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## Harm Pinkster (1942-2021)

*Caroline Kroon and Rodie Risselada*

The board of *Mnemosyne* was deeply saddened to receive news of the passing of the journal's former editor-in-chief Harm Pinkster on 14 December 2021, at the age of 79. He was a world leading expert in the study of Latin linguistics, and from 1992 to 2007 one of the driving forces behind *Mnemosyne*.

Harm Pinkster was born in Emmen on 5 March 1942, and grew up in a working-class family in the recently reclaimed 'new land' of the Noordoostpolder. Thanks to his elementary school teacher, who recognized his extraordinary talents, and partly also to fortune's aid, he ended up at the gymnasium, where he not only excelled in science subjects, but also developed a strong interest in classical languages. His love of Latin and Geek won out over his interest in the exact sciences, and brought him to Amsterdam, where in 1960 he started his study in Classics. Although his immense eagerness for acquiring and exchanging knowledge would lead him to many renowned universities and research institutes all over the world, his scientific career always remained closely tied to the University of Amsterdam: after his graduation in 1967, he completed his PhD there in 1971, was appointed as 'lector in Latin linguistics as well as Italian dialects' in the very same year, and held the chair of Latin linguistics (later on Latin linguistics and literature) from 1980 until 1996, when he became vice-rector until his retirement in 2004. This retirement did not, however, mean a downturn in his productivity. From 2004 until 2021 he worked uninterruptedly and with double energy on his *magnum opus*, the two-volume *Oxford Latin Syntax* ('the *OLS*'), which he had started working on some years earlier. In this monumental *Syntax*, which was intended to be the modern successor to the 19th-century grammar of R. Kühner and C. Stegmann<sup>1</sup> (a work that Pinkster highly admired), the research fruits of his long and productive career were brought together in a methodologically new and encompassing grammatical framework. The second volume of the *Oxford Latin Syntax* came out in 2021, just a few months before his death.

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1 Kühner, R., and Stegmann, C. (1912-1914), *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache. Zweiter Teil: Satzlehre*. Hannover.

The innovations to which the *OLS* testifies go back to ideas Harm Pinkster already formed early in his career, when he became influenced by functional currents in linguistics, which approach language in terms of human communication rather than in terms of formal systems of rules for the construction of grammatical sentences. Together with his fellow student Simon Dik, the later professor of General Linguistics in Amsterdam, and the Latin linguist Machtelt Bolkestein, he was at the forefront of the development of the Amsterdam model of Functional Grammar, which would turn out to be of decisive influence on the direction research in the field of Greek and Latin linguistics would take in the next decades, not only in the Netherlands but also far beyond. Characteristics of the approach, which can already be traced in Pinkster's 1972 dissertation *On Latin Adverbs*, include the centrality of the concept of 'valency', and the interest in the (semantic and pragmatic) *function* of linguistic elements rather than in their grammatical *form*.

The powerful concept of valency (i.e. the fact that every verb or verb-like form requires, on account of its specific meaning, one or more obligatory 'arguments'), and the distinction between the nucleus of a clause (predicate + arguments) and its periphery (optional satellites) determined, in a sense, Pinkster's research agenda throughout his career. It not only enabled him to direct new questions at the Latin material and to come up with new solutions to old problems, but also provided him with a comprehensive descriptive framework within which individual linguistic phenomena could be accounted for in a coherent and insightful way. In the years 1970-1990 this resulted in a number of articles on, among other things, the Latin case system,<sup>2</sup> the Latin tense system, and various types of embedded predications. Parallel to this, Pinkster started working on a book in which he wanted to "introduce advanced students in the university into topics of Latin syntax and semantics which can be studied or have been studied more fruitfully due to contemporary insights in linguistic theory and linguistic analysis".<sup>3</sup> The book, *Latin Syntax and Semantics*, appeared in its original Dutch version in 1984, and was followed by translations in German (1988), English (1990), Italian (1991), and Spanish (1995). Although in its preface Pinkster explicitly stated that it had never been his intention to write

2 One of the main merits of Pinkster's new approach is that he has convincingly demonstrated the imperfection of the traditional treatment of the Latin cases. In a recent article on the first volume of his *OLS* in the Dutch Journal *Lampas* he formulated the advance as follows (translation is ours): "As for the description of the noun cases, the distinction of 17 different ablatives and some 30 different genitives that we find in the grammars provide us with a kind of mock precision from which we suffer more than benefit" (Pinkster, H. (2015). Een nieuwe syntaxis voor een dode taal?, *Lampas* 48.2, pp. 168-197, here 173).

3 Pinkster, H. (1990). *Latin Syntax and Semantics*. London, xi.

a comprehensive new Latin grammar;<sup>4</sup> the foundations for the *Oxford Latin Syntax* were clearly laid in this book.

In articles from 2015 and 2016 Pinkster formulated the six reasons why eventually he did take on the task of writing such a comprehensive grammar:<sup>5</sup> (i) the availability of new data—such as the Vindolanda tablets (from 1973 onwards) and the *Senatus consultum de Gn. Pisone patre* (end of the eighties); (ii) the availability of new research instruments such as new text editions, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, advancement of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, and the availability of computer corpora; (iii) a changed/changing group of users with less knowledge of Latin than in Kühner-Stegmann's time, asking for translations of examples and an emphasis on regularities rather than exceptions; (iv) the necessity of integrating the results of one century of valuable linguistic research after Kühner-Stegmann; (v) changing ideas of what a syntax should look like; and (vi) the emergence of new theories and new methodologies.

With this last reason Pinkster referred to the linguistic subfields of pragmatics and discourse linguistics, a still unexplored territory in the times of previous Latin grammars like Kühner-Stegmann (1912-1914) and Szantyr (1965),<sup>6</sup> but added by Pinkster as a natural extension resulting from the functional perspective which underlies all of his research. The results of pragmatic and discourse linguistic research on, for instance, word order, particles, text types, and tenses, both by Pinkster himself and by many researchers inspired by his work, have made their way to the second volume of the *OLS*. A seventh motivation, not mentioned in the 2015 and 2016 articles but often expressed by Pinkster at other occasions, was the perceived need of commentators of an up-to-date (and English) reference work on grammatical phenomena. In his multi-volume commentary (with A.D. Leeman and others) on Cicero's *De oratore* Pinkster illustrated himself how modern commentaries on Latin texts might profit from new insights into Latin linguistics.

Harm Pinkster's motivations for writing 'another grammar' are revealing for the type of researcher he was. Like no other, he took seriously his responsibility as a researcher for serving the changing needs of the discipline, both within and outside the academic context. In 1981 this made him bring together international specialists in the Latin language at a conference in Amsterdam, thereby founding a series of biannual *International Colloquia on Latin Linguistics*, the 21st edition of which is to be held this year in Santiago de Compostela. Pinkster

4 *Ibid.*

5 Pinkster, H. (2016). Developments in Latin Syntax after the Publication of Szantyr (1965). In: P. Cordin, and A. Parente, eds., *Problemi e prospettive della linguistica storica*, Roma, pp. 75-92; see also n. 2.

6 Szantyr, A. (1965). *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*. München (re-edition of Hofmann's volume II (*Syntax und Stilistik*, 1928) of the *Lateinische Grammatik*). See further n. 1.

also contributed generously to the modernization of Latin teaching in secondary schools in the Netherlands, providing them not only with critical reviews of existing Latin course books, but also with an up-to-date, valency-based Latin-Dutch dictionary, which as of its introduction in 1998 has been the prescribed dictionary for all high school students taking Latin. But above all, he was an inspiration to countless young researchers from all over the world, who could count on his caring attention, useful advice, and concrete support, both academically and in practical matters. His criticism of their work was always constructive and respectful. Those who were privileged to have known him personally will remember Harm Pinkster as a fully straightforward and authentic person, averse to any kind of stardom.

For his contributions to science Pinkster was honoured with visiting professorships and fellowships throughout Europe and the US, and with honorary doctorates from the University of Chicago (in 2006) and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (in 2017). Only recently, he was made a 'Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw', a prestigious royal distinction he received from the mayor of the city of Amsterdam for his services to scholarship, education and society, including important administrative positions at the university and at the *Dutch Research Council* (*nwo*).

Harm Pinkster's quite unexpected death has cut short his plans to use his 'renewed retirement' for working on a number of small-scale collaborative projects. We hope that the fruits of his groundbreaking work shall live on, in studies by new generations of Latin linguists, in text editions and commentaries on Latin texts, and in the study of Latin at large.<sup>7</sup>

### Main Publications Harm Pinkster

- 1972      *On Latin Adverbs*. Amsterdam (= diss. University of Amsterdam).  
 1984      *Latijnse Syntaxis en Semantiek*. Amsterdam.  
 1990      *Latin Syntax and Semantics*. London (revised edition and translation of Pinkster 1984).  
 2015      *The Oxford Latin Syntax, Vol. 1: The Simple Clause*. Oxford.  
 2021      *The Oxford Latin Syntax, Vol. 2: The Complex Sentence and Discourse*. Oxford.

together with Anton D. Leeman *et al.*

1981-1996    *M. Tullius Cicero De oratore libri III. Kommentar*. (4 vols). Heidelberg.

<sup>7</sup> For a full bibliography and a curriculum vitae of Harm Pinkster, see his website [www.harpinkster.nl](http://www.harpinkster.nl).