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Introduction

Hugo Quené
Louis Pols
Wim Zonneveld

Marten Egbertus Hendrik (Bert) Schouten was born on 1 November 1946 in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. After obtaining his Dutch ‘kandidaats’ (BA) and ‘doctoraal’ (MA) degrees in English Language and Literature at the Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht (now: Utrecht University), he taught English pronunciation and speaking proficiency at this University, while working towards his PhD. Bert Schouten defended his PhD thesis on “Native-language interference in the perception of second-language vowels” on September 26, 1975 in Utrecht, prof. Antonie (Toon) Cohen being his promotor. The research project leading towards the degree was funded by the Utrecht Faculty of Arts, with additional support by the Department of English Language and Literature, and by ZWO (Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research). The experimental work for this project was performed at the Institute for Perception Research (IPO) in Eindhoven. In this dissertation, two lines of research were combined that have been present ever since in Bert Schouten’s career in phonetics: teaching of English pronunciation to Dutch students, and listeners’ performance in phonetic categorization of speech sounds. A third strand in his career concerns sociolinguistic variation in spoken Standard Dutch and Dutch dialects.

Bert’s experience in experimental phonetics made him excellently suited to a subsequent ZWO-funded project (1975-1978) entitled “The influence of context upon the dynamic spectral properties of vowels, diphthongs and glides”, in cooperation with Louis Pols, this time at the TNO Institute for Perception (IZF) in Soesterberg. He felt attracted to the hands-on approach, the measurements using advanced equipment, the use of computers and – last but not least – the working atmosphere in that institute. By analyzing many replications by five Dutch speakers of all combinations of several initial consonants, four vowels /i,u,a,ɛ/ and several final consonants, the influence of the consonantal environment upon the dynamic spectral properties of the vowels was

studied. Not only did he analyse isolated CVC words but also CVC fragments from a semi-nonsense read text that started thus: *Dokter Rien van der Goeg, een homeopaat uit Trier, gaat vandaag in het geniep een kroeg in om een bemoeial een poets te bakken met een tartaar met kinine*. This project resulted in several publications in the Journal of Phonetics (Schouten & Pols, 1979a; 1979b; 1981) and in JASA (Pols & Schouten, 1978; 1981). When Louis Pols left for a one-year research stay in the United States, the two parties regularly communicated by means of old-fashioned letters. In these, Schouten informed Pols of the bureaucratic obstacles in becoming appointed at the Dept of English Language and Literature, and he shared the latest Tour de France results, and other gossip.

In 1978, Bert Schouten was indeed appointed as ‘wetenschappelijk ambtenaar’ (faculty member) at Utrecht University, in the Department of English Language and Literature. In 1988 he became associate professor in the Department of Phonetics, which later merged into the Department of Linguistics. After Sieb Nooteboom retired as chair in Phonetics (2004), Bert Schouten returned to the department of English Language and Culture.

Bert Schouten became well-known in the Dutch and international phonetic and sociophonetic community as the organizer of a range of excellent workshops in his fields of scientific interest. The first in 1986 was a NATO Advanced Workshop on *The Psychophysics of Speech Perception* (Schouten, 1987). The second in 1987 was an ZWO-KNAW workshop on *New Methods in Dialectology*, co-organized with Piet van Reenen at the Free University of Amsterdam (Van Reenen & Schouten, 1989). The third workshop in 1991 was entitled *The Auditory Processing of Speech: From Sounds to Words*, sponsored by Utrecht University (Schouten, 1992). And the fourth in 2000 was an NWO-KNAW-LOT Workshop on *The Nature of Speech Perception* (Schouten, 2003). He strongly believed in the benefits of bringing together phoneticians, speech scientists, psycho-acousticians, physiologists and even linguists, and he strongly encouraged interaction and exchange between these experts. These workshops ranged over a very wide area, as exemplified by a few session titles: Physiological correlates of speech perception, Perception of spectral change and timbre, Phoneme perception, The development of speech perception and neural plasticity, Cortical language processing.

Bert has served the field of Phonetics not only as a dedicated researcher, teacher, supervisor, and organizer, but also as a board member of the Dutch Association of Phonetic Sciences, of which he has been the chairman for longer than we can remember.

The present volume marks Bert Schouten’s formal retirement at his 65th birthday. This volume contains original contributions by some of Bert Schouten’s past and present co-workers at Utrecht University, by speech researchers-cum-colleagues from other universities in the Netherlands, and by colleagues from overseas with whom Bert Schouten has collaborated intensively. Because of the strict deadlines imposed by Bert Schouten’s 65th birthday, not all prospective authors were able to contribute to this volume.

The contributions to this Festschrift represent the three areas of research in which Bert Schouten has been interested throughout his career. The first area is the teaching of pronunciation of English to Dutch students. In fact, this area provided the background for Schouten's dissertation (1975): to what extent does teaching result in more native-like pronunciation of vowels? If teaching pronunciation yields only limited improvement, is this perhaps due to students' inability to perceive categorical differences between vowels? Using students' judgements of synthesized English vowels, Schouten was able to show, for example, that "first-year students have a fairly clear idea about where to draw the line between English /e/ and /æ/, although they are not very sure of themselves in this respect. Second- and third-year students show a great deal more confidence in their judgements, but they have apparently adapted to an erroneous boundary" (Schouten, 1975, p.31). This area of research remains very relevant to this date, as witnessed by the various contributions on L2 perception and production to this volume: by Caspers on stress, Chen & Lai on intonation, by Wang & Van den Doel, and by Van Heuven, Broerse & Pacilly.

The second area of research concerns the nature of speech perception, in particular listeners' performance in classification and discrimination of speech sounds, with categorical perception being the empirical touchstone for theories and ideas about this topic. Together with his PhD students Van Hessen, Gerrits and Heeren, Schouten has shown that categorical perception strongly depends on the listener's language background and on the detailed circumstances of the experiments (Schouten & Van Hessen, 1992; Van Hessen & Schouten, 1992, 1999; Schouten, Gerrits & Van Hessen, 2003; Gerrits & Schouten, 2004; Heeren & Schouten, 2008, 2010). Several studies in this volume are primarily concerned with the nature of speech perception, viz. those by Capel et al., Heeren, Moore, and by Pastore & Gaston; speech intelligibility and its robustness is addressed by Clapham et al., and the assessment of orally presented speech by Kager & Schliesser.

The third area is that of sociophonetics, where dialectology, sociolinguistics, and phonetics are combined. Bert Schouten and colleagues (Scholtmeijer, Peeters, Van der Harst) have had considerable impact in this area, among other things by showing that acoustic-phonetic analyses may provide relevant sociolinguistic or dialectological evidence (e.g. Schouten & Peeters, 1996). Several contributions in this volume explore linguistic variation in space (Bloothoof, Grijzenhout, Scholtmeijer), in time (Kloots, Quené, Zonneveld), and in language impairment (De Bree & Van der Pas).

Bert is married to Hroswitha, and they have four children: Mark, the twins Cecilia and Fiona, and Francesca. It would be wrong to say his musical preferences are eclectic: Bert enjoys music in its myriad varieties, not only as an enthusiast listener but also as a sharp analyst. In addition, Bert is an avid fan of soccer, football, and baseball, as can be appreciated from his own homepage, and from the cover of this Festschrift.

Utrecht/Hilversum, October 2011

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