

THE RELEVANT FEATURE, THE NON-CORRELATED PHONEME AND
THE 'CASE VIDE'

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The notion of the relevant feature is one of those with which functional phonology operates. I propose to discuss just one of the functionalist characteristics of this notion and some consequences that seem to follow from it.

Several scholars have discussed the question of the phonological status of voicelessness for the non-nasal phoneme in the dorsal order in the Dutch consonant system. According to a widespread analysis, the phoneme in question is identified as /k/ and also as a non-correlated phoneme because it lacks a potential partner phoneme which would be /g/ and, moreover, voicelessness which is generally admitted to be non-distinctive for the /k/ (though distinctive for /p/ and /t/ in Dutch) is nevertheless presented as if it were relevant or functional.

However, strict adherence to the notion of the relevant feature with which functional phonology traditionally operates would render the afore-mentioned analysis untenable in that, apart from the fact that this analysis fundamentally violates the defining characteristic of the relevant feature, it would be unjustified to identify the dorsal phoneme concerned as /k/ in the first place and further to envisage only one 'case vide' which would correspond to /g/, i.e. the potential partner of /k/.