

Opening address

Some Aspects of the 'Phonetic Sciences', Past and Present

Eli Fischer-Jørgensen
Copenhagen, Denmark

Dames en heren,

Het is voor mij een grote eer en een bijzonder plezier hier in Nederland als eerste te spreken. Ik ben kort na de oorlog een half jaar in Nederland geweest, en die tijd behoort tot mijn beste herinneringen. Ik heb sindsdien een bijzondere sympathie bewaard voor het nederlandse landschap, de nederlandse kunst en de nederlandse mensen.

Mr. President, dear Colleagues,

I first want to thank the Committee for inviting me to give this talk. I feel it as a great honour, in fact as *too* great an honour. I know of various colleagues who could have done it better, and I am somewhat ashamed that I accepted it. But, as I just mentioned, I have a soft spot in my heart for Holland. Moreover, that was two years ago, when I had just retired and thought that I would have plenty of time for reading and writing; perhaps I might even become more intelligent – who knows? But that was, of course, a vain hope. – Anyhow there are a few things I should like to say.

This is a sort of jubilee. It is the tenth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, and it is approximately 50 years (more exactly 51 years) since the first congress took place in 1932, also in Holland.

It is true that on various occasions (1965 and 1982) Eberhard Zwirner has pointed to the fact that the congress in Amsterdam in 1932 was not really the first International Congress of Phonetics: there was one in 1914 (but due to the war no proceedings were ever published), and there was one again in 1930 in Bonn. That is correct, but these were congresses of experimental phonetics, whereas the congress in Amsterdam was the first congress of what was called 'the phonetic sciences', and that makes a difference.

It was not by chance that Holland was chosen as the place for the congress in 1932. Holland has a long and rich tradition in phonetics. One of the most impressive older works is the book by Petrus Montanus van Delft in 1635: 'Bericht van een nieuw konst genaemt de spreekkonst', a remarkable and very original work, which has rarely met with the appreciation it deserves, perhaps because it was written in Dutch and, moreover, used a forbidding terminology. In the first decades of this century, thus in the years before the

congress in Amsterdam, Holland had become an important centre of phonetic research with a number of very competent phoneticians, for instance Zwaardemaker, Eijkman, van Ginneken, and Louise Kaiser. Zwaardemaker and Eijkman had published an excellent textbook – or rather handbook – of phonetics in 1928 with original contributions on many points. The new phonological theories had also been quickly – but not uncritically – accepted in Holland, for instance by De Groot and Van Wijk. A few years later (1932) Van Wijk published an introduction to phonology which was less dogmatic and much easier to read than Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge*, and which might have made phonology more popular if it had been written in e.g. English. As early as 1914 a Dutch society for experimental phonetics had been founded, which in 1931 was transformed into a Society for Phonetics. Dutch phoneticians also published a periodical, 'Archives néerlandaises de phonétique expérimentale' (from 1927) which in the first years exclusively, and later to a large extent was based on contributions from Dutch phoneticians, and the University of Amsterdam had a lecturer in phonetics (Louise Kaiser) from 1926.

This brilliant tradition has continued to the present day with phonetic research centers and excellent phoneticians at various universities and at the Institute for Perception Research in Eindhoven. Their contributions are well known. I will therefore only mention that, although several Dutch phoneticians must have been very busy organizing this congress, there are more than forty section papers by Dutch phoneticians. It is thus not simply for sentimental reasons that this tenth congress is also being held in Holland. It is scientifically very well motivated.

The congress in Amsterdam in 1932 was originally – like those in 1914 and 1930 – planned as a congress on experimental phonetics. But the Dutch committee widened its scope on the initiative of its chairman, the psychologist Van Ginneken. Van Ginneken was an impressive personality, and his appearance was impressive too (for instance, he had long hair long before its time); and he was a man of vision. Some of them were rather wild, but some were fruitful. One of them was that all those who were interested in any aspect of speech sounds should meet and work together. Therefore invitations were sent out to a broad spectrum of scholars from different sciences, and the name of the congress changed to 'congress of phonetic sciences'. The topics of the congress were announced to be: physiology of speech and voice, the development of speech and voice in the individual and in mankind, anthropology of speech and voice, phonology, linguistic psychology, pathology of speech and voice, comparative physiology of the sounds of animals, and musicology; and the congress program included a meeting of the so-called 'Internationale phonologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft'. But shortly after the invitations had been sent out, the International Society of Experimental Phonetics which had taken the original initiative gave up participating as a society because its president, E. Scripture, was afraid that the economic crisis would prevent too many members from coming. The committee, however, continued its work with Louise Kaiser as general secretary.

