



Universiteit  
Leiden

## The mechanisms of dialogue in health communication

### Applicants

This interdisciplinary project proposes positions for two research trainees with a background in discourse studies, linguistics, and/or literary studies.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Roosmaryn Pilgram	Linguistics/Discourse studies (LUCL)
Dr. Geert Warnar	Literary studies/Medieval studies (LUCAS)

### Project description

People talk, always and everywhere. The ability to enter into dialogue with other human beings to exchange ideas, argue, create forms of understanding and agreement, acquire information or seek consolation is a necessary instrument for any social interaction. Dialogue is everywhere nowadays, from television interviews to the FAQ's on websites, to shared decision making by doctor and patient. Now omnipresent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century media culture, dialogue once was a well-established form of literary production, especially in the Medieval and Early Modern Period. Cultures of courtly conversation, academic disputation and humanist dialogue shaped personalities, offered patterns of civilized interaction, generated knowledge and offered models for meditation and reflection.

Despite these long literary and scientific traditions of dialogue writing, there still is only a relatively small amount of shared knowledge in the various disciplines studying fictive and spontaneous conversation. Literary studies, linguistics and discourse studies have their own research interests in dialogue, but apparently hesitate to communicate with each other. This project integrates literary and linguistic research on the *mechanisms* that make dialogue an effective tool for communication, teaching and thinking, for the benefit of the historical understanding of constructed dialogue and the analysis of modern forms of human communication.

The project combines the study of modern conversational practices and the tradition of literary dialogue to analyse the mechanisms in verbal interaction in health communication, including dialogue in a therapy context. What can we learn from the medieval soliloquy that taught readers how to let reason guide their inner life for understanding self-talk? When we see that cultural uses of dialogue in the past include rearrangements of institutional hierarchies between experts and lay persons, can we build on these to overcome authority barriers in the interaction between doctor and patient, or to analyse argumentative structures in their conversations?

### Research Trainee Profile

The candidates should be (Res)MA-students, trained in (BA-programs of) one of the Language and Culture programmes "Taal en Cultuur" and/or "Taalwetenschap", with an interest in medieval and early modern studies, and/or discourse studies (visible for instance through participation in a minor program, electives, internship, or the topic of the BA thesis). They should show a basic familiarity with the interdisciplinary aspects of studying language and literature in a social or cultural context.

The research project builds on the outcomes of a KIEM-project on the 'effectiveness of dialogue', that showed how the distinction between natural conversation (as the domain of linguistics and discourse studies) and constructed dialogue (domain of literary studies) disappears when focusing on the mechanisms

of human interaction and/or the use of a conversation frame in various types of scripted and spontaneous discourse. Research proposals to continue this integrated study of dialogue are currently developed by the two supervisors of this project (NWA and NWO Open Competition).

The traineeship provides a perfect opportunity for further developing research skills and expertise in the domains of discourse studies, linguistics and literary studies. The research trainees are expected to familiarise themselves with the concept of dialogue roles, to critically reflect on the commonalities and differences between domain specific (and possibly also general) interpretations of this concept, and to apply their insights concerning these roles to doctor patient decision making. As the project crosses the boundaries of the MA-programmes in Literary Studies and Linguistics, it will encourage students to move beyond the topics covered in the regular (Res)MA-programmes and therefore enhance their opportunities in pursuing an academic career.

### **Collaboration**

The applicants have both worked on dialogue in health communication and therapy (Pilgram) and literature (Warnar), and teach in a yearly Honours Class on *Dialogues in Past and Present: Human interaction and the construction of meaning*.

The recent launch of the Network *Dialogue Among Cultures and Disciplines: Past, Present, and Future*<sup>1</sup> (coordinated and cofounded by LIAS and LUCAS) marks the interdisciplinary interests in dialogue studies in the Faculty of Humanities, next to the KIEM-project, mentioned in the previous paragraph, that was a collaborative project of LUCL and LUCAS, that also included the involvement of Tabula rasa, consultancy of behavioural change. These initiatives go to show that dialogue studies in Leiden are increasingly interdisciplinary and inclusive, exploring this societal significance of studying dialogue from various perspectives.

The notion of commitment turned out to be crucial in studying dialogue. Any form of effective verbal interaction depends on the interlocutors' commitment to participate in a conversation within a certain role (master, pupil, doctor, patient, debater, lover, talk show host, etc.). Both in literary dialogue and real life conversation, these roles determine the process of a dialogue as a joint project. A deeper understanding of the distribution of and commitment to roles in a conversation can be gained by looking at the practices of human interaction (ranging from medical consultations to television interviews) and its literary treatment in novels, drama and in the genre of the dialogue.

This project will make it possible to involve students in a further analysis of dialogue and conversation, not as separate domains of literary and linguistic research, but as a new field to be covered by academic scholars that will be prepared to connect the tradition of dialogue writing to the new practices of social media and intercultural communication.

### **Deliverables**

The objectives of the project are:

- (1) a survey of the roles in
  - a set of literary dialogues, focusing on the Dutch tradition of consolation literature.
  - a corpus of real life conversations on medical shared decision making and in therapy context
- (2) a presentation of the comparison between the two corpora at a meeting of the Network *Dialogue Among Cultures and Disciplines: Past, Present, and Future* (September 2019)

The deliverables will coincide with these objectives. The trainees will select and study a corpus of literary dialogues and conversations from medical practice in order to describe the mechanisms of interaction and to determine how a joined linguistic and literary analysis inform us on the ways we (should) arrive at understanding and agreement in verbal communication.

### **Planning**

Month 1-2: Trainee 1 (literary studies) selection of relevant dialogues and research on these texts  
Trainee 2 (linguistics) gathering transcripts and/or video material of conversations and research literature

Month 2-4: Trainee 1 and 2: analysis of corpora, focusing on roles and commitments in dialogues and conversations

Month 5-7: Trainee 1 and 2 together: comparative analysis of the sets of data on literary dialogue and conversations, preparing presentation

There will be regular meetings with the supervisors every two or three weeks.

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<sup>1</sup> see: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/dialogue-among-cultures-and-disciplines-past-present-and-future>

**Student Application**

Students should apply by sending a cv, a letter of motivation and the name of one referent to both applicants:

Dr. Roosmaryn Pilgram: [r.pilgram@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:r.pilgram@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Dr. Geert Warnar: [g.warnar@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:g.warnar@hum.leidenuniv.nl)