

C.C. Uhlenbeck and the Humboldtian tradition in linguistics

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1 Introduction

The young man who matriculated on Thursday 17 September 1885 as a student at Leiden University already had a large collection of somewhat outmoded, romantic poems to his credit. A few months before, at his final exam at the Haarlem *gymnasium*, he had received high marks for Dutch.¹ It did not surprise then that he had decided to study Dutch language and literature. However, young Christianus Cornelius Uhlenbeck (1866-1951) never did become a celebrated teacher of Dutch or a famous poet, although one of his verses was set to music by a Dutch composer.

In this contribution I would like to point out first of all how the Leiden student of Dutch took a different path already in his early student years. In the 1880s Uhlenbeck started on a quest that was to lead him via the Basque provinces to the plains of North America. In the second part of this essay it will be shown that in doing so Uhlenbeck followed a trend in nineteenth-century linguistics which has still remained somewhat underexposed in literature, and that he knew how to enthuse some gifted students about his own approach.

What was the ultimate goal of Uhlenbeck's linguistic quest? "Was it above all the romanticism of the past [...] that appealed to him in this research?" (de Josselin de Jong 1952:255). Given Uhlenbeck's complex personality and his voluminous oeuvre it is not easy to deal with these questions adequately. All in all, it appears that he has always remained loyal to the linguistic views that had been imparted to him as a student.

2 The formative years: Leiden 1885-1888

2.1 "das mystische dunkel, womit die Eskuara umgeben war"

In Leiden, once described by P.J. Cosijn as "a city where mummies are buried" (see Noordegraaf 2007:10), Uhlenbeck counted a number of leading linguists amongst his

teachers: not only the Dutch scholar Matthias de Vries (1820-1892), then in the twilight of his career, but also Pieter Jacob Cosijn (1840-1899), Professor of Old Germanic Studies, with whom he established a good personal relationship,² and Johan Hendrik Caspar Kern (1833-1917), generally referred to simply as “H. Kern”, Professor of Sanskrit and master of many exotic languages. Barely three years after his matriculation, on Monday 1 October 1888, he earned his doctorate in Dutch literature with Kern as his supervisor. His 77-page doctoral dissertation, composed in the historical-comparative style common at that time, was entitled *Verwantschapsbetrekkingen tusschen de Germaansche en Baltoslavische talen* [‘Relationships between the Germanic and Baltoslavic languages’]. The path to his doctorate was remarkably short, even for those days, but there were “special family circumstances”, as Kern tactfully put it,³ which obliged him to round off his studies quickly. A sojourn in Leipzig or Tübingen in preparation for the doctorate, which language students from more prosperous families, like Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) and Kern’s son J.H. Kern (1867-1933), could afford, was apparently not a luxury the young Uhlenbeck could permit himself. He was later to characterize his doctoral dissertation as “very mediocre” (de Josselin de Jong 1952:244), but it should be realized that the subject of his dissertation was actually nothing more than a *pis aller*. Uhlenbeck had really wanted to devote his thesis to Basque, but his professors at Leiden, “estupefactos” (Villasante 1979:413) by Uhlenbeck’s plan, declined to sanction this enterprise, “since a dissertation devoted to the Basque language would seem to be a very strange choice for a candidate who wished to gain a doctorate in Dutch literature.”⁴ Uhlenbeck’s keen interest in Basque was nevertheless reflected by the fact that of the twenty-seven *stellingen* appended to the thesis (propositions which the candidate must be able to defend during the public defence of the thesis, and which need not be related directly to the main topic of the study), six concerned that language.

But how did Uhlenbeck become interested in Basque in the first place? He explained this as follows in a letter of 17 October 1892 to the Dutch vasconist W.J. van Eys (1825-1914).⁵ “When I was studying at Leiden,” Uhlenbeck related, “[Matthias] de Vries mentioned during a lecture at a certain point⁶ that Basque showed affinity with the native languages of America. As a result, I decided to study Basque.” This occurred during Uhlenbeck’s first year at Leiden, the academic year 1885-1886. After having gained an acquaintance with the principles of the language – mainly from the rather antiquated two-volume *Grammaire basque* from 1826 by Fleury de Lécluse (1774-1845) – he immersed himself in the secondary literature on Basque, including the works of van Eys, who had been living in the Italian resort of San Remo since 1875. He wrote to van Eys in 1891: “The perusal of your copious writings on this language [Basque] had aroused in me the wish to add a stone myself to the edifice whose foundations you have so firmly constructed,” adding that he expressly counted himself “among your students.”⁷

This communication with van Eys took place in connection with Uhlenbeck’s publication in 1892 of his *Baskische studien*, with the support of his influential teacher Kern and under the aegis of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.⁸ The very first phrases

of these *Studien* remind us of the remark once made by Matthias de Vries that had so greatly intrigued the young student-poet:

Das baskische nimmt bekanntlich eine ganz isolierte stelle unter den sprachen der alten welt ein. Vergebens hat man versucht es bei den ägyptosemitischen und uralaltaischen sprachen einzureihen oder *eine nahere verwandtschaft des baskischen mit den ursprünglichen idiomen Amerika's* zu begründen [...]

(1892:179; italics added)

And, Uhlenbeck proceeds:

Der erste, der mit wissenschaftlicher methode die baskische sprache untersucht hat, ist der verdienstvolle gelehrte Jonkheer W.J. van Eys dessen wörterbuch und vergleichende grammatik den weg für weitere forschungen geebnet und einen lichtstrahl geworfen haben in *das mystische dunkel, womit die Eskuara umgeben war*.

(1892:179-181; italics added)

When van Eys received a complimentary copy of Uhlenbeck's *Baskische studien*, he was "bien étonné de recevoir cette brochure de l'auteur mon pays n'ayant jamais fait de moindre attention aux études basques."⁹ Obviously, young Uhlenbeck was among the rare Dutch language researchers who were really interested in this non-Indo-European language. Just like Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) he could remark later on: "Dieser ersten Erfahrung in diesem Theile der Sprachkunde folgte ich in den übrigen" (see Michelena 1973:125).

2.2 H. Kern, the "mahaguru"

Kern and Cosijn were Uhlenbeck's most influential teachers. P.J. Cosijn, a scholar marked by both brilliance and personal charm, had been editor of the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* ['Dictionary of the Dutch Language'] from 1871; in 1877 he was appointed professor of Old Germanic Studies at Leiden. He had already made his mark as co-founder and editor of the relatively short-lived *Taal- en Letterbode* ['Language and Literature Courier'; 1870-1875], a journal that presented the ideal of linguistics as a science with its own stringent rules to Dutch academe (van Driel 2007:233). As a professor, he followed the *junggrammatische* (Neogrammarian) school by studying Old German and Anglo-Saxon increasingly as independent entities. Though initially a classicist, Cosijn had largely developed his linguistic insights on the basis of the methods promulgated by the Neogrammarian School which was developing strongly at that time. These methods consisted largely in rigid application of the postulated "sound laws" – the laws claimed to govern the phonological changes that took place as the Indo-Germanic languages evolved. In 1898, Uhlenbeck heard his former teacher read a paper on *De volstrekte geldigheid der klankwetten* ['The absolute validity of the sound laws'] at the First Dutch Congress of Philology in Amsterdam. Uhlenbeck's own views on this subject

are reflected by the fact that he had expressed criticism of “the absolute character claimed for the so-called “sound laws””, and considered that the term “sound laws” was really a misnomer (see Uhlenbeck 1896:223).

Kern was much more reserved. He was known for his habit of bending deep over the book on the lectern before him while lecturing, thus making the short sentences he uttered almost inaudible to his audience. He was a demanding teacher and a spectacular polyglot, but good students found his courses and *privatissima* most inspiring. Uhlenbeck was among those who sought his “special guidance” (Boer 1917:490): for two years he attended Kern’s courses including one *privatissimum*, whereas his fellow student R.C. Boer (1863-1929) – later known in particular for his studies of Scandinavian and Old German sagas – confined himself to one course.¹⁰

It must be said that the appreciation was mutual. Kern regarded Uhlenbeck as “a highly gifted young man with a true love of scholarship, a quick understanding and a keen will to work”; the fact that he had gained his doctorate in a mere three years was in itself an indication that he was “an exceptional student”, Kern commented.¹¹ Uhlenbeck became good friends with the professor’s son, J.H. Kern (1867-1933), a fellow student who was often known as “young Kern” to contemporaries.

“Old Kern” was an influential man. When Cosijn died in 1899, it was generally expected that his place would be taken by Barend Sijmons (1853-1935), a Germanist from Groningen who had received his training in Leipzig. Sijmons headed the list of candidates, but surprisingly it was not he but Uhlenbeck who was appointed to the vacant chair (de Wilde 2007:36) – most probably because Kern used his influence to promote the cause of his former pupil. Uhlenbeck could not resist reminding the Board of Governors of the university during his inaugural lecture that he had not been their first choice when it came to filling this chair (Uhlenbeck 1899:31).

Kern, the *mahaguru* [‘great master’] of Leiden, occupied a unique position as a linguist (Uhlenbeck 1918:37), in the sense that he had no wish to become an adherent of a particular school. He adopted a critical attitude towards “the theories that were propagated with almost religious zeal by the *junggrammatiker* around 1880, which stated that ‘there can be no exception to the sound laws’.” Kern was too much aware of “the countless factors that determine the development of a language” to think that it would be possible “to solve the whole life of language in sound laws and analogies”, according to his former student R.C. Boer (1917:490).¹²

Uhlenbeck heartily agreed with this view, stating that Kern was averse to the “one-sided and soulless theory of the neo-grammarians” and concluding (I think this must also be seen as a clear reflection of Uhlenbeck’s own views) that Kern had no wish to be dictated to

by deductive principles concerning the relationship between the physical and the mental, the organic and the analogy-driven processes in the history of the development of the spoken word. *In essence, everything in language is mentally*

based; and Kern never doubted this. It cannot be denied that some neogrammarians have made very important discoveries in the field of historical linguistics, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for this; but what we should deny is that these discoveries were due to their investigative principles. Where they have reached major findings, it has been in spite of, not by virtue of their methodology. (Uhlenbeck 1918:38-39; italics added)

Kern was acquainted with too many other languages not to see “the vanity of a theory that was founded on merely one language family”, Uhlenbeck had stated in 1918; and twenty years later, in 1938, he pointed out once again what effect this had had on Kern’s courses:

[...] ‘Old Kern’ first taught us here in The Netherlands that the discipline of Indo-Germanic studies can benefit enormously from the study of non-Indo-Germanic languages. (see Hinrichs 2006:212)

This insight seems to have been crucial for the direction taken by Uhlenbeck’s own research. “*Binnenschipperij*” [literally ‘sailing in inland waters’, a metaphor taken from the maritime world with the sense in this context of ‘ridiculously restrictive’], he snorted in later years when one of his students wished to confine himself to Indo-Germanic language data exclusively (van Haeringen 1979:5).

While Uhlenbeck was indeed “educated in the European tradition of comparative historical linguistics” (Genee 2005:149), there are hints that the training Kern wished to give his students went much further than what might normally have been expected in this discipline (see Boer 1917:490). It is in any case clear that Kern does not fit into the standard neogrammarian paradigm and nor does his pupil Uhlenbeck, averse as he was to the “one-sidedness” that had so long afflicted German studies (1899:19).

2.3 Uhlenbeck’s linguistic coordinates

In 1918 Uhlenbeck also commented on the theoretical and methodological stance of his teacher with reference to Kern’s study *De Fidjitaal vergeleken met hare verwanten in Indonesië en Polynesië* [‘The language of Fiji compared with cognate languages of Indonesia and Polynesia’] from 1886, which he appreciated very highly with regard to both its content and the method used in its composition. This work had been favourably reviewed in 1887, in the third volume of the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft* founded and edited by Friedrich Techmer (1834-1891), a periodical that we know was consulted by Uhlenbeck. While preparing his 1892 *Baskische Studiën*, Uhlenbeck made use among other things of the 1887 supplement entitled *Zur Litteratur der Sprachkunde Europas*, written by August Friedrich Pott. Techmer’s short-lived journal (it only appeared from 1884 to 1889) was a *Fundgrube* for those with an interest in non-Indo-European languages. More than 700 books and articles dealing with “almost all aspects of the study of language one could think of in which contributions were made

during the 1880s” (Davies 1974:105-106) were reviewed in its pages. It breathed an atmosphere that differed appreciably from what was current in neogrammarian circles, by serving as an international forum “for the discussion of general linguistic topics, the Humboldtian philosophy of language, and the promotion of non-Indo-European linguistic research” (Koerner 1973:3). The first volume was very appropriately dedicated to the memory of Wilhelm von Humboldt. A recent commentator wrote that the journal “si inserisce [...] nella tradizione humboldtiana” [‘is fully in line with the Humboldtian tradition’] (Barozzi 1984:78).

The opening article was written by A.F. Pott (1802-1887); it provided an “Einleitung in die allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft”, which in later instalments was to give an overview of the “Litteratur der Sprachkunde” of the languages spoken in each continent. What is characteristic of Pott’s work is his strongly inductive approach, his “data-orientation which contrasts curiously with his theoretical, if not philosophical, ideas put forward in his often fairly extensive introductions to his books” (Koerner in Pott 1974:ix). So, on the one hand Pott followed “Der Weg Baco’s, d.h. sorgfältiger Beobachtung und ermüdlicher Aufsuchung von Analogien und Gesetzen” (Arens 1974,1:231), but on the other hand he was striving for a fruitful combination of empirical language research and Humboldt’s “von echter Sprachphilosophie durchdrungenen Sprachkenntnis” (Arens 1974,1:231). “Durch den Buchstaben zum Geiste”, such was Pott’s maxim – not without reason Plank (1993:110) considers him “als eine Art Synthese von Humboldt und Bopp”.

A similar dual program we also find in Uhlenbeck.¹³ To see Pott, the “grosse Sprachforscher”, as Uhlenbeck (1892:185) once called him, as a true role model, does not appear to me too bold a proposition. The current secondary literature counts Pott expressly among the “humboldtiens” (see Chabrolle-Cerretini 2007:129). In the next section we will see what is meant by this.

3 Humboldtian linguistics

It goes without saying that Uhlenbeck was acquainted with the works of the vasconist, linguist and language philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. This German scholar was mentioned on the very first page of Uhlenbeck’s *Baskische Studiën* (1892) and several times in his *Karakteristiek der Baskische grammatica* (1907) – albeit not always positively: according to Uhlenbeck, Humboldt’s *Prüfung der Untersuchungen über die Urbewohner Hispaniens vermittelt der Vaskischen Sprache* (published in 1821) was antiquated, and by far the most of the statements made in it had proved to be untenable (1907: 8).¹⁴ As regards this last point, Uhlenbeck’s stance closely resembled that of his teacher at a distance W.J. van Eys who, writing in the *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée*, had previously severely criticized this study by the “célèbre philologue allemand” (1874:5). But the historiographic-linguistic term “Humboldtian” has nothing to do with Humboldt’s aptitude as a vasconist. It concerns a nineteenth-century linguistic tradition that has become generally recognized during the past few decades.

3.1 The Humboldtian tradition

In van Essen (1983a:65) one finds a sketch of the linguistic landscape as linguists saw it in the last quarter of the nineteenth century:

Alongside the Neogrammarian school there existed the linguistic tradition inaugurated by Wilhelm von Humboldt, characterized by an interest in the general nature of language and a concern for exotic (or 'primitive') languages and a typological language classification. During the period discussed, the chief proponent of Humboldtian linguistics was Heymann Steintal.

(van Essen 1983a:65)¹⁵

Van Essen (1983a) is in agreement here with the position sketched by Koerner in an article published in 1977, and before that in his doctoral dissertation from 1973, where Pott is characterized as one of those who followed the Humboldtian trend in linguistics, which further includes scholars like Franz Nikolaus Finck (1867-1910), Franz Misteli (1841-1903) and Georg von der Gabelentz (1840-1893). As to their descriptive work, Koerner states that "as a result of Wilhelm von Humboldt's [...] preoccupation with questions concerning the relationship between linguistic structure and mental conceptualization and development" they were engaged in studies of "particular grammatical categories", usually demonstrated with reference to material from exotic languages (sometimes "contrasted with Indo-European languages" in this context) (Koerner 1977: 150-151; 1978:149). Some of the research themes he mentioned in this connection, such as grammatical gender, methods of counting, the passive, and case, may be recognized in Uhlenbeck's studies as well.

Another distinctive characteristic of linguists working within the Humboldtian framework concerns the classification of languages on morphological grounds, something we also find in the work of various European linguists such as Uhlenbeck. Genee (2003:147) calls him a "typologist avant-la-lettre". However, it was Georg von der Gabelentz who introduced, in a programmatic article published as early as 1894, the typology of languages as a particular task of linguistics.

A further important point is that Humboldtian linguists were keenly interested in the relationship between national cultures and languages. They regarded comparative language studies as an important way of demonstrating how the national spirit of language is manifested. Their work is thus closely related to *Völkerpsychologie* or ethnopsychology, which deals with the social nature of language and the diversity of languages; this second field of research has developed under the name of "linguistic typology" (Graffi 2001:41).

In 1915, J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1886-1964), a former student of Uhlenbeck, remarked that the firm belief in the correctness of the principles of the Neogrammarian school, which had until recently governed the method of Indo-Germanic linguistics, had been shaken in a rather worrying way. He pointed out that two factors had been of

major importance: first of all, linguists such as Hugo Schuchardt (1842-1927) and C.C. Uhlenbeck had argued that several problems in Indo-European linguistics could not possibly be solved by the sole means of a comparative study within the language group concerned. Secondly, modern language psychology had also made an important contribution toward a more distanced and critical attitude regarding the Neogrammarian framework (de Josselin de Jong 1915:87-88; see also Uhlenbeck 1899:19). It is this ethnopsychology which, next to his inductive working method and his orientation to “exotic” languages, forms an interesting, all be it an underlying dimension of Uhlenbeck’s linguistic work.

3.2 “The shining city”: ethnopsychological understanding

*In language, when we get into its
very essence, everything is mental*
(Uhlenbeck 1918:38-39)

While Uhlenbeck (1907:20) recognized that he did not know enough about psychology to be able to call himself both a psychologist and a linguist, he did stress later, in almost biblical terms, that it was sometimes “a grammarian’s duty to guide his audience through arid deserts or brackish steppes if he wished to bring them to *the shining city of ethnopsychological insight*” (1917:208; italics added). Uhlenbeck’s former student J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong informs us that “Uhlenbeck’s scientific interest was directed towards history and linguistic anthropology, in his own terminology: ethnopsychology. To him, linguistics was essentially the history of language, in a form that would necessarily lead via a comparative reconstruction of the actual processes of change to a deeper understanding of the essence of language” (de Josselin de Jong 1952:254). Uhlenbeck insisted on the primacy of the ethnopsychological approach to the end of his working life.¹⁶ In a letter he wrote from Lugano on 30 April 1946 to his cousin E.M. (“Bob”) Uhlenbeck (1913-2003)¹⁷ in Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), he remarked that Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949) and many other young linguistic scholars failed in his opinion to lay sufficient emphasis on the connection between the “ethnological special field” of language and other ethnological special fields such as magic, religion, and law. He picked out the “most meritorious” Edward Sapir (1884-1939) as particularly susceptible to this shortcoming:¹⁸

However one might look upon this matter, language is and remains an *ethnological phenomenon*, an expression of the same collective mentality on which magic and religion are also based. It is therefore impossible to penetrate deeper *into the essence of a certain language* without focussing at the same time on the general, both subliminal and fully conscious, mentality of the people who speak the language in question.
(see Portielje 2007:299; italics added)

A few years later, in 1949, he argued in the linguistic journal *Lingua*:

Nous ne nous dissimulons pas que nos considérations linguistiques ne sont pas d'accord avec une tendance actuelle à séparer nettement la linguistique d'avec l'ethnopsychologie. Cependant nous ne pouvons, ni ne voulons nous détacher de l'idée inéluctable que, de même que le droit, l'art, la magie, la religion, le groupement sociale etc. (l'entière culture dite matérielle incluse, puisque elle est au plus profond de son être aussi 'spirituelle') reflètent la mentalité collective de certains groupes humains à certaines époques, *les catégories grammaticales reflètent également certaines mentalités collectives*. L'étude de la langue humaine est à la fois psychologique, sociologique et historique, ce qui ne veut pas dire que les études linguistique n'aient pas encore d'autres aspects moins importants.

(Uhlenbeck 1949:72; italics added)

For Uhlenbeck, language is a means of penetrating to “the essence of things” (1917:187); the study of language leads “to a clearer view of the human mind” (1911: 39). In other words, he regards language as “*a magic key*: for the claim or implication is that studying the language of a people is the way to comprehend their minds or souls”, as Joseph (2002: 77) remarks. This places Uhlenbeck firmly on what is known in linguistics as the Herder-Humboldt line: language is the embodiment of a national world-view, “a kind of spiritual essence without which a culture cannot be adequately understood” (Joseph 2002:77). A few quotations may help to illustrate this. According to Uhlenbeck, a native American, let us say a speaker of Algonquin, has “a world view that is largely bounded by sensual perceptions” (1911:35-36). When Uhlenbeck discusses some grammatical distinctions in Algonquin, he claims that:

Such features of the grammar give us an insight into the way the Algonquins think, which is governed much more than in our own case by what can be perceived by the senses and is much less capable of dealing with things that are absent or are in the past or the future.

(Uhlenbeck 1911:35)

Similarly, he believes that a certain Basque grammatical construction still reflects the “primitive mentality” that gave rise to it and it is a reminiscence of “long-past ancestors whose thinking was magical in nature” (1917:216). In other words, when thought becomes less primitive, grammatical constructions also change. And elsewhere, Uhlenbeck also has the tendency to “look for our own habits of thought” in “primitive” peoples, to project “our world view” on to their less abstract way of thinking (1917:187).

A comparison with the prototypical Humboldtian linguist Georg von der Gabelentz may serve to add further relief to Uhlenbeck's pronouncements. In his *Die Sprachwissenschaft. Ihre Aufgaben, Methoden und bisherigen Ergebnisse* (1891, 1901²), Gabelentz notes among other things:

Jede Sprache verkörpert eine Weltanschauung, die Weltanschauung einer Nation. Sie stellt eine Welt dar, das heisst zunächst die Gesamtheit der Vorstellungen, in denen und über die sich das Denken eines Volkes bewegt; und sie ist der unmittelbarste und bündigste Ausdruck für die Art, wie diese Welt angeschaut [...] wird.
(Von der Gabelentz 1901:76)

Elsewhere in this “capital book” (van Ginneken 1906:522), full of “neo-Humboldtian pronouncements” (Hutton 1995:ix), Gabelentz quotes a number of passages from Humboldt’s own work. Among other things, the term “Weltanschauung” occurs several times in the latter’s treatise *Über den dualis*, shortly after the statement that “[d]ie Sprache ist aber durchaus kein blosses Verständigungsmittel, sondern Abdruck des Geistes und der Weltansicht der Redenden” (Humboldt 1963:135). Uhlenbeck would doubtless not have objected to such a description.

3.3 Some further considerations

The use of terms like *Weltansicht* and *Weltanschauung* raises the question as to whether, and to what extent, Uhlenbeck embraced what is commonly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggests that language influences – or, in the strong form of the hypothesis, even *determines* – the way people think. Uhlenbeck clearly saw a close relationship between language and thought, in the sense that language reflects the contemporary collective mentality. His (fairly sparse) theoretical comments on the relationship between language and thought probably come close to Humboldt’s concepts of *Weltanschauung* and *innere Sprachform*, but a precise comparison would take us beyond the scope of the present paper. There seems to be no evidence, however, that Uhlenbeck subscribed to the strong version of the Whorfian hypothesis (see also Genee 2003)

According to Mueller-Vollmer (1992:129), it is “quite misleading and inadequate in the light of other equally important dimensions of Humboldt’s work” to associate the term “Humboldtian linguistics” with any one specific direction, for example with the Whorfian thesis of linguistic relativity or with Chomskyan generative grammar. Humboldt’s ideas can rather be seen as a reservoir from which one can draw inspiration “abondamment et avec assiduité” (Chabrolle-Cerretini 2007:128). In this sense, the term “Humboldtian linguistics” can be applied to a wide range of activities.

It thus seems reasonable in the light of such observations to place Uhlenbeck’s work in the tradition of Humboldtian linguistics, as described by Koerner (1973, 1977) and van Essen (1983a). Uhlenbeck’s critical distance from the neogrammarians, the attention he devoted to non-Indo-European languages from an early age, his keen interest in typological and his steady support for the ethnopsychological ideas of his time all testify to this. As mentioned above, his work also includes a number of traditional Humboldtian grammatical research themes.

4 Three students

.. in the second half of the nineteenth century we had our internationally reputed Sanskritist and expert in many languages, Kern, who has formed a school (Speyer, Caland, Uhlenbeck, and so on). And Uhlenbeck trained our nowadays most renowned linguists: v Ginneken, Royen. (Professor Jacobus Wille (1881-1964), a former student of Uhlenbeck)¹⁹

Did the Humboldtian approach of C.C. Uhlenbeck see any continuation within the Netherlands? To answer this question I would like to investigate three of Uhlenbeck's students with regard to the presence of Humboldtian ideas in their work. These scholars, the general linguists and netherlandists Jac. van Ginneken and Gerlach Royen, and the anglist-netherlandist Etsko Krusinga, are among his most renowned students, and the ideas one can find in their works clearly reflect some of the themes discussed above.

4.1 Jac. van Ginneken

In a letter to his former mentor, the Dutch vasconist W.J. van Eys, Uhlenbeck remarked (3 February 1903) that a student of his, a certain Jac. van Ginneken, was also involved with Basque, "mainly out of psycholinguistic motives (...) And isn't the Basque language interesting to the psycholinguist!"²⁰ As is well known, the Jesuit Jac. van Ginneken (1877-1945) was the most flamboyant Dutch linguist of the first half of the twentieth century. Roman Jakobson once characterized him as a "scholar of amazing energy, versatile erudition, and creative imagination". In 1907 van Ginneken started as a psycholinguist by writing a *cum laude* doctoral dissertation, *Principes de linguistique psychologique*, under the supervision of Uhlenbeck. The 550-odd pages of this thesis had already appeared in Dutch in the years 1904-1906. In the preface of this version professor Uhlenbeck is extensively thanked for his consistent helpfulness.

Jac. van Ginneken SJ was definitely not a scholarly recluse, but played an important role in Catholic cultural life. When he was young, he wrote exuberant, romantic poems, just like Uhlenbeck once did (see Hinrichs 2009). Only when his Jesuit superiors had told him to concentrate on linguistics, did he become the "most brilliant student of the brilliant Uhlenbeck" (Heeroma 1968:79). In 1923 he was appointed Professor of Dutch Language and Literature, Comparative Indo-European linguistics and Sanskrit at the newly founded Catholic University of Nijmegen, nowadays called Radboud University. He remained there until his untimely death in 1945. In one of his last publications Uhlenbeck (1949:63) characterizes his former student as "genial" ['a genius'], but also as "fantastique". In spite of the major differences between both personalities it is van Ginneken who comes closest to Uhlenbeck the linguist. He extends – in his own way – the latter's lines of research, as can be seen from his stance towards the prevailing trends, the importance he gives to psychology – in his dissertation he sought to surpass Wilhelm Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* on the basis of a better theory and more facts –, and his numerous re-

ferences to the works of the Humboldtian linguists in whom he saw kindred spirits.

In the first of the altogether 44 *stellingen* ['propositions'] that van Ginneken added to his dissertation the idea was put forward that the official study of Indo-European had been reduced to a "one-sided positivism". As a remedy he recommended "comparative study of the non-Indo-Germanic languages" for breadth, and "study of the mental causes" for depth. In his *Principes* van Ginneken criticized "la grammaire comparée, telle qu'elle est à la mode de nos jours". Comparative grammar had "un champ de travail plus vaste il est vrai, mais elle restreint de part pris sa méthode: elle ne s'occupe que de lois phonétiques ou d'actions analogiques ou d'emprunts" (1907:1). Although van Ginneken felt a close affinity to the Neo-linguists (see 1923:6) and denounced the one-sidedness of the "Prussian science" of the Leipzig school of linguists (see 1923:12), he tried to bridge the breadth of the former and the soundness of method of the latter (1907:533). His conception of general linguistics, however, remained largely historically coloured and continued to be so for many years, even after linguistics had developed in a more synchronic direction.

In 1917 van Ginneken had the occasion to make a comparison between the lectures on general linguistics given by Uhlenbeck around 1906 and Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), which had only recently become accessible to him. He characterizes Uhlenbeck's approach as follows:

By studying the Basque language, the Eskimo-dialects, the Algonkin languages, and all sorts of other American, Palaeo-Asiatic and Indonesian vernaculars, his outlook was broadened and his view on Indogermanic grammar had changed in such a fundamental way that he felt forced, now already more than ten years ago, to give a course in general linguistics, and for that I will remain grateful to him all my life.

(van Ginneken 1917:11-12)

Van Ginneken was of the opinion that Uhlenbeck's course had to be preferred: although it was – "not to my regret" – inferior to the Genevan course "in the sharpness of systematic exclusions", it appeared to surpass Saussure's course in an incomparable way "in its flowering richness of variegated facts and world-wide horizons" (van Ginneken 1917:12).²¹

When reading these lecture notes with the text of Saussure's *Cours* at the back of one's mind, one finds oneself in a different world.²² It is evident that Uhlenbeck did not teach "system linguistics" (see Daalder and Foolen 2008:219), but belonged to a different tradition. As is well-known, to Saussure himself Humboldt appears to be a researcher with a completely different, ethnolinguistic research program (Koerner 1978:146).

The difference in approach between Uhlenbeck and Saussure is clearly reflected in Uhlenbeck's comment on his former Genevan colleague, i.e. that while indisputably a great genius, the latter knew "next to nothing" outside the field of the Indo-Germanic languages. As a result, his *Cours de linguistique générale* did not really deserve the name (see Portielje 2005:218). Van Ginneken was also of the opinion that as a general linguist

one should examine language, “as a world event”, in its main lines, and that the grammatical categories of the Indo-Germanic languages only covered some 10 to 20% of these lines. He further believed that Hermann Paul’s *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1880) did not have the universal validity his German colleagues claimed for it. In addition, van Ginneken was convinced of the very strong links between psycholinguistics and general linguistics. He mentioned Humboldt, F. von Schlegel, Steinthal, Finck and Misteli as exponents of this joint discipline, and considered Gabelentz, “der Sprachgewaltige”, to be “the polyglot of the second half of the 19th century, much greater than those Indo-Germanists who have achieved a much greater renown” (1906:522).

Elsewhere I have pointed out the various Humboldtian references one can find in van Ginneken’s works (see Noordegraaf 2002). However, it is also clear that van Ginneken did wish to borrow some of Saussure’s ideas on linguistics, in particular the idea of language as a system, and to integrate it in his own approach which bears the undeniable stamp of Humboldt. Nowadays, language as a structured system is generally seen as the principal object of (structural) linguistics. For van Ginneken, however, the focus lay elsewhere. Just like his teacher he did not wish to study language solely “pour soi” and “en soi”. His approach was a holistic one, as he did not want to study language phenomena in splendid isolation. Secondly, as one of his students put it: behind word and sentence van Ginneken always saw man, and, “in line with the tradition of the “innere Sprachform” from Humboldt to Weisgerber, he always saw the people” (de Witte 1951: 825-826).

4.2 Gerlach Royen

The Dutch daily *Het Vaderland* reported in its columns of 16 May 1922 on “a remarkable examination” that had taken place in Leiden a few days before. This was the *doctoraal* examination (approx. M.A.) in comparative Indo-Germanic linguistics by Nicolaus Jakobus Hubertus Royen O.F.M. (1880-1955), a student who was already in his forties and who had assumed the monastic name Gerlach when he became a Franciscan. The examination was approved *cum laude* by his professors. According to the newspaper, it was an examination “the likes of which has seldom been seen before”. The candidate had studied much more than the usual amount of material, and had reported the results of his investigation in an exemplary fashion. Uhlenbeck, his research supervisor, declared that the Faculty of Arts of Leiden University had had great expectations of this examination, and that none of the professors present had commented in any way on Royen’s master’s thesis. Uhlenbeck was looking forward to the brilliant doctoral thesis that Royen without any doubt was to produce.

Gerlach Royen, who later became professor of general linguistics at Utrecht University, was Uhlenbeck’s most outstanding doctoral student. By the end of 1925 he had completed a monumental study of some 1000 pages entitled *Die nominalen Klassifikations-Systeme in den Sprachen der Erde. Historisch-kritische Studie, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Indogermanischen*. However, since Uhlenbeck had decided to resign

from his professorship for reasons of health at the close of the 1926 summer term and since the translation and printing of Royen's doctoral dissertation had not been completed by then, Royen was allowed to take his PhD degree on 22 June 1926 after having defended only a part of the original work. His dissertation appeared under the title *De jongere veranderingen van het indogermaanse nominale drieklassensysteem* ['Recent changes in the Indo-Germanic nominal three-class system'] and comprised some 180 pages. The whole work was finally published in 1929.

As Royen (1926:x) himself put it during the defence of his thesis, "the basic ideas and core considerations of this work are taken entirely from the conceptual world of my highly esteemed teacher". Royen had immersed himself "in der Frage der Klassifikationen" as early as the period 1914-1921, and although he had already published a number of articles on word gender in Dutch, it was the "Unschätzbare Vorlesungen meines Professors und Freundes C.C. Uhlenbeck" that had brought him to "ein tieferes und kritischeres Eindringen in diese Frage" (1929:iv) – and not only with regard to Dutch: Royen's approach had now been broadened to include "die Sprachen der Erde". While the main emphasis still lay on the Indo-Germanic languages, "stets (wurden) Parallelen und ergänzende Tatsachen aus andere Sprachgebieten gebracht, während die verschiedenen Klassifikationssysteme passim zur Sprache kamen". As a result, Royen was also able to present an "ins Einzelne gehende Darstellung der außerhalb des Indogermanischen vorhandenen Klassifikationssysteme" (1929:vii). Royen followed an inductive procedure in his work, stating that theoretical speculations should not be allowed to take the lead in linguistic studies. Only the observed facts should count, for "linguistic science which is not based upon accurately determined data is doomed to end in idle fantasy" (1926:152).

The historical-critical aspect of Royen's contribution "zur allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft" consisted of hundreds of pages devoted to extensive description, analysis and systematization of views held by earlier linguists such as Grimm and Humboldt on the subject under discussion. It is abundantly clear that Royen had received a thorough philosophical education from the Franciscans. He explained his decision to take examples from far beyond the field of the Indo-Germanic languages as follows:

Es beginnt sich immer mehr die Erkenntnis durchzusetzen, daß ein Studium des Sprachlichen, die sich auf ein kleineres Sprachgebiet einengt, nicht nur im Stoff beschränkter bleibt, sondern auch außerstande sein wird, in die tieferen Fragen nach Warum und Woher der sprachlichen Tatsachen entdeckend einzudringen. Die Ansicht, daß die Indogermanistik dadurch, daß sie lauter Fragen rein formalistischer Art nachgeht, sich in eine Sackgasse verrannt hat, wird ohne Rückhalt von jenen Sprachwissenschaftlern vertreten, die ihren Gesichtskreis etwas weiter erstreckten als bloß auf indogermanisches Sprachgebiet eine eifrigere und kritische Pflege der Völkerkunde und der vergleichenden Religionswissenschaft, gepaart mit einem größeren Interesse für *völkerpsychologische Fragen* haben ganz von selbst dazu geführt einen engeren Zusammenhang zwischen diesen universalen Wissenschaften und dem Studium der Sprachen herzustellen. Es war dies um so leichter

möglich, weil auf dem Gebiete der Sprachwissenschaft der Gesichtskreis ein weltweiter geworden war infolge zahlreicher Veröffentlichungen gerade des letzten Halbjahrhunderts. (Royen 1929:III; italics added)

Here we clearly hear an echo of “his master’s voice”: this statement of Royen’s position seamlessly matches the sketches of Uhlenbeck’s ethnopsychological interests by de Josselin de Jong and by Uhlenbeck himself quoted above. Royen stated explicitly that he regarded himself as a student of Uhlenbeck’s – but not one who followed him “slavishly [...], sicut calamus scribentis” (1926:x). It may be noted that Uhlenbeck was among the first to react, in the journal *Anthropos*, to Royen’s magnum opus of 1929, which he described as an important contribution to ethnolinguistics (Uhlenbeck 1930).

There can be no doubt that both the subject and the scope of Royen’s doctoral study are in line with the Humboldtian trend in linguistics as sketched by Koerner (1977), and with the approach to linguistic research advocated by Uhlenbeck. Royen’s subsequent interest in other fields does nothing to detract from this.¹⁵

4.3 Etsko Krusinga

In early October of the year 1925 the well-known English specialist Etsko Krusinga (1875-1944) came to Leiden to attend two series of lectures given by Uhlenbeck. As it appears from the five notebooks that have been preserved, the first series dealt with language comparison, in particular with the noun, and the second one focussed on Basque.¹⁶ I myself examined these notebooks, but find no reason to go beyond van Essen’s (1983a: 200-207) thorough analyses and clear excerpts. In general, when reading these notes one finds oneself in a world completely different from Saussure’s *Cours*. The notebooks include the usual references to ethnopsychology and all sorts of examples from ‘exotic’ languages such as Blackfoot. Obviously, there are also many references to the various writings of Uhlenbeck’s former student Jac. van Ginneken.

Dr Etsko Krusinga, in the 1920s without any doubt a scholar in his own right, was a linguist from the school of Wilhelm von Humboldt and of Henry Sweet (1845-1912).¹⁷ In terms of Dutch academic life, he showed himself to be such an independent character that he was never appointed professor at a Dutch university in spite of his undisputed scholarly qualities. In the works of Krusinga, who was a prolific student of English, we find many a plea for an ahistorical approach to linguistics. For instance, Krusinga applied the distinction between the synchronic and diachronic point of view in one of his English grammars, years before the *Cours* appeared in print. It is striking, however, that in later years Krusinga never referred to Saussure in order to support his own “synchronic” approach. As Krusinga’s biographer has it, Krusinga’s references to Saussure’s *Cours* seem to be only “concessions to the changing climate of the late 1920s and the 1930s, in which Saussure’s work gained a certain popularity” (van Essen 1983a:99-100). In 1932 Krusinga himself noted that the *Cours* might be said to have had not much influence, “despite the propaganda by some of Saussure’s students” (van Essen 1983a:309 fn. 90).

As van Essen (1983a:99) has pointed out convincingly, Kruisinga traced the trend among scholars for according greater prominence to the living language not to Saussure's synchronic approach, but to Humboldt's emphasis on language as an *energeia*.

There are many traces of Humboldtian influence on Kruisinga's early linguistic thought. For example, his *Taal en Maatschappij* ['Language and Society', 1909], the lecture he gave when he was appointed *privaat-docent* ['external lecturer'] in English at Utrecht University, is a worthy specimen of Humboldtian ethnolinguistics. In his *Lessons in English Grammar* of 1922 "a resurgence of Humboldtian ideas" (van Essen 1983a:98) can be noticed; one finds among other things various references to the work of F.N. Finck. For example, Kruisinga endorsed Finck's point of view that historical linguistics was no more than a prescientific *Vorarbeit*.

In the brief introductory chapter to his book *Het Nederlands van Nu* ['Present-day Dutch'] of 1938, Kruisinga's most explicit and extensive theoretical exposition, there is a strong emphasis on the social aspect of language, an aspect that as far as I can see is never highlighted in Uhlenbeck's writings. Language is explicitly recognized as a social institution: Kruisinga deems it to be the prime socializing force. This introduction closes with the wish that this book should instill in modern man the same respect for the "miracle of language" that "primitive man" felt intuitively (Kruisinga 1938:13). It is unfortunate that Etsko Kruisinga made his theoretical views explicit only in passing and never did elaborate on them in separate publications. However, as van Essen (1983a:99) puts it, it should be clear that Kruisinga felt that he belonged to a different linguistic tradition from Saussure, that is to say the Humboldtian tradition.

As mentioned before, Uhlenbeck decided to resign as professor at the close of the 1926 summer term. Although Kruisinga attended Uhlenbeck's courses for one year only, the momentum Uhlenbeck "had imparted to Kruisinga's linguistic studies was not to be lost for several years", van Essen (1983a:204) concludes. Thus, his later publications clearly show the impact that Uhlenbeck's lectures had had during the academic year 1925-1926 (van Essen 1983a:205-207). We may conclude that these lectures did strengthen Kruisinga's Humboldtian views.

4.4 An Uhlenbeck school in linguistics?

The gifted young grammar-school student Robert van Gulik (1910-1967), who was to become a well-known diplomat and writer of detective stories,¹⁶ reports how he received private tuition in general linguistics and Sanskrit from Uhlenbeck in Nijmegen in the 1920s. According to van Gulik, Uhlenbeck thought "that he could make me his special pupil who would continue his own school of linguistics in later years" (Barkman and van der Hoeven 1993:25). However, the orientalist van Gulik opted for a career in the Dutch diplomatic service, not one *in academia*; this was "a heavy blow" to Uhlenbeck (Barkman and van der Hoeven 1993:27), who may have been worried that his approach to linguistics might not have a proper continuation within Dutch academe.

His fears were not without foundation: in fact, none of Uhlenbeck's many

students, including his former close collaborator J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1886-1964), kept on working within the linguistic framework developed by their teacher. Consequently, in a strict sense one cannot speak of an Uhlenbeck school in Dutch linguistics. On the other hand, as has been argued above, Uhlenbeck did place a crucial stamp on the works of several of his students. Scholars such as van Ginneken and Royen selected interesting themes from Uhlenbeck's work – concerning psychology and gender for instance – and elaborated on them, critically and extensively, continuing on the same course as their Leiden mentor.

5 Concluding remarks

*Thus we recognize in all the languages of
the world the unity of the human mind*
(Uhlenbeck 1899:18)

Both Pedersen's classical *Linguistic science in the nineteenth century* (1931) and Malmberg's *Historie de la linguistique* (1991) include a concise sketch of Uhlenbeck's descriptive work on Basque, Inuit, Blackfoot and other non-Indo-European languages. However, as befits a Humboldtian linguist – which he certainly was – Uhlenbeck did not restrict himself to purely descriptive work. During his student years at Leiden, he had learned from his research supervisor Kern to see the importance of the study of exotic languages. His early wish to study a Basque theme for his doctorate clearly reflects this. As to method, he had learned both from Kern and from "der grosse Sprachforscher" (1892:185), the Humboldtian linguist A.F. Pott, that *in linguisticis* one should proceed inductively and that starting from the facts, which may or may not have been collected or checked by means of independent field work, one should ascend "zum Geiste".

And this last-mentioned approach should not concern the psychology of the speaking individual, but always that of the *ethnos*, the people, whose collective mind (often referred to by researchers of that period as "primitive") is reflected in the language. It would appear from our 21st-century vantage point that it was in the 1890s that Uhlenbeck turned to ethnopsychology, accepting the views of the *Völkerpsychologie* which reached him via the work of Steinthal amongst others. He thus arrived at a position closely related to that of a distinguished contemporary – whose vasculological work, it may be remarked, he regarded with great scepticism (see 1907:27) –, the Humboldtian linguist Georg von der Gabelentz, who had adopted a "mixed" research style just like Uhlenbeck. "This style is data-oriented; it aims at inductively valid empirical generalizations. For explanation, however, it relies upon non-mechanical philosophical concepts and forces", as Elffers (2008:197) put it. As is well-known, Gabelentz had been striving at "eine wahrhaft allgemeine Grammatik, ganz philosophisch und doch ganz induktiv" (Gabelentz 1894:7). However, Uhlenbeck did not elaborate an ethnopsychological theory of his own: first and foremost he considered himself to be a linguist, not a psychologist.

Many of Uhlenbeck's preoccupations are reflected and even magnified in the work of his above-mentioned students, even though each one of them did by and large go his own way. J.J.A. van Ginneken concentrated on the psychology of language in an attempt to surpass Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*. Gerlach Royen produced a historical-critical view of grammatical gender, while Etsko Kruisinga – who had joined the ranks of the Humboldtians at an early stage –, attached great value to the study of exotic languages and maintained a critical attitude towards the historical-grammatical paradigm, largely thanks to Uhlenbeck's lectures.

In sum, we may conclude that Uhlenbeck was basically a descriptive linguist working in line with the Humboldtian tradition, who did in a limited sense leave behind him an Uhlenbeck school in Dutch linguistics and who, like many contemporaries, was driven by an impetus that largely dominated nineteenth-century linguistics: the wish to explore the mysteries of the human mind by studying one of its most important expressions, the human language in its worldwide manifestations.¹⁷ In February 1950, he wrote to his cousin Bob that he considered himself to be an “old-fashioned romantic” (see Portielje 2008:321). I think that is not a bad way to characterize his ultimate drive to practice linguistics.

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NOTES

¹ This contribution is based on a paper presented to the Sixth Congress of the *Suider-Afrikaanse Vereniging vir Neerlandistiek* held on 16-18 July 2007 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. Several references are made in the text to letters from the George Lacombe collection – the property of the Olaso Dorrea Foundation – in the

Azkue Bibliotheka of the *Euskaltzaindia* in Bilbao. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Pruden Gartzia, Director of the *Azkue Bibliotheka*, for his kind permission to view the correspondence in question during my visit to the Basque Academy in March 2008. I would also like to thank Greetje Mantel, Magdalena Lis, Ruth Little and Gé Scholten for their contributions to the seminar “Topics in the history of linguistics” devoted to the work of C.C. Uhlenbeck. All quotations in Dutch have been translated into English.

² Uhlenbeck remarked in 1951 that he owed a lot to Cosijn (see Portielje 2008:318).

³ Letter of 1 August 1888 to the headmaster of the Stedelijk Gymnasium Leeuwarden, Dr. O.E. Houtsma (Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden 58-I, inv. nr. 77). The special family circumstances referred to were doubtless connected with the fact that Uhlenbeck’s father, Peter Frederik (1816-1882), died when his only surviving son was fifteen. Uhlenbeck would later describe his father, who had served in the Dutch navy, as a man broken in body and soul who had squandered appreciable sums of money during his time in Haarlem in fruitless attempts “to construct a flying machine” (Uhlenbeck 1921:985).

⁴ Uhlenbeck to van Eys, 17 October 1892, *Azkue Bibliotheka* Bilbao. His professors were “stupéfais” and “le futur jury se déclare incompetent”, according to Uhlenbeck’s faithful correspondent and translator George Lacombe (1879-1947) in 1922. During Uhlenbeck’s time as a professor at Leiden, one of his students – William Rollo (1892-1960) – gained a doctorate in Dutch literature in 1925 on the basis of a dissertation entitled *The Basque dialect of Marquina*.

⁵ Letter of 17 October 1892, *Azkue Bibliotheka* Bilbao. For van Eys, see Noordegraaf 2008.

⁶ De Vries used to review “the connection between languages in general” during his first-year lectures on Dutch language and literature (see Noordegraaf 1985:380). In this context, he would present a schematic overview of the relationship between all European languages, which students were expected to copy. This overview was based in part on the very clear presentation given in *Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Übersicht*, a work published in 1850 by August Schleicher (1821-1868). Basque received fairly extensive attention in Schleicher’s book (see pp. 104-112 of that work), so it may be expected that “die Euskarische Sprache” was also covered in de Vries’ Dutch lectures.

⁷ Uhlenbeck to van Eys, 3 August 1891. Trask (1997:56) has a rather poor opinion of van Eys, but in the nineteenth century the latter’s *Essai de grammaire de la langue basque* (1865) was considered by no one less than A.F. Pott as a “vortreffliches Werk” (letter to van Eys dated 29-6-1868, *Azkue Bibliotheka* Bilbao). The distinguished Oxford linguist A.H. Sayce (1845-1933) also mentioned “the flattering terms in which Pott, the veteran of comparative philology, speaks of your grammar” (letter to van Eys dated 12 June 1877, *Azkue Bibliotheka* Bilbao).

⁸ It may be mentioned that in 1935 Uhlenbeck referred to these studies as containing no more than “les rêveries de ma jeunesse [...] il n’y a rien [...] que je pourrais affirmer maintenant sans réserve” (see Lacombe and Lafon 1936:111).

⁹ Letter to Jules Vinson, 15-4-1893 (*Azkue Bibliotheka* Bilbao).

¹⁰ Letter of 1 August 1888 to the headmaster of the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Leeuwarden, Dr. O.E. Houtsma (Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden 58-I, inv. nr. 77).

¹¹ Letter of 1 August 1888 to the headmaster of the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Leeuwarden, Dr. O.E. Houtsma (Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden 58-I, inv. nr. 77). It may be noted that it was Kern who wrote a letter of recommendation to support Uhlenbeck’s application for a position as a teacher of Dutch at Leeuwarden.

¹² “What many choose to call ‘linguistic laws’ are in no way laws governing the behaviour or development of languages, but simply botched, over-hasty generalizations that arose in the brain of some linguist or other”, according to Kern (1886:91).

¹³ Still in 1940 Uhlenbeck writes in a letter to his cousin Bob, E.M. Uhlenbeck (1913-2003): “It is obvious that one should not start language study on the basis of a preconceived psychological hypothesis. One should study whatever language *inductively*, and later on one should approach the mental background of the language system *inductively* as well” (see Portielje 2005:217; italics added).

¹⁴ Uhlenbeck owned a French translation of this book, which he donated to Leiden University Library in 1936 (see *Bibliotheca Academiae Lugduno-Batavae catalogus xxxiii*, Leiden 1936, 38).

¹⁵ Uhlenbeck (1911:34 fn. 4) appears to be acquainted with Franz Misteli’s “Neubearbeitung” of Steinthal’s *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues* (1893).

¹⁶ Uhlenbeck often returned to topics he had initially raised in his youth. For example, he spoke to the Congress of Linguists in 1933 of “il rapport naturale fra suono idea” [‘the natural relationship between sounds and the corresponding ideas’] (Daalder and Foolen 2008:213 ff.), a theme that had intrigued him since as early as 1896. Uhlenbeck claimed (1896:226), among other things, that all language was initially in essence onomatopoeic and that all linguistic roots were once reflexes conveying a certain impression.

¹⁷ Actually, C.C. Uhlenbeck was a cousin of Bob’s father, which means that C.C. and Bob were strictly speaking first cousins once removed.

¹⁸ As is well known, Sapir had no truck with approaches of this type. In 1917, he went so far as to call Uhlenbeck’s work on the passive “ethnopsychologic speculation” (see Sapir 1990a [1917]:69).

¹⁹ J. Wille, *Dictaatcahier Algemeene Taalwetenschap I* (1933-1934), 25 (private collection). This statement dates from the years 1933-34, when Wille gave a course on general linguistics at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

²⁰ See van Ginneken 1904-1906:vi. He himself could account for “the facts of Basque”. With regard to the facts of other languages van Ginneken based himself on the available literature. Note that Uhlenbeck was one of the supervisors of the *Grondbeginselen*.

²¹ In 1922, the second edition of the *Cours* appeared. A few years later, in 1926, van Ginneken published an uncompromising note on this book, which is brief enough to be quoted in full: “Unveränderter Abdruck der ersten Ausgabe. Sehr ungleich von Wert. Neben tiefen Einblicken in das Leben der Sprache, dilettantische Freisinnigkeiten.” See Noordegraaf 2002.

²² A fine overview of the contents of several of Uhlenbeck’s courses, among other things those on general linguistics, can be found in van Essen (1983a:200-207).

¹⁵ On Royen’s “späte Werk”, see Vonk 1996.

¹⁶ The notebooks can be consulted in the Krusinga collection at the University Library Groningen.

¹⁷ This section is mainly based on van Essen 1983a and 1983b; see also Noordegraaf 2002:146-147. Van Essen’s 1983 excellent monograph includes a full bibliography of the published writings of Krusinga.

¹⁶ Van Gulik was the author of the well-known Judge Dee mysteries. Uhlenbeck appears in a rather obvious disguise in one of these stories, *The Chinese Lake Murders* (see Eggermont-Molenaar 2002).

¹⁷ As Sapir (1990a:69) saw it in 1917: “I think it would be doing Uhlenbeck no injustice to say that his main interest in writing the paper [sc. Uhlenbeck 1917] was not a strictly philological one, but rather to contribute to ethno-psychologic speculation on the basis of linguistic data.”