

Introduction

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The Dutch linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck (1866-1951) was a key figure in the Dutch and international academic world between the 1880s and the 1940s. He worked on many different languages, including Balto-Slavic, Sanskrit, Dutch, Basque, Eskimo, and Blackfoot. He engaged in the scholarly debates of his time on topics such as the genetic relationships between languages, the relation between language and culture, and the role of psychology in the explanation of linguistic structure. He was instrumental in the establishment of important organizations and publication venues, such as the International Congress of Linguists, of which he was the first President (1928) and the *International Journal of American Linguistics*. He also was a loyal and active member of the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* [Royal Academy of Sciences], in whose proceedings he published much of his work. He trained or influenced many important academics and others, including the anthropologist J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, the slavists N. van Wijk and R. van der Meulen, the hispanist G.J. Geers, the sanskritists F.B.J. Kuiper and J.P. Vogel, the linguist and netherlandist J.J.A. van Ginneken, and the germanist A.J. Portengen.

Interest in Uhlenbeck's work and the influence he had on his students and colleagues has been rekindled in the past few years by a number of publications in which Uhlenbeck played an important role, even though he was not always the main character. The first is the translation and edition of the diary kept by his wife, Willy Uhlenbeck-Melchior, when she accompanied him to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana in 1911 (Eggermont-Molenaar 2005). Uhlenbeck was there to do fieldwork on the Blackfoot language. The diary is now located in the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Canada. The second publication is the biography of the slavist Nicolaas van Wijk (Hinrichs 2006). Uhlenbeck played an important role in Van Wijk's personal and professional development, and his name occurs in many places in the book. In addition to these book-length publications, a number of recent articles have addressed aspects of his life and work (Daalder 2004, 2006; Daalder and Foolen 2008; Eggermont-Molenaar 2002; Genee 2003; Hinrichs 2007; Noordegraaf 2007a, b, 2008; Portielje 2005, 2007, 2008a, b; Swiggers 1988, 1998; Van der Voort 2008).

There is, however, no biography of Uhlenbeck. While he certainly deserves a book-length examination of his life and work in the context of developments in linguistics and anthropology in his time, it is perhaps not surprising that no one has, as yet, taken up that challenge. This would be a very considerable challenge indeed, given the number of different subfields and language areas to which Uhlenbeck contributed. This collection, in which specialists in some of the most important fields in which Uhlenbeck worked write about aspects of his life and work and his contributions to their fields, hopes to be the next-best thing to a full biographical monograph.¹

Christianus Cornelius (Kees) Uhlenbeck was born in Voorburg, near The Hague, on 18 October 1866, but grew up in Haarlem. His father, Peter Frederik Uhlenbeck (1816-1882), was a retired naval officer who had spent his active years mostly in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). His mother, Julie le Roux (1842-1925), was 25 years younger than her husband. From the age of five, after the death of three young siblings, Kees grew up as an only child of a father who was over fifty and a much younger mother. His father died when he was fifteen. Shortly afterwards Uhlenbeck experienced the first of what would become a series of depressive periods that would afflict him throughout his life.

Uhlenbeck's first publication was the poetry collection *Gedachten en droomen* (1885), published around the date of his graduation from high school. In 1885 he moved to Leiden, where he entered university to study Dutch language and literature. After only three years he defended his doctoral dissertation *De verwantschapsbetrekkingen tusschen de Germaansche en Baltoslavische talen* (1888). His advisor was the orientalist J.H.C. Kern.

After completing his doctorate, Uhlenbeck worked as a high school teacher in Leeuwarden during the 1888/1889 school year. He did not enjoy teaching, and was happy when an opportunity for further linguistic study presented itself in 1890 in the form of a trip to Russia on behalf of the Dutch government to investigate archival material regarding Dutch history. In the spring of 1891 he worked again as a supply teacher, this time in Leiden. During these years Uhlenbeck continued to publish academic papers mostly on etymological issues in Germanic and Slavic. A German translation of his dissertation was published in 1890.

On 23 July 1891 he married Wilhelmina Maria (Willy) Melchior (1862-1954); they settled in Leiden. In that same year Uhlenbeck joined the Leiden-based editorial board of the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*. A year later, in 1892, they moved to Amsterdam, where Uhlenbeck became professor of Sanskrit at the age of 26. His inaugural lecture (1892) indicates his ambition of broadening the study of Sanskrit by embedding it in the wider context of comparative linguistics. Also in 1892 his first important work on Basque, *Baskische studien*, appears in the proceedings of the Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW). The years in Amsterdam were hard work: Uhlenbeck was required to teach on subjects with which he himself was not yet sufficiently familiar, and he continued to publish papers and reviews on etymological topics in Basque, Germanic, Slavic,

Indic and general Indo-European. Larger publications included a handbook of Sanskrit phonetics (1894; English translation 1898) and etymological dictionaries of Gothic (1896) and Sanskrit (1899).

Uhlenbeck's marriage remained childless, but in 1898 he gained custody of two nephews and a niece from his mother's side of the family, after the unexpected death of their parents. The whole new family briefly moved to Hilversum around June 1899, but when Uhlenbeck was offered the Chair of Old Germanic at Leiden University he and his wife moved to Leiden and the Van Spengler children were sent to boarding school.

Uhlenbeck occupied the Chair of Old Germanic at Leiden University from 1899 until his early retirement in 1926 at the age of 60. Despite his heavy teaching load and recurring mental health problems which sometimes incapacitated him for long periods of time, these were extremely productive years. Major publications on Basque included a comparative phonology of Basque dialects (1903) and a monograph on Basque derivational morphology (1905). In addition to ongoing work in etymology and historical phonology of Basque and Indo-European languages, he began to be interested in questions relating to non-Indo-European languages, inspired by what he had learned from the study of Basque and by the work of linguists such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Hugo Schuchardt and Franz Boas. His first publication on Eskimo grammar appears in 1906, followed by a monograph on the comparative morphology of the Eskimo languages in 1907. His first publication on North-American Indian languages appears in 1908, and the first paper on Algonquian (Ojibwe) sees the light in 1909, followed by a monograph on Algonquian morphology in 1910.

The work in Algonquian leads to original fieldwork on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana in the summers of 1910 and 1911. Text editions are published in 1911 and 1912, followed by theoretical papers in ethnopsychology and a stream of reviews of publications on American Indian languages and cultures. In 1915, at the request of Franz Boas, Uhlenbeck joins the founding editorial board of the new americanistic journal *International Journal of American Linguistics*. The next ten years see a large number of smaller articles and reviews on topics in Blackfoot, Algonquian, general North-American languages and cultures, Basque, Germanic, Indo-European, comparative and historical linguistics and genealogy. While the sheer number of publications is enormous, the vast majority are short notes and reviews, with the occasional larger paper mainly on aspects of Blackfoot or Basque grammar.

In addition to his teaching and research, Uhlenbeck also supervised a number of doctoral students in the Leiden years, including Jan de Cock (1899), Adrianus Barnouw (1902), Jacobus van Ginneken (1907), Reinder van der Meulen (1907), Marcus van Blankenstein (1911), Jan de Josselin de Jong (1913), Alberta Portengen (1913), Gerardus Geers (1917), Coenraad van Haeringen (1918), Arend Odé (1924), William Rollo (1925), and Gerlach Royen (1925). To Uhlenbeck's great disappointment, none of his students continued work on American Indian languages.

In 1926, after Uhlenbeck's early retirement for health reasons, the couple moved to Nijmegen, where Uhlenbeck was able to concentrate fully on his linguistic work, not hindered by teaching duties he had come to detest. Large numbers of mostly small articles and reviews also characterize this period. In 1928 he served as the first President of the International Congress of Linguists which took place in The Hague. Also in the Nijmegen years he met the young high school student Robert van Gulik (1910-1967), later a famous sinologue, diplomat and writer of detective novels, to whom he entrusted the material for the Blackfoot dictionary which he had gathered in 1910-1911 but had been unable to publish. Van Gulik's work was so substantial that Uhlenbeck made him co-author of both dictionaries (Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik 1930, 1934).

In 1930 Uhlenbeck and his wife moved to Amersfoort. A short train ride to Amsterdam provided him easy access to his beloved Royal Academy of Sciences and the university library, which allowed him to continue his scholarly activities.

A final move brought the Uhlenbecks to Lugano-Ruvigliana in Switzerland, where they took up residence in the *pension* Villa Eugenia in 1936, the year in which Uhlenbeck turned 70. Before leaving, Uhlenbeck donated his collection of rare Basque books to the University Library at Leiden. The move to Switzerland allowed them to live out WWII in relative peace and comfort, although there were financial problems related to interruptions in the payment of Dutch pensions to foreign countries during the War. In some of his publications in these years he returned to topics in Indo-European, Basque and Eskimo which had occupied him throughout his career. Substantial contributions included papers on Proto-Indo-European (1934a), Eskimo (1934b, 1941, 1942a), and Basque (1942b, 1946), the Blackfoot grammar (1938), and work on the historical connections between Algonquian and Ritwan (1939).

His last publication was a review of a monograph on the possible historical relation between Basque and Caucasian (1951), a possibility which Uhlenbeck felt in his later years was very promising. He died at Lugano-Ruvigliana on 12 August 1951 at the age of 84. He was cremated in Lugano. His wife Willy remained in Switzerland and passed away there on 6 May 1954, aged 92. As far as we know, Uhlenbeck did not leave a personal archive, but after his death the Leiden University Library received several shelves of books, mainly on American Indian languages, and a large collection of offprints, among which a few letters to Uhlenbeck were found during the preparation of this volume.

The papers in this collection highlight some of the more important and/or as yet unexamined aspects of Uhlenbeck's life and work. The first two contributions examine the relation between the personal and the professional in Uhlenbeck's life by taking his non-academic writings as their subject, viz. his poetry and his correspondence.

JAN PAUL HINRICHS focuses on Uhlenbeck's early life, tracing the roots of the romantic view of humanity which also pervades Uhlenbeck's later academic work to a collection of poems published when he was only 18 years old. Hinrichs paints a picture of

the young Uhlenbeck as a lonely, studious boy whose early life was marked by the untimely loss of all three of his siblings to various childhood diseases and the death of his father when he was only 15. The poetry belongs neither to the established so-called *domineespoëzie* nor to the new movement of the *Tachtigers* but is grounded in values of romantic chivalry, patriotism and anti-religiousness. An essentially romantic attitude to life also formed the background to some of the academic choices that Uhlenbeck made, such as the decisions to study Basque, Eskimo and Algonquian, and to his life-long fascination with genealogy.

MARY EGGERMONT-MOLENAAR has mined Uhlenbeck's correspondence to a large number of friends, family members and colleagues to paint a picture of his life as it appears from his private writings. Unfortunately, the great majority of the correspondence received by Uhlenbeck has not been preserved; his personal papers were probably discarded when he and his wife Willy moved to Switzerland in 1936. Uhlenbeck's letters and postcards show him to be a cordial, generous man, who always showed great interest in other people's wellbeing. The correspondence is virtually the only source we have of his private relationships with, for instance, the "Van Spengler" children, who he and his wife adopted in 1898 after their parents had passed away. His and Willy's letters also chronicle his frequent bouts of depression and other health problems which impeded his work and finally caused him to take early retirement in 1926 at the age of 60.

JAN NOORDEGRAAF's paper then shows how Uhlenbeck's romantic view of culture and language led him, in the footsteps of his influential teacher Kern, to become a follower of the linguistic tradition associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) rather than the much more stringent neo-grammarians approach. The Humboldtian approach focussed on the study of the nature of language by emphasizing the typological classification of exotic languages and cultures. To this, Uhlenbeck added an interest in what he called "ethnopsychology", the investigation of the psychological underpinnings of linguistic structure. While one cannot perhaps talk of an "Uhlenbeck school" in linguistics, Noordegraaf traces the pervasive influence that Uhlenbeck had on three of his students, Jac. van Ginneken (1877-1945), Gerlach Royen (1880-1955) and Etsko Kruisinga (1875-1944).

The next two papers discuss two of the languages on which Uhlenbeck worked early on in his career as a linguist: Sanskrit and Basque. That they were early interests, however, is the only thing they have in common: Sanskrit fell by the wayside even before the turn of the 20th century, but Basque remained an enduring fascination throughout his career.

ARLO GRIFFITHS points out that even Uhlenbeck's early career as "Extraordinary Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology" contained signs of a much keener interest in *aanverwante vakken*, including other Indo-European languages such as Balto-Slavic and non-Indo-European ones such as Basque, than in Sanskrit. Uhlenbeck did not publish extensively on Sanskrit, but, as Griffiths points out, his importance for the field of Indology

lies mainly in the influence he had on J.Ph. Vogel (1871-1958) and F.B.J. Kuiper (1907-2003), both of whom later occupied the chair of Sanskrit at Leiden university.

PETER BAKKER shows that the Basque language was the most enduring preoccupation of Uhlenbeck's life: his first publication on it dates from 1890, the last one from 1951. He had wanted to write his dissertation on Basque, but his supervisors would not allow it; he slipped in some Basque anyways by devoting some of the *stellingen* to Basque. Important areas of theoretical interest, such as the establishment of genetic relations between languages or ethnopsychological explanations for typological trends, are illustrated in the work on Basque. Uhlenbeck investigated possible genetic relations between Basque and Indo-European, Caucasian, Uralic and Chukchi; he ultimately rejected all these possibilities and considered Basque an isolate.

The next three papers bring us to what Uhlenbeck himself once disparagingly called his "Americanistic hobbies": the study of Algonquian and Blackfoot. The sheer volume of his work in these areas makes it abundantly clear that these were not "hobbies", but, instead, serious and lasting interests. Uhlenbeck considered them hobbies because none of his academic positions ever officially included the study of North-American languages; rather, he himself added them to his more narrowly-defined teaching and research tasks.

INGE GENEÉ explains how Uhlenbeck's focus shifted from Indo-European and Basque via Eskimo to Algonquian, and finally concentrated on the Blackfoot language. Blackfoot is the only language on which Uhlenbeck ever conducted original fieldwork. This resulted in what in his time was the definitive description of the language in the form of two large text collections in bilingual format, a dictionary and a grammar. Blackfoot also provided Uhlenbeck with important inspiration for his ethnopsychological theories.

Uhlenbeck spent the two summers of 1910 and 1911 on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. The first summer he was accompanied by his student J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong; the second summer his wife Willy Uhlenbeck-Melchior was with him. During a period of in total more than six months Uhlenbeck made friends with many of his informants, who gave him and his wife gifts which later became a small collection at the *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* in Leiden. PIETER HOVENS provides a first description of these artifacts, including information about the makers and the context in which each piece was given or acquired and explaining their ceremonial significance and symbolic meanings.

Uhlenbeck was interested in the establishment of genetic relations between languages, so that a correct picture of linguistic family groupings could shed light on pre-historic migrations and relations between cultures. As PETER BAKKER describes, in the first decades of the 20th century Uhlenbeck became involved in the discussion around the genetic affiliation of two isolated languages in California, Wiyot and Yurok. Edward Sapir and others proposed that these languages, jointly called Ritwan, were related to the Algonquian languages, from which they were separated by a geographical distance of thousands of miles. Uhlenbeck, along with other linguists, however, was not convinced

and attacked Sapir on methodological grounds. Somewhat paradoxically, later research has shown that Sapir's general conclusion was correct, while many of his detailed analyses were indeed wrong, as Uhlenbeck had pointed out.

This collection concludes with two contributions that complete and correct the bibliographical and archival record of Uhlenbeck's work.

PETER BAKKER and JAN PAUL HINRICHS present a bibliography of Uhlenbeck's publications, containing 496 items organized chronologically. This almost doubles the bibliography published as an appendix to J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's 1952 obituary in *Lingua*.

MARY EGGERMONT-MOLENAAR collected more than 600 pieces of correspondence by Uhlenbeck held by a large number of archives in many different countries. Her second contribution presents this correspondence alphabetically by name of the addressee with an indication of the archive in which the correspondence is located.

We are well aware that important aspects of Uhlenbeck's work remain unexamined here, including his work on Balto-Slavic, Germanic and Dutch, his role and position in the KNAW and at the universities of Amsterdam and Leiden, his *Nachwuchs*, his theorizing on ergativity and language mixing, his views on the nature of the Indo-European mother tongue, and his attitude toward early 20th century structuralist linguistics. This collection is no more than *een voorzetje*. We conclude by expressing the hope that some historian of linguistics will soon take up the challenge implicit in these pages and devote a monograph to the life and work of this most remarkable man.

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NOTE

¹ The editors would like to thank Mary Eggermont-Molenaar for suggesting the idea for the present volume and for making her collection of Uhlenbeck's correspondence available to its contributors.