my own interests, work in my own tempo and not depend much on other people in order to move forward. An obvious challenge of such a setup is that you need to undertake almost all steps of a research project by yourself. I say *almost*, because it is important to highlight that I received much support and feedback from the Lab supervisors and other (bachelor's, master's, and PhD) student members of the Lab. I exchanged ideas about theoretical issues, methodology, and materials with people working on other, some similar and some very different, child language research projects. Despite the moments of uncertainty (and slight despair) that you will experience in probably every research internship, it was a very useful experience. It helped me grow as a beginning researcher, both in knowledge, confidence and independence. If you think you want to be a researcher in whatever shape or form, I would recommend an internship like I had. However, make sure to choose a host institute that is open to and, preferably, experienced in supervising individual student projects, where they take your work seriously and give you enough support and feedback. Try to formulate your goal for the internship, whether it is to answer a specific research question you are interested in, to learn a specific skill, or something else, and make sure your host can help you reach that goal. On a final note, whether you are sure your future is in research or you are still in doubt, it is never a bad idea to go abroad and learn how linguistic research is done in different parts of the world, with different rules, cultures, and expertise – and, should you choose to visit Michigan as well, very snowy weather conditions. ■