The Art of Acting in Accents

An Evaluation of the Effect of L2-Accented English of Dutch Actors on Their Success in the English-Speaking Film World

by

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Abstract

In the last few decades an increasing number of Dutch actors were featured in English-language films. This phenomenon appears to go hand in hand with an increase in how native-like these actors sound speaking English. This study investigates whether the level of success at producing a native-like English accent by the Dutch actors influences their success in the English-language American film world. Literary research suggests that natives have negative attitudes towards foreign-accented English. The correlation between the success in the English-language film world and the attainment of a native-like English has been calculated for seven Dutch actors with varying levels of success in the English-language film world and varying degrees of attainment of an English target accent. To do so a survey was sent to 49 American respondents, who were requested to evaluate the accents of nine speakers. Seven of these were the Dutch actors and two were native speakers of a non-standard variety, added as a control group. The survey contained audio clips of each actor and a question about if he sounded native and if not, the respondent had to indicate on a 8-point-Likert scale how obvious and how annoying that was to him. Two hierarchies were made of the results and a comparison between the two showed a slight similarity in the order of which actors were the most successful in the English-language film world and in producing a native-like accent, with clusters at the top, middle and bottom of both hierarchies, pointing out that accent might influence success.

Contents

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades a few Dutch actors[1] have become even more popular in the Dutch media than they already were. For example, Michiel Huisman and Carice van Houten star in the major hit series *Game of Thrones*; Famke Janssen and Rutger Hauer have been acting in several successful English language films for many years. Not only Dutch actors, but actors from other European countries, too, are becoming more frequently cast in American or English films. This increase appears to go hand in hand with the increasing role of English on the European continent. Perhaps the English of actors is becoming so good that it no longer disqualifies actors who have another mother tongue from English-spoken roles, or perhaps film audiences have become less judgemental towards accented English, or perhaps the Anglophone world does not notice them so much anymore as a consequence of globalisation.

In films and series the scripts are already written before the actors are cast, and therefore the use of English concerning the grammar and choice of words of actors is not dependent on the actors' level of English. The actors' accents, however, are harder to alter from the director's chair. The question that will be central to this thesis is: does the success of producing a native-like English accent by Dutch actors affect their level of success in the English-language film world?

1.1 Definition of success of films

There are two ways of defining success in film studies, which are both financial. One is to look at a film's revenue; the other is to look at a film's return on investment (ROI). Many of the studies that look at the success of films are mainly interested in what affects this financial success. A major point of criticism on those studies is that arguably success is more than

[1] In this study, both actors and actresses in general shall be referred to as 'actor(s)' and 'he' and 'him', in order to keep the text conveniently arranged. However, if a specific actress is discussed individually, she will be referred to with 'actress', 'she' and 'her'.

financial success and that other factors should be taken into account, like major film prizes the films have won or have been nominated for, positive criticism of leading papers and magazines and ratings on online forums by people who had seen the films.

Brewer et al. (2009) look at what influences the success of films in the American film industry. The factors it takes into account are: "production budget; peak number of screens that the film was shown on in theaters; Consumer price index for movie tickets; personal income; season and year of the release in theaters; a measure of pre-existing audience; aggregate critic rating; MPAA rating; genre; word-of-mouth recommendation; the presence of popular stars and the award nominations" (p. 589).

Brewer et al. (2009) also discuss a number of other studies of the factors that influence financial success, some of which research the influence of actors. Bagella and Bachetti (1999) look at the influence of famous actors and directors on a film's box office success. This study found that the appearance of famous actors and directors enhanced the financial success of the films. Ravid (1999) found that the presence of film stars in a film, like any other large investment, positively influences a film's profits. Simonoff and Sparrow (2000) found that skilled actors have a positive influence on the success of a film. Lastly, Deuchert et al. (2005) found that if actors of the film are nominated for Oscars, the revenue will slightly rise, whereas winning Oscars does not really affect the revenue any more. In conclusion, there are many studies on how the presence of stars in films influences the financial success, and these studies vary with their outcomes.

However, (to the knowledge of the present author) no study exists which as one of its main topics treats the success of actors individually. Therefore, this study has no example to follow suit regarding the definition of an actor's success. However, a new method can be invented that elaborates on the existing methods to define a film's success in film literature. Since the academic literature on film defines success by financial measures, the most viable

way to measure an actor's success is to look at the financial success of the films in which he has played. Since a film's revenue is more likely to be online than its profit, this study will look at the revenues of the English language films the actors have played in.[2] Besides the previously mentioned demerits of only taking a film's financial success into account to define the film's success on the whole, this method has several other weak points. Much will depend on whether or not a film's revenues are available online, since not all revenues are.

Additionally, actors are often not only famous for their roles in films, but also for roles in television series or roles in other forms of entertainment. Besides that, there will be no distinction between lead and support roles, which may give a distorted image of the success of each individual actor.

To add to that, a steep economic growth had occurred in the film industry the past few decades; a film that was very successful in 1970 might have a relatively low revenue compared to recent films, even if there were a correction for inflation. Therefore and because there is no correction for inflation, an old successful film may not really count in this study's results of success, whereas at the time the film was released, it might have been very successful.

Despite all these disadvantages, this study attempts to create an image of the individual success of the seven actors. After all the criticism expressed above, it appears self-evident that these definitions should not be seen as academically reliable in any way. The resulting hierarchy of success will only give a possible image of the success of the actors.

1.2 Accented English in films

In America there were a number of famous foreign actors before the sound-film arrived. However, after its arrival, many film stars went back to their home country because no

[2] Since this study is focussed on the American audience, the revenue generated in America is the one that has been used for every film throughout this study.

director wanted actors with strong foreign accents, unless they were to use it for amusing effects (Horak, 2005, p. 257).

Lippi-Green's (1997) research into stereotyping in Disney films discusses the use of foreign actors in films in general (p. 108). She says about their L2-accents: "This accent may restrict the roles they can play, or they may have roles written or rewritten to suit the immutable nature of their accents" (p. 108). In her study she assumes that foreign actors have accents that are noticeable to Americans.

These studies then leave the following question open: if foreign actors are successful in producing a native-like accent (if such actors indeed exist), will they therefore be more likely to be cast for more roles in (successful) English-spoken films than foreign actors who do have noticeable L2-accents?

1.3 Studies concerning attitudes towards accented English

Lippi-Green (1997) uses the notion of foreign accents in films mainly to explain that many people find it acceptable to discriminate against others on based on their accents. Her research into language ideology in Disney films indicates that foreign-accented English is usually used to portray certain stereotypes and in many cases (40.7 percent of the foreign-accented characters), these characters have negative motivations and actions (1997, p. 119). This image is enforced by the findings mentioned in the paragraph above, which show that after the arrival of the talkie, foreign actors' accents were only used for amusing effects or to highlight the difference between compatriots and foreigners.

A large variety of studies on native attitudes towards foreign accents have already found that many native speakers regard foreign-accented English negatively. Eisenstein (1983) has investigated the attitudes of native speakers to non-native speakers as well and found that "non-native aspects of phonology, syntax, lexicon and intonation have each been

shown to evoke negative reactions. Responses reportedly stem from intelligibility, negative affect, or inferences about the speakers' membership in particular social or ethnic groups" (p. 176).

Munro and Derwing (1995), in their research on native attitudes towards the speech of Mandarin speakers who have English as an L2, find that though the comprehensibility or intelligibility of non-native speakers is not in every case lessened, the attitudes of native speakers towards L2-speakers will be more negative when native speakers judge their accent as more obviously identifiable.

In her study on social psychological mechanisms between native and non-native speakers, Ryan (1983) indicates that native speakers tend to evaluate the accented English of non-native speakers negatively because a stereotypical image is evoked by the accent. These images are often regarded negatively because the listeners cannot associate with them (p. 159). She also states that native speakers regard non-native speakers negatively because they are hard to understand (p. 159). Ryan ends on a slightly more positive note, when she explains that if a speaker has a foreign accent, native speakers may link this to general language competence and intelligence, whereas at the same time, a speaker might be forgiven for making language mistakes because of their lack of knowledge of the language and culture (p. 159).

1.4 American attitudes

Since this study looks at the attitudes of Americans, the previous studies into American attitudes are of importance. In his study on native attitudes towards Dutch-accented English, Van den Doel (2006) made a distinction between American attitudes and the attitudes of speakers of Received Pronunciation (and earlier in the study other varieties of English too). He found that although North Americans perceive fewer errors, they judge perceived L2-

errors more severely than other native speakers of English who, for example, were born in England or Australia (2006, p. 336).

Bresnahan et al. (2002) looked into the attitudes of American students towards L2-accents. The study reveals that American students prefer an American accent to an intelligible L2-accent, and prefer those two over less intelligible L2-accents. Given a social theory quoted in the study, it seems natural that comparison with one's own in-group can lead to negative attitudes towards out-groups (p. 172). This phenomenon might explain why native speakers judge non-native speakers so severely. It might predict that Americans prefer American accents not only to L2-accents but also to other varieties of English.

1.5 Attitudes in professional situations

Some studies state that native speakers' irritation towards L2-accents increases in more demanding professional situations. In her conclusion of a study into the relevance of native English speech when determining how English should be pronounced, Scheuer (2005) states: "speakers with irritating (which reads as 'strongly foreign-accented') features of L2 performance generally meet with contemptuous reaction, at least on [sic] professional level" (2005, p. 125). She found this in a study that analyses academic norms on L2-speech, and states the same reactions occur in non-academic situations, yet she has no evidence for that.

In his study on the attitudes of native speakers towards Dutch-accented English, Van den Doel (2006) concludes the following on the judgement of native speakers of English on foreign-accented speech: "the social context in which native speakers encounter a foreign accent plays an important part in their evaluation of the accent concerned. In particular, when non-native speakers assume 'more demanding social roles', which presuppose a large degree of 'public accountability', the extent of their foreign accent is likely to be scrutinised more closely by natives" (Van den Doel, 2006, p. 5, based on Bresnahan *et al.*, 2002, p. 173, which

again was based on Cote & Clement, 1994). Arguably, the social role of an actor in society is quite demanding, since films are an important part of Western culture. Actors are burdened with demanding social roles when they act out a story and are a main focus in a film. In addition, besides playing a main part in the industry, due to their fame they also play a significant role outside the industry. Many actors have a large fan base, are interviewed frequently and are looked upon as idols. This puts them in an exemplary role in society, which can be seen as quite demanding socially.

1.6 Research question

Many studies show that native attitudes towards L2-accents are quite negative in general. Since the social roles of actors or celebrities in society can be seen as quite demanding, the following question arises: Does the success of producing a native-like English accent of Dutch actors affect their level of success in the English-language film world?

In order to answer this study's research question, it was divided into two sub-questions:

1. How successful are the actors in the film world?
2. How successful are the actors in achieving a native-like accent according to Americans with English as their L1?

A third question was added, not necessarily to answer the main research question, but more to give more insight into the overall study:

3. How obvious and annoying were the accents that were judged to be non-native to the Americans?

The hypothesis of this research is that the actors with the highest ranking on the scale of success will also have the highest ranking on the scale of achieved accent, which would indicate that accents may in a way influence the possibility to achieve a more successful

position in the film world. The answer to the third question would reinforce this by providing evidence that the actors with the L2-accents that scored highest on obviousness and annoyance would be less successful than actors with hardly noticeable accents that were not annoying.

1.7 Relevance

The relevance of this study into the L2-accents of Dutch actors resides in its testing of existing theories on native speakers' language attitudes. For instance, if the results of this study find that a strong L2-accent has a negative effect on the success of an actor, most of the previously mentioned studies on native speakers' attitudes will be confirmed once again. On the other hand, if the results suggest that foreign accents do not have a negative influence on success at all, the studies that indicated that natives regard foreign accents negatively may have to be reconstructed to test if this is still the case. It could also be the case that native speakers do not detect all of the actors' accents at all. If this were to happen and the actors whose accents were not detected are more successful than actors whose accents are noticed, this would show that successful mastery of a native-like accent can bring about success in the film world. In addition, the study may shed light on which features are most important when native speakers listen to non-native speakers. This then could be used for teaching material for learners of English as an L2 or FL.

2. Research method

2.1 Materials

Seven different Dutch actors were chosen on the basis of their varying levels of success in the film world and their varying degrees of attainment of an English target accent. Three of the actors were male (Rutger Hauer, Michiel Huisman and Jeroen Krabbé,) and the other four

were female (Carice van Houten, Famke Janssen, Thekla Reuten and Lotte Verbeek). Of these actors, audio clips were used containing interview material in which they speak for about 15 to 20 seconds. The audio clips of each actor were taken from interviews available on Youtube (2005), except for one: the sound file of Jeroen Krabbé (speaker 8) was taken from a scripted scene from the James Bond film *The Living Daylights* (Broccoli, 1987). All clips were downloaded with the programme YouTube Download (2005) and edited with the programme iMovie, on a MacBook Pro. The resulting sound quality of the clips was 48 kHZ, 25 Bps. The survey was made with the online survey programme Typeform (Okuniev & Muñoz, 2012).

There were 77 people in total who responded to the survey. The respondents' only criterion for inclusion was that they were native speakers of American English, which they self-reported at the start of the survey. The results of the others that responded to the survey (15 with English as their L1, but with a different accent than American English and 13 with a different L1 than English) were discarded, firstly because the main focus of this study is on the American audience and secondly because these groups were not large enough to provide reliable results. There were no further criteria in order to keep the sample as representative as possible for the American film audience. The remaining 49 respondents were Americans with English as their native language, of which 21 were male and 28 were female. Of these American respondents, 16 respondents were in the age category 0-25, 27 in the age category 26-55 and 5 in the age category 56 and over.

2.2 Procedure

The study was carried out as follows. To answer the first sub-question, the English-spoken films the actors featured in were first listed. Despite the criticisms, this study only took into account the financial successes of the films each actor acted in for the definition of an actor's

success. For each English-spoken film revenues were traced on the Internet. However, not all revenues could be found. Further details are reported in the results section. The two websites that provided all the available information on the revenues were *IMDb* (1990) and *The-Numbers* (1997). For each actor the total revenue was calculated for all English language films he was featured in, as well as the average revenue per film.

The second sub-question was examined by first selecting two short video clips of about 15 to 20 seconds in which each actor speaks English (e.g. an interview). To make a decision on which clip to use, help was provided by Dr. Allison Kirk, a Canadian linguist who teaches General American pronunciation at the University of Utrecht. The clips were presented to Dr. Kirk, who then decided which had the most non-native (accent) features in it. The clip of her choice was used in the experiment.

Subsequently, these clips were embedded in an online survey that tested native American English speakers' opinions on the accents of the actors. The survey was distributed via Facebook and personal email. It can be found in full in Appendix B. The survey consisted of 3 introductory questions which were followed by 9 sets of questions. The first introductory question was: 'What is your native language?', which they could answer with 'American English', 'other English' or 'not English'. The second introductory question was: 'What is your gender?', which they could answer with 'male', 'female' or 'other'. The third introductory question was: 'What is your age group?', which they could answer by clicking on one of the following groups: 'under 18', '18-25', '26-35', '36-45', '46-55', '56-65' and 'over 66'. For each multiple-choice question respondents could choose one answer. The sets of questions after that were presented in a fixed order and each consisted of an audio file and the question: 'Do you think this is a native speaker?', which they could answer with 'yes' or 'no'. If the respondent answered that the speaker was native, the next set of questions appeared. If the respondents answered that the speaker was not native, the following questions

appeared in this order: 'Why did you think this was not a native speaker?', 'How obvious was it to you that this was not a native speaker?' and 'How annoying were the features that were not native-like to you?'. The first of these questions was a multiple choice question with the following possible answers: 'his/her intonation pattern was not native-like'; 'the way he/she pronounced some words was not native-like'; 'the words he/she used were not native-like'; 'his/her grammar was not native-like'; 'other' (in which they could submit their own answer). With the last two questions, the respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 7, 0 being not obvious/annoying at all and 7 being very obvious/annoying.

2.3 Analysis of results

Despite the criticisms, actors' successes were fully linked to the successes of the films they were featured in. The actor with the highest overall revenue was given the index number 100 and then the index numbers for all other actors were calculated. Then a second index number for average revenue was calculated for each actor. These index numbers for all actors were added and provided the base for a hierarchy of success.

The survey results were analysed and each actor was put on a scale from which it is easy to read how successful they are at producing a native-like accent of English. What followed was a comparison between the scale of success in the film industry and the scale of success in the achievement of target accents.

3. Results

3.1 Sub-question 1

Table 1 presents the overall and the average revenues per actor. The level of the overall revenues determined the order of the table, from the actor with the highest overall revenues to the one with the lowest.

The first speaker in the survey was Rutger Hauer, who has acted in 94 English spoken films or series since his first in 1975. Of these, the revenues were available online for 36 films. They add up to a total revenue of $444,821,988[3], which is an average of approximately $12,356,166 per film. This is the lowest average of all actors involved in this study.

The third speaker in the survey was Carice van Houten. She has acted in nine English spoken films or series since her first in 2008. Of these titles, the revenues of five were available. The overall revenue of these films is $100,218,167, which leads to an average of $20,043,633 per film.

The fourth speaker in the survey was Michiel Huisman, who has acted in 12 Anglophone films or series, most of which were series. He landed his first English spoken role in 2006. The revenues of four films were publicly available, which together added up to $293,699,126. The average revenue per film was $73,424,782, which is the highest average revenue in this study.

The sixth speaker in the survey was Famke Janssen. She has acted in 56 English spoken films or series, of which the first one was in 1992. The revenues of 32 of these films were available online, and they totalled to a revenue of $1,484,177,327, which is the highest overall revenue of all actors involved in this study. The average revenue per film for Famke Janssen is $46,380,541.

[3] The dollar-signs in this study always represent the USD.

The seventh speaker was Thekla Reuten, who has featured in nine English language films or series of which only two had online-available revenues. Her first English spoken role was in 2003. These revenues added to $43,363,506, which is the lowest overall revenue in this study; the average revenue per film was $21,681,753.

The eighth speaker in the survey was Jeroen Krabbé. He has acted in a total of 46 English spoken films or series, of which his first was in 1972. 19 Films had revenues that could be found online, and together these films were worth $661,147,512; the average per film was $34,797,237.

The ninth and final Dutch speaker in the survey was Lotte Verbeek. She has been acting in English spoken films and series since 2009 and she has featured in eight Anglophone films or series altogether. The total revenueof the three titles that could be found online is $152,199,033, which is an average of $50,733,011 per film.

The second and the fifth speakers in the survey were native speakers of English. The second speaker was Gemma Ward, an Australian model/actress from Perth and the fifth speaker was Edward Hogg, an English actor from Doncaster. Both of these speakers were selected because they do have an accent that sounds very different from the American accent, yet to the current writer's ear the accents did not seem very obviously Australian or Northern English. Adding these speakers has the purpose of deterring respondents from concluding that everyone with a different/foreign accent is non-native. By adding these speakers in the survey it was made sure that the respondents did not just eliminate everyone with a different accent as non-native. It also served as a benchmark. If the Dutch speaker receives an equal or higher amount of native-votes, it can be stated that his accent is native-like.

Table 1 – financial success

Actor	Films with revenue online	Revenues of all films added up	Average revenue per film
Famke Janssen	32	$1,484,177,327	$46,380,541
Jeroen Krabbé	19	$661,147,512	$34,797,238
Rutger Hauer	36	$444,821,988	$12,356,166
Michiel Huisman	4	$293,699,126	$73,424,782
Lotte Verbeek	3	$152,199,033	$50,733,011
Carice van Houten	5	$100,218,167	$20,043,633
Thekla Reuten	2	$43,363,506	$21,681,753

Many different financial factors can be taken into account when defining the success of a film star. This study only takes into account the financial success of the films the actors acted in, though it should be noted again that a film's success does not necessarily equal the success of the actors involved. Since there are no previous studies that measure the individual success of artists, this study combines two standards into one. One of the ways to measure the success of a star could be to add all the revenues of all the films he has featured in, like the website *the Numbers* does. According to this strategy, the following order of "success" of these actors appears:

1. Famke Janssen
2. Jeroen Krabbé
3. Rutger Hauer
4. Michiel Huisman
5. Lotte Verbeek
6. Carice van Houten
7. Thekla Reuten

However, since some of the actors are much older than others, this may underestimate the success of the young actors. A different way of measuring the success of the actors would be to calculate the average revenue per film per actor. On the other hand, that might not be the most representative metric for the older actors since market values change over time.

According to the data that has been available, looking at the average revenues would give the following hierarchy:

1. Michiel Huisman
2. Lotte Verbeek
3. Famke Janssen
4. Jeroen Krabbé
5. Thekla Reuten
6. Carice van Houten
7. Rutger Hauer

As can be concluded from comparing these lists, there is quite a large difference between the definitions of success of an actor, which depends on what numbers are being looked at. A combination of both overall revenue and average revenue was therefore chosen as the best solution.

Table 2 shows the financial successes calculated with a different formula. The actors with the highest added formula are at the top and the ones with the lowest at the bottom of the table. The formula was created to include both overall and average revenue per film. To keep the financial differences between the actors in correct proportion, index numbers were used. For the overall revenue per actor, the one with the highest overall revenue was used to create the base index number (index = 100). In this case, that is Famke Janssen with an overall revenue of $1,484,177,327. An index number for every actor's revenue could then be calculated in relation to the index number 100, by dividing 100 by 1,484,177,327 and multiplying it by the overall revenue of the actor. For example Rutger Hauer had an overall revenue of $444,821,988, so his index number is: (100/1,484,177,327*444,821,988≈) 30.

The same can be done with the average revenue per film. The actor with the highest average revenue per film is Michiel Huisman, with an average revenue of $73,424,782. The

calculation for Rutger Hauer, who has an average revenue per film of $12,356,166, has the following outcome: (100/73,424,782*12,356,166≈) 17.

After calculating these indexes the following order of success appears:

Table 2 – Calculations formula, in order of highest added numbers

#	Actor	Index number overall revenue	Index number average revenue	Index numbers added	Index numbers added compared to "world's best"
1	Famke Janssen	100	63	163	33
2	Michiel Huisman	20	100	120	24
3	Jeroen Krabbé	45	47	92	19
4	Lotte Verbeek	10	69	79	16
5	Rutger Hauer	30	17	47	10
6	Carice van Houten	7	27	34	8
7	Thekla Reuten	3	30	33	7

The last column shows the percentages added in a larger perspective. It is done exactly the same as in the calculations above, yet now the number one actor in the whole world according to the figures on the *The-Numbers* website is taken for the base index. The worldwide number one actor with the most overall revenue was Samuel L. Jackson, with a revenue of $7,241,507,646, and the actor with the highest average revenue was Anthony Daniels, with an average revenue of $361,374,602. Now the differences do not appear so huge anymore, yet the proportions are relatively the same.

3.2 Sub-question 2

Table 3 presents the number of times a respondent answered 'yes' to the question whether or not the actor was native, and the accompanying percentages. It then shows how many of the respondents who answered 'no' attributed this to accent features, followed by the average score the 'no'-voters gave for obviousness and annoyance. The amount of native votes

determined the order of the table, going from the actor with the most votes to the one with the least.

On average, the seven Dutch actors were thought to be native 24.6 times by the 49 American respondents, which is about 50.2%. The most native-rated Dutch actor was Michiel Huisman, with 45 Americans answering the native-question with 'yes', which is 91.8%. Famke Janssen (87.5%) and Lotte Verbeek (85.7%) closely follow Huisman. The four other actors scored much lower going from Carice van Houten and Thekla Reuten with 12 native-votes to Rutger Hauer with 10 native-votes (20.4%), to Jeroen Krabbé, who scored lowest with nine native-votes (18.4%).

The real native speakers in the experiment were rated as native less often than Michiel Huisman, Lotte Verbeek and Famke Janssen. The Australian female speaker was rated as native 32 times (65.3%) and the English male speaker was rated as native 34 times (69.4%).

A few issues of note remain to be pointed out here that may be of importance when analysing the results. There were two respondents who left one question unanswered: one did not answer the question about which age-group she was in and one did not answer the question if he thought that Famke Janssen was or was not native, which is why she had a higher percentage of native-votes than Lotte Verbeek. Finally, one person responded "no" to the question if she thought Rutger Hauer was native and later, to the question: 'how obvious did you think it was' she replied the following at the "other"-box: "Sorry, I made a mistake; it sounds like a native speaker of a non-American variety". I have corrected this in the results so that Hauer did receive one vote extra for 'native'.

Table 3 – number of native-votes and scale of annoyance/obviousness

Actor	Number of votes native	Percentage of votes native	If 'not native', accent ?	If 'not native', how obvious 0-7	Standard deviation	If 'not native', how annoying 0-7	Standard deviation
Michiel Huisman	45/49	91.8%	5/5	3.5	2.646	1.25	2.5
Famke Janssen	42/48	87.5%	6/6	2.333	2.16	1.5	2.074
Lotte Verbeek	42/49	85.7%	7/7	2.286	1.799	0.286	0.756
Native man	34/49	69.4%	15/15	4.8	2.077	1.333	1.676
Native woman	32/49	65.3%	15/17	3.471	1.663	0.706	1.404
Carice van Houten	12/49	24.5%	37/37	3.595	1.993	0.973	1.323
Thekla Reuten	12/49	24.5%	37/37	3.568	1.644	0.919	1.064
Rutger Hauer	10/49	20.4%	38/39	2.743	1.697	0.538	0.942
Jeroen Krabbé	9/49	18.4%	36/40	4.425	1.723	1.275	1.432

3.3 Age and gender in the survey

In the beginning of the survey there were two questions to establish the identity of the respondent. First they were asked to indicate their age (they had to click an age group) and subsequently they were asked their gender. One person did not enter her age, other than that everyone answered every question.

Table 5, which shows the results for these different groups, can be found in Appendix A. From this table it can be concluded that there are no significant differences between the male and the female respondents, because most answers lay closely together (except maybe for the female native speaker). The age-groups do not vary as a rule; however, attention can

be drawn to Jeroen Krabbé, who appeared to sound quite native to respondents under 26, yet not to respondents of 26 and older. Besides that, Rutger Hauer seems to sound more native-like to the younger participants (under 56) than to the older ones. However, the last age group only consisted of five respondents, so the results shown may give a distorted image. The overall average native-votes per category are as follows, male respondents: 55%, female respondents: 52.8%, under 26: 52.8%, 26-55: 55.5%, over 55: 46.7%. It may be concluded that on the whole no important differences appear from the different groups of respondents.

3.4 Hierarchies

From the results of sub-question 1 and sub-question 2, a hierarchy can be made that indicates which actors were most and which were least successful at producing a native-like accent according to this survey. Both the hierarchy of financial success in the English language film world and the hierarchy of success at producing a native-like accent are presented in table 4, along with the accompanying index numbers and percentages of native-votes.

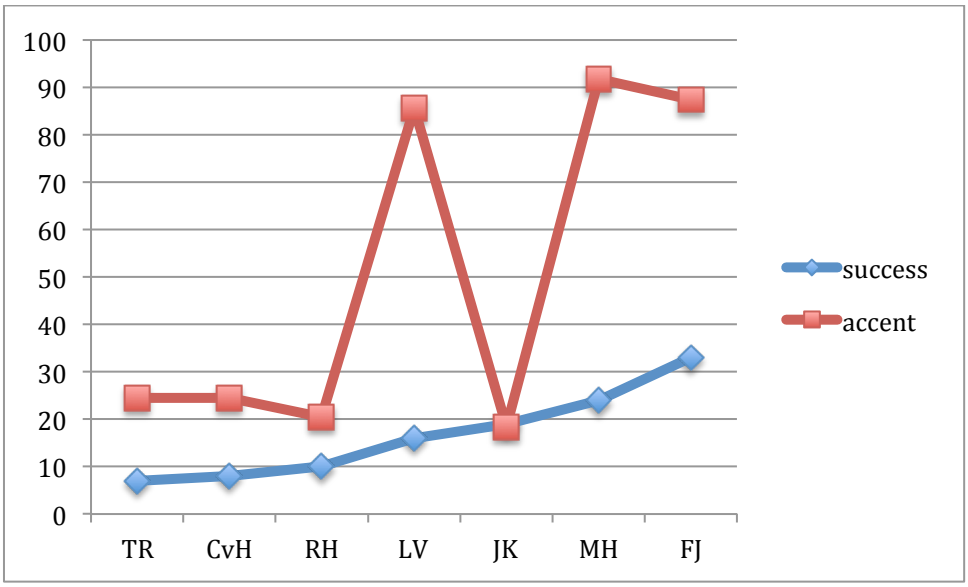
Table 4 – hierarchies of success and accent

#	**Most successful**	**Index number**	#	**Best accent**	**Percentage of votes native**
1	Famke Janssen	33	**1**	Michiel Huisman	91.8%
2	Michiel Huisman	24	**2**	Famke Janssen	87.5%
3	Jeroen Krabbé	19	**3**	Lotte Verbeek	85.7%
4	Lotte Verbeek	16	**4**	Carice van Houten Thekla Reuten	24.5%
5	Rutger Hauer	10	**5**	Rutger Hauer	20.4%
6	Carice van Houten	8	**6**	Jeroen Krabbé	18.4%
7	Thekla Reuten	7			

Figure 1 shows a graph that reveals how both hierarchies look when they are plotted. On the x-axis are the initials of the actors. The order of actors on the x-axis was determined based on

the index number of success, starting from the actor with the lowest index number for success, going up to the actor with the highest index number.

Figure 1 – index numbers and percentages native-votes plotted per actor



4. Conclusion

In table 4 the results of both sub-question 1 and sub-question 2 are presented alongside one another, which makes it easy to compare the results of the sub-questions. This comparison is essential in order to give an answer to the research question of this study: Does the success of producing a native-like English accent of Dutch actors affect their level of success in the English-language film world?

If the accents indeed influenced success and if this were the only factor to influence it, the hierarchy should be exactly the same. This is not the case. However, that does not immediately prove that there is no link between the success in producing a target accent and the success in the film world. The results do show a clustering of actors at the top, middle and bottom of the two columns, indicating there might be a correlation between the two.

Famke Janssen and Michiel Huisman are both at the top of both hierarchies. In the least this shows that they are both very successful in the English-language film world and at producing a native-like accent.

Lotte Verbeek is also at similar positions in both hierarchies, with a number three and a number four score. This indicates that she is less successful in the English-language film world and in producing a native-like accent than Janssen and Huisman, but more successful in both hierarchies than the actors at the bottoms. .

The names of Rutger Hauer, Thekla Reuten and Carice van Houten appear at the bottom of both hierarchies, yet there is a slight variation in the order in which they appear. Jeroen Krabbé is an outlier, as he does not have a similar position in both columns. An elaborate discussion of why this might be follows in chapter five.

5. Discussion

5.1 Jeroen Krabbé

Jeroen Krabbé appears to be an outlier when comparing the results. The films he acts in are quite successful (third of all actors), yet his accent is regarded as least native-like of all the actors involved in this study, with a percentage of only 18.4.

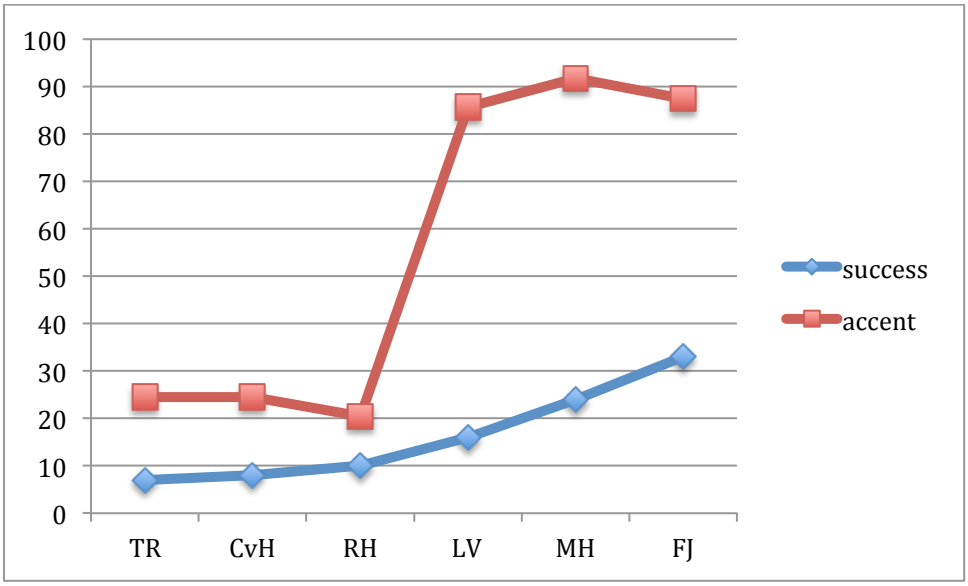
However, a look at his appearance in the survey sheds light on a few obstacles. Firstly, he was the only actor who attempted a British accent during his audio clip, whereas all of the other actors were probably aiming at an American accent. The results show that the American respondents had a tendency to rate native speakers with an accent differently from the American accent as non-native as well at times (34.7% and 30.6%). If there were a correction for Americans judging natives as non-native when they have a different English accent, his score might not be so low.

Secondly, he was the only actor whose audio clip was a scripted text, whereas all of the other actors' audio clips were parts of interviews and therefore probably unscripted. What is even more important to notice is that of the people who thought he was not a native speaker, four respondents attributed it to something other than his accent (choice of words or grammar), which means that his percentage would become slightly higher if these answers were disregarded since it was a scripted text (20% if the responses are totally disregarded, 26.5% if these no-votes are changed into yes-votes).

Thirdly, this study did not look at which roles the actors were cast for. However, a closer look at Jeroen Krabbé's English language performances shows that in most of these, he is featured as a foreigner, whereas many of the other actors' characters often have unidentified nationalities, or in some cases even native English language nationalities. If an actor acts out the role of a foreigner, his accent arguably is in his favour instead of being a demerit. If an actor wants to act with a foreign accent but fails, this might do just as much damage to his financial success as when a foreign actor tries to act with a native English accent and is not very successful. In conclusion, the roles and the context should actually also be taken into account when studying the success of actors and this effect could also be relevant for the other actors in this study.

For these reasons, Jeroen Krabbé could be left out of the study or at least regarded as a special case. Figure 2 shows the results when Jeroen Krabbé is left out. It is exactly the same graph as graph 1, except that the outlier is removed.

Figure 2 – index numbers and percentages native-votes plotted per actor without Jeroen Krabbé



5.2 Other possible interpretations

This study showed that success in achieving a native-like accent to the American ear appears to influence success in the English language film world. However, other interpretations of the results are possible. Previous research had already indicated that native American English speakers tend to have a quite negative attitude towards (strong) foreign accents (see theoretical framework section).

However, during this study, when respondents indicated that the L2-accent of a speaker was quite obvious, the rating of "annoyance" on the scale of 0-7 never exceeded 1.5 and if it already was as high as one or above, the standard deviation was in most cases so high that these results may be disregarded. For example, Rutger Hauer and Jeroen Krabbé had the lowest scores on how native-like their accent was. Yet Hauer scored a 0.538 and Krabbé scored a 1.275 average score on how annoying the natives thought their accents were. In the scale ranging from 0-7, these results are slightly above 'not annoying at all'.

It may be concluded from these results that having an accent does not seem to be very annoying to American native speakers of English. This appears to be in contrast with the

studies mentioned in the theoretical framework, which overall found that L2-accents do evoke a negative attitude from native speakers. The reasons for the success of the actors in this study could also (partly) be attributed to a lesser degree of annoyance of American native speakers of English with foreign-accented English.

On the other hand, most of the studies mentioned in the theoretical framework used longer audio clips than 15 to 20 seconds. Also, a context might be given. The respondents to this study only had to listen to the actors for 15 to 20 seconds and were not told that these speakers were actors. If they had listened to them longer, or if they had been given the context that explained that these speakers have socially demanding roles, they might have judged differently, causing the results to be more in line with the previous research on the subject.

5.3 Limitations of the study

There were a number of limitations to this study, some of which are already mentioned throughout the study but will be summarised here again. Firstly, an actor's success is a hard concept to define. This study followed the example of other studies that defined the success of film by its financial success, in spite of the resulting exclusion of many other important factors. Additionally, if a film is successful that does not necessarily mean that the actors involved are successful: this study did not make a distinction between lead roles and small supporting roles and an actor could be successful by featuring in entertainment media other than films.

Secondly, not all of the revenues of the English language films the actors acted in could be found online. Therefore, much depended on those films that did have their revenues online. There can be various reasons for film's revenue to (not) be online. However, there seemed to be a trend in which films could be and which films could not be found online. None of the made-for-television films and B-films nor the television series' revenues were

available online. Probably only the big films' revenues are open to the public and if indeed this is the case then all actors are in the same boat and it does not result in individual differences regarding which films were and which were not used during this study. However, it must be noted that some actors are mostly known for their roles in television series and therefore their results may be distorted. Michiel Huisman, for example, has featured in seven series and five films. This indicates that he is more known for his television roles. It may be interesting to research whether having the data of these series would make him more or less successful.

Thirdly, a problem that will always exist when a researcher wants to compare historical economic data with more recent evidence is that economy is an ever-changing entity. Therefore, the old films in this study may have been of lesser importance to the results of success, which distorts the results.

Fourthly, the actors were selected based on the current writer's knowledge, which may have introduced a bias. Only the actors of whom the writer knew that they had featured in English language films or series were included. It may be that some actors were disregarded that would have been important as well.

Finally, the respondents to the survey were not randomly selected but acquaintances of the writer or of friends of the writer and the research circumstances could not be controlled. Therefore, the selection of respondents may not be very representative and it should be taken into account that some of the respondents might not have filled out the survey seriously or they might even have answered questions wrongly.

5.4 Further research

However limited this study may be, it has laid bare interesting new research directions that can be explored in the future. Further research could look at how foreign-accented speech

influences success at other occupations. The study proved that accents could be interesting to take into account in future film research. And lastly, a question that has arisen from the discussion section of this study is if native American English speakers have possibly become more lenient towards foreign-accented English than previous research had suggested.

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Appendix A

Table 5 – percentages that answered "native" per category

Actor	Male respondents	Female respondents	Under 26	26-55	56 and over
Michiel Huisman	95.2%	89.3%	93.8%	92.6%	80%
Famke Janssen	81%	85.7%	81.3%	92.3%	80%
Lotte Verbeek	85.7%	85.7%	93.8%	77.8%	100%
Native man	71.4%	67.9%	62.5%	81.5%	40%
Native woman	76.2%	57.1%	56.3%	74.1%	60%
Carice van Houten	19.1%	28.6%	12.5%	29.6%	20%
Thekla Reuten	28.6%	21.4%	12.5%	25.9%	40%
Rutger Hauer	19.1%	21.4%	18.8%	18.2%	0%
Jeroen Krabbé	19.1%	17.9%	43.8%	7.4%	0%
Average	55%	52.8%	52.8%	55.5%	46.7%

Appendix B

Welcome to this survey! The survey is part of my bachelor's thesis as an English student at the Utrecht University.

You will be asked to listen to short audio clips and decide whether or not you think the speaker is a native speaker of English.

The survey will take no more than 5-10 minutes of your time.

Though the audioclips may seem videos, they're not.
A black screen is all you'll see.

start press ENTER

1 → What is your native language?

A American English
B other English
C not English

2 → What is your gender?

A male B female C other

3 → What is your age?

- A under 18
- B 18-25
- C 26-35
- D 36-45
- E 46-55
- F 56-65
- G over 66

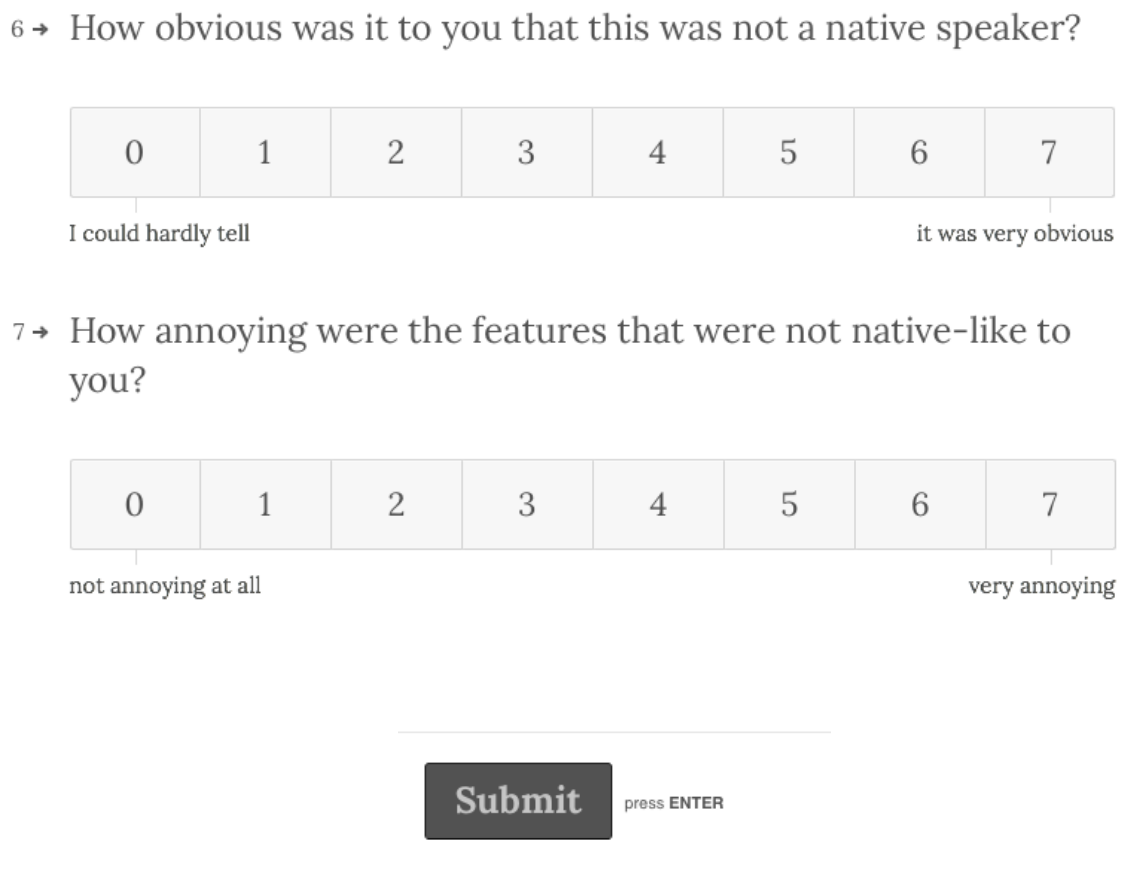
4 → Do you think this is a native speaker of English?

- Y Yes
- N No

5 → Why did you think this was not a native speaker?

Choose as many as you like

- A his grammar was not native-like
- B his intonation pattern was not native like
- C the words he used were not native-like
- D the way he pronounced some words was not native-like
- E Other


6 → How obvious was it to you that this was not a native speaker?
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
I could hardly tell
it was very obvious
7 → How annoying were the features that were not native-like to you?
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
not annoying at all
very annoying
Submit
press ENTER