

**“I Want to Be a Part of the Conversation”: A Qualitative Study on Americans’ Use of  
English and Dutch in the Netherlands**

Madison Steele 6353800

Departments of Languages, Literature and Communication | Utrecht University

Intercultural Communication Master Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Ashley Micklos

Second Reader: Dr. Carlo Giordano

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## Abstract

This thesis explores how English-speaking Americans who grew up monolingual experience language when living in the Netherlands. Addressing a gap in research on Americans' linguistic experiences abroad, this study investigates how Americans interact with a host population that is known for being bilingual with high English proficiency. Using qualitative data collected from 10 semi-structured interviews, this study investigates two particular language phenomena. The first is Americans' motivation to learn Dutch, and the second is their evaluations of interactions with Dutch interlocutors. Participants' stories are discussed through the framework of complexity in intercultural communication, supported by ideas concerning language learning motivation and accommodation strategies, as well as Schumann's (1986) Acculturation Model of second language acquisition. The results indicate that participants are highly motivated to learn Dutch through a variety of internal and external factors, and they have varying opinions on what constitutes over- and under-accommodation. Americans' intentions to use either English or Dutch depend on their communicative goals, which may change from one interaction to another. Communication between Americans and Dutch people is complex, because the meanings that Americans interpret from their interactions depend on their perceptions of themselves and their interlocutors, as well as their interlocutors' perceptions of them.

*Keywords:* intercultural communication, complexity, language learning, motivation, accommodation, acculturation, English language, Dutch language

## 1. Introduction

While knowledge of the English language facilitates intercultural communication, it may also hinder native English speakers from learning other languages. Such a phenomenon is visible in the Netherlands. In their book *The Undutchables: an observation of the Netherlands, its culture, and its inhabitants*, White and Boucke (2010) write “The more you try to learn the language, the more the Dutch refuse to speak it with you and the more they complain that you haven’t learned it” (p. 205). Though White and Boucke’s book is humorous, studies and public discourse suggest that English speakers in the Netherlands do hear conflicting advice regarding language use. These contradictions sometimes result in a demotivation to learn Dutch, with sentiments such as “I hereby give notice that I henceforth give up the attempt to speak Dutch when I go to the Netherlands . . . [T]he reply is invariably given in English” (Kingscott, 1991, as cited in McArthur, 1992, p. 2). More recently, discourse on language confusion can be recognized on expatriate websites, travel blogs, and social media posts. The following question posted by an American in an online Dutch travel forum further illustrates the linguistic dilemma:

I know that most people there speak English; but I have heard conflicting opinions on how to speak to people.

1. I have been told that asking people if they speak English is considered a mild insult; as if to say they are uneducated [*sic*].
2. I have heard from friends who have been there, that if you walk up to locals and immediately start speaking English that they can be annoyed/insulted.

What would your advice be on this matter? (*Speaking English to the Dutch?*, 2015)

As the various quotes indicate, the English language is prevalent in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is becoming increasingly recognized as bilingual, with Dutch and English proficiency (Van Oostendorp, 2012). English has been a compulsory subject in Dutch primary education since 1986 (Ytsma, 2006), and bilingual instruction has been on the rise since 2000 (Kuiken & Van Der Linden, 2013). In 2020, the Netherlands was ranked the highest in the world for English proficiency among non-native-speaking countries (Education First, 2020). According to the European Commission (2012), about 90% of all Dutch people can hold a conversation in English. Studies on Dutch and English language use in the Netherlands have indicated that both languages share positive evaluations, and the prevalence of English does not appear to be a significant threat to Dutch (De Bot & Weltens, 1997; Edwards, 2014; Van Oostendorp, 2012; Weltens & De Bot, 1995). The status of English in the Netherlands creates a shared linguistic repertoire between Dutch people and native English speakers; however, this does not necessarily mean that English speakers never have to learn Dutch.

As a community of over 31,000 (Contact with Statistics Netherlands, 2008), Americans in the Netherlands have a unique linguistic background. Many Americans are monolingual and speak English as a first language, which is rare in the European linguistic repertoire (European Commission, 2012; Jenkins, 2011). While monolinguals from the United Kingdom may have a similar background, this study focuses on Americans to include linguistic repertoires outside of a solely European context. This thesis aims to fill in a gap in research on Americans living in one foreign country, as previous research largely concerns business expatriates in global contexts (e.g. Tung, 1998). This study also addresses Americans' linguistic experiences in particular. Focusing on Americans who grew up monolingual may shed light on the factors that drive Americans either to utilize their native language (L1) or adopt a second language (L2).

Furthermore, studying a group of people who voluntarily moved to another country and share common knowledge of English with the host population, can highlight the agency involved in language usage. The main research question is:

*RQ: What are the linguistic experiences of Americans when interacting with Dutch people?*

To further dive into the way Americans experience language use in the Netherlands, there are two sub-questions:

*SQ1: What factors motivate Americans to learn Dutch?*

*SQ2: To what extent do Americans feel accommodated by the interactive strategies of their Dutch interlocutors?*

These questions are answered through the framework of complexity in intercultural communication, supported by concepts concerning language learning motivation and accommodation. Communication between Americans and Dutch people is complex because the internal and external factors that motivate Americans to learn Dutch, along with mixed evaluations of accommodation, show that creating meaning in an interaction depends on perceptions that Americans and their interlocutors hold.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Intercultural Communication and Complexity**

Americans' linguistic experiences in the Netherlands will be analyzed through a framework of complexity in intercultural communication, using concepts from Pym (2004) and Scollon et al. (2012). Scollon et al. (2012) address the issue of "culture" as the term is unlimited



in scope. They define culture as “[...] a way of dividing people up into groups according to some feature of these people which helps us to understand something about them and how they are different from or similar to other people” (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 3). This definition emphasizes the conscious decision in dividing people into groups in order to make claims. In this study, labeling Americans and Dutch people as two different cultural groups allows for a potential understanding of how expatriates and a host population interact. When discussing cultures, it is critical to avoid lumping and binarism. Lumping refers to thinking that all people of a single culture are the same, while binarism refers to the idea that people from different cultures are inherently different (Scollon et al., 2012). The complications and nuances that come with defining a culture support the idea intercultural communication is complex.

According to Pym (2004), intercultural communication involves a high degree of complexity, which refers to “the plurality of possible interpretations” (p. 3). While Pym (2004) uses cross-cultural communication and complexity as a basis for evaluating textual translations, these concepts can be utilized to assess Americans’ interactions with Dutch people. Pym (2004) also notes that intercultural communication involves transaction costs, or an expenditure of effort by at least one participant to overcome complexity. An example is spending time and money learning a new language. Pym (2004) also argues “The lowering of transaction costs produces a potential increase in complexity, since any number of partners are available for an action and it is difficult to ascertain which will produce the most beneficial relationship” (p. 21). While learning a new language can help overcome complexity in certain situations, it can also increase complexity by widening the range of linguistic repertoires from which to choose. Intercultural communication is complex because there is high potential for participants to interpret different meanings from a single communicative act. Scollon et al. (2012) argue that all communication is

complex because language is ambiguous and people constantly engage with different discourse systems. They define a discourse system as a “cultural toolkit” (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 8) that people carry with them. The toolkit consists of ideas about the world, ways of treating people, and methods of communication. For example, Americans’ experiences living with a particular ideology concerning English may be part of their discourse system.

### ***2.1.1 The Force of English***

The dominance of English in the United States is reflective of a particular ideology. In sociolinguistics, ideology refers to the sociopolitical meaning of language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2006). Over the past several decades, several politicians and other leaders have spearheaded what is known as the English-Only movement (Baker, 2001; Schmidt, 2008). California Senator S.I. Hawakaya’s attempt in 1981 to amend the United States Constitution and deem English the official language exemplifies this movement. This movement reflects the ideology that English is necessary for the public good, and the coexistence of multiple languages causes disunity (Schmidt, 2008). These ideas relate to Spencer-Oatey & Franklin’s (2009) claim that English is a *lingua culturae* for L1 speakers in the United States, meaning “Speakers closely identify with the language as a symbol of their native community and link it closely with their identity” (p. 148). Furthermore, President Ronald Reagan once stated that bilingual education is “[...] absolutely wrong and against American concepts” (Crawford, 1999, p. 53 as cited in Baker, 2001, p. 376) because it would result in English deficiency for non-native speakers and leave them out of the job market. Deeming English the language that grants people economic advantages justifies the longevity of monolingual education. Though most American high schools offer foreign language courses, less than 1% of native-born American adults are fluent in the language they had studied (Friedman, 2015, as cited in Gandara, 2018, p. 336). Therefore, many people in the United States

grow up with English not only as their first language, but also as their only language (Jenkins, 2011). Comparing this situation with foreign language learning in the Netherlands (e.g. Kuiken & Van Der Linden, 2013; Ytsma, 2006) highlights the significance of studying Americans' communication with Dutch people.

### ***2.1.2 Americans Living Abroad***

Research on Americans abroad, particularly those who stay in a foreign country for long periods of time, remains limited. There is some research regarding American expatriates, however, that touch upon interactions with host populations. Americans living in the Netherlands can be considered expatriates using Green's (2009) definition of people who live abroad "[...] for a considerable amount of time" (p. 307), though previous studies often refer to business expatriates. One study that touches upon language use is Tung's (1998) research on 409 American expatriates' adaptation in 51 different countries. Tung's questionnaire includes items regarding attitudes towards the placement, modes of acculturation, and coping mechanisms. For modes of acculturation, "Conform and adapt to norms of host country most of the time" is rated with a mean agreement of 4.02 on a five-point scale, whereas "Keep certain distance between self and host country nationals" is rated with the lowest mean agreement, with a score of 1.76 (Tung, 1998, p. 130). Therefore, many Americans consider it important to respect the norms of the host country and to interact with the local population. For coping mechanisms, the highest rated answer is "Learning more about host country including language, sightseeing" (Tung, 1998, p. 133). Although 50.1% of the surveyed expatriates spoke at least one Western European language (Tung, 1998, p. 128), the study does not delve into Americans' particular experiences with learning or practicing the host language.

### ***2.1.3 Summarizing the Framework***

The concepts of intercultural communication and complexity provide a structured framework through which to analyze American-Dutch interactions. Since the main problem that Scollon et al. (2012) address is “[...] how a person manages to cope with the complexity of the various discourse systems in which he or she participates,” (p. 267), it follows that intercultural communication is complex because it is also interdiscourse. The various ways in which people use language and other communicative tools can lead speakers to interpret multiple meanings, not only with people’s words but also their intentions. It is critical to note that this study concerns Americans’ experiences alone. Therefore, evaluations are subjective and only reflective of one of the cultural groups at hand. Ideas concerning language learning motivation and interactive strategies are used to analyze Americans’ experiences.

## **2.2 Language Attitudes and Motivation**

### ***2.2.1 Language Attitudes***

Motivation to learn a language is intertwined with language attitudes. Language attitude research often investigates cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Adebija, 1994; Garrett, 2010). The cognitive component refers to thoughts and beliefs about a language, the affective component concerns feelings and evaluations, and the behavioral component comprises intentions or actions (Adebija, 1994). Though the three components simplify the observation of language attitudes, they are not always consistent with one another. Internal and external factors can influence behavior, even if the thoughts and feelings would insinuate different behavior (Garrett, 2010). For example, though English is widely adopted in Ireland, there is also a strong

sense of unfavorability towards the language as a result of sociopolitical tension with the British (Edwards, 1983).

There have been some studies to date on language attitudes in the Netherlands. In the largest known study, Edwards (2014) surveyed 2,000 Dutch people. The overall results indicate a positive evaluation of both Dutch and English. Eight in 10 respondents agree that they like speaking English, while eight in 10 prefer to use Dutch most of the time (Edwards, 2014, p. 105). There is also an equal amount of anglophilic and anti-English responses. Furthermore, 99% of respondents agree that speaking both Dutch and English is advantageous (Edwards, 2014, p. 116), which is consistent with De Bot and Weltens' (1997) finding that the importance of knowing English in the Netherlands is undisputed. De Bot and Weltens (1997) follow Weltens and De Bot's (1995) study, which asks "Why do immigrants to the Netherlands learn Dutch when they have the choice of learning English instead, which is spoken internationally and is sufficient also for survival in the Netherlands?" (p. 135). This question is a matter of motivation.

### ***2.2.2 Language Learning Motivation***

Recent literature on language attitudes and second language acquisition (SLA) has increasingly recognized the importance of motivation (e.g. Baker, 2001; Kormos et al., 2011; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Paiva, 2011; Sade, 2011). Motivation can be defined as "[...] a dynamic force involving social, affective and cognitive factors manifested in desire, attitudes, expectations, interests, needs, values, pleasure and efforts" (Paiva, 2011, p. 63). This definition highlights the various internal and external factors at play in language learning motivation. These factors may influence or even contradict one another. Participants across different immigrant groups in Weltens and De Bot's (1995) study indicate that people assume that "Speakers of

English, who can easily get around using their L1” (p. 139) are unmotivated to learn Dutch. The L1 English speakers in their study do have negative attitudes towards learning Dutch; however, this is only because they are in fact motivated to learn and they “[...] complain that it is difficult for them to practise their Dutch because the Dutch themselves like to show off their English” (Weltens & De Bot, 1995, p. 138). Such motivation is also indicated in De Bot and Weltens’ (1997) study, in which more L1 English speakers were enrolled in Dutch courses than members of other surveyed groups. These studies suggest two things in particular. First, something drives English speakers to learn Dutch, even if they may have an advantage with their L1. Second, there is a tension between motivation to learn Dutch and given opportunities to practice speaking Dutch.

The frustration that English-speaking learners of Dutch experience could be attributed to changes in identity. According to Schumann’s (1986) Acculturation Model of SLA, “[...] the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates” (p. 379). The Acculturation Model includes a taxonomy of social and psychological factors that influence people’s success in learning an L2. As an affective factor, motivation refers to a learner’s reasons for acquiring a new language. The two commonly recognized motivational orientations are integrative and instrumental (Kormos et al., 2011; Masgoret & Gardner, 2008; Paiva, 2011; Schumann, 1986). The integrative orientation refers to the learner’s desire to become part of the target-language speakers’ culture, while the instrumental orientation refers to the learner’s utilitarian use of the language. The Irish’s use of English (Edwards, 1983) is an example of the latter. The integrative approach is considered more effective for SLA as it enables the learner to acculturate to the target culture (Schumann, 1986). Paiva (2011) makes a similar argument, suggesting that changes in identity may help L2 development. Furthermore, such changes are

dependent upon interpersonal communication. Paiva (2011) states “In this sense, the language learner agent influences, and is influenced by, his/her social practices in a constant movement of organization and reorganization, a process that, paradoxically, possesses a certain degree of freedom and dependency.” (p. 63). The paradox is the constant negotiation between a person’s autonomy and their reliance on others to develop an L2. This cycle of influence is consistent with the recognition that (language) attitudes are put into and taken out of social action (Garrett, 2010). Attitudes may change according to the functions, goals, settings, or power distribution in an interaction (Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; Soukup, 2012). Since language attitudes affect interactions, it is important to assess interactions between learners and speakers of a target language.

## **2.3 Interactive Strategies**

### ***2.3.1 Communication Accommodation***

Interactions are essential in SLA because “[...] language learning is not about learning and manipulating abstract symbols, but it is enacted in real-life experiences, such as when two or more interlocutors co-adapt during an interaction” (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 158, as cited in Paiva, 2011, p. 70). As one of the five main approaches to studying intercultural communication, the interactive approach investigates how communication is effective and meaningful in intercultural situations (Ten Thije, 2016). Even outside of language learning, interactions involve accommodation, which refers to speakers’ movements towards and away from their interlocutors (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Speakers may accommodate using a certain speech style, dialect, speed, or vocabulary (Williams, 1999). In this study, the term “accommodation” is used largely in reference to general speech adaptation and not necessarily to

the three strategies used in communication accommodation theory (CAT); however, a basic understanding of the CAT strategies is valuable. The three primary strategies in CAT are convergence (adaptation of speech to increase similarities to the partner), divergence (accentuation of differences in speech) and maintainance (lack of change) (Giles & Ogay, 2007). These strategies—and accommodation in general—can be used to varying degrees. If an addressee feels that an interlocutor is making more adjustments than are necessary or appropriate, this is seen as over-accommodation (Zuengler, 1991). On the other hand, not using enough convergence, or using divergence, can be perceived as under-accommodation. Both over- and under-accommodation are problematic, as these strategies fail to meet an addressee's needs and may lead to miscommunication or problematic talk (Williams, 1999).

People may also interpret their communicative partners' motives for using a particular strategy. Giles and Ogay (2007) point out "How listeners attribute motives for convergence is crucial to whether it garners positive or negative reactions" (p. 297). They use an example of an L1 speaker of Japanese responding to a learner of Japanese in English to illustrate differences in motives:

The nonnative speaker's attempt to speak Japanese might be perceived as a threat to Japanese identity. However, another motive has to be considered: By converging to Japanese, the nonnative speaker is depriving his Japanese interlocutor of the opportunity to use the much-studied but (little used) English language, a code with high social prestige in modern urban Japanese society. (Ross & Shortreed, 1990, as cited in Giles & Ogay, 2007, p. 301)



This example illustrates two important features of accommodation. First, using a particular strategy is contingent upon the socio-historical context of the interaction (Giles & Ogay, 2007) and perceived identities. It is significant that one speaker is Japanese and he recognizes his interlocutor as non-Japanese, as “Speakers’ interactional goals are influenced by their perceptions of the interlocutor” (Zuengler, 1991, p. 236). Second, the example shows how conflicting motives can lead to simultaneous convergence. Not knowing his Japanese interlocutor’s motives, the nonnative speaker may feel that his competence is being judged. According to Zuengler (1991), native speakers of a language may assess the competence of a nonnative speaker and accommodate accordingly. When perceptions lead to a speaker using over-accommodation, the addressee may feel treated as a member of a foreign cultural group rather than as an individual (Zuengler, 1991).

### ***2.3.2 Politeness Strategies***

A politeness strategy is another type of interactive strategy that encompasses accommodation. Scollon et al. (2012) argue that in intercultural communication, people make assumptions about their communicative partner in order to reduce complexity. Constant assumptions can lead to issues with face, a term used in sociolinguistics to address the mutual negotiation of interactants’ public images. Scollon et al. (2012) explain that face is paradoxical because people constantly negotiate between the strategies of involvement and independence. This paradox echoes Paiva’s (2011) argument that learners of an L2 constantly negotiate between dependency and freedom. Involvement is similar to convergence and is used when interactants want to show solidarity and emphasize similarities. Independence is a strategy people use to make minimal assumptions about their interlocutors and maintain a polite distance (Scollon et al., 2012). Both involvement and independence encompass various linguistic

strategies that one can use. The strategies that are relevant to this study are using the hearer's language or dialect (involvement) and using one's own language or dialect (independence) (Scollon et al., 2012). The high proficiency of English in the Netherlands, previous studies regarding L1 English speakers' motivation to learn Dutch, and the Acculturation Model of SLA indicate that the linguistic features of politeness strategies may not perfectly suit the context of Americans in the Netherlands.

Though Americans and Dutch people may share English proficiency, other factors may complicate communication. Motivation to learn an L2 and feelings of accommodation can lead interactants to evaluate their communication differently. Though intercultural communication is highly complex (Pym, 2004), recognizing the different complexities involved has the potential to change attitudes and influence future interactions (Zuengler, 1991).

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

This study employed methods used in research regarding language attitudes and accommodation to uncover Americans' experiences in the Netherlands. Language attitude research can use direct or indirect approaches. The indirect approach often involves the matched-guise technique (MGT), in which participants listen to different speakers and make judgments (Soukup, 2012). Despite the usefulness of MGT, the direct approach is more common, especially when investigating motivation. This approach explicitly asks people explicitly about their evaluations of certain language phenomena (Garrett, 2010). Though previous studies have often used quantitative measures with questionnaires, recent research has increasingly used qualitative measures such as interviews (Garrett, 2010; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Qualitative

measures may be “[...] better at capturing the type of interactive meaning-making implicated in language evaluation” (Soukup, 2012, p. 216). Research into accommodation may use case studies or observations of conversations; however, self-reported data is also important as it helps the researcher to “[...] gain knowledge about people’s awareness and perceptions of their own and other’s accommodations” (Williams, 1999, p. 157). Researchers can identify where and when participants may experience problematic talk. Combining different elements of established methods, this study used semi-structured interviews with Americans to collect an in-depth understanding of their perceptions (Patton, 2002, as cited in Hagar, 2018) of language in the Netherlands.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants in this study were 10 Americans between the ages of 25 and 55, with an average age of 39. There were eight female and two male participants. Each participant resided in a different Dutch city or town. The amount of time lived in the Netherlands ranged from six months to 28 years, with an average time of 10 years. All participants either intended to live in the Netherlands permanently or had no immediate plans to return to the United States. An overview of the participants can be found in Appendix A.

Participants were selected using criterion and snowball sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). They fulfilled two basic criteria. The first was that they must have lived in the Netherlands for at least six months and planned to continue their residence for a considerable amount of time (Green, 2009). The minimum duration was selected based on Tung’s (1998) finding that it takes approximately six to 12 months for expatriates to adapt in another country. The second criterion was that participants identified as having grown up monolingual in the United States. In this

study, “monolingual” is used as a point of contrast from bi- or multilingual Dutch people, who typically start foreign language education at the elementary level (Ytsma, 2006). Most Americans in this research studied a foreign language in high school, practiced speaking a foreign language in their adulthood, or grew up recognizing some words in a foreign language. However, the participants did not self-identify as having grown up bi- or multilingual and therefore fit the criteria.

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). The researcher sent text messages and e-mails to known Americans who fit the criteria. Participants were also found by commenting on the researcher’s post in a Facebook group for Americans living in the Netherlands. Additional participants were found through existing participants contacting other Americans.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data was collected in the format of 10 semi-structured interviews conducted between February 20th and March 4th, 2021. Interviews lasted between 15 minutes and one hour, with an average duration of 37 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nine out of 10 interviews were conducted online using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. All interviews included audio and/or video recordings with participants’ consent. Recordings were saved on the researcher’s password-protected laptop and smartphone. Prior to the interviews, participants received an information letter containing details about the research and a consent form to sign. These documents can be found in Appendices C and D.

The researcher created and used an interview guide with general questions about participants’ language use. The guide can be found in Appendix B. The researcher aimed to “[...]”

establish rapport and empathy to gain access to the participants' lives and stories" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 65). The guide was used as a starting point for conversation, allowing participants to elaborate on topics to varying degrees. Several prompts enabled participants to speak about the ways in which they think about, feel about, and behave regarding English and Dutch. Other prompts allowed participants to speak about particular interactions with Dutch people.

### **3.4 Analytical Procedures**

The researcher took a content-based approach to the analysis, using conversation transcripts as data sets. A content-based approach allows the researcher to analyze data sets for patterns and assign categories "[...] according to the arguments he or she wants to make by providing examples from each category in the discussion" (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009, p. 197). Audio files of the interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. The transcripts were edited manually in Google Docs and then uploaded to NVivo 12. In NVivo, the data was separated into categories through initial and second-level coding (Dörnyei, 2007). Though the researcher intentionally scanned the transcripts for references to language use, specific categories and subcategories emerged from the data itself (e.g. Hagar, 2018) with an inductive approach (Dörnyei, 2007). In the initial coding stage, interesting words and phrases were highlighted as unique codes. These codes were then grouped into various categories, constituting second-level coding. The process of coding was iterative (Dörnyei, 2007) as codes were continuously reviewed and reassigned. This reassignment allowed for crafting coherent stories in which all participants were represented.

Four categories emerged as motivating factors for learning Dutch, and four categories emerged under interactive strategies. Figure 1 shows the final assignment of codes in NVivo,

which became two main topics with their various categories and subcategories. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the conceptual maps that were made based on the codes.

## Figure 1

### *NVivo Coding Trees*

Name	Files	References
▼ Motivation to learn Dutch	10	105
● social inclusion	8	21
● personal interest	8	39
● location	6	12
▼ external pressure	10	33
● work or living requirements	10	20
● from Dutch people	6	13
▼ Interactive Strategies	10	172
▼ Dutch speaking English	10	63
● frustrating	9	42
● benevolent	10	21
▼ Dutch speaking Dutch	10	39
● unhelpful	9	23
● helpful	8	16
▼ Americans speaking English	9	22
● necessary	6	12
● easy	5	10
▼ Americans speaking Dutch	9	48
● self identifying	6	25
● habitual	9	23

Figure 1 illustrates the NVivo coding schema. *Name* refers to the names of the topics, categories, or subcategories under which the data is marked. *Files* are the amounts of participants represented under a certain Name. *References* are the amounts of initial-level codes (quotes from the transcripts) marked under each Name.

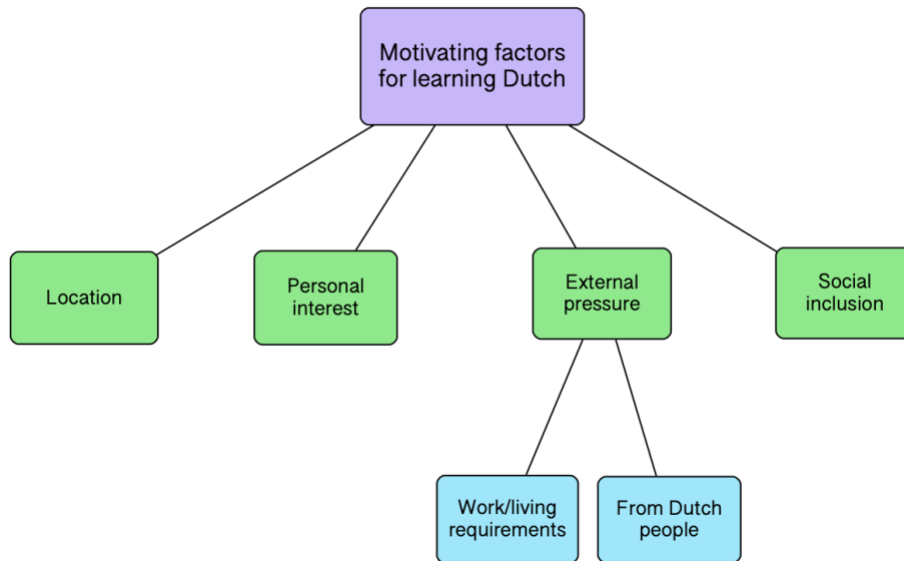
**Figure 2***Motivating Factors for Learning Dutch*

Figure 2 illustrates the factors that motivate participants to learn Dutch. The factors are divided into four categories: location, personal interest, external pressure, and social inclusion. There are also two subcategories for external pressure: work/living requirements and pressure from Dutch people.

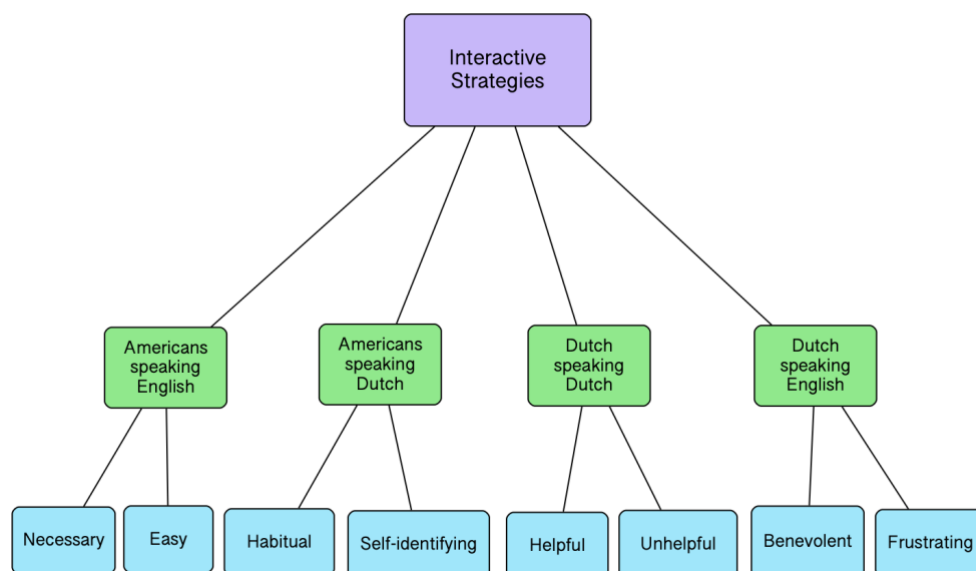
**Figure 3***Interactive Strategies*

Figure 3 illustrates the interactive strategies that Americans experience, indicated by the nationality of the speaker and the language spoken when initiating or taking control in an interaction. The four categories are: Americans speaking English, Americans speaking Dutch, Dutch speaking Dutch, and Dutch speaking English. Each category also consists of two subcategories, encompassing the evaluations of or associations with using a particular language.

#### 4. Results

The results of this study indicate that all participants engage with both English and Dutch. All 10 participants are either actively learning or proficient in Dutch. Participants who have lived in the Netherlands for longer amounts of time (7.5-28 years) identify as highly proficient or fluent. Those who have lived in the country for shorter amounts of time (6 months-



2.5 years) have varying self-proclaimed levels of proficiency. They are actively learning through self-study or formal lessons.

In spite of high motivation among all participants to learn and speak Dutch, there are also cases in which Dutch is used to a lesser extent or not at all. Americans' motivations for speaking Dutch influence how they use certain interactive strategies as well as which strategies they prefer from their Dutch interlocutors. The following sections highlight examples from participants' experiences that exemplify the categories within motivation and interactive strategies.

#### **4.1 Motivation to Learn Dutch**

Figure 2 from Chapter 3.4 illustrates the factors that motivate participants to learn Dutch, showing both the diversity and commonalities of the participants' experiences.

##### ***4.1.1 Location***

Seven of the 10 participants mention location as a reason for learning Dutch. Many explain that English is more widely spoken in larger cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. In contrast, English is spoken less in the smaller towns or cities where many participants live. One participant even names a specific province as a place where less English is spoken.

Examples 1 and 2 highlight why Participants 7 and 9 decided to learn Dutch.

##### ***Example 1***

Participant 7: So it's just, and I don't live, you know, I don't live in one of the big cities, I don't live in Amsterdam, I don't live in Rotterdam, where everybody speaks English. I live in a little farming community, you know, about 20 minutes from Zwolle and people here...they probably can, but they don't.

Participant 7 explains that he lives in a “little farming community.” Unlike in large cities such as Amsterdam or Rotterdam, English is seldom spoken in his small town. Participant 7 suggests that residents in his town “probably can” speak English, but in his experience they do not.

*Example 2*

Participant 9: Because I went from having an attitude, in the beginning of, “Well, everyone here speaks English. Why do I have to learn Dutch? I don’t want to learn Dutch.” And then I lived in Zeeland of all places, where not many people speak English. And so I was like, “Oh, crap, I really need to learn some Dutch.”

Participant 9 explains that she was not motivated to learn Dutch when she first moved to the Netherlands. Earlier in the interview, she mentioned that she had originally lived in Amsterdam. Her mindset changed after moving to the province of Zeeland, “where not many people speak English.”

**4.1.2 Personal Interest**

Eight out of 10 participants express personal interest in learning Dutch. Some participants convey a desire to learn Dutch specifically or a new language in general. Others believe that speaking Dutch is a sign of respect towards Dutch people. In addition, nine out of 10 participants have Dutch partners. Many participants who met their partners before moving to the Netherlands mention an interest in speaking their partners’ first language. In any case, this category illustrates an internal drive for SLA.

Examples 3 and 4 show how personal interest has impacted Participants 4 and 5.

*Example 3*

Participant 4: I have heard about American expats who have lived here for like 10, 15 years, and they have not learned Dutch because it's not necessary, because they can talk in English in their, in their jobs. And you know, everybody speaks really good English here, whatever. For me, it feels a little disrespectful to not try. So I do it out of, um, respect for the country, because this is where people speak Dutch and you should learn if you want to live here. Um, but then also just like personally, I think, too. Um, I just think it would be cool.

Participant 4 claims that many American expatriates do not learn Dutch because “it’s not necessary” and “everybody speaks really good English.” Unlike the Americans that she references, Participant 4 is particularly interested in learning Dutch. She finds it disrespectful if people live in the Netherlands but do not try to learn. In addition to showing respect, Participant 4 wants to learn Dutch because she thinks “it would be cool.”

*Example 4*

Participant 5: [...] I was really motivated actually to learn Dutch because I speak, um, I learned, I have a background in foreign language. So...um, and I thought it'd be nice to learn my partner's language. [...] So I wanted to learn it, so I could learn part of the culture and part of my partner. And also my, my mother-in-law doesn't speak English very well. And it was really important that I learned to communicate with her.

Participant 5 explains that linguistic interests motivated him to learn Dutch. Furthermore, he wanted to become closer with his Dutch partner and his mother-in-law, who “doesn't speak English very well.” Like Participant 4, Participant 5 has a particular linguistic interest that drives him to speak Dutch. On the other hand, while Participant 4 mentions widespread high English proficiency, Participant 5 has a personal connection to someone who does not speak English well.

### 4.1.3 External Pressure

All 10 participants note some extent of external pressure to learn Dutch. There are two subcategories of pressure. The first is pressure resulting from a particular line of work or residency requirements. The second is pressure from Dutch people, encompassing the ways that Dutch family, friends, or strangers have indicated that the participants should learn Dutch. Overall, nine participants cite work or long-term residency requirements such as the *inburgeringsexamen* (civil integration exam) as motivating factors. Six participants mention pressure from Dutch people. Though these instances often arouse negative attitudes about living situations or interactions, motivation to learn Dutch still persists.

Example 5 shows how the pressure of future job opportunities motivates Participant 3.

#### *Example 5*

Participant 3: Um, just...I guess, like, job wise, because, as, as well as they speak English in this country, like most people speak English....um, that also lessens the jobs for people that only speak English, because why would they take me over a Dutch person that can speak perfectly good English just as much as me? Um, so it's kind of hard when - when I'm not speaking Dutch, it really takes a lot away from...my job opportunities. So it's like...I work in home health, which I normally would not be able to do that unless I spoke perfect Dutch, but I got really lucky with this very small business [...]

Participant 3 explains that since there are Dutch people who “speak perfectly good English,” people who do not speak Dutch are disadvantaged in the job market. Though she did obtain a job in healthcare, Participant 3 explains that this is not normally the case for people with her level of Dutch. She feels that she “got really lucky” in finding a position with her limited proficiency.

Example 6 illustrates how Participant 10 experiences pressure from Dutch people.

*Example 6*

Participant 10: And...and I think at first it was a little bit intimidating. And it made me a little bit frustrated, like, you know, you've been, they'll say, "Well, we know two languages." And I know now that from a really young age, people learn English in school. So if I had been learning Dutch in school at age 10, I probably would know it too. So, now I just kind of say, "Well, I'm doing the best I can!"

Participant 10 notes that Dutch people sometimes point out their own knowledge of two languages to indicate that she should learn Dutch. Once she learned that Dutch people start language learning young, she became less intimidated by the pressure. She expresses her persisting motivation to learn Dutch by saying that she is doing her best.

**4.1.4 Social Inclusion**

Eight out of 10 participants cite social inclusion as a motivating factor for learning Dutch. Social inclusion encompasses a sense of belonging with Dutch partners or family, as well as a desire to make Dutch friends. Group dynamics in conversations and the ability to communicate with the greater community are especially a point of interest.

In Example 7, Participant 7 mentions how, in addition to needing to speak Dutch in a small town (Example 1), the desire for social inclusion also motivates him.

*Example 7*

Participant 7: The other motivating factor is, you know, I'm here with partner and she has four kids, and when we sit around the dinner table, they're speaking Dutch. So in order to not be excluded from conversations, you know, in order to sort of fit in socially, I think it would be a good idea to learn how to speak the language if I'm gonna live here.

Interviewer: Yeah. And do the kids speak English as well?

Participant 7: Yeah, they all, they can all, we can all communicate. They, their English is much, much better than, than my Dutch.

Participant 7 lives with his Dutch partner and her four children. He wants to learn more Dutch so that he can be included in conversations with his new family. Although everyone is proficient in English and they “can all communicate,” conversations tend to be in Dutch, which makes Participant 7 feel excluded.

Example 8 shows how Participant 6 desires to increase the depth and breadth of her interactions overall.

### *Example 8*

Participant 6: Um, what really motivates me is just wanting to be included, more. Um, I’m, I’m very aware that I would have a much more enriching experience, um, in the Netherlands if I spoke the language. Um, and even with my boyfriend’s family, I don’t care to speak to them all the time. But stuff like, for Christmas. I had an awful time because everyone was just speaking Dutch. [...] And also just shame. You know, I don’t know any other language. You know, you come here and everyone speaks English, German, French, like Spanish. And then it’s just like, “Oh, you only speak English, right?” Yeah. So that kind of motivates me. I want to be more well rounded and be able to, like, interact with other people.

Negative experiences, such as speaking with her boyfriend’s family, push Participant 6 to learn Dutch and have nicer interactions. She also feels ashamed of being monolingual in a multilingual environment. Furthermore, she associates learning another language with being “more well rounded.” She is motivated to learn Dutch in order to expand her scope of interactions.

## **4.2 Interactive Strategies**

Figure 3 from Chapter 3.4 highlights Americans’ experiences with interactive strategies. Based on the participants’ experiences, both Americans and Dutch people may employ English or Dutch in a conversation. The following sections highlight examples from each of the four categories.

### 4.2.1 Americans Speaking English

While all participants express motivation to learn Dutch, there are also instances in which they enter an interaction with Dutch people by speaking English. Based on the participants' responses, English is primarily used in two cases. The first is when it is necessary, such as at an English-speaking job. The second is when it is easier to use than Dutch, such as conversations with complicated or emotional subject matter.

Example 9 shows how English is necessary at Participant 2's job as an English teacher.

#### *Example 9*

Interviewer: And when you teach, do you instruct only in English? Or do you instruct in Dutch as well?

Participant 2: No, only in English. When I teach in a bilingual program, it's only in English. And everything, they have to ask me to go to the bathroom and English, they have to...yeah, everything is in English. If I teach in a regular stream...I try to do everything in English. [...] In a bilingual stream, I only speak English to them for everything we do, with - outside of the classroom activities and in the classroom and in their correspondence with each other. As with the other ones, I might speak a little bit more, but I try. I tried to speak as much English as possible.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Participant 2: And much more than my colleagues. ((laughing))

Participant 2 teaches English to Dutch students in bilingual and “regular stream” (primarily Dutch-language) classroom environments. When asked if she also instructs in Dutch, she responds by saying that she teaches “only in English.” She even compares her strategy for interacting with Dutch students to that of her colleagues, saying that she speaks “much more” English than they do.

In Example 10, Participant 10 talks about instances in which English is easier to use.

*Example 10*

Participant 10: But you know, we're talking about things that are...kind of a deep level, you know, like, how our families are doing, or what are, what are some issues that are going on with their kids, and her mom is not feeling well. So those aren't topics that you want to bother to struggle with, you know, really kind of elementary level of language, you really want to be able to communicate your full range of emotions, I think.

Participant 10 prefers to speak English when she discusses emotional topics with her Dutch partner's family. Speaking English in these cases allows her to express her "full range of emotions" that she cannot yet express with her "elementary level" of Dutch.

**4.2.2 Americans Speaking Dutch**

Consistent with the participants' motivation to learn Dutch, there are many situations in which they approach an interaction using Dutch. Two primary ideas regarding Americans' use of Dutch are salient in the data. First, speaking Dutch has become a habitual practice for some participants. Second, some participants use Dutch as a marker of their own identity.

In Example 11, Participant 8 talks about how normal it is for her to speak Dutch.

*Example 11*

Interviewer: [...] where and when do you come in contact with Dutch people?

Participant 8: Every day, every. Like speaking, yeah, speaking English for me right now I sometimes have to think about, think about some of the words.

Interviewer: So do you speak Dutch mostly? On a daily basis?

Participant 8: Yeah, my work is, at my work it's all in Dutch and in German. And um, I'm right with my boyfriend. I speak Dutch with him. And then, like, most of the other people I speak to here, I speak Dutch.



Participant 8 speaks Dutch every day at work and with her boyfriend. She is so accustomed to speaking Dutch that she has to “think about some of the words” in English. She also speaks German at work. Therefore, it has become a habit of Participant 8 to interact with people in environments that can be linguistically categorized not only as Dutch, but also as non-English.

Example 12 shows how Participant 9 speaks Dutch to assert her identity.

*Example 12*

Participant 9: Um...I've always gotten complimented that...when I'm, like those instances that they will hear me speak English to my children. And then I started speaking Dutch in response to them, whether it be someone, you know, the, the cashier or someone in line behind me you know, it's because they, they will start speaking English to my kids thinking, you know, we're American or British or whatever. And I say, “No, no, we're not, you know, they speak Dutch.”

Participant 9 sometimes speaks English to her bilingual children in a store, enacting a cashier or another customer to speak English. Participant 9 supposes that people speak English because she and her family seem “American or British.” Participant 9 tells people (in Dutch), “no, we're not,” and “they speak Dutch.” In this case, speaking the Dutch language is used as a marker of identity which stands in opposition to being American, even though Participant 9 is both American and Dutch-speaking.

#### ***4.2.3 Dutch Speaking Dutch***

In addition to the ways they adapt to a conversational partner, participants also discuss the strategies of their Dutch interlocutors. Participants express certain feelings towards particular strategies depending on the context. The strategy of Dutch people speaking Dutch can be categorized as helpful or unhelpful. Especially in the earlier stages of learning, participants find

it helpful when Dutch people are willing to speak with them; however, the strategy is unhelpful if the participants feel that they cannot fully contribute to a conversation.

Example 13 illustrates a case in which Participant 1 had found the strategy helpful.

*Example 13*

Participant 1: And the fact that I saw right from the beginning that I had a lot of support, that I had a lot of people around me who were speaking Dutch, they were willing to speak Dutch with me, they were willing to...um...be patient with, with, you know, my trying to speak a language that was hard for me.

In discussing what gave her confidence in speaking Dutch, Participant 1 explains that she “had a lot of support” from people who were patient and willing to speak with her. Even though learning the language was difficult overall, Participant 1 found it helpful when people would just speak Dutch with her right after she moved to the Netherlands.

In contrast, Example 14 illustrates a situation in which Participant 3 found the strategy unhelpful.

*Example 14*

Participant 3: [...] this woman was taking my COVID test, and I was like, she said something in Dutch and I said, “I’m sorry, I - my Dutch is not that good. I speak English.” And she continued to speak in Dutch [...] But she was like, pretty much said like, “Well, you - I’m gonna speak Dutch with you anyway, because you need to learn, so” and I was like okay...and I was like, alright. [...] Um, yeah, I’ve had - I’ve had a few times where people, they kind of refuse to...speak English because they think it’ll help you learn, but then I just feel a little bit...pressured.

Participant 3 explains how she once told a COVID-19 tester that her Dutch is “not that good,” so she preferred English. The Dutch woman responded that she would continue in Dutch so that

Participant 3 could learn. Participant 3 finds instances such as this unhelpful because she feels “pressured” to speak a language that she is still learning.

Besides the words themselves, some participants describe having trouble with the speed of their Dutch interlocutors’ speech. Example 15 highlights Participant 7’s struggle in group contexts.

*Example 15*

Participant 7: When I’m around groups of people, and they’re speaking at full speed, and I think, “Hey, man, I’m here too,” ((laughing)) you know, “Slow it down a little bit. I’m here too, I want to be a part of the conversation.” And, uh, but when they’re going full speed, sometimes it’s hard for me to keep up.

Participant 7 finds that Dutch people sometimes speak too fast and do not adapt their speech to slow down. He considers this non-accommodation unhelpful as it hinders him from contributing to the conversation.

**4.2.4 Dutch Speaking English**

Similar to the previous strategy, participants also have mixed feelings on the Dutch initiating English. When describing their experiences with this strategy, participants find their Dutch interlocutors’ accommodation to be either benevolent or frustrating. All 10 participants reference benevolence, and nine out of 10 reference frustration. In several cases, participants recognize the good intentions of the strategy while still feeling personally frustrated by it.

Example 16 illustrates Participant 10’s positive feelings towards the strategy.

*Example 16*

Interviewer: Okay, and what do you think about it, when people switch into English? Like, how do you feel about it?

Participant 10: Well, most of the time, I feel relieved. ((laughing)) I do know, I mean, I guess it's kind of like eating your vegetables. Like I, of course, you'd rather eat, you know, cookies and ice cream rather than your green beans. I know it would be better for me, for, for them to kind of help - speak Dutch and repeat things and go slowly.

When asked about how she feels when Dutch people switch from Dutch to English with her, Participant 10 states that she often feels “relieved.” She equates practicing Dutch to “eating your vegetables,” insinuating that although it would be good for her, she would prefer to eat “cookies and ice cream” and speak English.

In contrast, Example 17 shows Participant 8's frustration with Dutch people switching to English.

*Example 17*

Interviewer: Do you, would you like when people switched into English? Like, did you find it helpful? Or would you rather stay in Dutch?

Participant 8: Uh...rather stay in Dutch. I think that, yeah. I don't know, like, in...I would think about like, if I'm in America. If someone has an accent, I'm not just going to like, switch to some other language. Like, and, and here, I guess it's more normal to do. But it's also like...yeah, it's kind of just a sign of like, you're an outsider that you, yeah, you're not from here. So I can't speak this language with you.

When asked how she feels about Dutch people switching to English in a conversation, Participant 8 responds that she would prefer to stay in Dutch. She says that if she were in the United States, she would not change languages if her conversation partner had an accent. Besides Participant 8, five other participants also cite their Americans accents as reasons why the Dutch may switch to English with them. Participant 8 recognizes this language switch as “normal” in the Netherlands, but it makes her feel like an outsider.

Examples 18 and 19 illustrate how Participants 1 and 2 recognize benevolence while feeling personally frustrated.

*Example 18*

Interviewer: And so how would you feel when people would switch to English? Or what would you do?

Participant 1: I feel very frustrated. I knew that they were doing it out of politeness. Uh and...and...um you know, I think that in general, in the Dutch culture, it's seen as a very...um...kind gesture to meet you in your language. But I found it frustrating. I found it frustrating because I wanted to learn the language. I wanted to feel capable in the language. And each time I did it, it made me feel less capable.

Participant 1 shares that, when she was learning Dutch, she found it frustrating when Dutch people would switch into English because it made her feel “less capable” in speaking Dutch. On the other hand, she also recognizes this strategy as a “kind gesture,” presuming that Dutch people were “doing it out of politeness.”

*Example 19*

Participant 2: But if you speak to me long enough, you will...like, an accent will come up. And um, but, I've had some people say to me, “Oh, um...do you want me to speak English?” [...] After I've been speaking Dutch to them for like, 15 minutes or so, right?

[...]

Interviewer: Do you know why they - are there certain words that use, or your accent? Do you know why they...suddenly switch?

Participant 2: No, because I haven't. Like, I know it sounds show-off. But I've lived here like for more than... 25 years. Right? So I have a huge vocabulary. That's not it. It's just this automatic tendency, like, oh, you're American. Boom, I should speak English. ...even though I've been speaking to you in Dutch the whole time. ((laughing)) I think it's just an automatic reflex. With me. Oh, you're American? Oh, would you rather - like accommodating, the Dutch are very accommodating. Um, “Oh, you want me to speak Dutch, uh English? Because I will.” Well, that's great. But, you know, I'm speaking Dutch now.

Participant 2 finds it frustrating when a conversation switches to English after she has already been conversing in Dutch. She suspects that people switch to English when they detect her American accent, despite her having a “huge vocabulary.” She recognizes that “the Dutch are very accommodating,” but she dislikes the language change because she is capable of communicating in Dutch.

## **5. Discussion**

The results of this study show the complexity of communication between Americans and Dutch people. Americans’ motivation to learn Dutch and their evaluations of accommodation indicate that creating meaning in an interaction depends on their perceptions of themselves and their interlocutors, as well as their interlocutors’ perceptions of them.

### **5.1 Motivation**

In contrast to Tung’s (1998) study, where language plays a limited role in expatriates’ acculturation, language learning is an integral part of Americans’ experiences in this study. In each of the four categories of motivation, positive or negative attitudes can be recognized. Language motivation typically involves positive attitudes (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). The negative attitudes in this study are primarily associated with factors such as feeling pressured or feeling excluded rather than with the Dutch language itself. The participants’ persisting motivation despite some negative attitudes is reflective of Paiva’s (2011) understanding that motivation exists in a dynamic interactive system.

### ***5.1.1 The Four Motivating Factors***

The four categories of motivation highlight the participants' unique experiences and their similar linguistic struggles. The first category, location, suggests that English is not spoken to the same degree in all of the Netherlands. In Example 1, Participant 7 compares his small town to Amsterdam and Rotterdam, which are two of the largest Dutch cities. Since these two cities have the highest immigrant populations in the Netherlands (Entzinger, 2018), it is logical that English is prevalent there. In Example 2, Participant 9 explains that she was not motivated to learn Dutch until she moved to Zeeland. To say that Dutch is necessary in an entire province suggests that the image of high proficiency in the Netherlands may be deceiving. After moving to the Netherlands, Americans eventually realize that not every Dutch individual can speak or wants to speak English. Edwards (2014) finds that some Dutch people do not enjoy speaking English even if they are capable of doing so. Assuming that all Dutch people are equally proficient in or willing to speak English is an example of lumping (Scollon et al., 2012). An alternative explanation for Americans not experiencing English in certain locations could be that the Dutch residents do not expect non-Dutch speakers to also live there. This case would suggest that Dutch people prefer to speak Dutch if English is not necessary, which is also consistent with Edwards' (2014) overall findings.

The second category, personal interest, refers to intrinsic motivation and thoughts about respect. Americans learn Dutch because they are fascinated by the Dutch language or culture or because they find it respectful. Respect is featured in Example 3, where Participant 4 contrasts her motivation to learn Dutch with other Americans' lack of motivation. This desire to show respect is similar to Tung's (1998) finding that American expatriates find it important to conform to the host population's norms and learn more about the culture. While Participant 4 desires

acceptance from Dutch people in general, Participant 5 indicates more personal connections in Example 4. His motivation emphasizes two ideas. First, his desire to learn a new language despite being able to communicate with his partner in English shows that language choice has emotional implications. Second, the fact that Participant 5's mother-in-law speaks little English further supports the location category in that not all Dutch people speak English. Both Participants 4 and 5 show an integrative approach to SLA as they display an intrinsic desire to connect to the target culture. Paiva (2011) explains that changes in identity can trigger SLA development within the integrative approach. In this study, it seems that participants' identities even prior to learning Dutch may also influence their SLA.

The third category is external pressure. One area in which participants experience pressure to learn Dutch is work/living requirements. Example 5 suggests that Dutch proficiency is critical in healthcare. Participant 3 is surprised that she could find a healthcare job with her low Dutch proficiency. However, Example 10 shows that English is mandated at Participant 2's job as an English teacher. Therefore, the working language depends on the specific job. The pressure of work/living requirements as a motivating factor for learning Dutch arguably fits both the instrumental and integrative approaches. On the one hand, Dutch can be used as a tool to get a good job. On the other hand, to learn Dutch when English-speaking jobs also exist suggests that speaking Dutch at work is just one way in which Americans can acculturate. Participants also experience pressure from Dutch people. Example 6 illustrates a case in which Dutch people assert their knowledge of two languages to advise Participant 10 to learn Dutch. Comparing compulsory English lessons in the Netherlands (Ytsma, 2006) to foreign language learning in the United States (e.g. Baker, 2001; Gandara, 2018; Schmidt, 2008) indicates that Dutch people and monolingual Americans grow up with different exposures to languages. It may be that many



Americans do not achieve foreign language proficiency while living in the United States because they do not feel enough pressure.

The fourth category is social inclusion. Examples 7 and 8 suggest that there are instances in which Dutch people speak Dutch, even in the presence of an English speaker. Therefore, Dutch is used even though speaking English would likely lower the overall transaction costs (Pym, 2004), assuming the Dutch people also speak English. Supporting Tung's (1998) finding that American expatriates value social bonds with host populations, participants desire to speak Dutch in order to create meaningful connections. As all the participants in this study have a Dutch partner or Dutch family, the desire for social ties is likely even greater among them than in Tung's (1998) study. It is not clear, however, whether the desire for social inclusion is a sign of adopting a Dutch identity. While the personal interest category explicitly emphasizes an affinity towards the target culture, social inclusion may just be an example of Americans wanting to choose how much input they have in a conversation and not be restricted by language.

### ***5.1.2 Internal Versus External Factors***

The four motivating factors can be characterized as internal or external factors. Personal interest and social inclusion are internal in that they illustrate participants' desires to become part of Dutch society. Location and external pressure, in contrast, are outside forces that push Americans to learn Dutch. One could place internal factors under the integrative approach to motivation because participants show an innate desire to acculturate. External factors may illustrate the instrumental approach for utilitarian reasons such as getting a job or receiving a permit. Though the integrative and instrumental orientations dominate in motivation research (e.g. Kormos et al., 2011; Masgoret & Gardner, 2008; Paiva, 2011; Schumann, 1986), the results

of this study challenge these orientations because all participants experience both internal and external factors. Furthermore, social inclusion and pressure from Dutch people can arguably fit either the internal or external label. The desire to be included among Dutch people is an input for language motivation. At the same time, Americans might associate learning Dutch with acquiring social capital, which is more utilitarian than having an innate desire to create relationships. Similarly, external pressure from Dutch people is an output from social interactions, but Americans may respond to such pressure in various ways, such as reaffirming an innate desire to learn Dutch or connect with Dutch people. Since all participants share interconnected reasons for learning Dutch, it would not be accurate to only assign participants to either the integrative or instrumental approach. Looking at how internal and external factors work together illustrates how motivation to learn serves as both an input into and output from social action (Garrett, 2010).

## **5.2 Accommodation**

The four categories of interactive strategies show that Americans' feelings of accommodation are determined by the interaction at hand, which complicates the conceptions of cultural boundaries within CAT (e.g. Giles & Ogay, 2007; Williams, 1999) and politeness strategies (e.g. Scollon et al., 2012). The context-dependence of accommodation supports the idea that intercultural communication is influenced by interpersonal dynamics, motives, and the socio-historical context of an interaction (Giles & Ogay, 2007).

### ***5.2.1 The Four Interactive Strategies***

The first interactive strategy pertains to Americans speaking English. English may be necessary in some cases, such as at certain jobs. Example 9 shows how Participant 2 uses

English not as a way to show solidarity or to create distance, but because it is expected in her role as a teacher. She is dissatisfied not with her student interlocutors, but with her Dutch colleagues, who do not speak English as much as the role necessitates. Though Participant 2 does not insinuate asymmetries in English proficiency between herself and her colleagues, she does suggest that there is a mismatch between the expectations and reality of the job. In some cases, participants find it simply easier to use English. Example 10 shows how, especially in the early stages of SLA, it is easier for participants to express themselves in English. When subject matter is complex and personal, Americans may prefer to speak their L1, even if it means losing an opportunity to acculturate. Participant 2 speaks her own language, which is an attribute of the independence strategy (Scollon et al., 2012). In this case, however, it is more accurate to consider Participant 2's strategy involvement since she shows strong interests in her interlocutor's affairs (Scollon et al., 2012), and since her interlocutor also speaks English. Example 10 suggests that in multilingual environments, the linguistic strategies within involvement and independence may shift.

The second interactive strategy refers to Americans speaking Dutch, which is fitting given all participants' motivation to learn Dutch. For some participants, speaking Dutch is habitual. Example 11 illustrates Participant 8's daily use of Dutch at work and with her boyfriend. Participant 8 even expresses some difficulty switching from Dutch to English for the interview. In her case, speaking Dutch with Dutch people would likely not be considered convergence in CAT terms, because there appears to be a low communicative distance between her and Dutch interlocutors. Another implication of Americans speaking Dutch is that the language may become a marker of their identity. In Example 12, Participant 9 assures her Dutch interlocutors that she and her children speak Dutch. She chooses to speak Dutch even when

English is readily available, and she asserts her identity as a Dutch-speaker rather than as an American. The Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1986) and Paiva's (2011) understanding of identity shift argue that SLA success is dependent upon learners adopting a new cultural identity. It is evident that Participant 9 has experienced an identity shift since she refuses to speak her L1 with a Dutch interlocutor. When considering the motivating factors for learning Dutch, one could also argue that Participant 9 desires social inclusion among Dutch people. This suggests that Americans' motivation to learn Dutch influences their interactions to the point of abandoning expediency.

The third and fourth strategies concern Dutch people's interactive strategies, as described by the Americans. Participants express contradictory feelings towards either strategy. The third strategy refers to the Dutch speaking Dutch, which Americans find to be either helpful or unhelpful. Americans find this strategy helpful when Dutch people allow them to practice their L2. In Example 13, Participant 1 explains how she had felt supported when Dutch people were "willing" to speak English with her. She felt accommodated by her interlocutors because they allowed her to learn. Her feeling of gratitude supports the validity of the various claims that English speakers do not always have opportunities to practice speaking Dutch (McArthur, 1992; Weltens & De Bot, 1995). On the other hand, participants find it unhelpful when they struggle with the Dutch language but their interlocutors do not adapt their speech. In Example 14, Participant 3 recalls being denied by her interlocutor after requesting to speak English. In Example 15, Participant 7 describes how he finds it unhelpful when his Dutch interlocutors do not slow down their speech. In these cases, the participants are dissatisfied because they feel under-accommodated. Though external pressure is one of the motivating factors for learning Dutch, Examples 14 and 15 show that participants may sometimes experience too much pressure

and feel discouraged. The contrast between the helpfulness in Example 13 and the unhelpfulness in Examples 14 and 15 illustrate why it is difficult to assign CAT labels to Americans' interactions with Dutch people. Speaking Dutch could be considered convergence, divergence, or maintenance depending on how Americans feel about their own competence. Speech partners may have asymmetrical awareness of what the other wants, which can lead to problematic talk. Williams (1999) explores this idea but does not detail how shifting cultural identities may influence linguistic dilemmas. When considering the use of Dutch as an identity marker, such as in Example 12, it is evident that individuals require varying amounts of accommodation, depending on their communicative goals.

The fourth strategy is Dutch people speaking English. In some cases, Americans recognize this strategy as benevolent. Example 16 shows how Participant 10, who has lived in the Netherlands for 1.5 years, feels relieved when someone sees her struggling and switches to English. On the other hand, Participants 1, 2, and 8 have lived in the country much longer and share different thoughts. In Example 18, Participant 1 recognizes Dutch people switching to English as polite, but she felt frustrated when Dutch people switched to English early in her SLA. Similarly, in Example 19, Participant 2 describes Dutch people as "accommodating" but does not appreciate when they change languages because of her accent. Given Zuengler's (1991) understanding of native-nonnative interactions, the Americans may feel that their Dutch interlocutors are judging their Dutch competence, rating it low, and deciding to accommodate. In Example 18, which illustrates frustration only, Participant 8 also references her American accent. While Participants 1 and 2 mainly discuss how the strategy of switching to English makes them feel less competent, Participant 8 explicitly states that the strategy makes her feel like an outsider. Furthermore, she says that she would not switch languages because of someone's

accent if she were in the United States. Participant 8 draws upon her cultural toolkit (Scollon et al., 2012) to make claims about how she expects people to communicate. With her cultural background, it is uncommon to switch languages in a conversation, but she supposes this is “normal” in the Netherlands. It is possible that Participant 8 has never experienced switching languages in a conversation in the United States because the ideology of monolingualism as natural (Baker, 2001; Schmidt, 2008) influences communication. Example 17, along with Example 19, also suggest that Americans feel dissatisfied when the language of conversation changes because their accents mark them as non-Dutch. Participant 2’s recognition that Dutch people are accommodating suggests that Dutch interlocutors may intend to show involvement (Scollon et al., 2012) by switching to English. The Americans, on the other hand, do not feel a sense of solidarity, but rather over-accommodation. As previous examples have illustrated, the Americans in this study experience a shift in identity the more they speak Dutch, consistent with the Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1986). When Dutch people speak English to them, Americans may feel not only that their competence is questioned, but that their new identity is compromised.

### ***5.2.2 Evaluating Accommodation***

While intentions are relatively clear for the first two strategies, Americans must interpret their Dutch interlocutors’ intentions for the third and fourth strategies. Americans have contradictory feelings towards each of the two strategies that the Dutch use. These conflicting feelings can be attributed to the constant negotiation of assumptions (Scollon et al., 2012; Williams, 1999; Zuengler, 1991) that occurs in interactions. At any one time, speakers in an interaction have different communicative goals, which affect evaluations of the interaction (Soukup, 2012). Interactions that Americans find most satisfying can be characterized as having

an appropriate amount of accommodation, or even a lack thereof. This happens when an American's request to speak English is fulfilled or when the Americans are fluent in Dutch and converse fully Dutch. On the other hand, the most unsatisfying interactions have over- or under-accommodation. This happens when Dutch people speak English and their intent is unclear, or when Dutch people maintain Dutch but Americans struggle to speak the language. Evaluations of interactive strategies are context-dependent because both English and Dutch may be rated as either satisfying or unsatisfying.

Furthermore, Americans' evaluations of benevolence and frustration when Dutch people switch to English have implications for the status of English in the Netherlands. When Americans mention benevolence, they assume positions as guests who are being helped by their Dutch hosts. This idea implies that English is not part of Dutch culture. Despite the high proficiency of English in the Netherlands, Americans might think that English does not "belong" to the Dutch in the same way it "belongs" to them. A sense of language ownership could be an effect of the monolingual English dominance in the United States (Schmidt, 2008), further illustrating that English is a *lingua culturae* for monolingual Americans (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Furthermore, the fourth strategy also suggests that acculturation is contingent on increasing Dutch use and decreasing English use. In this case, bilingualism in the Netherlands (Van Oostendorp, 2012) would imply a deficiency in English compared to the "ideal" monolingual English-speaking United States. Overall, Americans' feelings that Dutch people switching to English can be benevolent or frustrating highlights the paradox of freedom and dependency in SLA (Paiva, 2011), as well as the paradoxical nature of face with involvement and independence (Scollon et al., 2012).

### 5.3 Overall Linguistic Experiences

The linguistic experiences of Americans when interacting with Dutch people can be characterized by ongoing negotiation with their Dutch interlocutors. The frequency and the extent to which Americans engage with either language depend on the factors that motivate them to learn Dutch, as well as the communicative strategies that emerge in an interaction. English is primarily used when it is mandatory at work, when Americans find it easier to use to express emotions, or when there is a perceived struggle with the Dutch language. Dutch is used when English is not readily available, when parties refuse to speak English, or when Americans desire to acculturate. The varied, often interconnected reasons to speak Dutch illustrate the circumstances in which Americans either cannot use their L1 or choose not to use it.

While Americans learning Dutch may reduce complexity, it can also increase complexity by widening the range of linguistic repertoires from which to choose. This aligns with Pym's (2004) argument that reducing transaction costs does not necessarily mean reducing complexity. When Americans in the Netherlands learn Dutch or interact with Dutch people, they engage with people equipped with different cultural toolkits (Scollon et al., 2012) and expand upon their own toolkits. If culture is "[...] a way of dividing people up into groups according to some feature of these people which helps us to understand something about them and how they are different from or similar to other people" (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 3), then there are endless possibilities in dividing up groups of people. Therefore, depending on the language used and the particular goals of an interaction, communication between Americans and Dutch people arguably fluctuates between inter- and intra-cultural. Americans' linguistic experiences in the Netherlands can be summarized by constant negotiations of communicative needs and desires, as well as negotiations of self-imposed identities and identities perceived by others. Consistent with the



Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1986), there seems to be a positive relationship between acquiring Dutch proficiency and becoming part of Dutch society. Though several participants are not highly proficient in Dutch, their motivations and personal desires indicate that they wish to acculturate and that they are on the path to doing so.

## 6. Conclusion

The main research question was *What are the linguistic experiences of Americans when interacting with Dutch people?* The experiences of the Americans in this study can be summarized by ongoing negotiations with their Dutch interlocutors about which language brings the most satisfaction and success to a conversation. The answers to the two sub-questions—*What factors motivate Americans to learn Dutch?* and *To what extent do Americans feel accommodated by the interactive strategies of their Dutch interlocutors?*—show that the Americans in this study are highly motivated to learn Dutch, and their motivation influences how they feel about interactions in either English or Dutch. The interconnected factors that drive Americans to learn Dutch explain why Americans evaluate some interactions as satisfying and others as unsatisfying. Feelings of accommodation depend on the Americans' communicative goals, their Dutch proficiency, and their interlocutors' judgments of their Dutch proficiency. The results suggest that Americans wish to assert their individual identities and linguistic needs, but with a consistent desire to be competent in Dutch. Despite the global influence of English (Jenkins, 2011) and high proficiency of English in the Netherlands (Education First, 2020; Van Oostendorp, 2012), L1 English speakers may still choose to learn Dutch.

The Americans in this study are particularly oriented towards the Dutch language and/or culture. They exhibit a movement away from being monolingual Americans. There is also an aversion to being *perceived* as a monolingual American. The results of this study indicate a

relationship between learning the Dutch language and acculturating to Dutch society, in line with the Acculturation Model (Schumann, 1986). Even for participants who are not yet fluent in Dutch, there are intentions to become closer to the target culture. When Americans do achieve Dutch proficiency and then sense that their competence is judged, they may feel that they are stripped of their new identity.

As indicated in existing literature and discourse, this study also shows a contradictory narrative regarding English use. Participants say that everyone *and* not everyone speaks English in the Netherlands. This narrative could be a result of switching between “everyone” and “not everyone” depending on which story the participants are trying to tell. It may seem that everyone speaks English when Americans want to speak Dutch but are responded to in English. On the other hand, if an American lives in a small town and does not yet speak Dutch, it becomes clear that not everyone speaks English. Regardless of the story being told, it is evident that the Americans in this study engage with both English and Dutch.

This study shows that communication is complex, even if two speakers know the same languages. Reducing transaction costs does not always mean reducing complexity (Pym, 2004). People develop language preferences, keeping complexity high by increasing the linguistic repertoires from which to choose. The future of intercultural communication relies not only on people adding languages to their linguistic repertoires, but also on deciding which communication strategies are most appropriate. For Americans in the Netherlands, confusion about language use in particular contexts does not stop after they decide to learn Dutch; however, it is evident that learning Dutch is beneficial if Americans seek to make the Netherlands their new home.

## 6.1 Limitations And Further Research

The aim of this study was to fill in a gap regarding L1 speakers of English in the Netherlands. At the same time, this study may serve as a catalyst for future studies of Americans or English speakers abroad. While the participants in this study provided rich data, the research also has limitations. Studies using qualitative methods are subject to researcher bias in interpreting the results (Dörnyei, 2007), especially when ideas of culture are salient. The researcher in this study aimed to reduce bias as much as possible, but future research could potentially be carried out by cross-referencing results with other researchers. A larger pool of participants could potentially include Americans who are not motivated to learn Dutch, have a short-term work contract, or grew up bi- or multilingual. A larger study could also include a questionnaire to investigate the statistical significance of participants' answers and see if other linguistic phenomena are relevant. A questionnaire could also ask participants for various demographic data to make connections between identities under the umbrella of being American, such as age, gender, or race. Furthermore, future studies could include Dutch nationals as participants. Including Dutch participants could expand upon, for example, research regarding motives behind certain interactive strategies. Another possibility is a case study observing interactions between Americans and Dutch people. Such a case study could then be analyzed using conversation analysis, which would provide first-hand qualitative data rather than story-telling data.

Beyond Dutch language learning motivation and interactive strategies, future research could further investigate the language ideologies in Americans' cultural toolkits (Scollon et al., 2012). Research could examine the extent to which the English-Only ideology plays a role in the

lives of Americans that move abroad. Such a study could expand research into the politics of language and investigate language as a resource (Baker, 2001) in an English-dominated world.

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**Appendix A***Participant Information*

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Time lived in the Netherlands (in years)
1	Female	46	23
2	Female	49	28
3	Female	25	1
4	Female	28	0.5
5	Male	55	20
6	Female	27	2.5
7	Male	48	1
8	Female	29	7.5
9	Female	39	14.5
10	Female	47	1.5

## Appendix B

### *Interview Topic Guide*

#### **1. Introductory questions**

- a. Name, age, gender, occupation, etc.
- b. Where they grew up

#### **2. Living in the Netherlands**

- a. Where do they currently live?
- b. Why did they move to the Netherlands?
- c. How long have they lived here/how long do they plan to stay?

#### **3. Interacting with Dutch people**

- a. Where/when do they come in contact with Dutch people?
- b. Can they think of particularly successful/unsuccessful interactions? Why were they successful/unsuccessful?

#### **4. Language use**

- a. Speaking Dutch
  - i. Why/how did they learn/not learn?
  - ii. What motivates them/would motivate them?
  - iii. Has anyone ever made comments on their Dutch/English?
  - iv. How important is it to speak Dutch?
- b. In which contexts do they use Dutch and/or English?
  - i. Does the language ever switch during a conversation? How do they feel about it?
  - ii. Confusion on which language to use?

#### **5. Comparing English and Dutch**

- a. Which language do they prefer speaking?
- b. What are the advantages to speaking Dutch/English? Any disadvantages?
- c. Has their English changed at all since living in the Netherlands?

#### **6. Reflection**

- a. Has their identity changed at all?
- b. How prepared were they for life in the Netherlands?
- c. Advice and/or questions on language in the Netherlands?
  - i. For Dutch people? For Americans?

#### **7. Closing statements**

- a. Anything else they'd like to add?

## Appendix C

### *Interview Transcripts*

If you would like to read the full (anonymous) interview transcripts or codes, please contact the researcher at [m.a.steele@students.uu.nl](mailto:m.a.steele@students.uu.nl).