

# **Selling Seashells: English Pronunciation Training in Secondary Schools in The Netherlands**



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## Preface

I first became interested in the teaching of pronunciation during a brief internship at a secondary school in Zeist. At the time, I was asked to give a lesson about English speech to a group of fifth year students in preparation for their oral exams. I remember explaining the difference between word-final voicing and devoicing, making sure the students understood, only to be frustrated when, with the best of intentions, the learners still pronounced the words bet, bed, bad and bat the same way. If anything, this experience taught me that pronunciation is not something that can be changed overnight; but it also marked the beginning of my interest in how pronunciation can best be taught.

It took rather more time than I expected to complete this MA thesis, and so I would like to thank dr. Rias van den Doel and prof. dr. Huub van den Bergh for allowing me to weave this project in between various other assignments, dental surgery, the summer recess, and my internship. I would also like to thank Norbert Sparnaaij at Het Nieuwe Lyceum in Bilthoven for allowing me to take some time off every now and then to complete my thesis, and for showing me not only that some teachers do, in fact, teach pronunciation, but also that you can use Harry Potter to do so.

## Introduction

Pronunciation is an integral part of speaking a language. After all, without being able to speak a language properly, communication may suffer, and an L2 speaker may experience difficulty in conveying his or her meaning. Yet, when watching typical Hollywood blockbusters, one often encounters stereotypical villains, mostly from non-English speaking nations, whose pitch-perfect English is betrayed by a thick foreign lilt. Apparently, Hollywood producers assume that foreign language schools are more than capable of teaching English grammar and vocabulary, but not pronunciation.

In the Netherlands, there is no unified approach to pronunciation training either. The demands for the final examinations of the pre-university secondary education or VWO<sup>1</sup> concerning pronunciation are not specified; instead, a learner is expected to be able to hold a coherent presentation with “correct and fitting use of language, fluency, and pronunciation” (7, Examenprogramma VWO Engels). Since these demands are not further specified, it is left up to the teacher whether or not to teach pronunciation, and if so, what to teach, and how to teach it. ‘

The purpose of this study is to combine previous research into a comprehensible plan suitable for teaching pronunciation in English classes in Dutch secondary schools. However, pronunciation is a broad subject. Though the general importance of suprasegmental features of speech such as rhythm and intonation is acknowledged, this study will focus on phonetic errors only. First of all, the exact needs and desires of learners in the area of pronunciation will need to be established: a ‘common core’ of

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<sup>1</sup> This translation of VWO is used by the Dutch ministry of education. VMBO translates as pre-vocational secondary education and HAVO is referred to as senior general secondary education (17, Van der Ree).

pronunciation problems encountered in communication between native speakers of Dutch and other non-native speakers of English, native speakers of English from various backgrounds, and preferences of Dutch speakers themselves, while also regarding the frequency of occurrence and importance of these phonemes. From these studies, a tentative 'top five' of common phonemes will be established.

Besides establishing the needs of learners in terms of what they will need to learn, the best way for them to learn will need to be examined and determined. Several aspects will need to be considered. First of all, arguments in favour of or against pronunciation training will need to be discussed. Secondly, the best age for beginning pronunciation training will be established. Thirdly, several practical aspects of implementation need to be examined: integration into the communicatively-oriented curriculum of secondary schools in the Netherlands, the types of exercises that can be used, and the way in which the interaction between perception and production takes place will be established. Finally, a discussion will take place concerning the materials necessary for pronunciation training and the way in which learners' pronunciation can be assessed.

Together, these aspects will form a plan that is suitable for pronunciation training in secondary schools in the Netherlands, and that can be implemented without having to increase the number of hours that learners spend in the English classroom.

# Chapter One: Towards a Common Core of Pronunciation for Dutch Learners of English

## *1.1 Introduction*

Several attempts have been made to create some sort of phonetic core to enhance comprehensibility for second language learners. The idea behind this core is that there are certain sounds that are essential to being understood in a target language. Many of these cores are based on the idea of minimal pairs: it is argued, for instance, that if a speaker cannot discriminate ‘bed’ from ‘bad’ or ‘bet’ from ‘bed’, this will potentially create problems, as the listener will understand ‘bed’ when the speaker means ‘bad’. However, as Koster and Koet indicate (74), the context often clarifies what the speaker means. The sentence ‘I am tired, I am going to bet’ makes less sense than ‘I am tired, I am going to bed’ does, certainly when it is put in context.

Another point that many of these common core theories appear to make is that consonants are far more important than vowels, because “the majority [of consonants in RP and GA] are essential in that confluents, substitutions, and elisions of these regularly cause a loss of intelligibility in the ILT data” (Jenkins, 137, 144-146). However, most common core theories contain some sort of vowel discrimination. A basic tenet of most common core theories is the fact that learners can retain aspects of their L1 in their L2 speech. There are two reasons for allowing learners to retain speech features of their own accent, and both are motivational. First of all, it is nearly impossible to achieve a perfectly native-like accent; only a small minority will achieve this, and only after spending a great deal of time and energy on it. Secondly, as Jenkins points out, retaining

speech elements of an L1 may be essential to the identity that a speaker has created for himself (16). Learners may lose their motivation if they are not allowed to retain some trace of their native language and identity; they may also become less motivated if the teacher sets the bar very high, i.e. by striving to achieve a native-like accent. Though a native-like accent may serve as a pronunciation model, setting it as a target will frustrate many, since most learners never reach this level.

However, a common core approach is aimed at international speakers in general, whether they are communicating with native speakers or non-native speakers with a different L1 background, and it does not provide a pronunciation guide for individual languages. Likewise, the common core approach is mostly aimed at comprehensibility and does not take into account certain stereotypes that may create a negative bias with the listener. A third disadvantage is that the common cores are sometimes aimed at communication with native speakers, most notably those from Great Britain and the United States, and sometimes at other speakers of English as a foreign language, in which case English is used as a Lingua Franca, but generally do not take into account the preferences of particular learner groups.

For these reasons, it would be desirable to create a separate common core aimed specifically at Dutch students. Many common core theories, for example, list consonant deletion as a problem, since many languages have a CV-structure and English has more complicated consonant clusters; however, since the Dutch language allows for consonant clusters that are similar to those of English, it is likely that complex consonant clusters will not play a part in a Dutch-English common core. Similarly, while both native and non-native speakers of English may understand a Dutch speaker, they may still have to

put in some extra effort to understand accented speech; such errors that do not matter to comprehensibility but that create a negative image in the listeners' mind may be included as well. In addition, any truly functional common core theory would ideally be suitable for communication with native as well as non-native speakers, and it should focus on the errors that cause the most instances of miscommunication and irritation.

Four studies will therefore be used to determine an ideal common core of approximately five phonemic/phonetic features that are especially suitable for Dutch learners. While this may not appear as sufficient, a larger core may be too daunting to be attempted in the already quite crowded secondary school curriculum. The first study was conducted by Jenkins, who developed a Lingua Franca core especially aimed at communication between non-native speakers with different L1 backgrounds. The second study by Van den Doel has examined the effect of typical Dutch English errors on native speakers of different backgrounds; though not a common core, it will be useful to determine which errors should be considered for inclusion in the top five. The third study by Koet and Koster has evaluated the effect of a series of typical Dutch English errors on both native Dutch and native English speakers. Finally, a study by Brown (1988) has investigated the 'functional load' or relative importance of certain phonemes in the English language. Combined, these studies could reveal a core that is suitable for speaking with both native and non-native speakers; that will incorporate those errors which will be found irritating by both native and non-native speakers; that will be supported by Dutch native speakers as well; and consisting of phonemes that carry a high functional load.



## ***1.2 The Lingua Franca Core***

In the introduction of her book *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Jenkins describes the “profoundly influential” effect that the work of Alastair Pennycook has had on her thinking (4). For those who are familiar with Pennycook’s work, this immediately indicates Jenkins’ stance on the acquisition of a native-like accent. Pennycook regards language from a postcolonial perspective, and in his work *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* he discusses the “hidden sales element” that is embedded in the use of an inner-circle or native accent of English (145). After World War II and during the Cold War, the US government worked together with the British Language Council to spread the English language throughout the Western world, providing or assisting with the creation of textbooks and offering scholarships such as Fulbright and Rockefeller. Culture was transferred along with the language. Through this, GA and especially RP remained the default mode of pronunciation training; the dominance of these accents reflected the political hegemony of these nations (Pennycook, 175). Only recently, teachers and linguists have come to realise that other varieties of English are not inferior but merely different. In a similar vein, Kirkpatrick suggests:

Some people feel that the older a variety is, the better it is. Native varieties are older and thought to be ‘purer’ than nativised varieties. The idea that varieties of British English are somehow purer than later varieties is very difficult to support, however... In the context of varieties of English, age does not bring with it superiority. Nor can we say that the older a variety, the purer it is. Even the earliest form of English had mixed and many parents (6).

According to Kirkpatrick, the newly emerging varieties of English are in no way inferior to the accepted, older varieties such as GA or RP. .

Jenkins draws upon these theories and suggests finding common ground in all the interlanguages of learners of English as a foreign language. Since most learners will not use English to communicate with native speakers, Jenkins argues, it makes no sense to include sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ that are almost universally difficult:

The crucial challenge for EIL (English as an International Language) phonological research, then, is to identify those areas in which differences among the manifold international varieties of English (including L1 varieties) are benign and those in which they pose a potential threat to international intelligibility, particularly those who remain NBESs [Non-Bilingual English Speaker], and whose interactions thus remain at the level of interlanguage talk. Having accomplished this, we will be in a far stronger position to make claims on behalf of L2 regional norms (29).

Jenkins also distinguishes between the “model” of a language and a “norm”: an accent such as RP or GA should be used as a point of reference, a “model” from which a learner can take advice, not a “norm” which a learner will not be able to live up to (18).

However, Jenkins does allow that some types of variation are simply unacceptable and, having established that there is no shame in retaining traces of an L1 in an L2, she does establish four things that are important to the “preservation of mutual phonological intelligibility in ILT [Interlanguage Talk]” (132). In order of importance, they are: most consonant sounds, appropriate consonant cluster simplification, vowel length distinctions,

and nuclear stress<sup>2</sup>. However, Jenkins also acknowledges that stress, pitch and intonation are hard to acquire once adolescence has been reached, and that there is a difference between that which is teachable and that which is learnable (133), although there seems to be a direct relationship between teachable and learnable features of a language:

For example, most of the world's languages have approximately twice as many consonant as vowel phonemes. English, with 24 consonant sounds and up to 20 vowel sounds, is marked in this respect, and we can therefore expect most learners to have problems with the English vowel system. (133)

Hence the conclusion that the focus of learners should be on consonants rather than vowels: the English language has more vowels. On the other hand, Jenkins points out, "the fact that a sound is marked, and therefore probably difficult for many learners to produce, does not automatically render it less important for intelligibility to the EIL receiver" (134). However, according to Abbot, single pronunciation errors, whether they stem from vowels or from consonants, are often important and not always clarified by their context, and hence it does not make sense to focus on consonants alone (302).

Jenkins also uses experimental data to establish which sounds should be prioritised; using data collected from 40 conversations between non-native speakers of English with different L1 backgrounds, Jenkins examines which phonemes most often cause communication breakdown. Of the 40 instances of miscommunication recorded, 27 were related to pronunciation; hence Jenkins' insistence on the importance of intelligibility.

Combining those features which are deemed essential with what is teachable and learnable, Jenkins proposes three core features: segmentals, suprasegmentals and

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<sup>2</sup> Since, as Jenkins allows, it is extremely hard to teach things such as stress, pitch and intonation, the focus of this study will be on individual sounds. Since the importance of correct stress, pitch and intonation are not to be ignored, this would make an interesting suggestion for further research.

articulatory settings. The category segmentals includes not only consonant and vowel phonemes, but also “certain phonetic realizations and methods of consonant cluster simplification” (136). Jenkins begins by stating that GA and RP have 24 consonant sounds, most of which are essential. Some, such as /θ/ and /ð/, can be omitted from the Lingua Franca core: “Substitutions of these phonemes did not cause phonological unintelligibility on a single occasion in any of the data” (137). Brown, too, agrees that ‘when time is short, it is probably not worthwhile spending time on teaching /θ/ and /ð/ if the students find them difficult’ (as cited in Jenkins, 137); considering the time constraints that English teachers in secondary education face, something that is of a time-consuming nature should not be kept in the curriculum if it is not deemed essential. Although Jenkins clarifies that it is not the goal of the LFC to find replacement vowels, she suggests that replacing /θ/ and /ð/ with [t] and [d] is suitable, because it is “prevalent among L1 as well as L2 varieties” (138).

Another candidate for omission is [ɫ], the dark velarised /l/. Jenkins notes that most learners find the production of [ɫ] difficult and that they may never acquire it; replacing it with a clear /l/ or even /ʊ/ is unproblematic, since it does not lead to decreased intelligibility and is already quite common among some L1 varieties (139).

Different considerations will have to be made where RP and GA differ, for instance when rhoticity is concerned. Jenkins suggests the GA retroflex approximant [ɻ] rather than RP [ɹ]. She proposes to do so to avoid encountering problems with orthography: RP speech, which is non-rhotic, often does not pronounce [ɹ] when it is spoken in isolation, but does pronounce it when a word is spoken in a sequence (139). Similarly, Jenkins prefers RP /t/, since intervocalic /t/ in GA becomes the voiced flap [ɾ],

which could easily be confused with /d/: an inexperienced listener is at risk of confusing “matter” with “madder”, especially because they cannot rely on the context due to their inexperience. (140). Another element that Jenkins considers essential in the LFC is the aspiration [h] after word-initial plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ to help the learner distinguish voiced sounds from voiceless sounds (141).

Only one vowel is singled out by Jenkins to be included in the LFC. This vowel does occasionally cause pronunciation problems: /ɜ:/ and its substitution /ɑ:/, which, for instance, could lead to ‘curtain’ being pronounced as ‘carton’ (146). She also distinguishes between vowel quantity, which is concerned with the relative length of a vowel, and vowel quality, which concerns tongue and lip position; although native-like quality and quantity are not always attainable even for language teachers, Jenkins suggests that consistency in the use of quality of vowels in combination with an approximation of the correct length should prevent vowels from becoming incomprehensible: “with sufficient guidance, this should be possible, and will in the process drastically reduce the pronunciation teaching load” (144-145). The teachers’ workload is also reduced by adopting GA rhoticity, which reduces the number of diphthongs from eight to five (145). As for the rest of the diphthongs, Jenkins concludes that:

diphthongs, like monophthongs, differ widely in quality among [Native Speakers] and cannot therefore be accorded high priority in L2 teaching. As with the monophthongs, then, it is the length rather than the quality of diphthongs that is most salient for intelligibility (145).

In short, Jenkins uses the Lingua Franca Core to propose teaching learners to avoid certain errors and inconsistencies deemed important for English speech for non-native speakers, most of which concern consonants: for instance, inconsistently used rhoticity, voicing the intervocalic /t/, substitutions for /θ/, /ð/, and [ɫ], lack of aspiration for word-initial /p/, /t/, and /k/, and the preservation of /ɜ:/. The rest, according to Jenkins, should be approximated from the L1 background, as long as consistency is maintained.<sup>3</sup>

Since Jenkins' work is not exclusively aimed at Dutch learners, not all elements of the Lingua Franca core are necessarily problematic. Since /θ/ and /ð/ are notorious among Dutch learners for their difficulty, removing them from the core may be sensible. The [ɫ], however, as Collins and Mees describe, is already present in standard Dutch speech: “/l/ is clear [l] before vowels; and dark [ɫ] before consonants and pause” (197). This situation is very similar to RP: “The distribution of clear [l] and dark [ɫ] in [standard Dutch] is similar to RP English”, yet the Dutch [ɫ] is quite different from its English counterpart: “there is pharyngealisation rather than velarisation with a noticeable retraction of the tongue-root towards the pharynx wall. Note that Belgian dark [ɫ], which is typically post-palatalised or velarised without apparent tongue-root retraction, strikes an English ear as being far more acceptable” (170). Slight modifications could be made: whereas the blade and front are raised during the pronunciation of Dutch /l/, the tip is inactive; in English, /l/ is pronounced using both the tip and the blade of the tongue (224); students are advised to decrease pharyngealisation and maintain tongue-tip contact for English [ɫ] (171). However, this difference may not be relevant to secondary school students.

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<sup>3</sup> Jenkins also proposes setting rules on elision and simplification, but these will not be discussed here.

On the other hand, aspiration of word initial plosives is unusual in Dutch, yet it is relevant. Collins and Mees state that:

in word-initial position, they [plosives] tend to be partially devoiced, e.g. *doos* [d̥o:s], *been* [b̥e:n]. Such devoicing is generally less than is the case in English...Dutch fortis plosives /p, t, k/ have no aspiration, so that voice begins immediately after the release of the closure. They are articulated with considerable greater tension than their lenis counterparts. It is also noticeable that they are much tenser than the lenis fortis plosives...The release of the closure is brisker and more energetic in Dutch /p, t, k/ (194).

From this description it follows that Jenkins' proposal would have value to Dutch learners of English to prevent their /p/ from being perceived as /b/ by speakers of a different L1 background.

Rhoticity as proposed by Jenkins would also carry advantages in terms of learnability for Dutch learners of English. The weak alveolar tap-/r/ and uvular /r/ that are common in the Netherlands are generally accepted by native English speakers; only Dutch speakers who habitually produce a strong uvular fricative [ʁ] will need to adapt their speech, in which case "most find the imitation of an American type retroflex [ɹ] the easiest way to approach E /r/ - the American sound is often familiar from films and television." (Collins and Mees, 179-180). Collins and Mees also point out that for most Dutch speakers it is distribution rather than articulation that creates most problems (180). Consequently, Jenkins' LFC would be beneficial to Dutch learners who use [ʁ] in particular and for simplification purposes in general. Likewise, intervocalic /t/ may be helpful to prevent orthographic confusion. Although in general production of English /t/

is not problematic for native speakers of Dutch, allophonic variation may trick them into believing that a /d/ is required rather than /t/. In fact, Collins and Mees note that:

Dutch learners (particularly the less proficient) often realise intervocalic [English] /t/...as /d/...This is probably owing to interpreting the English tap allophone of /t/ as /d/; though it may also be the result of American influence. (165).

In this light, Jenkins' proposal to adopt RP /t/ may cause some difficulties, through from an orthographic perspective it may simplify things considerably. In any case, intervocalic /t/ is a subject that requires elaboration for Dutch learners of English.

Objections to Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core have been raised from several perspectives, both phonological and ideological. Dauer argues that the LFC may not actually be easier to teach or learn, since /θ/, /ð/ and [t] are the only consonants that are left out, which "really does not reduce the teaching load very much" (546). She also wonders why /z/ was not omitted even though it did not account for any problems with intelligibility in Jenkins' data (547). Another problem raised by Dauer stems from Jenkins' use of both GA and RP features:

by referring to the long-short vowel distinction, Jenkins defines the LFC in terms of an analysis of the nonrhotic BrE vowel system. Yet she recommends that NNSs pronounce final /r/, so it is difficult to understand which vowel contrasts are included in the LFC's vowel system (547).

By combining features from the two models that are used most often, learners who are familiar with both could easily be confused in which features they are supposed to retain, and which ones they are supposed to ignore, such as RP /r/-deletion. Finally, Dauer also argues against Jenkins' insistence that vowels, and vowel reduction in particular, is



largely non-essential, pointing out that “it would be very difficult for anyone to speak English at a natural speed and pronounce all the consonants, consonant clusters, and long stressed vowels of English precisely without reducing syllables” (548).

Van den Doel (in print) objects on more ideological grounds to Jenkins’s proposal. He states that although English is often used as a lingua franca, Jenkins makes a sweeping generalisation about non-native speakers and their avoidance of native-speaker norms; learners sooner strive to achieve a native-like state than acceptance of their own, nativised varieties of English (in print, 3). Therefore, Jenkins’ claims that learners who strive to achieve a native-like model have been “brainwashed” and are linguistically insecure (Jenkins 2007, as cited in Van den Doel, in print) does not corroborate her claim that a learner should be free to choose, since the desire to attain a native-like accent is now presented as a result of indoctrination and propaganda. Similarly, Jenkins herself seems unable to create her list of essential pronunciation elements without referring to native models; not only does this defy the socio-political purpose of the LFC, but could also potentially hinder communication between speakers with different L1 backgrounds whose L1’s nonetheless share some (Van den Doel, in print). Furthermore, despite Jenkins’ ideological objections, several studies have found that students do not want their teachers to use their local varieties of English. A majority considers pronunciation to be an essential part of pronunciation lessons (only 8% consider pronunciation training to be of limited or no use; Van den Doel, 2006, 50); and 68% indicated that the accent used in English classes could be classified as ‘mostly British (Van den Doel, 2006, 55). In addition, Van der Haagen found that 47.8% of all secondary school students thinks English teachers should speak RP, even though they appear to prefer GA themselves

(106). Teachers, too, are as of yet not likely to agree with Jenkins; a 1996 study showed that 88% preferred to speak RP in class (Dekker, 28).

To conclude, Jenkins' common core suggests several phonetic and phonemic improvements that would potentially be interesting for secondary school curricula, but there are several problems attached to her proposition, both from an ideological and a pragmatic background.

### ***1.3 “How Friendly are the Natives?” Native Speaker Judgement***

Jenkins' common core is aimed at communication between non-native speakers of English with different L1 backgrounds. However, it would not be difficult to argue that native-speaker opinion of non-native speech should be taken into account as well, if only because of the close geographical proximity between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and the present political hegemony of the United States. Whether English is used by a soldier during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to communicate with British or American soldiers, or by a waiter working in an Amsterdam restaurant, Dutch native speakers are likely to use English not only as a lingua franca but to communicate with native speakers as well. The purpose of Van den Doel's study is twofold: first, it seeks to examine the prejudices that native Dutch speakers have about the ways in which native speakers of English judge their accent; second, it tries to set up a phonetic hierarchy of error for Dutch learners of English (Van den Doel, 2006, 1-3). The purpose of this hierarchy is to establish which errors are noted most often and which are judged most negatively. As Johansson notes, even if “the erroneous utterance is fully comprehensible, it could nevertheless have serious consequences from the point of communication, e.g.

make the receiver tired or irritated or draw away his attention from the contents of the message” (as cited in Van den Doel, 2006, 8).

To perform the experiment, an initial hierarchy of error was adapted from Mees and Collins, who collected the most common pronunciation errors of native speakers of Dutch learning English. There are three levels, the first of which is classified as “errors causing a breakdown in intelligibility (often involving the loss of a phonemic contrast)” and is further divided into two parts: persistent errors that are found in a majority of learners and that learners find hard to change, and errors that are non-persistent and are mostly observed in beginners and some advanced students (290). Though this level is mainly concerned with intelligibility, it does not take any effort to imagine that the ensuing miscommunication will cause the listener, be they a native speaker or a non-native speaker, feelings of annoyance and irritation. The second level is aimed at errors that do not create misunderstandings, but that cause distraction, irritation or amusement on the part of the native speaker. The third level discusses errors that are easily detectable, but do not cause any irritation, distraction or amusement with the native speaker. Quite depressingly, the first category is also the largest, with a list of 10 persistent errors and 7 non-persistent errors. At first glance, this list has very little in common with Jenkins’ LFC; for instance, it mentions /θ/ and /ð/ as persistent and significant errors that could possibly cause communication breakdown. There appear to be differences, then, between the ways in which native speakers and non-native speakers approach a certain subject.

During the experiment, participants rated errors on a so-called 5-point Likert scale which allowed them to arrange errors in order of “no error” to “a very serious error”. At

first, Dutch respondents ranked the errors as provided by the hierarchy of error established by Collins and Mees. The errors that had been selected as most serious were then divided into five categories – phonemic, realisational, distributional, stress and suprasegmental – and passed on to native-speaker respondents. Over 500 respondents participated; all were from countries within the Inner Core (Kachru, as cited in Kirkpatrick).

The phonemic errors that were presented to English teachers in the Netherlands can be divided into several categories:

1.3.1.1 Rhyming *Annie* with *penny*; no distinction between the vowels in *bed* and *bad*; rhyming *exam* with *jam*. These errors all point to the learners' inability to produce /æ/. Escudero and Boersma refer to this problem as the subset-problem: Dutch learners of English are incapable of distinguishing between English /æ/ and /e/ and consequently merge both categories of vowels into Dutch /e/ (250). The /æ/ in the word *exam* may also be replaced with Dutch /ɑ:/.

1.3.1.2 No distinction between the vowels in *collar* and *colour*; between *pull* and *pool*. The first case confuses the /ʌ/-/ʊ/ contrast, the second the /ʊ/-/u/ contrast. Both present common errors: as Collins and Mees describe, “all Dutch-speaking students confuse E /ʊ/ and E/u:/, hearing both in terms of their Dutch /u/, as in *moe*” (97). This, too is part of the subset problem in which two phonemes that are the same to Dutch ears but not to English are merged into one Dutch category.

1.3.1.3 Neutralisation of the fortis-lenis contrast in word final position in the words *bed* and *off*. This, too, is a common mistake made by Dutch learners of English, as in Dutch all word-final plosives are devoiced (Collins and Mees, 140).

1.3.1.4 TH-stopping in *that* and *thin*. TH-stopping in *Thomas* was inserted as a control item, since this word is pronounced with a word-initial plosive /t/. Substitution of /θ/ with /t/ and /s/ and of /ð/ with /d/ is a common and notorious error, not only with native Dutch speakers, but with the majority of foreign language learners (Van den Doel, 38-40).

Some realisational errors were incorporated in the study as well: producing a glottal stop in *dead*, lack of appropriate dark [ɫ], equal vowel length in *ice* and *eyes*, use of uvular [ʁ] in *red*, lack of aspiration in *tin*, and the use of a glottal stop in *that man* ([ðæʔ mæn]) (41). The distributional errors used in the study were rhoticity in the word *car*, non-rhoticity in *farmer*, epenthesis in the word *film*, pronouncing only one /t/ in *hot tea*, adding an intrusive /r/ before the word *of* in the phrase *the idea of it*, making *India* rhyme with *windier*, and yod-dropping in *new* and *suit*. The distributional errors will not always be regarded as errors by the native speaker population; non-rhoticity, for instance, is required in RP but a major error in GA (41). Several stress errors were incorporated into the study as well.

A number of these errors were then judged by native speakers of English from several linguistic backgrounds who were asked to identify their particular variety of English. They were then asked to rate the errors using the previously described Likert scale.

The results indicated that similar hierarchies could be established for RP and GA, with stress and phonemic errors rated more highly than the realisational, distributional and suprasegmental errors. Consonant-related errors were regarded as being significantly more important than errors concerning vowels; only three out of thirteen tokens included vowel errors, and none of these errors were assigned the highest score (238). Errors *thin*, *author*, *colour*, *bed* and *bad* made up the top 5 of the RP experiment, whereas the GA top 5 listed *bed*, *van*, *author*, *thin* and *weather* as the most important phonemic errors. An overall score of phonemic errors rated *thin*, *author*, *van*, *bed* and *bat* as the highest-ranking phonemic errors. Note that one error involving a vowel is included in the overall ranking; there are two in the RP experiment and none in the GA experiment (238).

Another significant result is that both versions include the /θ/-/ð/ sounds, which Jenkins' Lingua Franca core ranks as insignificant. However, Van den Doel points out that:

It is highly probably that a number of typically Dutch errors which may have the effect of...TH-stopping (*both*, *that*, *weather*)...were detected more readily and/or assessed more severely by North-Americans than by other respondents *not* because they were unintelligible but because of other reasons. They may, for instance, have been associated with stigmatised native speech or possibly with caricatures of certain foreign accents (239).

The differences in both results may serve as an indication that it is important for learners of English who wish to adopt a native accent to adhere to one variant only and to make sure to avoid those typically Dutch pronunciation errors that speakers of the chosen native variant have ranked most severely. Another result that could be significant to the teaching practice is that some phonemic errors are ranked more or less severely

depending on their position in a word: the mispronunciation or substitution of /ð/ in *weather* and *breathe* were ranked higher than in the high-frequency word *that*. Similarly, in both versions, /f/-/v/ confusion was judged severely in *van*, and it was ranked as the fourth most significant error in the overall ranking; *off*, containing a similar error, was judged to be the least significant error (238-239).

Van den Doel also establishes two separate hierarchies of error for RP and GA, since the results show large differences between the two. The error ratings are based on the “composite error severity” (296) that take into account both the detection of errors as well as their assessment, which prevents errors that were assessed severely but not very often detected from dominating errors that were noted more often but judged slightly less severely.

<b>RP</b>	<b>GA</b>
<u>Very high: error rating of 3.5 or higher:</u> Stress errors	<u>Very high: Error rating of 3.5 or higher:</u> Stress and stress-related errors Fortis-lenis neutralisation /f-v, t-d/
<u>High: Error rating between 2.2-3.5:</u> Stress-related errors Fortis-lenis neutralisation /f-v, t-d/ Use of uvular /r/ Some substitutions of /θ, ð/ with /t,d/ Glottalisation of final /d/ Epenthetic [ə] in /lm/ Confusion of /æ-e, ʌ-ɒ, ʊ-u:/ Unaspirated [t]	<u>High: Error rating between 2.2-3.5:</u> Most substitutions of /θ, ð/ with /t,d/ Glottalisation of final /d/ Epenthetic [ə] in /lm/ /v-w/ confusion /æ-e/ confusion Inappropriate post-vocalic /r/
<u>Medium: Error rating between 1.2-2.2</u> Absence of weakening in <i>secondary</i> Absence of weak and contracted forms Inappropriate post-vocalic /r/ Some substitutions of /θ/-/ð/ by /t,d/ Yod-deletion in <i>new</i> Overlong /aɪ/	<u>Medium: Error rating between 1.2-2.2</u> Weakening in <i>secondary</i> Phonemic consonant substitutions in high-frequency words such as <i>off</i> and <i>that</i> Degemination of /t#t/
<u>Low: Error rating between 0.4-1.2</u> Phonemic consonant substitutions in high-frequency words such as <i>off</i> and <i>that</i> Some intonational deviations	<u>Low: Error rating between 0.4-1.2</u> Absence of weak and unaspirated forms Unaspirated [t] Confusion of /ʌ-ɒ, ʊ-u:/ Overlong /aɪ/ Overdark pharyngealised [ɤ] Some intonational deviations
<u>Very low: Error rating lower than 0.4</u> Some intonational deviations Overdark pharyngealised [ɤ]	<u>Very low: Error rating lower than 0.4</u> Yod-insertion in <i>new</i> Some intonational deviations.

Figure 1: Adapted from Van den Doel (2006, 292)

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from this study. First of all, it is clear that some of the elements that are not present in the LFC take a prominent place here, such as the replacement of /θ, ð/ with /t,d/, which is considered a fairly serious error in both RP and GA target accents. On the other hand, word-initial aspiration, which Jenkins



considers to be essential, is hardly noticed by GA speakers, though RP speakers do rank it fairly high.

Another point to be taken into account is that there are significant differences between the ways in which speakers of RP and of GA perceive errors, and many of these cannot be explained by the differences between RP and GA (Van den Doel, 293). Yod-dropping, for instance, would be an error in RP, but not in GA; yet RP speakers only give a medium high error rating to yod-dropping.

A third aspect that bears a closer look is the inclusion of vowels in the native speaker core. Confusion of /æ-e/ has a high ranking with both GA and RP; /ʌ-ɒ/ and /ʊ-u:/ confusion is ranked highly with RP, whereas overlong /aɪ/ scores a medium high rating. With the exception of /æ-e/, vowels appear to be less significant in GA, but they are present in the GA pronunciation hierarchy nonetheless. If RP is the dominant form in Dutch secondary schools, the perception and production of vowels would therefore merit a more detailed approach in pronunciation teaching than Jenkins, among others, proposes.

Van den Doel also suggests including the results in secondary school curricula. 46% of the secondary school teachers that participated in the study specified that pronunciation training was given in every class, 17% claimed to offer it every week, and 37% only occasionally, yet only 5% of the students participating in this study claimed that pronunciation training was offered in every class; 74% claimed to receive pronunciation training only occasionally (49). Conversely, 29% of secondary school teachers considered pronunciation to be “essential” or “very important” against 62% of all students (50). Apparently, secondary school teachers have taken a lighter definition of what constitutes pronunciation training. However, since the desire to receive

pronunciation training is apparently present among students, a certain amount of formal training may not be such a bad idea after all. For secondary schools in the Netherlands, Van den Doel argues, the focusing errors which have received a rating of 2.2 or higher will suffice (314-315); he also states that “for pronunciation training to be effective, it is important that learners be exposed to a native-speaker model which they feel motivated to imitate” and that “teachers should make more explicit reference to different pronunciation models such as RP and GA...and should discuss a number of salient differences between the sounds systems of Dutch, RP, GA or other relevant models” (314).

However, the results of Van den Doel’s study should not be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum without further study. First of all, where Jenkins’s model is aimed at communication between non-native speakers, Van den Doel’s study focuses mainly on communication with native speakers, and therefore faces some limitations. Nevertheless, intelligibility in speech between two non-native speakers of English will most likely not be compromised; due to the hegemony of native speakers of RP and GA in the media, most learners will be familiar with these accents. A different problem, however, is encountered with the type of sounds that native speakers rank highest. As Jenkins suggests, /θ, ð/ are absent from the majority of languages in the world and do not compromise intelligibility (137). They are highly stigmatised by native speakers, as shown by Van den Doel, but since they are notoriously difficult to acquire one wonders whether including them into the curriculum would not cause the students to become demotivated after failing to acquire these sounds. As Van den Doel writes, “it should be

noted that this list is based on native-speaker judgements rather than on any other pedagogical considerations” (314).

In summary, this study shows some similarity to Jenkins’ work and also exposes several blind spots of the LFC, but the results cannot be copied and pasted into the final exam curriculum without further considerations.

#### ***1.4 Dutch learner judgement: Koster and Koet***

Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core is aimed specifically at providing a core pronunciation suitable for English that is spoken between non-native speakers of different L1 backgrounds. Van den Doel’s study, on the other hand, establishes which typically Dutch errors are most serious in communicating with native English speakers from different backgrounds. Although the native speaker study is aimed specifically at Dutch pronunciation errors, the aim of the study is to determine the opinion of native speakers of English rather than Dutch learners. This is what Koster and Koet have tried to establish in their study on the perception of errors in the speech of Dutch learners of English. Although limited in scope when compared to the Van den Doel study especially, Koster and Koet let both native speakers of English from diverse backgrounds and English teachers in Dutch secondary schools judge typical Dutch pronunciation errors. One fact that puts the results of the previous study in a different light is Koster and Koet’s remark, found early in the paper, that “British listeners, again, showed themselves more tolerant in finding the pronunciation of Dutch speakers more pleasant and less ugly than did Dutch teachers of English” (69), a fact which Koet (2008) later confirmed: “the Dutch listeners were stricter in their judgements of English speech produced by the native speakers of Dutch than the English” (112).

Koster and Koet also list various effects that accented speech may have on listeners. First of all, listeners determine nationality using speech features, then assign certain personality traits to the listeners (73); needless to say, these are often based on stereotypes and are not always favourable. Secondly, deviations from the accepted norm may lead to unintelligibility when a particular phoneme is replaced by another, already existing phoneme, for instance when /θ/ is replaced by /s/, although context will usually sort out these misunderstandings (74). Thirdly, unusual pronunciation, though comprehensible, may require extra efforts on the side of the listener, which could lead to fatigue (74). For these reasons, Koster and Koet advocate a certain amount of pronunciation training.

The purpose of their study is two-fold: first of all, they try to establish which typical Dutch English errors Dutch and English speakers find most annoying; secondly, they try to establish whether English speakers are indeed more tolerant than Dutch native speakers when it comes to errors in English speech production. During the experiment, 59 sentences, recorded by secondary school students and assessed to ensure typical Dutch English errors were represented, were presented to 21 English native speakers and 22 Dutch teachers of English at various levels. They were then asked to judge if the sentences that they heard contained any errors and if so, whether they were major or minor errors.

The results showed that indeed, “the English subjects were considerably more tolerant than were the Dutch ones with regard to the number of errors spotted”; where English listeners reported little over 20% of all sentences to be error-free, the Dutch judges reported this number at little over 10% (77). Both groups were shown to be more

sensitive to consonant errors than to vowel errors, yet the English listeners more so than the Dutch listeners. Vowel errors were judged less severely, though they were ranked higher by Dutch judges than by English judges. Other errors were spotted significantly less often. Errors that the Dutch spotted more often than the English, apart from vowel errors, were concatenation, weak forms, intonation, schwa-insertion, and American accent. The only errors that the English judges reported more often than the Dutch were stress and consonant errors (78).

However, not all of these errors were judged equally severely. A lack of weak forms, for instance, was not rated very severely, though Dutch judges objected slightly more. Increased rhoticity and a tendency to voice intervocalic /t/ were expected to be judged severely by Dutch judges especially, since these signs of an American accent were for a long time unacceptable in secondary schools in the Netherlands, but neither English nor Dutch judges found this to be a severe error. Likewise, schwa-insertions in Dutch-sounding intonation were not considered to be grave mispronunciations, although Dutch judges consistently rated these errors more severely than English judges. Stress, on the other hand, was determined by both groups as a severe error (78-79).

As for specific vowel errors, both groups seemed to agree that the most severe error is /ʌ/-/u/ confusion, closely followed by /æ/-/e/ confusion, though Dutch judges considered the latter to be more grave than the English judges, whom, in turn, found the realisation of /ɔ:/ as in *call* and /əʊ/ as in *coke* to be more severe than did Dutch judges (79-81). Consensus was also reached on most consonants. The English judges considered substitution of /ð/ by /d/ to be the most serious error by far. Dutch judges, too, considered this a fairly important error, though they rated a wider variety of consonant errors as

such. A possible explanation, according to Koster and Koet, is that Dutch teachers “have learned to live with the fact that the /ð/ poses almost insurmountable problems for Dutch students” (80). Despite the severity rates assigned to these errors, Koster and Koet claim that consonant errors do not, in practice, lead to misunderstandings very often, which implies that its significance for educational purposes is limited (81). Furthermore, they explain the heightened sensitivity of the Dutch judges to their “narrowly defined norm” of acceptable English; since Englishmen are more familiar with the various accents in the British Isles, they are more likely to rate a number of varieties as acceptable (82). Finally, although suprasegmental errors were included in the study, they were barely noticed and less objected to than phonemic errors, possibly because they appear to be more ‘tangible’ (83).

In comparison to the Lingua Franca core, the study yields some remarkable results. For instance, although Jenkins considers /θ, ð/ to be non-essential, both English and Dutch judges appear to attach great value to it, even if the pronunciation problems of Dutch learners considering these vowels appear insurmountable. More surprisingly, word-initial aspiration is absent from this study, although it receives a prominent place with the LFC and is rated as a “significant” error by Collins and Mees (291). This ties in with an objection raised by Van den Doel that Koster and Koet do not take into account the position that a phoneme occupies in a word or phrase; the native-speaker experiment indicated that this does matter (2006, 245). Also, unlike the native speaker experiment, incorrect stress did not receive a higher ranking than consonantal and vowel errors. The RP experiment performed by Van den Doel ranked stress and stress-related errors in top position, ahead of any of the other errors that have been given prominence by both Dutch

and English judges in Koster and Koet's study. A further limitation of the study is that it merely indicates the amount of errors noted by the listeners and not, as the native speaker experiment does, the severity rates as well as detection rates.

Koster and Koet's study has several restrictions that prevent it from being applicable to secondary education without further adaptations. The insights that it reveals by describing specific vowel and consonant rankings may provide to be useful in secondary education at teacher training institutes and university courses, but in the restricted curriculum at secondary schools they are irrelevant until elementary errors have been covered. Surprisingly, contrary to other studies, Koster and Koet conclude that although "in the teaching of English, little attention is paid to pronunciation...the little time that is spent on it is sufficient" (89). This is a remarkable conclusion, since it appears to indicate that if native speakers do not find the Dutch English accent annoying, then Dutch speakers do not have the right to desire improving their accent. The simple fact that it might enhance their motivation and self-confidence is, apparently, considered irrelevant, as are the views and positions of the listeners. However, since there is a strong bond between a learner's performance and their motivation, their opinion should be included in the final list of phonemes that should be included in the final list of

### ***1.5 Frequency and Minimal Pairs: Brown's Theory of Functional Load***

A number of criteria must be met for any sort of pronunciation core to be useful and successful. In addition to establishing the needs and desires for communication with native as well as non-native speakers of English and the preferences of the learners themselves, attention needs to be paid to the gravity of certain errors. For instance, a certain contrast often confused by Dutch learners of English might be rated high by both

native speakers and non-native speakers as well as the learners themselves, but if this contrast does not appear often in the target language, including it in a curriculum might take away time from more pressing needs.

To discover which phonemes weigh most heavily, the concept of functional load can be used. Functional load is measured and defined differently by several authors.

King, for example, defines it as follows:

The term functional load is customarily used in linguistics to describe the extent and degree of contrast between linguistic units, usually phonemes. In its simplest expression, functional load is a measure of the number of minimal pairs which can be found for a given opposition. More generally, in phonology, it is a measure of the work which two phonemes (or a distinctive feature) do in keeping utterances apart – in other words, a gauge of the frequency with which two phonemes contrast in all possible environments (381).

Applications for functional load have been diverse. Functional loads have been used, for example, to explain historic changes in speech, and, more recently, in speech recognition systems and spelling reform; however, it has not been applied extensively to language education (Brown, 595-596).

To determine phonemes' functional load, Brown first looks at the cumulative frequency of a set of phonemes. For instance, the /e/-/æ/-set has a cumulative frequency of 11.85%, meaning that over one in ten vowels is either /e/ or /æ/ (Brown, 579). Being able to distinguish these two, then, appears to be more significant than distinguishing /ɪə, eə/, which has a cumulative frequency of only 1.83%. Brown, however, also looks at the phonemes' separate probabilities of occurrence. The cumulative frequency of /i:,ɪ/ is



25.57%, but individually /i:,ɪ/ score 4.55% and 21.02% respectively. Brown calculates the probability of occurrence for each individual phoneme:

The closer the probability of occurrence of each member is to .50, the greater is the potential confusion to be caused by the conflation of the pair. In this way, we may distinguish four extremes: (a) pairs with a high cumulative frequency and relatively equal probability, for example /ð, d/; (b) pairs with a high cumulative frequency but unequal probability, for example /i:,ɪ/, /n, ŋ/; (c) pairs with a low cumulative frequency and relatively equal probability, for example, /ɪə, eə/, /tʃ, dʒ/; and (d) pairs with a low cumulative frequency and unequal probability, for example, /ɔ:, ɒ/. It seems reasonable to rank order them as above in decreasing order of importance for learners and teachers (597).

He also distinguishes between sets that have twenty or more minimal pairs, and those that have less, or only have very rare and contrived minimal pairs (such as *shoed/shoed*)

Finally, he indicates whether sets are conflated by some native speakers or not; if a certain set is often conflated by native speakers, Brown assumes that listeners will be used to this and will have no trouble accepting a similar pronunciation from non-native speakers (598). From this, Brown establishes a ranking: /p,b; e,æ; i:, ɪ; ð, d; n, ŋ; tʃ, dʒ; u:, ʊ; ɪə, eə; ɔ:, ɒ/ (most important first; 603). The higher the functional load of a vowel is, the more frequently it occurs both individually and in minimal pairs; a high functional load, therefore, indicates the need for a certain vowel to be mastered for foreign language production. Brown recommends teachers to determine which conflations are present in his or her student body and focus on these (604).

The use of functional load was put to the test by Munro and Derwing, who recorded perceptions of native speakers to Cantonese learners of English. Their findings confirm that phonemes with a high functional load were more significant in the comprehension of foreign accented speech: “the high FL (functional load) errors had relatively large effects on both perceptual scales, while errors seen in the data occurred with high FL errors in the judgement of accentedness” (520).

However, there are some drawbacks to Brown’s study, making it unsuitable for implementation in Dutch secondary school curricula. Primarily, it is not aimed at native speakers of Dutch, but rather provides a ranking from the point of view of native speakers. In addition, it focuses heavily on RP. Not only does Brown use the phonetic set of RP as a base for his research, he also appears to assume that the learner’s audience consists mainly of RP speakers or, at the very least, native speakers of English: when looking at occurrence of conflation in native languages, Brown’s references are from New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and East Anglia (598). As Jenkins has pointed out, a significant part of communication in the English language takes place between non-native speakers who may, or may not, follow native-speaker norms. Finally, although Brown mentions that it is worth looking at the difference between word-initial, word-medial and word-final position of certain phonemes, this is not reflected in his final rank ordering (604).

The premises of Brown’s study, then, are not so much incorrect as incomplete for the sake of education of English as a foreign language. Though Brown provides a convenient point of reference when it comes to importance of certain phonemes over others, it is worth keeping these points of criticism in mind.

## *1.6 Towards A Common Core for Dutch Learners of English*

Jenkins, Van den Doel, Koster and Koet, and Brown have all examined different groups of English speakers. While Jenkins focuses exclusively on communication between non-native speakers, it does not target Dutch speakers in particular; hence some parts of the Lingua Franca Core may not be essential to Dutch learners. For instance, Jenkins' suggestion to substitute [ɸ] is irrelevant since Dutch learners, if anything, tend to produce this phoneme with an over-dark quality, rather than too light. Collins and Mees regard an over-dark [ɸ] as a significant error, but it is not among the most significant errors that Dutch learners of English often commit (291).

The study by Van den Doel, unlike the Lingua Franca Core, is aimed at Dutch learners in that it creates a hierarchy of errors that are specifically problematic to Dutch learners. The results of the native speaker experiment have yielded results that contradict those found by Jenkins, although stress takes a prominent position in both studies. However, where Jenkins dismisses /θ, ð/ as irrelevant, native speakers rate this as important for both RP and GA; and where Jenkins indicates that aspiration for /p,t,k/ is essential, native speakers, especially from the GA experiment, appear to not even notice when aspiration is missing, and only the RP experiment ranked lack of aspiration in [t] as important. Similarly, Jenkins also dismisses most vowel contrasts as unimportant, save for /ɜ:/, whereas Van den Doel indicates several contrasts that are important for both GA and RP, most notably /æ-e/, but /ʌ-ɒ, ʊ-u:/ as well. One aspect that both studies agree on is the use of the correct realisation of /r/. Collins and Mees describe that of the several forms of /r/ that are generally used in the Netherlands, only uvular /ʁ/ is considered to be truly unacceptable; the native speaker experiment confirms this by assigning a high error

rating to the uvular /ʀ/ in GA and a medium-to-high rating in RP, but also post-vocalic /r/. Jenkins agrees with this and proposes to replace all instances of /r/ with GA rhotic [ɹ], which is easier to maintain than RP [ɹ], which is bound to more complex rules. Another similarity between both is their emphasis on the importance of the fortis/lenis contrast. Jenkins includes it to some degree in the LFC, and the native speakers rank it highly both for RP and GA in the case of /f-v/ and /t-d/. Typically, the study by Koster and Koet reports that Dutch speakers of English detected a high error rate in the use of /d/ (20.8% as opposed to 13.6% for the English judges), but not in the use of /v/ (6.6% as opposed to 1.8% for the English judges, 82). Remarkably, only 1.2% of all errors noticed by the Dutch judges in Koster and Koet were /r/ (82), indicating that they did not consider this a very serious error. In regard to vowels, the findings of Koster and Koet concurred with the /æ-e/, which accounted for 23.3% of all vowel errors perceived (as opposed to a mere 16.0% in the case of the English judges). An even greater percentage accounted for the /ʌ-ɒ/ contrast, which was 26.0% in the case of the Dutch judges, and 24.2% of all English judges. The Dutch judges also noted a high error incidence in the case of /əʊ/, 13.4% (81), but this diphthong is absent from both the Lingua Franca core and the native speaker judgements. Finally, Brown's study ranks phoneme pairs based on their frequency and positions of occurrence, but it relies heavily on RP and other native-speaker accents. Like Koster and Koet and Van den Doel, Brown ranks /æ-e/ and /ʌ-ɒ/: both contrasts earn a 10 on a scale from one to ten, and so does /p-b/; /k-g/ and /t-d/ score nine out of ten (604). However, as mentioned before, the positions in which these phonemes were most problematic are not specified. Differences between Brown's study on functional load and Van den Doel's native speaker test subjects also exist: the /ʊ-u:/-

contrast only scores three points with Brown, but is rated more significantly in Van den Doel's study. Finally, Brown's study relies heavily on minimal pairs, meaning that, for example, /r/-placement is not discussed, whereas Jenkins stresses the importance of proper /r/-placement and pronunciation, and similarly, it has a prominent place in the results of Van den Doel's study as well.

By comparing the results from the LFC, the native speaker judgements, the Dutch speaker judgements, and probability of occurrence, a tentative 'top five' can be established that would be beneficial for communication with native speakers as well as non-native speakers, while at the same time maintaining support for Dutch learners of English, as it also reflects their opinions and desires. These five sounds should not take learners too much time to acquire, yet adding them to their speech will improve their comprehensibility significantly.

The top five was composed by taking the sound with the highest error ratings for both GA and RP from the Van den Doel study, since these are errors typical of Dutch English pronunciation, and checking them against both Jenkins's study for communication with non-native speakers and the study by Koster and Koet to see if they matched Dutch learner preferences. Finally, Brown's study was used to ensure all sounds in the top five are used frequently, to prevent learners from focussing on contrasts appear only rarely in favour of those that appear frequently. The number of five was selected because a small core such as this will not require extracurricular hours for secondary school students of English. By keeping the core small, time constraints will not prevent learners from acquiring that which is essential.

### 1.6.1. /æ-e/ contrast

This is one of the most well-known aspects of Dutch English speech. Though Jenkins does not acknowledge its importance in the LFC, both the native speakers and Dutch speakers of English rank this contrast highly. The contrast also has a high cumulative frequency: 11.05% of all vowels is either /æ/ or /e/ (Brown, 598). Native speakers have assigned this contrast a high composite rate for both GA and RP, which is why it is appropriate to include it in the top five; it is salient no matter which model a learner chooses. Furthermore, the /æ-e/ is a common contrast that appears over 20 minimal pairs of mostly high-frequency words (Brown, 598), such as *bet-bat* and *bed-bad*; Collins and Mees also assess this contrast as being highly significant since, as they claim, it threatens a breakdown of intelligibility. They add that in addition to /æ-e/ confusion, both vowels are regularly switched with /ɛə/ as in the word *square*. (290) Dutch learners regularly substitute all three for Dutch /ɛ/, which is closer to English /e/ than to /æ, ɛə/. However, since the latter is not included in any of the studies and has a lower incidence rate, it is not part of the most salient errors and can be left out of the secondary school curriculum. Collins and Mees advise learners of Dutch to aim at an open quality, unlike /e/, and should aim more at Dutch /a:/ as in *maan* (94). In addition, they also point out that production of /æ/ is quite reliable when orthography presents an *a* such as in *sad, hat, battle, baron, Paris, marry, carry, etc.* This is a rule that secondary school students could easily learn. Hence, it should be possible for them to include this contrast into their speech.

### **1.6.2 Word-initial fortis/lenis contrast for /f-v/ and word-final fortis/lenis contrast for /f-v, t-d, (s-z)/**

The lack of fortis/lenis contrast is a common error in the English speech of Dutch learners. Jenkins, Van den Doel and Koster and Koet all include it in their results. Jenkins, admittedly, has a very minimal role for the fortis/lenis contrast, including it in her *Lingua Franca Core* merely to indicate its effect on vowel length. Native speakers assign a far more prominent role to this contrast, both for /f-v/ and /t-d/: with RP it has a medium to high rating, but for GA, fortis-lenis neutralisation is one of the worst sins that native speakers can commit. Collins and Mees have included both contrasts in their hierarchy of errors as well and consider them to be among the most significant, both in the case of word-initial as well as word-final (290). Brown, too, indicates the importance fortis-lenis contrasts, and gives the specific /t-d/ contrast a nine out of ten on a rank ordering; /f-v/ is ranked medium high, with seven out of ten (Brown, 604). However, Brown does not indicate in which positions these contrasts are problematic: according to Collins and Mees, the /f-v/ contrast is problematic both in initial, medial and word-final positions, which is why it merits a part in pronunciation training in secondary schools. Native Dutch speakers often do not contrast /f/ and /f̥/, let alone English /v/ which often gets replaced with Dutch /f/ in word-initial and medial positions (Collins and Mees, 140). Dutch learners are encouraged to use Dutch /v/ instead, as this is more likely to be perceived as /v/, which has more consistent voicing than Dutch /f̥/. The /t-d/ contrast in word-initial and word-medial positions is not problematic, though some learners tend to substitute word-medial /t/ for /d/; however, Dutch has final devoicing, which in effect transforms /d/ into /t/ and /v/ into /f̥/. Since this could potentially create problems with

intelligibility, for instance in the minimal pair *bet-bed* and *bad-bat*, these and other fortis-lenis contrasts need to be addressed in secondary schools.

### **1.6.3. /r/ placement and rhoticity vs. non-rhoticity**

The use of /r/, even in Dutch, is problematic in itself. Collins and Mees list eleven types of /r/ used in the Netherlands alone; five uvular /r/, five alveolar /r/ and one pre-velar /r/ (199). However, those who produce a weak alveolar or ‘tongue-tap’ /r/ are unlikely to experience any problems; strong taps may need to be reduced. Likewise, most of those who produce a uvular /r/ are unlikely to experience any problems; only those with a strong uvular [ʁ] will need to adapt their speech; however, this is only a small minority (179). The third group produces a pre-velar [ɹ], which is in line with the recommendations of Jenkins. At first glance, there appears to be very little reason to include /r/ in a secondary-school curriculum. However, Jenkins’ recommendation also indicates why /r/ placement, distribution in particular, is problematic. Jenkins proposes GA rhoticity using [ɹ] instead of RP [ɹ], since the rules on /r/-distribution are less complex in GA than in RP. Indeed, use of uvular [ʁ] has a high rating for RP and very high in GA, indicating that native speakers consider this a grave error. Strangely, inappropriate post-vocalic /r/ scores only a medium rating with non-rhotic RP, but a high rating with rhotic GA, which, by all means, does incorporate post-vocalic /r/.

For motivational reasons, it is best to let students choose which accent they prefer when RP and GA differ in pronunciation, as is the case with rhoticity. Orthographically, following GA rhoticity appears to be the path of least resistance, since it is comparable to the rule that is adhered to in Dutch: if the *r* is present in writing, it is present in pronunciation. However, the rule for /r/-deletion in RP is quite simple: /r/ is produced in



initial positions, in medial positions only when followed by a vowel, and in final positions only if the ensuing word begins with a vowel (a linking /r/) (Collins and Mees, 180). Jenkins' preference for GA rhoticity lacks consistency when combined with her insistence on pronouncing /t/ in medial positions as in RP; for students who wish to follow RP, a rule such as this could clarify enough so that they will be able to use the accent of their choice. At secondary school level, consistency of /r/-placement with RP or GA should be sufficient; students need not concern themselves with intrusive /r/ as well.

#### **1.6.4. Pronunciation of /θ, ð/**

Of all sounds listed in the top five, these two dental fricatives are perhaps the most controversial. Jenkins, for instance, insists that they are unimportant to the LFC: since most non-native speakers do not have either phoneme in their L1 sound inventory, English as a Lingua Franca will not suffer from this lack and can easily be replaced with /f-v, t-d/ or even /s-z/; however, Jenkins herself prefers /f-v/ since they are not only closer to the target sounds, but are also commonly used by some native speakers. In light of Jenkins' insistence that non-native speakers need not use native accents as their model, this is quite a paradoxical statement; if learners aspire to become native-like in their speech, they might as well go for the correct pronunciation. , Brown, too, ranks both /θ-s/ and /ð-d/-conflation as a medium error with five out of ten points on a pronunciation scale from one to ten (Brown, 604).

Nevertheless, as Koster and Koet have pointed out, many learners struggle with these phonemes. Collins and Mees consider /ð/ to be a persistent error for nearly all learners and assign it to level one in their hierarchy of errors; /θ/-substitution by /s, t, f/ is also assigned category one, though it is classified as non-persistent, and is mostly found

with beginners (290-291). Intelligibility could possibly be threatened in the case of /θ/-substitution, for instance in the minimal pair *think* and *sink*, though the context may clarify these things. Nevertheless, substitution of /θ, ð/ by /f-v/ is given significant attention in the native speaker study, scoring medium to high ratings for RP and mostly high ratings for GA. Dutch speakers of English regard this as a serious error as well: errors involving /ð/ account for 17.4% of all errors noted by the Dutch judges of the Koster and Koet experiment, second only to word-final devoicing of /d/. Notably, /θ/ accounted for only 7.6% of all errors noted, making a distant fourth. However, since /θ/ is the easier of the two to pronounce, it will be useful to include it.

Collins and Mees, too, confirm that since there is no Dutch equivalent for either /θ/ or /ð/, most learners will experience major problems in pronouncing these two sounds. (142-143). They offer some general pronunciation advice: “the traditional instruction [for /θ/] of *tongue between teeth* obtains the slit tongue shape which distinguishes /θ/ from /s/. It is advisable to move away from an inter-dental articulation as soon as reasonable fluency is achieved” (143). Similar instruction is provided for /ð/, where the learner is instructed to “aim at a post-dental place of articulation...and certainly not an inter-dental fricative” (143). Students are also advised to start with Dutch /d/, producing “a type of post-dental approximant which will pass for [English] /ð/” (143). Needless to say, secondary school students will not understand the terminology that is used by Collins and Mees, but if the production of these two sounds is to become one of the aims of pronunciation training, instruction of this nature, perhaps leaving out the phonetic terminology, could be useful. Similarly, as has been noted earlier by Van den Doel (2006), attention should be paid to the position of the sounds as well; since students find

them so difficult, it may be worth to teach them that avoidance in high-frequency words such as *that* is judged less severely. This way, students can focus on pronouncing these sounds in positions where they would be assessed more severely.

#### **1.6.5. /ʌ-ɒ/ contrast**

Vowels /ʌ/, as in *strut*, and /ɒ/, as in *lot*, are both checked vowels. While they are not used as frequently as, for instance, /e-æ/, they are persistently confused by Dutch listeners. The /ʌ-ɒ/ confusion mainly stems from orthography, as some high-frequency words, the so-called worry words, are spelled with an o, tricking learners into thinking that they should be pronounced with /ɒ/. Collins and Mees assign it a level 2 rating, meaning that the error is profound enough to cause irritation, distraction or amusement, but does not pose a threat to the intelligibility of a speaker. Brown, on the other hand, regards the /ʌ-ɒ/-contrast as one of the most important errors, assigning it a full ten out of ten points on a rank ordering (Brown, 604). The Dutch judges noted /ʌ-ɒ/ substitution most often of all vowel errors: it accounts for 26% of all the errors that were perceived. The native speakers in the RP-experiment performed by Van den Doel assigned /ʌ-ɒ/ confusion a high composite rating, meaning it was not only noticed often, but it was considered to be unpleasant or stigmatising as well. Remarkably, the GA experiment yielded a low rating for this item, making it less relevant for those who wish to learn the GA accent.

Dutch learners frequently replace /ʌ/ with Dutch /ʉ/; learners are advised to use Dutch /a:/ and gradually shorten the vowel instead (Collins and Mees, 95). This is an activity that can be done in class by working in pairs; it does not require more extensive phonological explanation, like the pronunciation of /θ, ð/. Since these phonemes are

significant enough to require correct pronunciation, and both Dutch speakers of English and native speakers of RP and RP-like varieties rate this as a very serious error, it is worthwhile to include it in the curriculum.

### ***1.7 Conclusion***

The fact that many studies are devoted to English pronunciation indicates an important fact about the language: it is no longer merely used by native speakers but increasingly as a lingua franca between speakers with different language backgrounds. Jenkins' suggestion that the attainment of native-like accents should no longer be a target for every language learner, therefore, contains an ideological if not practical core of truth, though the native speaker accent may still serve as a model. For several reasons, it would not be feasible to implement the Lingua Franca Core in secondary schools. As Van den Doel concludes, native speaker communication cannot be left out of the equation. It is important to combine the needs of native-speaker communication as well as non-native speaker communication. The opinion of native Dutch speakers should be included in the results, if only for motivational reasons. Finally, it is worth assessing just how often a certain contrast is used; a contrast that is hard to master yet used rarely may not be worth the learner's time. To prevent spending time on phonemes that may not be of great importance to comprehension, Brown's functional load index can be used to establish a phoneme's frequency of appearance. A comparison can be made from these four studies to devise a 'Dutch English' core, consisting of five phoneme contrasts. In the restricted secondary school curriculum, any pronunciation training at an advanced level is both time-consuming and disproportional when compared with other targets in secondary school English classes in the Netherlands; a core approach will remove the most salient

errors from the students' speech and improve communication with native and non-native speakers alike.

## Chapter Two: Implementation of a Common Core in Dutch Secondary Schools

### *2.1 Introduction*

When studying the maze of research conducted on the topic of L2 phonetic acquisition, one may be tempted to conclude that very little has been discovered about pronunciation acquisition and training. Elliot sums it up by stating that, according to the results of experimental studies, phonological instruction can have no apparent relation to pronunciation ability; can have beneficial effects on accuracy; can have negative effects on accuracy because of overgeneralisation; or, when it is not taught, it can have no or a slightly negative effect (96). However, there is one outcome that these studies have in common: though hypothetically, they are past their critical period, adult<sup>4</sup> learners are capable of improving their pronunciation, even if they hardly ever reach native-like status.

Yet very little pronunciation training is given in secondary schools. There are several reasons for this; first of all, the general idea that pronunciation is a difficult subject to teach; secondly, that secondary school learners are too old to acquire pronunciation; thirdly, that it does not fit in with the Communicative Approach used by most schools; fourthly, that there are not enough materials to cover pronunciation teaching; and, finally, that teachers do not know how to assess pronunciation. However, none of these problems are insurmountable, and with a suitable approach, pronunciation can be integrated into the secondary school curriculum.

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<sup>4</sup> Here, the term “adult learner” is used to indicate a learner who, in any case, is past his or her critical period, and is also used for adolescent learners.

## *2.2 Arguments for and against Pronunciation Training*

Despite the reservations of some, several reasons can be given for adding some form of pronunciation teaching to the curriculum. Pennington, for instance, points out the “covert prestige” of acquiring an accent. Whereas this term is most commonly used in L1 sociolinguistics, a British or American accent could certainly carry prestige for non-native speakers as well. Others, such as Morley, have pointed out that correct pronunciation not only raises intelligibility; it also gives the learner more self-confidence, causing him or her to use the language more often (67).

Motivation plays an important role in L2 acquisition; Oxford and Shearin, for instance, note that it is “crucial” for teachers to understand the learner’s motivation, or lack thereof (13). They point out that motivated students produce better results: “motivation is considered by many to be one of the main determining factors in success in developing a second or foreign language” (13). Hence, it would be sensible to let learners select the accent of their choice, since this might heighten their motivation. Barring the five essential phonetic contrasts as discussed in chapter one, learners should be able to select their accent of preference, should they decide to imitate one – though, if possible, they should be made aware of the stereotypes associated with the accent of their choice. Pennington suggests that good pronunciation teaching not only offers phonetics or phonology as a regular and structural part of a course, but also offers an assortment of varieties of English:

Attempting to teach students to sound exactly like one particular group as opposed to another is counter-productive, and not consistent with the need to provide as much input as possible in order for cognitive processes [of the learner]

to select modes of performance that are appropriate for the individual learner.  
(Esling, as cited in Pennington, 17).

Pennington advocates a variationist stance, where students are exposed to multiple varieties of English and “that they be actively involved in deciding what they will learn and in developing their own learning process” (17).

In light of the importance of motivation, it is important to keep in mind the desire of the learners themselves. In a survey conducted by Timmis, students from 14 different countries were asked with whom they sympathised more: the student with a native-like accent, or the student who is intelligible, but still has a strong L2 accent. 67% of all students considered the student with a near-native pronunciation an ideal, against 27% of all teachers.<sup>5</sup> There appears to be a difference, then, between the desire of the learners, whose ideal it is to sound native-like, and the teachers, who “regard ‘accented intelligibility’ as the most *desirable* outcome” (Timmis, 234).

Another argument commonly used against pronunciation training is that adults are incapable of learning an accent, since they are past the critical period. They have categorised all speech sounds known to them, and will experience problems in trying to integrate a second set of phonemes from an L2. As Flege points out, even with highly experienced learners, there are marginal differences with native speakers (60-61). However, there is no inherent need for secondary school students to strive to attain a native or native-like accent. As has been pointed out, certain phonemes are more important to learn because they could lead to either confusion or irritation. Lowie, for instance, distinguishes between intelligibility, “comfortable intelligibility”, and a native-

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<sup>5</sup> 39% of all teacher preferred the student who retained some L1 traces in their accent, and 34% expressed no preference. Students were not given a no-preference option in the questionnaire.



like accent (5). Acquiring the elements proposed in the previous chapter would take the middle road and allow for comfortable intelligibility. A study by Isaacs on the subject of intelligibility indicates that intelligibility is an acceptable criterion for pronunciation (570). In addition, she asked several native speakers of English to assess eight foreign accented speakers on their suitability as teaching assistants in native speaker undergraduate courses in various academic fields; the judges found that “speakers who performed well in intelligibility and comprehensibility ratings were also judged to have adequate pronunciation to be a TA [Teaching Assistant] for an undergraduate course” (571). Given this result, setting the learner’s goal at intelligibility rather than a near-native or native-like accent should suffice. This position is strengthened by Flege, who notes that it might not be possible for learners to acquire a native-like accent, although they can modify their categorisation and speech patterns to incorporate new vowels from the L2 (62), so that their pronunciation can reach the level of comfortable intelligibility. A study conducted by Rochet, too, indicates that learners were able to improve their pronunciation after instruction and sufficient exposure had been given, and even found that once learners started improving their pronunciation in one area, other areas began to benefit as well (401). Likewise, Jones notes that adults can learn pronunciation and phoneme discrimination, and in some cases were able to do so better than children, especially in the early stages of language acquisition (104).

Finally, Krashen, too, claims that pronunciation is largely an acquired skill and pronunciation training is either ineffective or even detrimental to a learner’s pronunciation (cited by Jones, 104). However, a study conducted by Elliot pointed in a different direction. Elliot compared the pronunciation acquisition of two similar groups of

learners, one of which received input only and one of which received both input and instruction. Elliot concludes that “the results suggest that formal instruction in pronunciation was significantly related to overall improvement for the experimental group,” and noted that very little changed for the input-only group (101).

From the lack of pronunciation training provided in secondary schools in the Netherlands, it would be easy to conclude those who are against pronunciation training have a point, but with instruction and enough time and exposure, pronunciation training can most certainly be beneficial.

### ***2.3 Age of introduction***

Secondary school in the Netherlands commences at the age of 12 for most students. Supporters of the Critical Period hypothesis usually hold this to be past the critical period for language learning. Pennington, among others, writes that by the age of twelve – at the latest – the learner’s critical period ends, meaning that language acquisition, though not at all impossible, becomes less automatic and requires more intensive study (7). Adults, unlike infants and young children, approach a language from an analytical point of view and base their pronunciation on their knowledge of their L1 but, as Pennington points out, while L1 transfer is beneficial to lexical or even grammatical acquisition, in most cases it will not aid the learners’ L2 phonological production (Pennington, 7-8).

From this perspective, it would be possible to argue that the ‘in between’-stage of the early teens is not the best time to start pronunciation training: after all, at age twelve, learners are past their critical period, but have not yet developed an adult’s analytical

skills. However, for several reasons, commencing pronunciation training during the early stages of language acquisition is preferable.

First of all, as Pennington points out, orthography often has a negative influence on pronunciation: knowledge of spelling can prevent learners from predicting the correct pronunciation of a word, since English orthography is highly irregular (184). However, students in the early stages of their L2 education will have a limited knowledge of orthography, which would make pronunciation training more effective and easier for them.

Secondly, starting pronunciation training early in the curriculum has the additional benefit that less spontaneous speech is produced. It seems likely that students are less inclined towards spontaneous speech in the early stages of language learning, because they simply do not have the language skills required for this. From this, it would then follow that language production in the early stages would be much more directed and, hence, not focused on meaning but rather on form. This fits in with the recommendations of Hewings, for instance, who recommends focusing on form before focusing on meaning (437).

Thirdly, several studies have revealed that exposure is an important element in pronunciation training (Rochet, 381-386; Llisteri, par. 59). An early start would allow teachers to give their students a greater amount of exposure, as well as ensure that there is diversity in the material used for pronunciation training. Increasing exposure for pronunciation training purposes later in the acquisition stages may not grant them enough time to become acquainted with the language, and could hinder their perception.

Fourthly, another reason to introduce pronunciation relatively early in the curriculum is that learners need time to acquire the motor skills necessary for accurate pronunciation. Much like an athlete training for a match, language learners do not acquire these skills overnight. As Jones puts it, pronunciation, unlike grammar, is a cognitive as well as a motor skill, and it involves habit formation (105). Flege, too, notes that it is hard to modify speech sounds after infancy, and that it takes time and experience (48-49). The extended period of time also allows the learner to keep up with the skills he or she has acquired; much like an athlete training before a match, pronunciation as a motor skill is something that requires maintenance in order to be successful. It is therefore best served by regular practice over an extended period of time.

Fifthly, beginning pronunciation training ensures that every learner receives at the very least a bare minimum of pronunciation training. Those learners who follow the pre-university educational track or VWO already receive more English lessons than those who follow a pre-vocational secondary school or VMBO track. By beginning pronunciation training at an early stage, all learners will have received a proportional amount of pronunciation training in relation to their (likely) overall knowledge of English; that way, higher demands can be made from those with pre-university training, even though pronunciation is not a conscious cognitive function.

Finally, the Critical Period hypothesis is by no means uncontested. Gass and Selinker point out that post-secondary school language students perform well on tests measuring the speed of language acquisition, especially in short term (336). If there is no such thing as a critical period, the age of acquisition should not matter; beginning at a younger age gives the learner more time to acquire the necessary skills. Additionally,

Even if the Critical period hypothesis is accepted, the question remains whether this period ends with a sudden drop off, or a “gradual decline in abilities, as suggested by Flege” (cited in Gass and Selinker, 337), in which case learners may still possess some of the abilities of their critical period by the time they begin secondary school.

To conclude, there are several arguments to be made for introducing pronunciation education at the beginning of the secondary school curriculum. Inexperienced learners have less knowledge of orthography and are less likely to be hindered by this, nor are they at risk of ‘forgetting’ their formal training when producing spontaneous speech, since they do not have enough language experience with this kind of speech production. It also allows teachers to provide learners with more exposure, allowing learners to develop their perceptive abilities. Likewise, by starting pronunciation training early on, learners will be given more time to develop the motor skills required for pronunciation. Despite the fact that learners at the beginning of Dutch secondary school are past the critical period, appropriate measures ensure that pronunciation training will be effective. The Critical Period is not uncontested, but even barring the possibility of a critical period, beginning early gives the learner more time. However, age is not the only requirement for pronunciation training; it is, in fact, a complicated process in which many factors are involved.

## ***2.4 How to Teach Pronunciation: Some Suggestions for the Educational Practice***

### **2.4.1. Introduction**

Much has been written about how pronunciation should be taught. A large amount of research focuses on the type of acquisition that does not require explicit instruction and takes place before the age of twelve. However, by the time students begin their secondary

school education in the Netherlands, many will have already passed this stage, and although some English education takes place in the highest classes of primary school, primary school teachers do not receive any formal training in phonology at teacher training institutes; in fact, a significant part of all primary school teacher training institutes (10% for full-time education, 28% for part-time education) does not even offer English in its curriculum; and primary school teacher trainees generally do not have great command of the English language (De Boer, 22-24).

Since children approach language learning in a less analytical and conscious fashion than adults, and since children in early secondary education are between these age groups, it would make sense to adopt an approach that combines both the intuitiveness of younger learners and the analytical processing skills of elder learners.

According to Pennington, a pronunciation lesson should meet certain criteria. First of all, the teacher needs to consider the student population, the teaching situation, and determine the rationale behind teaching phonetics in general and a specific contrast in particular (230). Pennington also suggests a five-step programme for the actual phonetics lessons. Each lesson focuses on one phonetic problem or contrast only; Pennington advocates selective listening, meaning students listen to sound files focussing on one particular phoneme or contrast only. First, a preview is provided: a humorous anecdote, sound file or movie clip can be provided to draw the learner's attention and to provide a context for the sound. Secondly, the problematic sound is isolated and explained. Thirdly, awareness raising takes place and the problematic phoneme or contrast is modelled, demonstrated and explained. Fourthly, controlled practice takes place, where direct feedback is provided by the teacher. Finally, learners practice in small

groups. The target of these practice sessions is to move from basic practice (such as word reading) to meaningful practice (such as acting out a written dialogue) to realistic practice (such as debating) (228-230).

This approach appears simple enough, but as of yet pronunciation is not taught extensively in secondary schools in the Netherlands. Pennington's approach gives practical advice on how to teach pronunciation, but actual implementation of pronunciation training takes more background study. Merely being able to pronounce contrasts does not make for a good speaker. Other things to be considered, for instance, are how to integrate pronunciation in the current ways of teaching in Dutch secondary schools. Learners have to be provided with input as well, since there is a complex link between the perception and production of speech sounds. Finally, not every type of speaking exercise is suitable for pronunciation. To be able to teach pronunciation effectively, teachers have to accept and include several principles into their lessons.

#### **2.4.2. Pronunciation and the Communicative Approach**

Secondary schools, over the past few decades, have begun to use the communicative approach in L2 instruction for “a shift in emphasis from language knowledge to language use”...in the classroom to create “a broader ability to use language naturally in natural situations” (Tschirner and Whitley as cited by Elliot, 95). It envelops ten central issues: communicative competence, vocabulary building, the Monitor Model, child-adult differences, the use of authentic materials, communicatively-oriented syllabi, communicative testing, explicit grammar instruction and the effect of teacher/self-error correction (Elliot, 95). Generally, this approach can be regarded as successful, but as

Elliot notes, “proponents of the communicative approach simply have not known what to do with pronunciation” (Elliot, 95).

The main problem of integrating pronunciation teaching in the communicative approach lies with the way in which the L2 phonology is acquired. According to Major’s Ontogeny Model, “transfer errors are more frequent in casual speech but decrease as speech becomes more formal” (Elliot, 101), meaning that students are more likely to fall prey to pronunciation errors when producing the type of spontaneous speech that the communicative approach favours. Another problem is created by the Monitor Model which the communicative approach uses. As Jones points out, the Monitor Model is useful for grammar acquisition, but due to the speed of speech production it does not grant the learner enough time to monitor his or her own output and could potentially even damage the learner’s acquisition if it is overused (Jones, 107).

The first of these problems can be dealt with at least partially by introducing pronunciation early in the curriculum, as has been advocated above, since students are less likely to produce spontaneous speech at in the early stages of L2 acquisition. When focus on form is present in the early stages of L2 acquisition, pronunciation could be introduced alongside. The second problem, that of the Monitor Model and pronunciation, could be solved partially by allowing the learners to reflect on their own speech by letting them record themselves; as Dłaska and Krekeler point out, learners are quite capable of assessing their own speech under certain conditions (10; please also see par. 2.6). While not generally as direct as the effect of the Monitor Model on grammatical acquisition, it will help learners gain insight in their own pronunciation as well as raise awareness about any problematic speech features that they might have acquired.



Jones, too, supports integrating formal pronunciation training into the communicative model, noting that formal rules for pronunciation “result in improvement when used for monitoring speech, and, although they can interfere with production when used for initiating speech, subjects gained in both fluency and accuracy after a period of ‘covert rehearsal’,” and also found that students with previous pronunciation training “seem to be better equipped to assess their own speech and more aware of their particular pronunciation problems” (108). It seems, then, that at least up to an elementary degree, pronunciation training can be integrated into the communicative approach.

### **2.4.3. Perception and production: a Two-Way Street**

Before the Communicative Approach was adopted as the standard format for language education, pronunciation training in the shape of drills was a common aspect of secondary school curricula. Learners would listen to either the instructor or a recording and repeat what they had heard. However, later research showed that this approach did not improve the learner’s free speech production, and when later methods of language teaching such as the Communicative Approach were adopted, pronunciation training was dropped from the secondary school curriculum altogether. Brown (1995), for instance, points out that a drill involving the minimal pair of *ship-sheep*, in a nation that has one of the largest sea ports in the world and virtually no sheep, is quite useless, since the context will nearly always clarify the speaker’s intention (173) and notes that “perhaps the greatest criticism against minimal pair drills is that they are not communicative, and therefore lack interest for the student” (172).

Drills were used to allow students to develop the motor skills to pronounce the target language. However, as later research shows, physical capacities are not the only

requirement to produce an L2 accurately. As Flege (1987) notes, there are two other causes for mispronunciation. First of all, learners who are past the critical period not only have physical difficulty producing certain phonemes; they also have problems perceiving them, firstly because they have been conditioned through their native language to ignore sounds that have no meaning in their L1, secondly because of equivalence classification (as mentioned in chapter 1) (Flege, 48-49). For this reason, pronunciation education should be based production as well as perception; the instructor cannot expect learners to produce L2 phonemes accurately without first teaching them to perceive these vowels correctly.

Others, however, stress that the connection between perception and production is more tenuous than others would suggest. In a study of /r/ and /l/-production by Japanese L1 speakers, Sheldon and Strange found that production can occasionally precede perception (254-256). However, some of the participants in the Sheldon and Strange study received explicit pronunciation training; these participants were able to produce the target sounds better than those who had not received any explicit instruction. Sheldon and Strange conclude their study by remarking that the established thought that perception precedes production is taken too much for granted. (257) Sheldon and Strange also remark that they found large individual differences between learners, which supports the thought that perception is not the only requirement for accurate pronunciation.

Nevertheless, Listeri and others also stress the importance of accurate perception by naming three factors that are important to language acquisition. The first, age of acquisition, has been outlined above; but the second and third factors, experience with the target language and amount of exposure, are tied in with perception and, in turn,

production (par. 59). Rochet, too, notes the fact that even after explicit instruction, learners can still make errors, and that correct pronunciation is a matter of experience rather than instruction alone (381-386). Keeping in mind the many inconclusive results in past studies and the research of Jones (par. 4.2 above), secondary school pronunciation training should ideally contain explicit instruction on the one hand and allow students to increase their exposure to and experience with the target language on the other.

#### **2.4.5 Theory and Practice: Examples of Exercises**

It is one thing to establish which components are essential to pronunciation education; it is, however, quite a different task to translate these components into successful lessons while, at the same time, still honouring the constraints of the preferred Communicative Approach. However, as Jones notes, most “commercially produced course books” offer activities catering to the audiolingual texts of the 1950s with drilling of “decontextualised words and sentences” (103-104). Textbooks commonly used in secondary schools in the Netherlands also tend to restrict pronunciation training to the listen-and-repeat of written down and pre-recorded sentences; as Jones and Evans point out, “while clear rules and repetition are important and useful components in any pronunciation course, they hardly constitute a communicative approach” (224). In addition, even though it may well be preferable to let students decide which accent to select, most pronunciation manuals offer only one accent, most often RP or GA. (Jones, 108)

Barring the lack of suitable material for pronunciation training, some have nevertheless developed their own approach at pronunciation training. De Altaide Melo, for example, outlines an approach suitable for the Communicative Approach. Beginning this approach with the assumption that “this approach to pronunciation teaching was that

the accuracy of form would ultimately be followed by fluency and that constant repetition would lead to perfection.” (749) A central tenet in this approach is that it focuses on the student rather than the teacher, and that “mechanical activities” such as minimal pairs are avoided because this type of exercise tends to “invite boredom.” (749). From this, De Altaide Melo derives five principles on which pronunciation training should rest:

1. The focus should be on the student; the teacher should be silent as much as possible.
2. Visual clues are necessary to link the form to the sound.
3. Technical symbols are not a necessity.
4. During the initial stages of language acquisition, vowels take priority over consonants.
5. The connection between phonology and orthography needs to be stressed.

In practice, this means that “the idea is to associate each phoneme with a visually effective word that students can see in their mind” (750), thus bypassing the need for phonetic symbols. Learners are given three different charts. Chart one is a standard vowel (or consonant) diagram with, instead of phonetic symbols, words containing the appropriate vowels in place. Learners are asked to match these words to a second chart, containing written and visualised forms of different words with the same vowel phoneme, divided up in a raster. This chart helps learners visualise phonemes. Finally, a third chart is provided, this time with a third set of words with the appropriate vowels, now without illustrations. Learners are asked to match these words to the correct square from the second chart. De Altaide Melo notes that “as we go about matching phonemes to boxes, students begin to see a sense of sound organisation and sound distribution in the language.”

This approach appears to be effective and, if nothing else, is student-centred and practical. However, for the teaching of English pronunciation, there are a few disadvantages that come with this method. The most important drawback, in this case, is that it relies heavily on the connection between pronunciation and orthography: De Altaide Melo's paper focuses on the pronunciation of Brazilian Portuguese, which has a fairly phonetic writing system, unlike English. However, this approach might still work on a limited scale, such as with the minimal pairs of bat-bad and bet-bed, for both vowels and consonants. This is also in line with Pennington's recommendations that each lesson should deal with one contrast only. In addition, the student-centered approach fits in with the Communicative Approach, and linking sounds to visual cues is an idea worth exploring, perhaps especially for those who do not have much experience with orthography. This is a subject that warrants further research.

Another example of pronunciation training brought over from theory to practice is provided by a teacher-training textbook by Staatsen *et al.* This textbook focuses on teaching foreign languages to secondary school students between the ages of approximately twelve and fifteen. Pronunciation, compared with other areas of language education, is not discussed in great detail. However, one example of pronunciation training is provided by discussing Neuner's exercise typology (122), where learners are asked to work on a series of activities that go from closed, such as reciting lines of dialogue, to open, where learners produce spontaneous speech. In the first task, learners are asked to listen to a pre-recorded dialogue, to learn the lines, and to present the dialogue out loud. This is a fairly traditional approach to language learning, but one that allows learners to focus on pronunciation almost exclusively by allowing them to stick to

a familiarised script. In the second task, the learners are asked to change details in the exercise, such as a travelling destination or location, or to change roles. In this case, learners cannot focus exclusively on pronunciation, but the amount of spontaneous speech is still fairly limited. Thirdly, learners are given a script outlining what needs to be said or asked in the learner's L1. Students are asked to prepare for this task, but as they do not know the answers of the person that they are working with, a greater amount of spontaneity is required in this task. Finally, a fourth task sees learners produce speech with only very limited support; for instance, learners are given a map and are asked to give each other directions (123-125).

There are several advantages to this approach. First of all, it allows learners a stage of 'warming up', by providing them with a set dialogue that allows them to focus solely on their pronunciation skills. Secondly, it is an exercise that teachers and learners are familiar with and will be easy to organise. Finally, these types of exercises do not require a great deal of preparation, which makes them easier still to carry out. However, this type of exercise also carries disadvantages, the most notable of which is that carrying this out in the recommended timeframe – that of a few lessons in a short period – may not grant learners enough time to practice the perceptual and physical skills required for pronunciation. Since this exercise was developed originally to practice speech abilities in general, not pronunciation specifically, it would need to be tailored to a more specific task, for instance by ensuring specific phonemes were present in the exercise. For example: if the target of a lesson is production of the /æ-e/-contrast, teachers could write a dialogue around this contrast ("have you met Matt?"), but even so, it is unlikely that

learners will remember to use this contrast correctly once they commence to use a greater amount of free speech.

However, the authors of the textbook also note that this type of exercise could be designed or adapted with long-term usage in mind. For reasons previously outlined, this would be far more suitable for pronunciation training, although some changes would have to be made. Staatsen *et al.* do not give a direct outline of how to adapt these exercises with the exception of stipulating that the subjects should go from concrete to abstract, from functional to value-orientating, and from transactional to interactional (126). Generally, the reasoning behind this exercise is clear, but adapting these exercises for the long run might be a daunting task to inexperienced teachers.

Similarly, the British Language Council has on its website a section devoted to teaching, including speech training and pronunciation. The website offers a manual for native speakers of English teaching abroad and provides some general points in the areas of class management, spoken English and teaching resources. The chapter on oral practice notes:

Speaking a language involves using the components correctly – making the right sounds, choosing the right words and getting constructions grammatically correct.

Pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary tasks will focus on the need for practice in language accuracy (Lavery, 36).

The manual separates fluency practice from pronunciation practice. The chapter on speech in general provides exercises similar to those from Staatsen, but the section on pronunciation gives more general advice on how to teach pronunciation. The native speaker is advised that “‘*Listen and Repeat*’ is the best model to follow” (56). As with De

Altaide Melo, Lavery recommends using visual aids to help learners, though she does not explain how and when these aids should be used. She also recommends using minimal pairs, but only “when it arises out of a real need...so have a list prepared at all times” (58). However, as has been pointed out, repetitive drills and a large and diverse amount of input can only go so far. Using visual aids and minimal pairs, on the other hand, does offer possibilities. Using minimal pairs when the need arises is more effective than simply having students learn them, since these phoneme contrasts will not be dealt with until the learner has reached the appropriate stage in his or her development. Using audiovisual material to support minimal pairs might make the exercise more palatable to learners; as Brown (1995) points out, “there is an old saying in ELT circles: ‘a drill is something used for boring’” (172).

In fact, Brown (1995) offers four steps in which to provide pronunciation training. First of all, teachers need to identify the students’ problem areas; secondly, they will need to look for lexical and grammatical contexts in which the problem area occurs naturally and frequently; thirdly, communicative tasks will need to be developed around these contexts; and finally, several different exercises will have to be developed to allow the learner as much practice as possible (173). As an example, /θ/-/ð/ production can be practiced by having students simulate a conversation at the doctor’s office with the “doctor examining the patient. This involves parts of the body such as *mouth, teeth, throat, thumb, and thigh*” (173). In addition, he notes that material such as this can be easily tailored to student’s needs in homogenous groups. In conclusion, it would be possible to develop exercises of this kind for Dutch secondary schools.



Finally, an exercise suitable for older, more advanced learners can be found in Pennington's recommendations about orthography and pronunciation. Although Pennington states that the irregular orthography of English makes it difficult for learners to predict the pronunciation of a word (184), she also states that avoiding spelling in the curriculum is impossible. Moreover, she notes that "making explicit connections in instruction between phonology and orthography may be of benefit to students who are highly motivated to learn both the written and spoken forms of the language." (206) By introducing spelling at the intermediate level, learners already have a phonetic foundation from which to work. Pennington recommends exercises focusing, for instance, on words with similar pronunciation and different spelling (great-grate, wait-weight) (217). Exercises such as these raise the learner's awareness about the differences between spelling and pronunciation.

There are several ideas to be gathered from these manuals about how pronunciation teaching in practice could be dealt with. Using visual stimuli will engage learners and potentially saves them from having to learn phonetic spelling. Using traditional speaking exercises from textbooks, going from closed to open speech, and adapting them for a longer period of time allows learners to train their speech by going from conscious to automatic pronunciation. Being creative with spelling will help learners understand the irregularities between spelling and pronunciation. By using these ideas, even inexperienced teachers should be able to teach elementary phonetics.

#### **2.4.6 Conclusion**

As is the case with all language skills, having a good pronunciation does not mean that teachers will be able to convey their skills to the learner. Several factors are involved in pronunciation acquisition that make it different from other aspects of language learning. First of all, for both practical and ideological reasons, lessons need to fit in with the Communicative Approach that most secondary schools in the Netherlands use, meaning that formal pronunciation instruction must be taught before learners begin producing free speech extensively. Secondly, speech production should be given alongside speech perception, since there is a complex link between the two. Providing learners with sufficient and appropriate input is equally important. Thirdly, not all traditional exercises are suitable for pronunciation training. Simply drilling learners with minimal pairs, as has been pointed out in par. 2.4.3, will not be sufficient; they need to be dealt with when the need arises. By providing audiovisual support, learners are more likely to be interested and thus more likely to remember what they have learned. By keeping these directions in mind, secondary school teachers should be able to provide their students with the elementary pronunciation elements outlined in chapter 1.

#### ***2.5 A Word on the Material Side***

Introducing pronunciation in secondary schools, in theory, is not very difficult to achieve. If teacher-trainees receive phonetic training themselves, teaching pronunciation under the right conditions should just be another area of language acquisition. However, there is still the question of which support materials to use.

As stated above, some traditional speaking exercises are easily adapted for pronunciation training. Auditory input, too, is widely available through the Internet, television and radio. The IPA has recordings of the same text, read out loud by speakers of different varieties of English; having students compare, for instance, RP with GA this way would be useful in a lesson dedicated to rhoticity. Ideally, these recordings should be integrated into the textbooks used in secondary schools, but they can be used without additional textbook support.

Recordings are helpful to allow students to monitor their own progress; they also allow teachers to track their students' accomplishments. Recording programmes such as PRAAT are free and easily downloadable. Microphones would require a small investment by the school or the learners themselves if they do not have them in stock already.

All in all, a lack of suitable materials should not be the main reason for schools not to teach pronunciation.

## ***2.6. Assessment***

According to Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin, three types of assessment should ideally be incorporated into the curriculum. First of all, a diagnostic evaluation should take place at the onset of the pronunciation training to assess the individual learner's needs or the requirements of the class as a collective. Second, ongoing evaluation should take place throughout the course to evaluate the learner's progress. Finally, some form of classroom testing should take place to assess the learner's pronunciation (5). Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin also note that in all situations, the learner should provide samples of both controlled and spontaneous speech; for instance,

by having the learner read a written text out loud and by making him tell a story to a series of pictures (7). Needless to say, the average secondary school teacher will not be able to check every learner's progress thoroughly; there is simply not enough time for this. A more economical option would be to have learners give peer feedback. While this is not as reliable and accurate as teacher feedback, especially in the students' eyes (Miller and Ng, 53-54), using peer reviews means that students will receive more feedback; and by letting students have their speech reviewed by their peers before the teacher passes his or her final judgement, they might feel more at ease. Miller and Ng found that, under certain conditions, peer assessment is realistic and reliable (41). In order for a peer review system to be successful, several criteria need to be established: assessment should take place in an homogenous group; the learners should have previous experience with their peers' speech production; assessment needs to take place in a non-threatening environment (52). Miller and Ng also state that learners need assistance in developing tests; however, for secondary school learners, simple feedback to the learners' production will be sufficient. They also state that learners need a high degree of proficiency; however, when learners are required to focus on one or two speech problems, peer assessment should not be problematic in secondary school education. In addition, as Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin point out, the peer feedback system benefits the learners' listening skills as well and allows them to put their recently acquired knowledge to immediate use (9).

For ongoing evaluation, the teacher could use a type of exercise which Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin describe as the "oral dialogue diary" (10). For this exercise, the learner records a spoken message and sends this message to the teacher. The teacher

then replies with feedback, which is recorded as well. The learner records a new message in which he or she attempts to incorporate the teacher's feedback into his or her speech. The advantage of having recorded feedback is that it allows the learner time to incorporate it into his or her speech before recording the next entry (10). Final assessment could take place in a similar fashion, with the student recording a sound file of controlled or spontaneous production, depending on the level of education, and having the teacher respond. Learners can also assess themselves in between teacher assessment, especially at a more advanced level: Dlaska and Krekeler found in one study that learners' self-assessment and teacher assessment coincided in 88% of all cases (5).

An important aspect of pronunciation assessment is that both perception and production need to be tested, since both are intricately linked (see par. 2.4.3.). Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin suggest having learners perform odd-one-out exercises from tape recordings or letting them put words of the same vowel or consonant together. (11) Using these exercises allows the teacher to focus on one certain contrast alone. Because perception often precedes instruction, perception tests are a useful tool for the teacher to assure that all learners are able to discriminate between the target sounds, thereby creating a foundation for production.

If pronunciation is included in the curriculum, some way of testing students' progress will have to be devised. However, speech production goes fast; unlike written speech, it is not usually preserved. Learners, too, cannot reflect on their speech as extensively as on their written work. For this reason, pronunciation should be recorded. Not only does it allow learners and their teachers to track their progress; it also facilitates

assessment, which means that the learner's grades will reliably reflect his or her pronunciation skills.

### **2.7. Conclusion**

Many arguments have been given against pronunciation training in secondary schools. Needless to say, this is not an encouragement to teachers willing to add pronunciation to the curriculum; additionally, many regard pronunciation training as difficult to teach and impossible to fit into the current approach on language teaching. They do not have the materials for it, nor do they know how to assess the learner's speech. However, these problems are not insurmountable.

Most arguments against pronunciation training, although they are worth addressing, do not provide enough evidence against the need for pronunciation training. Speech training can increase the learners' self-confidence as well as their intelligibility. Similarly, having learners select their own accent as the critical 'top five' outlined in Chapter one can increase their motivation. Similarly, the argument that older learners should not receive pronunciation training because they cannot reach a native accent does not hold water, since achieving a native-like accent should not be the target of any secondary-school student, but rather a model. Adults may not be able to reach a native-like accent, but they are able to modify their speech more efficiently than children.

Pronunciation training should be introduced at an early age for several reasons. At an early stage of acquisition, the learner does not have extensive knowledge of orthography and will thus not be hindered by the large discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation in the English language. Likewise, less spontaneous speech is

produced, allowing the learner to focus on pronunciation to a greater extent. It also leaves more time for exposure and practice.

Several aspects need to be considered with regard to how pronunciation should be taught. Aside from gauging the learner's situation, the student population and the rationale behind teaching certain sounds and contrasts, teachers need to establish a gradual build-up. First of all, they need to integrate pronunciation training into the Communicative Approach. Since this approach generally focuses on meaning and uses the monitor model, this is not always easy. However, if pronunciation training is started at an earlier age, the focus of speech will be on form rather than on meaning; learners will be more experienced by the time most speech is produced spontaneously. Allowing learners to record themselves allows them to reflect on their own speech at a more leisurely pace; formal instruction facilitates both self-assessment of recordings as well as peer-reviews. The connection between perception and production needs to be regarded as well: problems with pronunciation training are often, though not always, thought to originate with the learner's perception. Learners need to be allowed to increase their exposure to, as well as their experience with, the target language.

In addition, the right type of exercises needs to be developed. Using visual aids can stimulate learners and prevents them from having to learn the phonetic alphabet, but because of the large differences between spelling and pronunciation in English, this technique might only be useful on a restricted scale. A more convenient approach for teachers willing to integrate pronunciation into the secondary school curriculum would be to adapt traditional exercises that run from closed to open for an extended period of time. These exercises can also be tailored to contain a specific contrast. The use of minimal

pairs can be dealt with by discussing them when they offer problems in the learner's speech, especially if the teacher keeps a list of minimal pairs that can serve as examples to the contrast. Finally, introducing the difference between pronunciation and spelling can be useful at an intermediate or advanced level.

Any element introduced into the secondary school curriculum should be assessed as well. Brinton, Celce-Muria and Goodwin recommend a diagnostic evaluation early in the curriculum; ongoing evaluation, possibly with peer-reviews; and some form of classroom testing to assess the learner's perception as well as production.

With these elements incorporated into the pronunciation lesson, pronunciation training should no longer be an insurmountable problem to language teachers; with preparation, pedagogy and focus, structured phonetic training in secondary schools is a realistic possibility and not merely a lingering thought at the back of the teacher's and learner's mind.



## Conclusion

Pronunciation training in secondary schools in the Netherlands is not a popular subject: if it takes place at all, it is usually done in an ad-hoc fashion where the teacher corrects an individual learner's mistake. Pronunciation drills have long gone out of fashion, and have been replaced with a communication-oriented curriculum that holds no place for pronunciation drills that focus on how to learn a language rather than what to use it for.

Yet some see a native or native-like accent as an integral part of successful language learning; mostly a pitch-perfect RP or GA accent to match grammatical and lexical fluency. For many, though, this bar is set too high, and they merely attempt to reach a stage in English communication where they can make themselves understood. However, there is no rule that states pronunciation is an either/or-situation, and hence, clarification of this (occasionally rather inconsistent) subject begins with establishing the goals of pronunciation teaching. If any learner should wish to attempt to attain a perfect native-like accent, he or she should be free to do so, but for most, elevating their pronunciation to a level of 'comfortable intelligibility' will most likely prove to be more successful.

A tentative 'common core' can be created by taking into account several perspectives: that of the non-native speaker with a different L1, that of the native speaker of English, and that of the learner himself. This common core combines five of both the most salient errors and the learners' preferences. By establishing the functional load of all five of these phonemes, it is ensured that all of these are important to successful communication to prevent the learners from spending too much time and attention on a

phonemic contrast that does not occur very frequently. When combined, these studies lead to a top five of phonemes that Dutch learners of English typically struggle with: /æ/-/e/ contrast; word-initial fortis-lenis contrast in /f-v/ and word-final fortis-lenis contrast in /f/-/v/ and /t/-/d/; /r/-placement; pronunciation of /θ/-/ð/; and the /ʌ/-/ʊ/ contrast.

Ideally, implementing pronunciation teaching in secondary school education should not take up too much time. Since the top five is a small pronunciation core, teaching it to students should be done within the current curriculum. However, to do so, teachers will need to consider several aspects. For example, the arguments for and against teaching pronunciation are diverse, and teachers will need to know why they are teaching pronunciation, for instance because it will improve and facilitate communication, both with native and non-native speakers of English. In addition, they will need to consider the age at which to start pronunciation training: beginning at a younger age will give the learners more time to acquire the motor skills required for pronunciation, and they will not be hindered by their knowledge of orthography. Teachers will also need to consider the types of exercise that will be needed: ideally, these exercises flow gradually from scripted speech, such as dialogue reading, to free speech, which matches the communicatively oriented curriculum in Dutch secondary schools. To a certain degree, visualisation will also be useful to prevent orthographic confusion. Likewise, teachers will have to include both input and output into the curriculum: in order for students to be able to pronounce sounds correctly, they will have to receive input that is both quantitatively and qualitatively rich. This material is plentiful and accessible on the Internet, but it will have to be selected to fit the learners' needs. Teachers will also have to devise a way to assess the students' pronunciation. Students are capable, to some

degree, of assessing their own productions as well as their peers', but teachers will need to stay in control of the final assessment.

All in all, pronunciation training in secondary schools in the Netherlands should not be seen as an obstacle that cannot be overcome, but as an integral part of language education. With the enough time, the enough input, and a suitable type of exercises, improving the English pronunciation of secondary school students in the Netherlands should become reality instead of a faint idea.

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