The phonological word in Tilburg Dutch: Government phonology and a city dialect of Dutch

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1 Introduction

The phonological word constitutes a domain within which certain phonological regularities apply. In this book I explore some topics specifically related to the domain of the phonological word in the dialect of Tilburg Dutch. These topics include the representation of laxness and its relation to word structure, the analysis of monophthongs and diphthongs specifically in relation to demands on word-final structures and the phonological word in relation to morphology.

In all of these cases, it appears that, on the one hand, close observation of the data stimulates progress in the theory while, on the other hand, the theory itself stimulates the understanding and analysis of the data. The conclusion I draw is that, if a theory and linguistic data are in conflict, as Government Phonology (GP) and Tilburg Dutch seem to be in some of these cases, it is worthwhile to investigate these confrontations and not to simply let go of the theory. In other words, the fact that a theory imposes limitations on possible analyses is an advantage one should not hesitate to make use of. One such confrontation between framework and data concerns the representation of the Tilburg vowel system. It appears that the GP view of laxness does not agree with a certain representation of the vowel system. Interestingly, the direction in which GP forces us, leads to interesting conclusions. On the other hand, Tilburg data indicate that topics such as the requirement of words to end in consonants still have to receive an analysis in GP. In such a case, the confrontation between the framework and the data demonstrates the need for supplementation of the theory.

GP forms the theoretical basis of this dissertation. In Chapter 2, a presentation of the most relevant parts of the theory is given. GP is an explicitly formulated and restrictive phonological theory with a certain focus on phonotactics. In Government Phonology a segment’s position within the phonological structure is connected with the phonological phenomena it can undergo. A phonological domain (e.g. a word, a foot or a rhyme) is considered to be principally asymmetric in character: some positions within a domain are stronger and can therefore allow for, or license more segmental material than other positions. Phonologically dependent or weak positions, on the other hand, have to be licensed by strong or head positions and consequently prefer not to contain too much segmental material. An example of a strong position is the accented nucleus in a word whereas the unaccented nucleus

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1 GP was not the first to make use of important notions such as head, dependents, licensing etc. in phonology. Harris (1994) refers to various authors who refer to licensing relations internal to the prosodic hierarchy. These include Anderson & Jones (1977) and Anderson & Ewen (1987) (licensing expressed in terms of dependency), Liberman & Prince (1977) and Kiparsky (1979) (licensing in terms of strong/weak labelling of metrical and syllabic structure).
is a weak position. Accordingly, we expect to find vowels such as /o/ or /e/ in the head nucleus and almost empty vowels such as schwa in the dependent one.\(^2\)

There are several versions of GP theory. I base myself on Kaye (1990), Kaye et al. (1990) and, most of all, on Harris (1994, 1997). GP is basically a theory concerned with general phonological principles shared by languages. Phenomena are accounted for through the use of representations and the licensing relations these contain. This is the central part of the theory. With respect to variation between languages, this is traditionally treated by parameters. These two parts are independent to a large extent. It has been argued that instead of parameters one can use OT constraints with the same ease and the same results (see for instance the discussion of Polgárdi (1998) and Rowicka (1999) in Chapter 2, section 2.5). Parameters and constraint ranking perform the same function, that is, the function of capturing language variation. Therefore, besides the GP theory on representations I will sometimes make use of Optimality Theory.

The GP way of looking at phonological phenomena has proven insightful, for instance for English (cf. Harris 1994) and French (cf. Charette 1991). I will argue that it is also valid for Tilburg Dutch, the dialect from which the data for this dissertation are taken.\(^3\) My own roots are not in Tilburg - [tilbvrɔx] when pronounced by dialect speakers themselves - and not even in the province of Noord-Brabant. My interest in this dialect originally was accidental but grew when I started to study the dialect more closely and from a GP-background. The fact that I do not originate from Tilburg brings along some limitations: I am a speaker of Standard Dutch and my intuitions on Tilburg Dutch are nil. Furthermore, my concentration on the mutual influence of the study of dialect data and that of theory, made me decide not to collect any data myself. Instead, my information comes mainly from a phonological description of this dialect by Dirk Boutkan and Maarten Kossmann from 1996. The authors both were linguists\(^4\) and their descriptive phonology of this dialect has been the basis of this dissertation, as far as the data are concerned. The description of Tilburg Dutch by Boutkan & Kossmann in turn was based mainly on the dialect as it was spoken by Dirk Boutkan, who was a native speaker of Tilburg Dutch. I will generally restrict myself to his version of the dialect. In Boutkan & Kossmann (1996:i) the authors note that his dialect shows little influence from Standard Dutch and that Dirk Boutkan’s intuitions were regularly checked with other speakers of the dialect. Besides the more descriptive study by Boutkan and Kossmann (1996), Van Oostendorp (2000), who proposes a recent analysis of some aspects of the Tilburg phonological system, is also referred to intensively. A useful

\(^2\) Vowels such as /o/ and /e/ are considered to be complex in GP because they consist of more than one element. Elements are the ingredients of which a segment is made up: /e/ is represented by the elements I and A.

\(^3\) Comparisons are often made with Standard Dutch as well as sometimes with other Germanic languages or dialects.

\(^4\) Both authors were linguists: I regret very much to say that Dirk Boutkan died in January 2002. I am grateful for his helpful and stimulating comments in the earlier stages of my research.
dictionary of Tilburg Dutch was published in 1993 (Van Rijen 1993) and has been used besides Boutkan & Kossmann.

Looking at the map of the Netherlands, we see Tilburg more or less in the middle of the province of Noord-Brabant, which itself is in the south of the country. According to Weijnen (1987), we can divide the area of Noord-Brabant into two main dialect parts: Eastern and Western, with a transitory area in the middle (belonging more to the East than to the West). Tilburg belongs to this middle/eastern dialect group.

Map 1: the Dutch language area

Maybe one of the most striking features of the Tilburg Dutch phonological system is the fact that it has long lax vowels, whereas in the standard dialect these are restricted to loanwords. These long lax vowels are discussed at length in the chapter on the vowel system, Chapter 4. As far as the consonants are concerned, there is very little difference between them and those found within Standard Dutch. The stress systems are similar, basically trochaic, as well.

Below I will briefly sketch a case in which the theory, by its very restrictiveness encourages further understanding of a certain phonological topic. This concerns the problematic representation of word-final syllables with lax heads. It is demonstrated that GP offers interesting ways of looking at this dilemma.

1.1. Word-final ambisyllabic	ity

This subsection highlights a dilemma: the usual analysis of certain data is not feasible in the framework used. It concerns the representation of syllabic structure. Tilburg Dutch not only has the opposition between long or tense vowels on the one
hand and short, lax vowels on the other (as is commonly found in Germanic) but also one between short, lax vowels and long, lax vowels. A representation (in terms of features) of the vowel system as presented in Van Oostendorp (2000) can be found in (1).

(1) The Tilburg Dutch vowel system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Short lax</th>
<th>Long lax</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
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(Van Oostendorp 2000:120, with adaptations)

The long, lax and the tense vowels behave in a similar fashion as far as phonotactics is concerned. Whereas long, lax and tense vowels can occur in syllable-final position, short, lax vowels cannot. Short, lax vowels always have to be followed by a tautosyllabic consonant. For Standard Dutch, some examples are given in (2).

(2) *hI.at but hI.at ‘hiatus’

*la but la ‘drawer’

(Van der Hulst 1985:105, in my transcription)

Partly because of linguistic facts, partly because of theory-internal considerations, GP assumes that a phonetically word-final consonant is in an onset structurally followed by an empty nucleus. By way of illustration, we take some phonetically monosyllabic words such as Standard Dutch meet /me/) ‘measure (1 s.)’. In GP such a word is bisyllabic, the phonetically final consonant being in the onset of the second syllable, followed by an empty vowel in the nucleus:

(3) a. me.t0 meet ‘measure (1 s.)’

     la.t0 laat ‘late’

(3) b. me.t0 met ‘with’

     la.t0 lat ‘slat, strip’

For words such as those shown in (3a), that is, words ending on a tense/long vowel and a consonant, this premise has gained the acceptance of many (for Dutch for instance Zonneveld 1993 and Van Oostendorp 2000). For words ending in a lax/short vowel and a consonant this analysis is more controversial because it would imply that such words should end in an ambisyllabic consonant. That is, considering the fact that a short lax vowel needs to be followed by a consonant in the same syllable (cf. */hI.at/, */la/ in above) and considering the fact that in GP a phonetically word-final consonant occurs structurally in the onset of a following empty nucleus, a (phonetically) CV_lax/shortC word actually must be a CV_lax/shortCC0
If such a word does not end in an ambisyllabic consonant, either the phonetically word-final consonant cannot be in the onset of an empty syllable or the short, lax vowel is not followed by a consonant in the same syllable. In other words, the theory dictates a CV$_{\text{lax/short}}$C0 structure (a bisyllabic structure, with an empty second syllable) for any simple Dutch monosyllabic, lax-vowel word. This is demonstrated in (4).

(4)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>met</td>
<td>met</td>
<td>‘with’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lat</td>
<td>lat</td>
<td>‘slat’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rot</td>
<td>rot</td>
<td>‘rotten’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pit</td>
<td>pit</td>
<td>‘seed’</td>
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I will argue that a rejection of the theory is not the way the problem must be solved. On the contrary, in Chapter 6, I provide arguments for an ambisyllabic representation of word final consonants.

### 1.2. Organisation of the thesis

The main line of argument is as follows. In Chapter 2, the framework used in this thesis is set out. In the first place I discuss the phonological elements used in the representation of vowels and of consonants. The subject of laxness is briefly introduced; it is studied more thoroughly in Chapter 4 because the way laxness is represented in GP has far-reaching consequences for the analysis of the vowel system in this dialect and consequently needs arguments in defence of this view. Furthermore, the representation of word-final consonants in GP is considered, as well as that of empty nuclei. These aspects are reviewed in depth, because of the effects of these representations for the analysis of word-final consonants, following lax vowels.

In Chapter 3 the constraint FINAL-C (McCarthy 1993) is discussed. This constraint requires words to end in a consonant and it is defined in such a way that it refers to horizontal, sequential segmental material and to vertical constituent structure. This view of the constraint in question – a view in which explicit reference is made to structural relations – is the outcome of a discussion of French loans in Tilburg Dutch and the related question of whether we need to refer to structural relations at all. FINAL-C also has strong connections with the concept of sonority, a notion discussed in section 3.5.4. French loans might possibly be considered to be exceptions to FINAL-C as well as function words and exclamations. It will however be argued in this chapter that, whereas the group of French loanwords are exceptions, function words and exclamations are not. The fact that these latter words often end in vowels can be understood if one realizes that FINAL-C refers to

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5 Piggott (1999) assumes that there are languages in which words end in codas as well as languages in which words always end in onsets, when phonetically consonant-final. Note, however, that according to his criteria Dutch would be a language which ends in onsets.
phonological words, whereas function words are not parsed as such. Exclamations cross-linguistically behave oddly, in the sense that they do not behave like phonological words either. Because /au/ behaves somewhat differently from other vocoid sequences, Tilburg Dutch /au/ as well as the Standard Dutch one are discussed here as well. My conclusion is among other things that /au/ in Standard Dutch should not be considered to be a diphthong at all but a vowel+glide sequence, contrary to the true diphthongs /ei/ and /œy/ in Standard Dutch. Since F\text{INAL}-C is a controversial constraint, attention is paid to supporting evidence from Tilburg Dutch itself as well as from other languages: from English, Dutch dialects and other non-European languages. F\text{INAL}-C is, in some ways, still a kind of descriptive label for a phenomenon which is observable in many languages. The discussion in this chapter is partly meant to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, so that eventually it can be included in an insightful manner in GP theory.

Chapter 4 deals with the Tilburg Dutch vowel system. Special attention is directed towards the representation of the lax vowels /i, y, u/. Two competing views regarding the representation of these vowels are presented, a Mid-Vowel analysis in which these vowels are considered to be of the same height as mid, tense /e, o, o/, and in the second place a High-Vowel analysis which considers these vowels to be of the same height as the high, tense vowels /i, y, u/. In section 4.3 I discuss the special status of laxness in GP. The problem, which this view creates for a Mid-Vowel analysis of the vowel system is demonstrated in 4.4. I will show in 4.5 that a High-Vowel analysis gives a more adequate analysis of the Tilburg vowel system within GP. Arguments for both analyses are reviewed. The conclusion will be that no clear empirical evidence can be found for one of the two hypotheses but that GP forces us to adopt the High-Vowel analysis. It is shown that this High-Vowel analysis does indeed account for the data in question, specifically for the tense-lax vowel alternations in Tilburg Dutch. The High-Vowel analysis, which is the one adopted in this thesis, can be subdivided into two separate analyses. These will be examined in 4.8.

Chapter 5 deals with the way morphology is represented in phonology. The working of F\text{INAL}-C is a clear indication of the existence of analytic domains or internal word-domains in Tilburg Dutch. F\text{INAL}-C is parameterised for the internal word domain, the word without inflectional affixes. Inflectional affixes affect vowel length; this can be seen as the result of the fact that whereas empty nuclei at the end of the external, largest word-domain are licensed in Tilburg Dutch, this is not the case for internal word-domain-final nuclei. Because of this such nuclei have to be licensed by the head of their domain through Trochaic Licensing. However, without vowel shortening this nuclear head would have to license the empty nucleus in the internal word-final position and the dependent position within the nucleus itself (because in a long vowel, the first position licenses the second, dependent one). This is impossible because one position cannot license two positions at the same time. Vowel shortening in Tilburg Dutch thus results from the lack of parametrical licensing of internal word-final, empty nuclei in combination with the working of Trochaic Licensing. It does not result from Closed Syllable Shortness. Vowel shortening with derivational suffixes is also considered: we find variation here
because lexicalisation is a gradual process. When derivational forms and compounds are lexicalised, we generally find short vowels and when they are not, the vowels remain long.

The subject of word-final ambisyllabicity is discussed in Chapter 6. The proposal that words which end in a short lax vowel and a consonant structurally end in an ambisyllabic, phonetically short consonant is a result of two other proposals, found in this thesis. The first is the GP proposal that final consonants are onsets and not codas. The second one is the observation that short, lax vowels have to be followed by tautosyllabic consonants. These two demands cannot be combined in a satisfactory fashion, unless we assume that such words with lax final vowels end in ambisyllabic consonants. In order to be able to consider such a proposal, the notion of ambisyllabicity in general has to be accepted. In 6.3 arguments in favour of an analysis of a certain class of Dutch words based on ambisyllabicity are reviewed, followed by arguments against the notion of ambisyllabicity, mainly by Harris (1999). The conclusion is that there appear to be no reasons not to accept ambisyllabicity since it does not result in a weakening of the theory (nor does it appear to be unnecessary). It is demonstrated that part of the problem might be caused by the fact that ambisyllabicity is unjustly and unnecessarily used for the analysis of English. In 6.4 word-final ambisyllabicity is dealt with, with special attention to the topics of Final Devoicing and stress. Both of these are argued to be unconvincing counter-arguments against word-final ambisyllabicity.