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Obituary – Marcel P. R. van den Broecke (25 May 1942–8 March 2020)

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Marcel P. R. van den Broecke was the second editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Phonetics*. He took over the position from his British namesake and founding editor, Marcel Tatham, in 1985 (starting Volume 13, Issue 3), and was succeeded in turn in 1990 by Mary Beckman (Volume 18, Issue 1).

An important innovation Van den Broecke introduced was to institute a mechanism for editing and publishing three different types of special issue, which were often guest-edited: (1) collection of carefully peer-reviewed papers that came out of a workshop or symposium (cf. Volume 14, Issues 3–4, edited by Björn Fritzen & Gunnar Fant, with papers from the symposium in Gotland on “Voice Acoustics and Dysphonia”); (2) theme issue (cf. Volume 16, Issue 1, edited by Steven Greenberg, on the theme of “Representation of Speech in the Auditory Periphery”); (3) open peer review format issue (e.g. Volume 17, Issues 1–2, with Ken Stevens’s “On the Quantal nature of speech” paper, 11 commentary papers, and Ken’s response). These special issues are an important strength of the journal and are often very well cited for many years.¹

Van den Broecke was born in Amsterdam and spent his childhood there. After graduating from the Barlaeus Gymnasium, he studied Chemistry at Brandeis University (Waltham MA) during one year and then switched to English Language and Literature, General Linguistics and Phonetics at the University of Amsterdam. His MA thesis (1967) was a description of his (partly) successful attempt to build a replica of the mechanical speaking machine described by Wolfgang von Kempelen in the 18th century (see his summary and postscript in [van den Broecke, 1983](#)). After one year as a secondary school teacher of English, Marcel was appointed assistant professor of English at Utrecht University in 1969. A few years later, the phoneticians of the English department, including professor Antonie Cohen and associate professor Van den Broecke, were asked to start a new Phonetics Department, which would develop into a successful centre of Phonetics in the Netherlands. In 1976 Marcel completed his doctoral dissertation *Hierarchies and Rank Orders in Distinctive Features*. The next year he spent, accompanied by his family, as

a visiting professor (with a one-year grant from the Dutch Government) at the Department of Linguistics and Phonetics of UCLA, where he worked with Peter Ladefoged, Victoria Fromkin and – especially – Louis Goldstein.

Marcel was the convener and secretary general of the legendary Tenth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, which was held in Utrecht in the summer of 1983 (legendary because of the recording of a Dutch street organ that was played at deafening volume in all rooms of the congress centre at the end of every presentation, brutally preventing speakers to continue in overtime).

Earlier that year he was one of the founding editors of the book series *Netherlands Phonetic Archives* (NPA, Foris Publications) in which appeared the book of abstracts (1983) and the 800-page proceedings of the congress (1984), both co-edited by Van den Broecke. Interestingly, also the (revised and extended) dissertations of two later editors-in-chief of *Journal of Phonetics* were published as books in the NPA series ([Beckman, 1986](#); [Docherty, 1992](#)). In 1988, Marcel edited a comprehensive Phonetics textbook (in Dutch), in which 35 Dutch experts wrote chapters on a great variety of topics in the speech research discipline. The appearance of this book, which would be reprinted twice later the same year, coincides more or less with Marcel’s farewell to Phonetics. He left academia in the summer of 1988, to become the director of the Foundation for Public Information on Science and Technology (1988–1995), and subsequently the director of the Netherlands Humanistic Society (1995–1997). He ended his professional career as the director of the International Statistical Institute in The Hague (1997–2003).

As a phonetician Marcel has published on a wide variety of topics, ranging from the mental representation of distinctive features and their role in speech errors ([van den Broecke & Goldstein, 1980](#)), or the role of the amplitude envelope features in speech perception ([van den Broecke & van Heuven, 1983](#)) to the automatic extraction of frequencies of linguistic units from printed text ([van den Broecke, Elstrodt, & Aerts, 1986](#), [van den Broecke et al., 1987](#)). Marcel was a brilliant organizer and beloved teacher and thesis supervisor, with ten doctoral dissertations written under his primary supervision.

¹ I thank Mary Beckman for suggesting this paragraph be included in the obituary.

In his second academic life, Marcel became a leading expert on historical atlases, specializing in the works by the 16th century cartographer Abraham Ortelius, with some 20 professional journal articles, books, and yet another doctoral dissertation (van den Broecke, 2009). Together with his wife, former phonetician Deborah Günzburger, Marcel founded *Cartographica Neerlandica*, a (mainly) on-line niche company buying and selling antique atlas maps and prints.



Marcel van den Broecke
(Utrecht, May 1978, age 35)



Marcel van den Broecke (Bilthoven,
October 2013, age 71). Photograph taken by
Deborah Günzburger.

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