

Afscheid John Nerbonne, 27 januari 2017

Dear colleagues, friends and family of John Nerbonne, and above all dear John

On this day we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the department and educational programs of Humanities Computing, officially called Information Science nowadays. The programs belong to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen and they combine students' scientific training with excellent research of which the Faculty of Arts is proud. For that reason this is festive day, but at the same time it is also a day of some sadness. It is also the day of John's farewell and we all know what great role for many years you have played, John, and how you contributed to the success of alpha-informatics.

Time for some history.

After your PhD in Ohio on German temporal logic (1984), you worked as a visiting professor at Hewlett Packard Laboratories, and, next, in a German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence. You were appointed in October 1989 at the University of Groningen and in 1993 you became Professor of Computational Linguistics at the Faculty of Arts.

In your Groningen years you enormously stimulated research in your field of expertise both by your own leading research, your managerial skills, foreign projects and the supervision of about 40 PhD students of whom you were the promotor. You also stimulated the curriculum development of alpha-informatics, which came a fully developed bachelor and master program.

You combined computational linguistics with dialectology, the niche of your research. The very fact that you combine great technical expertise with strong empirical linguistic investigations deserves great respect. Your research has great impact and is highly cited. You also created a team of staff of high quality as is demonstrated by the results of the peer reviews of the research in 2003, 2009 and last year.

It is, therefore, not amazing that the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation awarded you a prize in 2012. The judgement stated: "Professor John Nerbonne is an internationally renowned researcher at the interface of linguistics and informatics. Over the last 15 years he has fundamentally reshaped linguistics, particularly dialectology, by applying cutting edge methods of computational linguistics and statistics to research traditionally located in the humanities." The fact that you are

invited to chair several research projects abroad, to participate in international advisory boards and to act as visiting professor clearly demonstrates the recognition of your work, as is also demonstrated by your membership of the Royal Dutch Academy (2005).

For years you were director of the research institute Center of Language and Cognition Groningen, and you did this for 13 years! Your leadership style is thoughtful, tenacious and with a good sense of the strategy needed you encouraged individual researchers. With heart and soul, you dedicated yourself to the young researchers (PhD students).

Apart from being director of CLCG you were also (in the same period) chair of the department of Information Sciences, interim chair of English Linguistics and participated in various university broad committees.

Because of your exceptional scientific qualities combined with your managerial qualities you were invited in many (international and national) boards and committees that have

to do with linguistics in general. To mention only a few of them and to start with the international ones:

- the European Association for Digital Humanities (2012-2015)
- the Association for Computational Linguistics (2000-2003)
- Advisory Board Institut für Deutsche Sprache in Mannheim (2006-2012)
- Advisory Board Swedish National Graduate School for Language Technology (2003-2008)
- the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (2007-2013)

Special mention may be made of the NUFFIC project you led as co-director (along with prof. Baryamureeba of Makerere), a project in which a consortium (Radboud University Nijmegen, TU Eindhoven, University of Groningen) helped the four public universities in Uganda to improve the curriculum of Computer Science, strengthen research capacity in this area and improve the ICT infrastructure. There are now 23 staff members from Uganda who have completed a PhD in the Netherlands (three of which are supervised by yourself).

Let's mention some national committees you led or were part of:

- the Council for the Humanities, NWO (1994-1999)
- advisory board of the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam. (2011-2014)

- the Boards of CLARIN-NL (Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructural Program) and CLARIAH and STEVIN
- section Language and speech of the Dutch Language Union

Because of your great merits you were not only honored by a Humboldt Forschungspreis (mentioned earlier) and recently by a fellowship at the DFG center in Tübingen, but you also received a royal distinction in 2014. You were appointed Knight of the order of the Netherlands lion. It is no wonder, then, that the university and faculty want to honor you likewise because of your dedication and commitment and they award you a so-called Academieplaquette (Academy plaque). This plaquette is awarded to staff members who worked here for at least 25 years and have had great merits for the faculty and university. It is clear that you fulfill all criteria. It is an honor for me to present you now with the Academieplaquette. Thank you for all your work and commitment and for our cooperation in the last 14 years. You were always positive critical of the faculty's policy and always focused on the success of the faculty and linguistics in particular. Thank you very much and for the future I wish you and your family much happiness.