

## In Memoriam, Eugenius Marius Uhlenbeck, 1913–2003

Eugenius Marius Uhlenbeck, Bob as he was affectionately known to his friends, died at home on May 27, 2003, two months before his 90th birthday. He was a distinguished scholar, an indefatigable organizer and academic initiator, a gifted and inspiring teacher, a loyal friend and, despite his many activities, a family man with a sense of tradition handed down to his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Professor of Javanese Language and Literature (1950–83) and in addition also Professor of General Linguistics (1958–79) at Leiden University, Bob was a pivotal figure in both fields, bestowed with numerous honors and awards, both nationally and internationally. In the Netherlands he was member and subsequently vice president of the Dutch Council for Science Policy (1967–76); member of the advisory board of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (1967–82), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (from 1967), and the Royal Holland Society of Sciences and Humanities (from 1970); and honorary member of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (from 1983), after having been a member of its board and subsequently president (1950–65). In 1969 he received a knighthood in the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands. In 1983 the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies inaugurated an annual series of Uhlenbeck lectures to honor its founding president (1970–83), the first being Bob's statement on the autonomy of linguistics (Uhlenbeck 1983b). Under his editorship (1950–84), *Lingua* became one of the leading journals in the field of general linguistics. International acclaim soon followed. After having been visiting professor at the Linguistic Institute in Bloomington, Indiana (1953), and at the University of California at San Diego (1965), associate editor of the *International Journal of American Linguistics* (from 1959), and research fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, California (1965–66), Bob was elected honorary member of the Linguistic Society of America (1972). He received *honoris causa* doctorates from the Catholic University of Louvain (1975) and Charles University in Prague (1991), where he was also elected honorary member of the Prague Linguistic Circle (1991) and the Association of Alumni and Friends of Charles University (1993). After having been president of the Societas Linguistica Europaea (1972), he was elected member of the Academia Europaea (1991). In 1994 a corresponding fellowship of the British Academy was conferred upon him. Pacific acclaim materialized in the form of a professorial fellowship at the Australian National University (1973), followed by a research fellowship at the same university (1985). In 1991 he was invited to give the opening keynote address at the 6th International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics in Honolulu, Hawai'i; it was published the year

after as the lead article of *Oceanic Linguistics* (Uhlenbeck 1992a), the journal that claimed him as a member of its Editorial Advisory Board from its inception in 1962. Last but definitely not least, Bob was elected secretary general of the Permanent International Committee of Linguists at the 12th International Congress of Linguists in Vienna (1977) and would remain in office until the 15th in Quebec (1992).

**1. Indonesian years (1939–48).** Bob was born in The Hague on August 9, 1913. He was named after his father, who had served as an officer in the Dutch East Indian army, but returned to the Netherlands to ensure a good education for his children. His eldest brother, the famous physicist George Eugène Uhlenbeck (1900–1988), was born in Batavia (now Jakarta), and Bob seems to have been destined for a career in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). He received his secondary education at the renowned Gymnasium Haganum in The Hague (1925–32), before taking up the study of Indology at the University of Leiden (1932–37) and Indonesian Law (“Indisch Recht”) at the University of Utrecht (1933–38). After his military service he married Sabine Ottevanger. They left immediately for the Dutch East Indies where Bob was to take up a position as government linguist at Balai Pustaka, the Bureau for Popular Literature, in Batavia. The three years at Balai Pustaka proved to be crucial in his development as a Javanese specialist as well as a general linguist: “Six days a week, seven hours per day of either reading, speaking, or listening to Javanese prepared me for the study of Javanese in an unparalleled way” (Uhlenbeck 1983a:10). However, a thorough command of a language that is not one’s native tongue is a necessary—though not sufficient—condition for the scientific study of that language, as Bob himself declared wholeheartedly (*ibid.*). Not having had any formal training in linguistics, he was introduced to the work of the Dutch linguist and philosopher Hendrik J. Pos (1898–1955) by the then director of Balai Pustaka, Klaas A. H. Hidding (1902–86), a specialist in Indonesian and comparative religion. Soon he immersed himself in the study of the classic works of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Edward Sapir (1884–1939), Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949), Karl Bühler (1879–1963), Anton Reichling (1898–1986), and members of the Prague School such as Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945), Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938), and Roman Jakobson (1896–1982). Having also read the works of such well-known nineteenth-century linguists as Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), Hermann Paul (1846–1921), and Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1933), he realized that the historical-comparative paradigm that had dominated nineteenth-century linguistics was being replaced by a synchronically oriented linguistics focusing on the structural aspects of language(s). One of the tenets of structural linguistics, both European and American, was that languages have to be described “in terms of their own structure,” to quote Bloomfield’s famous dictum (1939:2). Bob’s own experiences in learning Javanese and Malay had already convinced him that the conceptual framework of traditional grammar was ill-defined and of little use in the description of Indonesian and, for that matter, “exotic” (i.e., non-Indo-European) languages in general (Uhlenbeck 1960c). For this reason he refrained from using traditional concepts such as subject and predicate, but instead used intonational features to distinguish between basic sentence types in his Javanese grammar (1941). Bob’s service at Balai Pustaka ended with the Japanese occupation of Java in 1942. He was

imprisoned for two years until he was embarked on a Japanese cargo ship called the Yunyo Maru together with about 2,300 other prisoners of war, 4,200 *romusha* (Javanese forced laborers), and 300 Ambonese and Menadonese soldiers. On September 16, 1944, the Yunyo Maru sailed from Batavia for an unknown destination and was torpedoed two days later by a British submarine off the west coast of Sumatra. Bob, who had been lucky and fit enough to stay on deck, managed to save himself by jumping overboard as soon as the torpedoes hit. With 5,620 casualties, the wreck of the Yunyo Maru remains the greatest naval disaster to date. After about half a day in the water, Bob was picked up by a Japanese destroyer and subsequently imprisoned in Pakan Baru, a Japanese labor camp with a heavy death toll. Being a tenacious survivor, he lived to see the Japanese capitulation and the Indonesian declaration of independence in 1945. From 1946 until 1948 he was lecturer in general and Indonesian linguistics at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. At the same time he prepared his PhD dissertation under the supervision of Cornelis C. Berg (1900–1990), who held the chair of Javanese language and literature at Leiden University. The subject of his dissertation was the structure of the Javanese morpheme (Uhlenbeck 1949). In it he combined insights from the Prague School such as the distinction between center and periphery with distributional analysis and innovative theoretical views such as the distinction between absolute, exceptionless rules and statistical rules that allow for exceptions.

**2. Leiden years (1949–83).** In 1949 Bob returned to the Netherlands together with his wife and his daughter, who was born during his imprisonment. He defended his thesis *cum laude* and joined the editorial board of the *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. In this capacity he revived its companion series *Verhandelingen* and took the initiative to launch two new ones, the *Bibliographical Series* and the *Translation Series*. In 1950 he was elected member of the board of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV), the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. He managed to secure the continued existence of the Institute, and as president of its board (1962–65) arranged for its transfer from The Hague to Leiden (1967). Back in 1950 he also took over Berg's chair of Javanese language and literature at Leiden University. His teaching led him to develop a comprehensive theory of morphology inspired not by American (i.e., Neo-Bloomfieldian) but by European structuralists, particularly Jakobson and Reichling. The first results of his theoretical reflections on Javanese morphology were published in *Lingua* (Uhlenbeck 1953a), the Dutch journal of which he had joined the editorial board and which would become one of the leading periodicals in the field of general linguistics under his editorship (1950–83). His reputation as a general linguist was soon established: in 1958 he became professor of general linguistics in addition to his Javanese chair in Leiden and from 1959 he would be teaching the same subject at the Nutsacademie (now Hogeschool Rotterdam). As a general linguist Bob was immediately faced with a new challenge: developing an alternative to transformational-generative grammar, which—as he was probably one of the first to realize—had much more in common with the Neo-Bloomfieldian conception of language and linguistics than the term “Chomskyan revolution” suggested (Uhlenbeck 1979). The first of what would become a series of critical comments on transformational-generative grammar were again published in *Lingua* (Uhlenbeck

1963a; 1967c). In the same period, Bob revealed himself more and more as a natural-born organizer and academic initiator. In 1967 he was elected member of the advisory board of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research and member and subsequently also president of the Dutch Council for Science Policy. In both capacities he took a particularly active part in research policy in the Netherlands, culminating in the birth of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS), which Bob could deservedly claim as his own brainchild (Uhlenbeck 1994a). Past NIAS fellows include psychologist Jerome Bruner; sociologists Gunhild Hagestad and Samuel Eisenstadt; historians Robert Darnton, Jürgen Kocka, and Jonathan Israel; political scientists Elie Kedourie and Arend Lijphart; and linguists Peter Matthews and Jan Firbas. In the 1970s his organizational talents were put to use on a global scale, first as President of the Societas Linguistica Europaea (1972), later as secretary general of the Permanent International Committee of Linguists (1977–92)—better known under its French acronym CIPL (Comité International Permanent de Linguistes). The year after he had been elected secretary general of CIPL his wife Sabine died after a long illness.

**3. Retirement?** Bob retired from the chair of Javanese language and literature in 1983, after he had given up the chair of general linguistics rather unexpectedly in 1979. His retirement from the university did not imply a retirement from his many other activities. In his capacity as secretary general of CIPL he revitalized *Linguistic Bibliography*, better known under its French acronym BL (*Bibliographie Linguistique*), and arranged for its transfer to the National Library of the Netherlands in The Hague.<sup>1</sup> In his work for CIPL he was helped in word and deed by his second wife, Mariëtte Winkel, a former student and research assistant whom he married in 1979. In preparation for the 15th International Congress of Linguists in Quebec (1992), he put the endangered languages issue at the top of the agenda. Together with CIPL president Robert Henry Robins (1921–2000) he put together an important collection of articles on the subject (Uhlenbeck 1991b) and assembled a panel of internationally acknowledged specialists for one of the plenary sessions at the congress: Colette Craig, Nancy Dorian, Ken Hale, and Michael Krauss. Contrary to traditional practice, the proceedings were subsequently published under a separate main title: *Les langues menacées / Endangered languages* (Crochetière, Boulanger, and Ouellon 1993). The initiative was taken up by the establishment of the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages in Tokyo and the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages, the latter on the initiative of the later president of CIPL, Stephen Wurm (1922–2001). CIPL subsequently sponsored the study of a number of endangered languages: Raepa Tati (alternatively called Kaki Ae) and Koita (Trans–New Guinea phylum), Musom (a Western Oceanic language of Papua New Guinea), Eynu (an Uyghur language with Persian vocabulary of Eastern Turkistan), and Udehe (a Tungus language of East Siberia). After his retirement as CIPL's secretary general, Bob continued to lecture and publish, and his legacy still contains a couple of forthcoming papers. He also continued his annual hibernation on the Big Island of Hawai'i, which he had fallen in love with after attending the 10th Pacific Science Congress in Honolulu in 1961.

1. BL is now available for free at <http://www.blonline.nl>.

**4. General linguistics.** Bob's way of doing linguistics was characterized by the continuous interaction between theory and data. Regarding the latter, he did not rely on his near-native-speaker command of Javanese already referred to, but instead made systematic and large-scale use of data from two basically different but complementary sources: large corpora, both oral and written, and data elicited from native speakers. Bob's theory of language is structural-functional and professedly antigerative. As already mentioned, he was a European rather than an American structuralist, finding inspiration in the sign-based theory of Saussure and its applications in Prague School linguistics. Linguistic signs are defined as "bipartite elements of sound and meaning" (Uhlenbeck 1983b:5): "Language reduced to sound is no longer language and there is no linguistic meaning unsupported by perceptible sound differences" (Uhlenbeck 1978a:2). Following a general trend in structural linguistics of the first half of the twentieth century, Bob moved from phonology to morphology to syntax, that is, from the most systematic to the least systematic part of language. His morphology is word-based and hence primarily concerned with word-formation. Following Reichling (1935), the word is viewed as a central unit of language use and linguistic analysis (Uhlenbeck 2003). It is the minimal unit of form and (independent) meaning and, as such, different from morphemes, which are defined as "systematic features" dependent on words. From this perspective, formally different morphological processes such as affixation, reduplication, modification, and compounding—or any combination of these—can be regarded as functionally equivalent. Javanese *bola-bali* "to move back and forth," for instance, is derived from *bali* "to turn" by a morphological process characterized by both reduplication and modification (Uhlenbeck 1992a:7). Morphological processes are seen as devices for the systematic extension of the lexicon and, as such, amenable to rule. In this respect, the Prague School concepts of productivity, potentiality, and creativity figure conspicuously in Bob's morphological publications (Uhlenbeck 1977b; 1981a). Because every language is at any given stage of its development the temporary outcome of a historical development, morphological descriptions necessarily have a "rule plus list" format, the list containing the exceptions to the rule, for example, the Germanic strong verbs as opposed to the productive weak verbs. The word is also the minimal unit for the construction of word groups (syntagms, constituents, phrases, ...), that is, syntax in its etymological sense. The perspective is again functional: the basic function of syntax is to bring about semantic interaction between the words combined, which is why syntax is considered "instrumental" in relation to semantics (Uhlenbeck 1983c). The rules of syntax offer the speakers of a language a framework within which words can be combined freely and, indeed, creatively. A *square circle* may be a combination of words that are logically incompatible, but not syntactically, given the appropriate intralinguistic context and/or extralinguistic situation (Uhlenbeck 1983b:16). Syntax, however, is not concerned exclusively with the construction of word groups into larger constructions (and, ultimately, sentences), but also with the structure of sentences viewed as units in and of themselves. In retrospect, the origins of Bob's broader conception of syntax can be traced back to the early 1960s. In a paper coauthored by Reichling and presented at the 9th International Congress of Linguists in Cambridge, Mass., in 1962—the same venue where Chomsky made his first major international

appearance (Newmeyer 1986:42f.)—he rightly stresses the importance of intonation as a quintessential feature of the sentence (Uhlenbeck 1964b:167). In the same paper, the importance of Saussure's well-known *principe linéaire* is emphasized: “elements following one another linearly may remain unconnected and kept present until an element or elements appearing in the utterance much later can be connected with them” (Uhlenbeck 1964b:168). In another paper of the same period, this is referred to as the “principle of sustained memory” (Uhlenbeck 1973 [1963a]:14) and credited to Reichling (1935:424f.). Bob's “linear method,” as it has come to be known in Dutch linguistics, was illustrated with the following analysis (Uhlenbeck 1973 [1963a]:8), which, of course, ran counter to traditional and transformational-generative analyses: [[[*the man*][*hit*]][*the ball*]]. The problem was, as Bob realized himself (Uhlenbeck 1983a:18), that the analysis was at once bottom-up and top-down. In the 1970s, however, the linear method was applied to the sentence *as a unit* on the basis of intonational criteria, not to successive combinations of words and/or word groups. A distinction was made between “word group,” a word-based (bottom-up) syntactic concept, and “sentence segment” (an intonation unit), a sentence-based (top-down) syntactic concept (Uhlenbeck 1975b). Sentence segmentation (intonational phrasing) was explicitly connected with the Prague School notion of Functional Sentence Perspective (Uhlenbeck 1994b) or, in other words, with the topic-comment organization of the sentence (Uhlenbeck 1983b:20). Bob's sign-based theory of language, with words and sentences as units of form and meaning functioning in an intralinguistic context and an extralinguistic situation, had become structural and functional in the fullest sense of both words.

**5. Javanese and Indonesian linguistics.** Bob's first contribution to Javanese linguistics was a concise grammar, written in Dutch and published just before the Japanese occupation of Java (Uhlenbeck 1941). The originality of this little work lies in its rejection of traditional notions such as subject and predicate and its use of intonational criteria in the classification of basic sentence types, but it lacked the scientific rigor that characterized his later publications (Uhlenbeck 1983a:18). The publication of his PhD dissertation on the structure of the Javanese morpheme (Uhlenbeck 1949) was characteristically preceded by an article exploring the theoretical relevance of phonology (Uhlenbeck 1948). From phonology, Bob moved on to morphology. Over a period of 25 years he wrote 15 major contributions to Javanese word-formation, including exhaustive descriptions of the numeral (Uhlenbeck 1953c) and pronominal system (Uhlenbeck 1960b) and the use of honorifics or “respect forms” (1950a; 1970c; 1976). These were later revised and, in seven cases, translated into English and conveniently collected in one volume (Uhlenbeck 1978a). His first publication on Javanese syntax dealt with nominal and verbal word-groups and was programmatically titled “Some preliminary remarks on Javanese syntax” (1965a). It was not until the 1970s that the notion of sentence segment was introduced and applied to the functional analysis of sentences in Javanese (1975; 1983d; 1994b) and later also Old Javanese (1987; 1994b). As a matter of fact, Old Javanese figures prominently among his later publications, both morphological (1985b; 1991a) and syntactic (1986; 1991a). He was convinced that in studying older stages of a language, one had to be a good philologist to be a good linguist, and vice versa, and suited the action to the word (1975a; 1989).

Being stern on himself, he was also severe on others. Zurbuchen (1976) was harshly criticized for her poor understanding of Old Javanese and her inability to digest a specialist literature written in Dutch (Uhlenbeck 1981b). A decade later, Becker and Hunter (1988) were given similar treatment (Uhlenbeck 1992c). In the wider field of Indonesian linguistics, Bob's state-of-the-art publications on the languages of Borneo (Uhlenbeck 1958a) and Java and Madura (1964a) deserve special mention, as do his solid contributions to Sebeok's *Current Trends in Linguistics* on Indonesia and Malaysia (1967b; 1971c). He also took an active but critical interest in comparative Austro-nesian studies (1955b; 1963b; 1965b). Finally, it should be mentioned that Bob was the moving spirit behind the so-called "Dictionaries of Indonesian Languages Project" funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research and published by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), including dictionaries of Toba Batak (Warneck 1977), Makasarese (Cense 1979), Old Javanese (Zoetmulder 1982), Kambera (Onvlee 1984), Sundanese (Eringa 1984), and Wolio (Anceaux 1987), although the latter was not part of the original project.

**6. The man and the teacher.** Although Bob had officially retired when I first met him, I can nevertheless claim him as my teacher, as he was the supervisor of my PhD thesis. As a matter of fact, he considered supervising a PhD student the highest form of education, which is the reason why he never had too many PhD students at the same time (and not that many in all). As secretary general of CIPL, Bob was also my boss, as I was editor of BL, which was published under the auspices of CIPL. This may seem like an awkward situation, but he had that rare ability to keep things strictly separate. In both capacities I came to know him as a serious, honest, and strict but fair and upright man—a man who taught me more about linguistics than anyone else could have, a man, indeed, who taught me and many others to think and, in the words of Mulder (1998:119f), "to think about what we were thinking about." During my last visit at his home in Voorhout early in 2003, Bob still had the latest issues of journals such as *Language*, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, and, indeed, *Oceanic Linguistics* on his desk. He even discussed the possibility of coauthoring a paper on Latin word-formation with me. Just a few months later, on May 27, Bob passed away at home after a short illness. He is survived by his wife, Mariëtte, his children Anne Marie, Erica, and Christiaan, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Ἦδε ἡ τελευτή τοῦ ἐταίρου ἡμῶν ἐγένετο, ἀνδρός, ὡς ἡμεῖς φαίμεν ἄν, τῶν τότε ὧν ἐπειράθημεν ἀρίστου καὶ ἄλλως φρονιμωτάτου καὶ δικαιοτάτου. (Plato, *Phaedo* 118a)

"This was the end of our friend, a man who was, as we may say, of all those of his time whom we have known, the best and wisest and most righteous."

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