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

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7 Conclusion

In this dissertation I discuss some topics which are - directly or indirectly – related to the phonological word in Tilburg Dutch. Throughout the book, an important consideration is the useful mutual influence between a restrictive theoretical framework, such as Government Phonology, on the one hand and dialect data from Tilburg Dutch on the other.

After an introductory chapter in which information is provided on the dialectal background of Tilburg Dutch and a second chapter in which relevant theoretical topics are explained, the main subject of Chapter 3 are diphthongs and pseudo-diphthongs. I demonstrate that Tilburg Dutch has an obligation, FINAL-C, to have its words end in a consonant, which itself occupies a structurally consonantal position in the syllable (McCarthy 1993). In other words, word-final segmental material should occur in an onset. This obligation or constraint reveals itself in the fact that in Tilburg Dutch pseudo-diphthongs occur word-finally while the opposite is true of monophthongs. FINAL-C accounts for this complementary distribution: pseudo-diphthongs consist of among others a second part which has only a little sonority: the glide or semi-vowel /i/, /j/ or /u/. If we assume that this second part of the pseudo-diphthong actually is a consonant occupying a consonantal position in the syllable, we account for at least part of this distribution. Of course FINAL-C is not the only factor playing a role: topics such as ‘what can and cannot occupy a consonantal position’ and ‘in which position do semi-vowels prefer to occur’ also have an influence. Another topic discussed in this chapter, is the interpretation of possible exceptions to FINAL-C. I claim that function words, interjections and exclamations are not really exceptions, in spite of the fact that they often end in a vowel and thus do not satisfy FINAL-C. We can account for this by assuming that these function words, interjections and exclamations are not really words in the phonological sense. I also discuss the form /Au/: it occurs more often word-internally as compared to, for instance, /Ei/ – which of course I would not expect. I argue that this is connected to the lack of a close alternate to /Au/: whereas /Ei/ can alternate with /Eù/ without having to undergo major changes in the head-segment of the pseudo-diphthong, for /Au/ no such close alternate exists. Some words are argued to be exceptions to FINAL-C: for instance, loanwords from French. These almost all end in /i/. These words are exceptions because I define FINAL-C as being related not only to consonantal segments but also to consonantal positions. These French loans end in /i/ which is a segment with only a little sonority. However, this segment does not occur in a consonantal position. This subject gives rise to a discussion on sonority and its expression within GP.

FINAL-C is a controversial constraint: after all, it is opposite to the important principle that syllables should preferably not end in a consonant. This controversial character makes it all the more important to demonstrate that FINAL-C plays a role in other languages and other phenomena as well. This is why the relevance of FINAL-C is demonstrated in English, the language for which FINAL-C was ‘discovered’ in the first place, as well as in Tunica, Lardil and Germanic dialects, among which is Standard Dutch. The occurrence of pseudo-diphthongs as
compared to that of vowels is demonstrated on a linguistic map of the Dutch language area: it appears that in some dialects there is a clear difference in occurrence of (pseudo-) diphthongs on the basis of whether the segments occur word-finally or word-externally. The conclusion to this chapter is that Final-C is an example of how dialect data can feed the theory. That is, in GP there is no concept similar to that of Final-C. Thus, this chapter shows that attention should be paid to this concept in GP so that a deeper understanding of this phenomenon can be reached.

In Chapter 4, the representation of the phonological quality of laxness and its consequences for the analysis of the Tilburg Dutch vowel system is the main topic. Lax vowels are often analysed in a very specific way in GP. As a result, headship which can distinguish tense vowels represented by the same elements, cannot fulfill this function in the case of lax vowels. Tense /e/, for instance, can be represented by a combination of two elements: A (‘openness’) and I (‘frontness’) - (A, I). The element I is underlined because it is the head of the expression. This means that in this imaginary language, /e/ is an open version of a front vowel. In this same language system we could represent /æ/ as (A, I): a front version of a fundamentally open vowel. For lax vowels centrality is always the most important kind of element and therefore, by definition, the head. Because of this, headship is no longer available for other distinctions (such as place) – it is already used to indicate that the segment in question is lax and not tense. Consequently, fewer distinctions are possible among lax vowels as compared to tense vowels. I demonstrate that because of this very specific view on laxness within GP, as well as because of the structure of the Tilburg Dutch vowel system, the Tilburg Dutch vowels /l, y, u/ cannot be represented as mid. They have to be represented as high. In other words: GP forces me to adhere to, what I call, a High-Vowel analysis – an analysis in which the lax vowels are high and mid and not mid and low. Apparently, this choice for either a High- or a Mid-Vowel analysis cannot be made on the basis of, for instance, information on phonetics or the system of vowel alternations. In this respect the restrictive view of GP on laxness is an advantage: it forces us to seriously consider an analysis which otherwise might not have been considered at all. Upon closer investigation, a High-Vowel analysis is quite plausible- as long as one does not consider tense-lax alternations as ‘pure’ laxing but as also implying height differences, caused by apophony or umlaut. I discuss two analyses based on apophony and umlaut and finally choose an analysis based on umlaut. I conclude this chapter by confirming again the importance of not looking at data ‘neutrally’ but with a framework in mind – it often stimulates a fresh view of the same data and sometimes brings forward even better analyses than before.

Chapter 5 deals with morphophonology in Tilburg Dutch. In this chapter we observe in which way the analysis in terms of Final-C has relations with the mirroring of morphological structure in phonology. There is more than one phonological level in a Tilburg Dutch phonological word and apparently Final-C is only concerned with the lower, most internal word-domain, the domain without any inflectional or derivational affixes. However, at first sight an analysis based on Final-C seems hard to combine with a Closed Syllable Analysis of vowel shortening before inflectional or derivational suffixes in this dialect. I argue that the
alternation between long and short lax vowels in Tilburg Dutch is not caused by Closed Syllable Shortening but by the impossibility of a nucleus head licensing more than one dependent position. I combine this with the proposal that languages differ with respect to the domain for which domain-final empty nuclei are licensed. It appears to be the case that, in Tilburg Dutch, only the most external domain-final empty nucleus is licensed. The internal domain-final nucleus has to be licensed in another way. This can be done by the preceding nucleus but not if the vowel in this nucleus is long. This is why the vowel shortens. Once again, we conclude that the framework pushes the analysis in a certain, unexpected, direction. At first sight, an analysis based on Closed Syllable Shortening seems evident but on close scrutiny it does not work. An alternative analysis not only gives the correct results but also helps to improve our understanding and knowledge of licensing mechanisms, empty nuclei, different phonological domains and so forth.

In Chapter 6, we study ambisyllabicity, specifically word-final ambisyllabicity. Whereas in earlier chapters we noticed that the GP conception of laxness has consequences for the analysis of the vowel system, this chapter will try to deal with another result of the special character of laxness within GP. That is, in this chapter I discuss the need for lax vowels to be followed by a tautosyllabic consonant whereas at the same time this consonant has to occur in the onset of a following (empty) syllable - if word-final - in GP. This is contradictory. As a solution to this problem I suggest that words which end in a syllable with a lax vowel, structurally end in an ambisyllabic consonant (followed by an empty nucleus). Of course one can only accept the notion of word-final ambisyllabicity, if one accepts the notion of ambisyllabicity in general. In this chapter I argue that the representation of phonetically single consonants as ambisyllabic, geminate consonants structurally, is a fundamentally correct representation. Many linguists already assume that, in Dutch, a word-final consonant after a tense vowel occurs structurally in the onset of an empty syllable (cf. Van Oostendorp 2000 and Zonneveld 1993). I suggest that we should represent all word-final consonants, including those occurring after a lax vowel, in the onset of an empty nucleus. It is demonstrated that problems which seem to adhere to such a word-final ambisyllabicity analysis can be solved: Final Devoicing – the phenomenon that voice is impossible syllable-finally, can be combined with word-final ambisyllabicity. As far as stress is concerned, I claim that the apparent problem in this domain is not so much related to the word-final structure but rather to a difference between bisyllabic and trisyllabic words in this respect. I do not attempt to account for this difference but merely argue that stress in itself presents no problem for such a word-final ambisyllabicity analysis. In this chapter, GP – with its representation of word-final consonants in onsets of empty syllables – and certain characteristics of laxness enforce a certain analysis which, at first sight, seems improbable. However, the dilemma can be solved, without having to relinquish the theory and without needing to add all kinds of extras.

Of course many questions have remained unanswered. In a certain sense, there might be even more questions than before: after all, sometimes a ‘complicated’ or ‘abstract’ analysis has been chosen instead of a ‘simpler’, descriptively adequate analysis. However, if we want to reach our goal eventually - which in the case of this study is a thorough understanding and detailed analysis of the Tilburg Dutch
data, including an understanding of the ‘why’s behind phenomena - it is inevitable that with every step forward, we also go one small step backwards.

One of the problems which I notice for instance, is the way empty positions function in GP: sometimes they seem to be a kind of ‘medicine for everything’. It seems for instance, that when certain structural constellations are impossible they sometimes do not occur whereas at other times, when a certain structure is ungrammatical, an empty nucleus is used to save the structure.

Another subject in need of more study is laxness. More information about tense/lax /ATR/RTR systems is needed. In particular, if laxness in Tilburg Dutch has such far-reaching consequences for the representation of the vowel system, one would expect that other languages might show the same limitations with regard to the possible amount of distinctions. Connected with this is the question regarding the relation between schwa and laxness on the one hand and laxness and stress on the other hand.