

Dear members of the selection committee,

I write this letter to express my interest in the assistant professor position at the Department of General Linguistics at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. My name is Fenna Bergsma, and I am in the final stages of my PhD within the Research Training Group 'Nominal Modification' in Frankfurt. I will hand in my dissertation at the end of July 2020. The PhD position I currently have is limited to three years, and I am encouraged to mainly focus on research. Accordingly, I presented my work at international conferences (a.o. GLOW), and I published an article in a peer-reviewed journal in the second year of my PhD. Additionally, I invested some time to teach an MA class, which I experienced as a very energy-providing and fulfilling task. Moreover, I am convinced I can transfer the management skills, that I obtained from the industry job I had before I started a PhD, to a university position. In this letter I elaborate on my research projects, and on the teaching experience and management skills I acquired over the years.

In my own research I mainly focus on morphosyntactic phenomena from a theoretical generative perspective. I am currently working on three projects within that field: case attraction in headless relatives across languages, R-pronouns and postpositions in Dutch, and connecting gender to the mass/count distinction in Dutch. I discuss these projects in what follows.

For my dissertation I am working the well-studied phenomenon of case attraction in Germanic headless relatives. I address two main points. First, a language such as Gothic allows for case requirements from the main and relative clause to differ. The only restriction is that the relative pronoun appears in the most complex required case, following the scale $NOM < ACC < DAT$. The second point I address concerns the cross-linguistic differences that are found. Gothic allows for case attraction in both directions: the case required in the main clause can win over the case required in the relative clause, but also the other way around. Old High German and Modern German do not, they only allow one of the two directions (Old High German only lets the main clause case surface, and German only the relative clause one). My proposal connects the observations to language-internal properties. Both points are a reflex from the language's morphology. My main goal is to show that case attraction in headless relatives is not a special property of a small set of languages. Instead, its existence is expected to appear because of how language is organized.

In another morphosyntax project I have been working on the R-pronoun and postposition *waar-mee* 'with what' in Dutch. I argue that this form surfaces when all relevant features form a proper constituent. When this requirement is not met, *met wat* 'with what' appears, realizing the same set of features as *waar-mee* 'with what'. This alternation is analyzed as a result of regular spellout mechanisms in nanosyntax. A finer decomposition offers an account for three observations: R-pronouns are syncretic with locatives, R-pronouns combine with postpositions and regular pronouns with prepositions, and the instrumental preposition differs phonologically from

the instrumental postposition (*met* vs. *mee*). I am working on also incorporating verbal particles (that pattern in form with postpositions, even though they precede the verb), and extending the proposal to other adpositions in Dutch. The next step is to compare Dutch to German and (my native) Frisian.

The third research topic I am currently working on in collaboration with Dr. Jan Don from the Universiteit van Amsterdam is gender in Dutch. We start from the observation that Dutch has some nouns that refer to masses if they combine with the neuter gender determiner, and they refer to counts if they combine with the common gender determiner. Another observation is that the diminutive suffix makes all mass nouns countable, and that the noun plus diminutive always combines with the neuter gender determiner. At the same time, we also have to allow for randomness: neuter gender nouns can be mass or count, and common gender nouns can be mass or count too. We propose an account in which the nouns differ in how they are stored in the lexicon, spelling out more or less features. Combining them with the features that can be realized by the diminutive suffix and the different determiners derives the properties of the noun.

However, my linguistic knowledge and experience is not limited to theoretical morphosyntax. Even before my PhD I gained some valuable research experience in research projects during my BA and MA. I developed and conducted my own experiments, and I worked with child data and statistical models. I briefly highlight five projects I conducted in what follows.

In a research project in my MA, I investigated the nature of restrictions in root infinitives. I examined whether the restriction to eventive verbs in root infinitives of children acquiring their first language might be a result of a lack of epistemic modality. I investigated Dutch root infinitives in second language acquisition from CHILDES using CLAN. In another project in my MA, I researched complementizer agreement in Frisian. I examined the distribution of *-st* and *-sto* as complementizer agreement forms in Frisian in emphatic and non-emphatic contexts. I gathered data from a translation task and a felicity judgment task which I developed myself. A third project in my MA focused on the underlying skills of writing and reading abilities. I explored which underlying skills can account for the correlation between reading and writing abilities. I modeled this using structural equation modeling with the Lavaan package in R. For my BA thesis I designed and set up an experiment. I transcribed the 1,000 most frequent words in Frisian and their translations into Dutch to find the most frequent phonological correspondences between Dutch and Frisian. I developed an intervention to teach the phonological correspondences and two intelligibility tests (one on text and one on word level) as pre- and posttest. I taught the phonological correspondences to Dutch school children. It did not improve the intelligibility of Frisian, but their attitude towards Frisian became more positive. The thesis was a part of a research project on Mutual intelligibility of closely related languages. In a research project in my BA, I worked on Theory of Mind tests. I developed and used my own modified version of the Sally-Anne test, in which the location of the object was unknown

after doing a shell game.

Although my main research focus is on theoretical morphosyntax these days, my interest and training extends to numerous subfields of linguistics. I had five years of training in general linguistics (three in my BA and two in my MA). My BA at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen put a large emphasis on neurolinguistics and experimental linguistics. For example, I focused on aphasia and specific language impairment, and I conducted experiments on child language acquisition. I broadened my perspective more through courses on language change, speech analysis and eye-tracking during my MA at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. I attached lists of courses I took in my BA and MA to my application. I am confident that I can teach in any of these subfields.

In my time in Frankfurt, I taught an MA seminar on DP morphology. Besides teaching the students the content of the class, I had another (in my opinion, evenly important) goal. I wanted to help them train skills that are generally valuable, inside and outside linguistics. The skills I refer to are, for example, to learn to form and to have the courage to ask questions in front of a group, to evaluate arguments critically, and to identify the pros and cons of different approaches.

My management experience I gained mostly on the job I had before I started my PhD. I was working as a project manager in a company that develops teaching materials for vocational education. My task was to form sets of assignments based on nation-wide regulations and requests from schools. I worked with teachers, who were content-specialists on the topic, and who wrote the content of the assignments. Throughout the year, I became increasingly better at providing the teachers with feedback that they would happily implement. After a break for a five-month kayaking trip, the same company happily invited me back to help out wherever needed. One of these tasks was to reorganize the work portfolio of a colleague who became absent due to a burn-out. This was a challenging but satisfying job in which I needed to restart projects content-wise, while keeping work relationships among colleagues intact. I believe these skills are advantageous for any management task within a university.

I hope to have given a good overview of how I can be an asset for the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I would be more than happy to answer any further questions.

Sincerely,
Fenna Bergsma