

# About the similarity between the oystercatcher and Vincent van Heuven

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The illustration on the front cover of this book shows an oystercatcher, the favourite bird of phonetician Professor Vincent J. van Heuven, to whom this collection of papers is dedicated. He used the Dutch word for oystercatcher *scholekster* in his Dutch book *Algemene fonetiek* (Rietveld & Van Heuven 2009: 380) on general phonetics to illustrate how a morphological parser is necessary to develop a successful speech synthesis system. To know that the first vowel in *scholekster* should be pronounced as /ɔ/ rather than as /o/ the system needs to know that the word is schol+ekster [sɔləkstər] and not scho+lekster [sxələkstər].

The oystercatcher has many characteristics in common with Vincent. They are both globetrotters living in different places. The oystercatcher is a migratory bird that can be observed in many parts of the world, but only in Great Britain and in the north and west of the Netherlands can it be found all year round. It builds its nest in the form of a bare scrap on pebbles, mostly in meadows, but sometimes also on farmland and on top of flat roofs. Vincent has attended countless international conferences, has been active as a phonetician in various countries and has many contacts all over the world. Apart from a year at the University of Edinburgh, he spent most of his academic career in Leiden in the west of the Netherlands and recently he bought a house in Friesland in the north where he stayed most weekends during the later years of his career. He was on a sabbatical at the University of Groningen and has continued to work together with his Groningen colleagues, most of whom are authors of the papers in this volume. His living localities have varied from modern apartments in cities to a traditional cottage in the countryside. Like the oystercatcher's humble nest, his offices at the university have not always reflected his status as a professor. He has often shared small office spaces with his post-docs and PhD students, something which did not seem to bother him at all. He can work anywhere.

Both the oystercatcher and Vincent have a varied diet. The oystercatcher eats shellfish, worms and crabs. With their bill tips they first attempt to open molluscs by prising them apart. If unsuccessful, they try to open them by hammering through the shell on the hard ground. Vincent's academic diet has also contained a large range of ingredients. When look-

ing at his impressive academic oeuvre it becomes clear how multilateral his interests are. People who have worked with him have experienced his broad knowledge about phonetics and linguistics in general and benefitted from his creative and innovative ways of approaching scientific problems. If he does not succeed in solving a problem with the most straightforward method, he always thinks of other ways to tackle the issue, just like an oystercatcher finding new ways to open a shell.

In contrast with most birds living in grasslands and meadows, the oystercatcher continues to feed its young ones for some time after they are hatched out. Vincent is very committed to his students' academic progress. He is a real mentor and tutor and he enjoys sharing his knowledge at any time and with anyone. A great number of students and colleagues have benefitted from his critical comments and sharp eye for both detail and the larger picture. He is the sort of teacher that inspires and motivates students and that is capable of explaining complicated material in an illuminating and clarifying way, making sure that you will never forget it again. He shows a genuine interest in his students and even after graduation he still follows their lives and supports them in their further career.

Vincent spent the major part of his academic career in Leiden, but as mentioned he also became closely involved in research carried out at the University of Groningen. During the last couple of years he has been coming to Groningen on a regular basis to work together with colleagues. We have all benefited from his sharing of knowledge and ideas. After his retirement in September 2013, he takes permanent residence in Friesland and we hope that in the years to come he will continue to be a part of the academic scene in Groningen. We are highly indebted to Vincent for his contribution to our academic lives and for his personal support to all of us. We wish to thank him by means of this book with contributions from all the colleagues with whom he has worked so closely in Groningen. The oystercatcher can get very old, and so we hope to benefit from Vincent's academic input and advice for many years to come.

This book contains 15 papers written by 21 colleagues from different departments of the University of Groningen at various stages in their career. The papers are written in honour of Vincent on the occasion of his retirement and they are in many ways a good reflection of his multifaceted interests. The authors represent nine different nationalities and the papers cover many different European languages. They are all concerned with some aspect of phonetics in Europe and they are all in some way related to the work of Vincent. Some of the papers take an experimental approach while others are of a descriptive or theoretical nature. What they have in

common is the inspiration stemming from Vincent's ideas, research or personal musings.

### *Bibliography*

Rietveld, A.C.M. & Van Heuven, V.J. (2009). *Algemene fonetiek*, 3rd edition. Bussum: Coutinho.