LINGUISTICS AND THE DUTCH

By

R. SALVERDA

Professor of Dutch Language and Literature
in the University of London

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There is a common myth that the Dutch are born linguists in the sense that they easily pick up foreign languages, and that they have a natural and unrivalled multilingual proficiency. And of course, they all speak English too. A living example of this myth is the Dutch prime minister Lubbers, who, according to reports in the press, speaks five or six languages and addresses all his major European colleagues in their own native tongues.

This Dutch myth is nicely counterbalanced by a common belief among the English that they do not have this knack for learning foreign languages, for which they proudly envy the Dutch, especially in view of 1992. Some even seem to believe that the English lack the generic predisposition for learning foreign languages. How fortunate then that English is the major international language today.

My lecture today is not on comparative national mythology, so I will not further discuss those beliefs here, except to say that in reality things are rather different. It is not that the Dutch are genetically better equipped than the English when it comes to foreign language learning. In a way, I submit, that our national interests have been different so far, and, as a consequence, the respective educational policies and school systems have developed differently too. Moreover, in language learning, a lot depends on exposure and experience, immigrants and habit formation - and in these respects, Dutch schoolschildren have more, and more varied, linguistic experiences during their years in secondary school, when they do the hard work that is necessary in order to acquire foreign languages. English schoolschildren, on the other hand, do not have this invaluable experience; they have a much more limited exposure to foreign languages while they are at school. This lack of exposure and experience tends to breed ignorance about the learning of foreign languages, which in turn may help to explain why, in this country, one can get away with advertisements claiming that Spanish or German can easily be learnt in seven days. The underlying assumption seems to be that learning a foreign language is just another skill, with nothing much to it, something that anybody can easily do in a language laboratory. The reality is very often quite different.

And this, I may add, clearly illustrates the need for fundamental research into the actual processes and factors involved in successful foreign language learning.

Now, what I have been saying so far concerns the actual learning of languages, and though I consider this to be of great academic and social importance, it is not my main topic today. I will not be concerned here with language learning, but with linguistics as an academic pursuit.

Linguistics is usually defined as the scientific study of language, and I think it is not my main topic today, I will not be concerned here with
and Scaliger (1550-1609), came to these universities, soon to be followed by many other eminent scholars, all inspired by the humanistic ideal of studying and disseminating classical culture which they admired so highly. Famous throughout Europe for its leading professors and higher education establishments, as well as its Latin grammar and polyglot dictionaries, they had a deep and lasting influence. In the seventeenth century, one man in twenty studied Greek, one had to use Lexicon. Classical philology in Europe was dominated by the Dutch School until well into the eighteenth century. Of particular importance are the Lexicon grammaticum (1635-1642) and Veins (1577-1649), published at the end of the previous and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, not only because they lasted until the late nineteenth century, but especially because they were used as a model for the description of vernacular Dutch and German.

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Secondly, in the field of Dutch language studies, a remarkable tradition of literature and scholarship started in the latter half of the sixteenth century in the publication of the dictionaries of Cremer, Eliaen (1507-1560). His first known biblical dictionary, followed by Plumpt, in Amsterdam, third edition in 1599, stands out because of its careful explanations and its comprehensive vocabulary, showing that the role in the canon, Encyclopaedia were fantastically out.-

Another important event is the publication, in 1584, of the first comprehensive grammar of Dutch, followed by a Rhetic and a Latin, also in Dutch. While their descriptive model was still that of Latin, these works demonstrated that one could study the three liberal arts (grammar, logic and rhetoric) of the basic curriculum in Dutch. In fact, this publication was motivated by a conscious decision to see education change Dutch as an object of instruction, instead of Latin, in order to widen access to the field of education for the teaching and learning of grammar, not only or because they lasted until the late nineteenth century, but especially because they were used as a model for the description of vernacular Dutch and German. In the seventeenth century, the university of Leyden also laid the foundations for the development of the field of Oriental studies, especially Hebrew and Arabic. A scholarly tradition of narrow few centuries began with Erasmus's (1466-1536) and his successor's (1530-1667), were also very enterprising, travel in the study of these languages, to collect manuscripts and to carry out diplomatic evolutions. They also added upon the opportunities offered by the new printing technology, setting up an Arabic press at Leiden, which until nearly 1600 was the only source of Arabic type in Europe.

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And thus, thirdly, there is the field of foreign language learning. With respect to European languages, we now turn to publications from the early part of the sixteenth century, of polyglot dictionaries and translation books for learning Latin and French. Later on, we find that Spanish and German are also added. The first books for learning English began to appear also from the early part of the sixteenth century, and a strong tradition is reaching English and in Anglo-Dutch linguistic scholarship developed in the seventeenth century, culminating in William Sewell's (1653-1720) great dictionary and grammar of 1691. Today, therefore, we are looking at a long tradition of nearly four centuries, during which almost any idea has been tried and tested, generating a vast body of experience and common sense with respect to foreign language learning. The notions for learning foreign languages have been poorly practical throughout, and for most of these four centuries the field remained to the hands of schoolmasters, translators and publishers, working outside the universities. As an academic subject it is relatively young: the first foreign language department at a Dutch university was the French department at the University of Groningen, established in 1684. At the beginning of the seventeenth century a man like Kruisinga (1835-1946) still had no idea how to enter his disciple in English studies, since this was not yet possible at a Dutch university. This predominantly practical orientation may help to explain why the Dutch have not, so far, made any significant theoretical and methodological contributions in the field of foreign language learning.

Outside the European sphere, there is the long tradition of studies in the field of Indonesian languages, a tradition that began early in the seventeenth century. In 1683 the merchant Frederik de Hoopman (1597-1687), after two years as a prisoner in Axim in the north of Ghana, came back to the Netherlands and published his Malac dictionary and conversion book, to which he added the first descriptions of the various configurations of the Southern hemisphere. This book inaugurated a distinguished tradition, still continuing at Leyden today, of studies on the indigenous languages of the Borneo archipelago. The driving force behind these studies, at least during the seventeenth century, appears to have been a peculiar Dutch mix of religion and commercial motive: the desire to spread the Word of God and the Fraternal faith in the Spice Islands, just as in the acceptance of Malagasy, the language of the Archipelago, for trading purposes. In this field too, the first contributions were made by merchants, missionaries and translators working in the field. Although De Hoopman’s reputation was made mainly on the international commerce between Latin, Indian, Fijian and English translations that remained in use for a few centuries, the majority of these studies were published in Dutch.

important to see that the linguistic investigations of these men were inspired by a variety of motives, and undertaking with a view to important wider issues. Instead, we should not think of these men as today's students, but rather, as innovative and enterprising investigators, like George Staalie find all kinds of information, of strongly variable reliability and relevance, in order to get at the truth (or least to eliminate the erroneous), as matters most as divine as the text of the Bible, the correct chronology of world history, the original language, the exact position of the stern and the contours, or even the ideal language with which to compose the elements of reality. It is in the search for both of these matters, at the expense of knowledge that etymology was used and could be of decisive importance. Thus, for example, in 1605, when Collins, who was professor of Arabic and Hebrew languages at Leyden University, was to open the first for several reasons, it was actually the same as the Chinese he was told by the Jesuits, the defecting factor was the available philosophical evidence, and the discovery itself no importance that it was published right away in Martin's great Atlas of China, published by Blaues in 1655.

Considering this survey, I think it is fair to say that the activities and achievements of Dutch lexicographers in this early period demonstrate that in linguistics too, as in so many other fields, the Dutch have had a Golden Age during which they dominated the European scene by the sheer accumulation of linguistic materials, the concentration of high quality scholarship and the availability of a well-organized, international publishing trade.

However, for all its quality and rich variety, one could argue that all this does not really count as linguistic, since language at the time was not studied in itself and for itself, but for some other purpose, and the study of language was generally governed by some other agenda, a theological, transatlantic or nationalist program. As we have seen, this happens to the Nahuatl. However, this line of criticism is self-defeating; at least, it would follow that Chomsky's 'universalist and rationalist perspective on researh' has no role to play, but only a clear agenda to define the study of language. One could equally resent this view, but to argue with me about the programmatic nature of the Bible is our own agenda. One could also have a view, for example, on the so-called Leiden School, for the original language and Chomsky's quest for our native universal language capacity as programmatic views, each of which is crucially adapted to construct a coherent object for empirical investigations. Even so, we might still argue that the grammatical and philosophical of the period we have seen reviewed existed languages, but not language, that they

with the result that even today a knowledge of Dutch is indispensable if one wants to come to a serious understanding of Indonesian history, culture and languages.

The fourth and final point I want to make about early Dutch linguistics, concerns the contributions by a number of Dutch linguists who would eventually become, in the seventeenth century and onwards, the disciplinarians of comparative linguistics. Of great theoretical significance was the work of Van Neck, postulated in 1608 by Scaliger, in which he reduced all known European languages to 11 basic roots, concluding that there was no common ancestor language in these roots. The importance of this treatise lies in the systematic comparative approach on which he based his conclusions. Of wider significance is the fact in fact reflects the various claims that had been made for either Latin or Hebrew or Dutch as the original language, then there being the question of linguistic hierarchy from the Latin 19th and 20th centuries. As we have for such a long time in the past. A new, in 1665, came the breakable publication of the Codex Argenteus by Franciscus Jansis (1385-1877), which made available to the scientific community the transmission of the Bible into Greek, the ancient known Greek language. On the basis of this material, a Dutch scholar, Lambert van Meurs (1674-1737) of Amsterdam, succeeded in 1710 in establishing the family tree among the Indo-European languages, on the sole foundation of syntactic correspondences. Thus, we see integrated the scientific community of comparative grammarians a full century before Heine-Gerome's Die Griechische Sprache (1780-1781).

At this point I should like to note that while I am highlighting the most significant contributions by Dutch linguists in the period from about 1500 to about 1750, I am not arguing that all this was done by the Dutch or their own. On the contrary, there have always been close international contacts and cooperation. For example, a scholar like Scaliger was not a Dutchman, but he did have an important work which he was professor at Leyden. The book by Jansis was postulated in 1608 with a Latin translation made by his English colleague. Ten Keuke's work was also dependent on his work with the Englishman George Nicolson. In France, in 1606, the influential Encyclopedie des Sciences et des Arts was published. And in so-called scientific community, for example, the work of Scaliger and Scaliger was done.

My point is, rather, that at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, in the four fields I have reviewed: database and oriental philology, Dutch and German vocabulary and phonetics, and foreign languages and comparative linguistics - we see an explosion of activity in all the four fields, a rich variety of linguistic exploration and the publication of what really are monuments of discovery and learning. It is

unquestionably adopted the logoi-Latin model of traditional grammar for the description of other languages, that they were quite innovative in their approach; that is, that they lacked a proper theoretical concept of language and an acceptable method for describing and explaining the paradoxes of the object in question; that they were not doing proper, scientific linguistics. In my words, I should say that the presence of these elements of, for me, a twelfth century conception of linguistics as a 'pure' academic discipline. And if we apply the scientific standards of our own time to works published in the eighteenth century, we see that not only have they not in an anachronistic sense, but we still run the risk of seriously misjudging works that perfectly satisfied the standards of their own day.

Instead, I think it is more interesting to pursue this modern view of pure linguistics and take a closer look at each of the present century, in which this view has, after all, played in leading role. So, taking up our central question of today, we ask again: What did the Dutch contribute to the further development of linguistics? The first thing I would like to now in this respect is, that while it is generally true that linguistics has become a different discipline from what it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we can expect at least that there is considerable measure of continuity. In the twentieth century, Dutch linguists have contributed to produce a number of new grammarians. And although this involves the use of new methods and techniques, conserving wider ranges of data in far deeper detail, the descriptive work involved is not fundamentally different from what it was then.

As it is the early period, the Dutch have also continued to be concerned with the problems of spelling. In the course of the present century, we see a series of four official spelling reforms. These reforms have generated a lot of debate and the resulting spelling is clearly a compromise between the one hand, modern, scientific and phonological considerations and, on the other hand, more traditional social and cultural values. Nevertheless, the reforms have given the Dutch spelling for Old language which gives far a greater approximation of the current spoken language than those of their French, English or German contemporaries.

The Dutch have also continued to study foreign languages. They have remained strong in Oriental languages and, just as in the seventeenth century, Dutch of English has remained an important concern. In fact, for the first three quarters of the present century, the Dutch have played a leading role in the study of English's grammar. Before the World War II, there was The Great Tradition of Pater, Krauza, Zandvoort and Vreden. So along with this tradition, in 1950 the claim was made that
was published in The Hague by Mouton, when he had not even an American publisher interested in taking it. 224

This example is interesting in that it provides a good insight into how the Dutch trade in new ideas in international linguistics is related to subsidiary development inside the Low Countries. 225 Chomsky's book was at first something of an oddity and led by the leading Dutchman of the time, but at the same time well received by Dutch mathematicians, philosophers, and linguists working on formal languages systems. With their backing, Chomsky's new approach soon became very influential, especially during the sixties, when there was a general view that new ideas would sweep away everything that had been built up earlier in Dutch linguistics. We see here a substantial Dutch contribution and a corresponding lack of multinationalism, a willingness to move on with innovative ideas in exchange for new and better insights imported from abroad. Acceptance is not automatic, however, and new ideas are usually just a test in thorough empirical research. This, in sum, has had important and original contributions by young Dutch linguists like Kees van Elst, and Kees van Berkel, who are now among the major players in the international development of Chomskyan linguistic theories. At the same time Chomsky's approach has continued to be challenged from the outside, mainly from the hands of his so-called Functional Grammar, which provides a Dutch alternative that has faced a wide international response. But there have also been other challenges too, especially in the field of formal logical semantics and textual grammar.

However, the real benefit of the international influence is not to be found in the substantial level of linguistics. Throughout the century, a wide range of languages has been studied by Dutch linguists, not only the traditional Indo-European, Oriental and South west Asian languages, but also languages as diverse as Fokker, Basque, Hugarian, Turkish, Cree and African languages, the languages of the Netherlands, and of the American Indians. Now, the interesting thing is that many of the linguists involved in these languages have come back and toned their interests towards the study of Dutch. Thus, we had a wonderful diversity of scholars, divinists, divinists, and divinists, with all these in the study of Dutch and much has been done by linguists studying the native aspects of it, in syntax, semantics, morphometry, lexicography and literature, which has increased the knowledge of Dutch by the important observations and the attention to details that had often escaped their more traditional home linguists.

This line of linguistic research has recently culminated in the magnificent doctoral dissertation on Information Structure in Russian, English and Dutch, published in 1985 by Keizer. Her critical concepts of themes from Russian

European, especially Slavic scholars, on the basis of careful observations of the fact and meaning of accentuation, case and word order in these three languages, has led to surprising new insights into the way information is structured and preserved in these three languages. This has led to more and more results and empirical research that continues to be published in Dutch. As the author of this book is a Dutch linguist, the results of this research are written in Dutch.

Let us now take a closer look at the most recent part, the eighties, and see what is going on in the moment in Dutch linguistics. To begin with, in the study of Dutch, a number of interesting developments have taken place in the last decade. There is a publication in 1984 of the first comprehensive standard grammar of Dutch, 223 exactly forty-five hundred years after the first grammar of 1345. And the great dictionary of the Dutch language (a project that started in 1845) in recent completion and will hopefully be finished before the year 2000. 225 There is a lively and active output on the Dutch language. Speaking very generally, one could say that linguistics are in Flanders, who are closer to the linguistic frontier with French, have a stronger political awareness and are more active in sociolinguistics, whereas their colleagues in Holland, farther away from the front, concentrate more on theoretical matters. And the number of publications in English, but the large majority and in particular, the most significant discoveries continue to be published in Dutch. 226
politics, when the Dutch habit of disagreement is most strongly developed.

On the other hand, this variety of viewpoints may also reflect the essential pliability of the object "language", which we are studying. At any rate, the diversity of theoretical options, which is far greater than anything we saw in the seventeenth century, is a valuable asset and a strong incentive for serious intellectual strife on the fundamental structure of language.

But when a first attempt is undertaken between experts of a number of these theories was made in 1968, cooperation turned out to be hampered by an almost Brahminical contention. Key terms, like form, meaning, function, structure, interpretation and explanation turned out to be usually different from one theoretical framework to the next. The debate was, perhaps, the more lively for this: it is not clear whether these theories really involve empirical and explanatory differences of a substantial nature.

Such a state of affairs is not accessible to a Dutch mind. For all their individuality, and love of disagreement, there is also, among the Dutch, a strong desire for cocompression and a wish, when all is said and done, to engage in a constructive common enterprise. Thus, there is a need for an integrated framework for linguistic inquiry, within which we can then develop empirically testable theories.

In this respect, I think it would be a sensible move for the grammarians to join forces with the psychologists who are also studying language, especially since on the psychological side there is a growing model in Levelt's recent published book Speaking. In his 300 pages Levelt gives a comprehensive outline of all that may be needed by the process between first intention and final Articulation, a distance we dolly move to a split second when we talk.

My point is not that Levelt is right, but that he presents the correct theory, or the definitive picture of what goes on in our brains when we talk. This returns to the nest. At the very least, his psychological perspective should be matched with the empirical findings of a careful linguistic like Keizer in her forthcoming book. And it is by no means easy to see how this could be done, partly because the work in different fields and disciplines is not apparently unaware of each other. Levelt starts from the speech motor and describes how we conceive, plan, formulate, execute, monitor and repair our utterance, and his aim is to present a model of how the speaker works. Keizer on the other hand, starts from the listener, and analyzes how and why we can interpret and understand what we hear, and leaf focus on our capacity to construct utterances from the linguistic material before us. Obviously there is connection here, since speakers and listeners simultaneously often succeed in reaching a measure of mutual understanding, but their

mental make up is necessarily conducted on the same blueprint, as our daily misunderstandings and misinterpretations may also too clear. All the more reason then, to study speakers and listeners and their interactions together. In this respect, these two community books, Speaking for Levelt and Information Acquisition by Keizer, which Erard found the most substantial contributions of the decade to come from Dutch linguistics, do offer a good starting point for joint future research, and they also enable us to draw up an agenda for research and a sound division of academic labour.

As at this point, the logical and most exciting - next step would be, I think, to form the fundamental grammatical and psychological investigations with another line of research: the effect of the linguistic knowledge on the logic and speech hearing. Much more is involved here than the mere use of computers and other machines. In fact, the construction of linguistic and new information technology is opening up new worlds of inquiry, and the development of conversational speech databases is in the past decade already feasible for large scale research environments.

In this arena, we can see how important is the way new findings are being carried out in the Netherlands, which involves the construction of complex models of phonology, semantics, syntax, semantics, text grammars and pragmatics, all aiming to produce a complete test-speech conversation by automatic means.

This new field of inquiry, for which the term 'experimental linguistics' has been suggested, is of course not exclusive in the Low Countries alone. There is no remaining (inter)intellectual independence here, and the Dutch are also part in an eight-nation project on Speech Technology, for which, I note with pleasure, the UCL, Department of Phonetics and Language is the prime contractor.

The expected output of such research, in the form of machines that can speak, read and understand, and also e.g. linguistically sophisticated word processors, and multilingual translation aids, has already attracted investments from companies like IBM, Philips and Kuyper. We are witnessing here the beginning of a real language industry.

In signing this survey, I submit that in the present century the strong points of Dutch linguistics are much the same as in the seventeenth: the concentration of diverse linguistic phenomena, the concentration of high quality research and the availability of a well established publishing house working for the linguistic world market. One can therefore well understand how it is that the great Chemnitz has predicted a brilliant future for linguistics in the Low Countries.
It was born in London, in 1564, by Sir Thomas More's son-in-law, John Raikes, with the ambition to make it more practical and useful than the Dutch language. In this century, almost in London, he was an expert in the English language, and it has been a tradition of scholarship over the years. There has been an impressive work done by Professors Bensink, Kustermans, and myself on the development of Dutch.

Literary works flourished, first after the Second World War under Professor Theo van Bree at the University of Amsterdam, but especially since 1970 under my professor Professor Reinder Meijer, whose standard work on the literature of the Low Countries has been the foundation on which we in the Department of Dutch can confidently build.

There is a wider context, too, in which modern logics, Anglo-Dutch relations have involved not only literature but also Art, War, Trade, Translation, Colonial Policy, or Social change. Therefore, there is no Dart of Progress here. In the study of this wider context, I am confident that the recently established interdisciplinary Center for Low Countries Studies at UCLA can and will play a leading academic role.

And I will be happy to contribute my expertise as a Dutch Region to these developments. As for any new work, against the background of the programmes for which I have outlined above, I shall concentrate on two things: the grammar of Dutch in the widest sense, and the literary works in which this language is represented.

Earlier I told you that I saw the philosophy of science, as one of the first sciences. It may very well be that linguistics is the ultimate science too, giving rise to the fields of Science and Genetical Theory in the University of Leiden, May 1971.


39. C.B. Beth Aufstand voor de Wijzegeest van de Welzijn, Amsterdam 1947, especially chapter 7 and 11.
44. A. Wijnen, ‘On the initiative for the Dutch Language in Europe, which since 1975 is being pressed at the Centre for Diachrony and Chronology at Nijmegen under the auspices of UNESCO’. Basic elements for foreign languages in the EC were set by J. van der Meij, ‘Die Theorien der eine European Auto/Code System for Modern Language Learning by Adults’, Mainzberg 1977.
45. N. van den Boogaard, De Nederlandse taal, Amsterdam 1957, Jouw Lengte, Studies Memoriën Nederlandse Akoestiek, Samen Mover 4.
58. A. Wijnen, ‘On the initiative for the Dutch Language in Europe, which since 1975 is being pressed at the Centre for Diachrony and Chronology at Nijmegen under the auspices of UNESCO’. Basic elements for foreign languages in the EC were set by J. van der Meij, ‘Die Theorien der eine European Auto/Code System for Modern Language Learning by Adults’, Mainzberg 1977.