

Accent Preferences Within the EFL Context

The Impact of Cultural Affiliations on Learners of English in the Netherlands

English Language and Culture

Utrecht University

Lotte van der Brug (5735025)

May 2019

First Supervisor: dr. D.L. Cole

Second Supervisor: dr. K. Sebregts

Abstract

This bachelor's thesis considered the importance of affiliations to cultures within the English-speaking world for Dutch learners of English in a high school as well as a university context, and the role these affiliations may play in accent preferences of English. Previously conducted research has shown that knowledge of the English language is considered extremely important in the Netherlands (Admiraal, 2006; Edwards, 2014, p. 175), and that approximation of native speaker varieties is deemed most desirable (Van den Doel & Quené, 2013, p. 87; Gerritsen, van Meurs, Planken & Korzilius, 2016, p. 469). Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) discussed the three concepts of language affiliation, expertise and inheritance (p. 555-56); this study attempted to employ these concepts in an EFL context. Furthermore, the growing popularity of American music and television in Europe, as studied by Gerritsen, van Meurs, Planken and Korzilius (2016, p. 468), McKay (1997), De Bens and Smaele (2001), as well as Modiano (1996), has led to the belief that the American accent may be the most popular accent preference for learners of English in Europe today. This study, however, has shown that despite the acknowledged influence of American English through television and broadcasting company Netflix, it does not seem as popular as has been claimed. By comparing a demographic forced to learn English and a demographic that has chosen to pursue a study in English, this study hypothesized that there may be a stronger attachment to English cultures amongst those who chose to study English. However, the other demographic, too, has shown a considerable degree of affiliations and experiences outside of school that have influenced them. These results show that concepts such as language affiliation and inheritance may be important to consider for non-native learners of

English as much as for native learners of English. It also shows that it may not be as desirable as previously thought by researchers such as Modiano (1996) to implement American English as the new standard in the Netherlands.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Theoretical Background.....	7
2.1 English in the Netherlands	7
2.2 Language Affiliation, Inheritance, and Expertise	8
2.3 Americanization	10
3. Methodology	11
3.1 Sampling	12
3.2 Interviews.....	13
3.2.1 Interview Questions.....	13
4. Results.....	16
4.1 The High School Students.....	16
4.2 The University Students	20
4.3 The Two Groups Compared.....	25
4.4 Analysis.....	25
5. Conclusion and Discussion	28
6. References.....	30
7. Appendices.....	32
7.1 Appendix A: High school student interviews.....	32
7.2 Appendix B: University student interviews	38

1. Introduction

For years, European countries have used the British prestige dialect termed Received Pronunciation (RP) as their standard model for English education; the Netherlands is no exception in this regard. However, with the influx of American culture, a newfound interest in the exposure of new generations of learners of English to American varieties of English caught fire. Popular music originating from America has been the most popular with European youth for decades (Gerritsen, van Meurs, Planken & Korzilius, 2016, p. 468; McKay, 1997). American television has dominated European TV (de Bens & de Smaele, 2001; Gerritsen et al., 2016, p. 465), even before the introduction of Netflix in the Netherlands. Research conducted in European high schools on these Americans influences and any impact they may have on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) preferences shows evidence that young learners of English prefer American English over the standard model of the British RP. In his chapter on English in Finland, Sjöholm (2003) cites a study conducted by Forsman, where several excerpts of Scandinavian high schoolers' responses to questions relating to the English accent they want to learn and the accent they currently learn, reveal that the majority of these pupils prefer American English over RP (p. 227). One of these responses has a pupil outright stating that "I use American English, I learn it from music and TV" (as cited in Sjöholm, 2003, p. 227). Other responses that Sjöholm includes in his chapter state that "the pronunciation [of British English] is impossible to understand" (as cited in Sjöholm, 2003, p. 227), and that British English sounds too "old-fashioned" (Sjöholm, 2003, p. 227). Likewise, Gerritsen, Korzilius, van Meurs, and Gijbers (1999) include in their article on English in Dutch advertisements that research

conducted by van Haagen confirmed that Dutch high schoolers find American English to be “more dynamic and attractive than British English”¹ (n.p.). According to this study, British English also tends to “be associated with something not everyone particularly likes: school”² (n.p.). Young learners of English in Europe have been shown to prefer American English for these reasons.

Despite this, RP is still the standard model of English taught in Dutch high schools (de Bens & de Smaele, 2001, p. 207; Gerritsen et al., 1999, np.; Gerritsen et al., 2016, p. 470). Previously, this researcher conducted a small-scale ethnographic study amongst English Language and Culture students at Utrecht University (2019). This ethnography revealed that seven out of ten respondents currently aimed for a British English accent. As such, this thesis will consider and revisit the prevalence of British English accent preferences amongst university students of English, and uncover any internal and external motivations there may be. Previous influences within the classroom through factors such as regulations and teachers’ accents are, given the results of this researcher’s ethnographic study on the same demographic that thesis will choose to consider, expected to play a role. Interestingly, though, the ethnography also showed that when asked whether their currently preferred English accent was influenced exclusively by themselves or also by previous EFL classroom preferences, five out of ten respondents believed their choice to learn a British accent to have been influenced most strongly by their own affiliation to British cultures, shaped through various cultural encounters and experiences.

¹ Original text: “Middelbare scholieren vinden het Amerikaans Engels dynamischer en aantrekkelijker dan het Brits Engels.”

² Original text: “Een tweede reden om Nederlands Engels naar Amerikaans model te gebruiken zou kunnen zijn dat Brits Engels wordt geassocieerd met iets wat niet iedereen even prettig vindt: school.”

This thesis will also consider the position of high school students. Previous research calls forth the following question: to what extent can accent preferences of both high schoolers-and university students of English, be attributed to individual cultural affiliations?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 English in the Netherlands

On the topic of accent preferences amongst EFL learners, previous research has focused for a large part on attitudes towards World Englishes. As Jenkins (2010) states in her article on ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), non-native accents of English continue to be inferior to native accents of English, and then especially British and American accents (p. 926). Therefore, international English requirements remain focused on native varieties (p. 927). Research conducted in the Netherlands showed similar results; in their paper on the status of English in the Netherlands, Gerritsen, van Meurs, Planken and Korzilius (2016) cite a previous study by Neijari et al. that shows that “[p]eople with a moderate Dutch accent in English were accorded less status than people with a slight Dutch accent or a native English (RP) accent (as cited in Gerritsen et al., 2016, p. 469). The Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie) has expressed that “native speakers of English do not like to see ‘their English language used in some sort of gibberish’ [...] and that failure to observe a near-native target would lead to the decay of the English language” (as cited in Gerritsen et al., 2016, p. 469). Discussing previous claims that English in the Netherlands is moving from the Expanding Circle (where English is spoken as a foreign language) to the Outer Circle (with English as a second language) in Kachru’s model (as cited in Gerritsen et al., 2016), Gerritsen et al. conclude that “the official norm for English in the Netherlands is still that of the Inner Circle varieties, especially British English, [which] places the English used in the Netherlands in the Expanding Circle” (p. 470). Likewise, research by van den Doel and Quené (2013) shows that native speakers of Dutch were amongst the most critical when evaluating non-native accents of English (p. 87). In fact, “Dutch-speaking judges found significantly more errors in the Dutch samples than did any of the other groups” (p. 90) and were

regularly stricter than native speakers of English (p. 91). A similar conclusion to that of Gerritsen et al.'s paper is reached: Europe is not ready to discard Inner Circle varieties as their norm for English.

2.2 Language Affiliation, Inheritance, and Expertise

In her article on ELF, Jenkins goes on to discuss the “influence of native speaker ideology” (p. 933), in which native English speakers tend to still feel a sense of “ownership” (p. 933) of the English language. Other studies, however, show that some non-native speakers, such as Dutch language speakers, tended to be stricter on following native accent ideologies than native speakers. Despite Gerritsen et al.'s outcome that the continued devotion of Dutch speakers of English to Inner Circle varieties of English positions them in the Expanding Circle (2016, p. 470), their study still includes factors that may place the Netherlands in the Outer Circle instead: the abundance of English in advertisements (p. 464-65), undubbed TV shows and movies (p. 465), and popular songs (p. 468) demonstrate that English plays a large role in the lives of Dutch inhabitants. In Dutch high schools the study of English is given more and more importance, “and is without doubt the most important foreign language” (p. 463), whilst Dutch higher education and scientific research use English intensively; “both actively and receptively” (p. 463). A Eurobarometer survey from 2005 shows that English is by far more widespread than other foreign languages, with “[t]hirty-eight per cent of respondents [claiming] they used English almost every day” (p. 462). Similarly, Admiraal, Westhoff, and de Bot (2006) state that “foreign language skills have been important in Dutch society for a long time” (p. 75). Edwards (2014) writes about the importance of English in the Netherlands and the high proficiency of Dutch speakers of English (p. 175), that “a degree of bilingualism among the general population is

simply assumed” (176). Therefore, English may come attached with a sense of ideology similar to that of native English speakers.

A study by Leung, Harris, & Rampton (1997) considers the importance of “displacing conventional notions of the native speaker of English,” labelled as “the idealised native speakers” (p. 544), and states that to achieve this, questions about “the language expertise, language inheritance, and language affiliation of all learners of English in the classroom” must be asked (as cited in Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997). Suggesting a replacement of the terms native and mother language, Rampton proposes we consider language expertise, inheritance, and affiliation instead (p. 555), explained as the following:

1. **Language expertise.** “What do teachers know about their pupils' ability in each of the posited languages?” (p. 555)
2. **Language affiliation.** “Do teachers know anything about their pupils' sense of affiliation to any of the languages allegedly within their repertoire?” (p. 555)
3. **Language inheritance.** “Does membership in an ethnic group mean an automatic language inheritance?” (p. 556)

Although Leung et al.'s study focuses on speakers of English in English-speaking countries, these terms may be suitable for speakers of English as a Foreign Language as well. Whilst language expertise is already considered within the EFL classroom, questions of affiliation to the English language and its cultures, perhaps through cultural factors such as exposure to TV or music originated in English-speaking countries, English-speaking friends, habitual vacations to a specific English-speaking country, or any encounters and experiences that may have shaped preferences for specific varieties of English, are often left behind. Such affiliations may also

originate from connections to English-speaking countries, thus placing an importance on the consideration for language inheritance in EFL learners of English as well.

2.3 Americanization

Another factor to be considered when it comes to potential affiliations to English – more specifically, to distinct varieties of English – for EFL learners, is the influx of American culture in Europe and its subsequent influence on EFL learning. The increasing popularity of American music and television in Europe and the Netherlands (de Bens & de Smaele, 2001; Gerritsen et al., 2016, p. 465) has been discussed, as well as the subsequent preference for American English amongst Scandinavian and Dutch high school students that previously conducted research shows (Gerritsen et al., 1999; Sjöholm, 2003). Van Elteren uses his article on “the impact of US popular culture” (1996) to discuss globalization and its influences in Europe, writing that “[n]ational identities are declining but new identity [sic] of cultural hybridity are taking their place” (p. 56). He also states that “[i]n debates on the influences of US popular culture abroad often a particular notion of ‘cultural identity’ is taken for granted” (p. 51); rather, “culture should be conceived as a site of continuous contestation, both inter- and intranationally” (p. 51). Culture is not static, and international influences must not be overlooked. Writing about the “Americanization of EuroEnglish,” Modiano (1996) strongly advocates for the inclusion of American English in English education and criticizes the disparaging attitude of teachers towards American English (p. 207), stating that “this prejudice is deeply rooted and will be with us for some time” (p. 207). Much like aforementioned scholars, he, too, emphasizes the increasing exposure of learners of English to American English, rather than British English, suggesting that this will only lead to unnecessary confusion amongst EFL learners when they are faced with a variety of English they are not nearly as familiar with (p. 208), that is more difficult to

understand (p. 210), and which itself is being heavily influenced by American English to boot (p. 2007). According to Modiano, “strict adherence to BrE denies many students an opportunity to learn the English which they find most desirable” (p. 209). Altogether, the option for learners of English to choose from more than just one accent to adhere to is crucial.

Existing literature has focused on the superiority given to native English accents in EFL countries, where established classroom norms and regulations are often debated. It has also focused on the increasing exposure of learners of English to American English through popular culture and Americanization, and the concepts of language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance in classrooms within English-speaking countries. However, the extent to which factors such as culture and language affiliations may influence EFL learners in other countries in their accent preferences for English, does not seem to have received as much attention. The results of this study may further indicate the extent to which culture impacts language learning even in settings outside of these cultures.

3. Methodology

For this thesis, a qualitative approach to answering the research question was deemed most suitable. In his chapter on qualitative research, Dörnyei (2007) writes that “[i]t is exactly because

interviewing is a known communication routine that the method works so well as a versatile research instrument” (p. 134). In order to make respondents feel as comfortable as possible to express their thoughts, it was decided to use interviews, since even younger respondents are familiar with this technique. As Dörnyei states: “[t]he interview is a natural and socially acceptable way of collecting information that most people feel comfortable with and which can be used in a variety of situations and focusing on diverse topics to yield in-depth data” (p. 143).

3.1 Sampling

To ensure an accurate answer to the research question, it was decided that two separate groups of respondents would yield the best results. As such, a maximum variation sampling was chosen, where two groups with “markedly different forms of experience” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 128) were compared. Five students that study English Language and Culture at Utrecht University were selected based on convenience sampling. In addition, five fourth year HAVO high school students were selected, also based on convenience sampling. Dutch high schools are comprised of three levels: VMBO, HAVO, and VWO. Since HAVO is considered to be mid-level, this study’s choice to include HAVO students was an attempt to use a neutral, middle-ground demographic. Universities are considered the highest form of Dutch higher education; whilst VWO students are upon graduation eligible for university, HAVO students generally go to universities of applied sciences (HBO). Apart from a difference in level, the largest difference between these groups relates to their English education: the high school students all followed English as a required subject, whereas the English university students actively chose to pursue a study in English.

3.2 Interviews

In order to promote maximum comfort for respondents to express their experiences, the interview was deemed the most suitable qualitative inquiry. This study made use of single-session, semi-structured interviews: pre-prepared guiding questions are formulated in advance, but because the respondents' experience is at the forefront, an open-ended format with room for respondents to elaborate was most desirable. The interviews were held individually.

Prior to each interview, respondents were notified of their anonymity and gave their informed consent to use their answers as well as their (high school) year and level. Permission to record the interviews was always asked and granted.

3.2.1 Interview Questions

Dörnyei (2007) refers to Patton when he writes that "it is possible to ask any of six main types of question focusing on: (a) experiences and behaviors, (b) opinions and values, (c) feelings, (d) knowledge, (e) sensory information (...), and (f) background or demographic information" (as cited in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 138). The interview questions for this study will focus mostly on experiences, opinions and values, and knowledge. Because one of the two demographic groups involves high schoolers, wording is extremely important: questions must be easy to follow and easy to understand. In order to promote a higher level of comfort for the high school students, it was decided that these respondents could choose whether to hold the interview in Dutch or English: prior to the interview, they were asked what language they preferred. Any Dutch interviews were later translated into English. This was because this demographic group's proficiency in English may not be sufficient, leading to them withholding information they are unable to express. The group of English students at Utrecht University were interviewed solely

in English. Both groups had a slightly different format of questions, based on differing levels of knowledge.

The interview questions for the university students were as follows:

1. *In your first year at university, were you allowed to choose from more than one accent of English to learn?*
2. *Were you allowed to choose your preferred accent?*
3. *In high school, were you allowed to choose from more than one accent?*
4. *What accent do you currently aim for?*
5. *Do you feel like this accent was influenced exclusively by your own choice, or do you feel like classroom influences, such as teachers' or maybe other students' accents, may have played a role as well?*
6. *What are some experiences or encounters of any nature that you had before choosing your target accent, that you think might have influenced your accent choice?*

Questions for the high school students were slightly different:

1. *When I say the word 'accent,' what do you think about?*
2. *Can you provide an example of an accent in Dutch?*
3. *Can you provide an example of an accent in English?*
4. *In school, are you asked to learn a specific accent of English?*
5. *How do you feel about this?*
6. *Do you have any preference for what English accent you want to learn the most?*
7. *Why this accent?*
8. *What is it about this accent that you like?*

The answers given by the respondents were fully transcribed, with it being decided later what parts were to be included in the results section. The fully transcribed interviews for each respondent can be found in appendixes A and B. Two of the high school students chose to hold their interviews in Dutch. Only the sentences included in the results section were translated into English; the transcription of their interviews is in Dutch.

4. Results

Since this study concerns itself with two separate groups, and the interview questions for both groups differ, results for both groups will initially be analyzed separately. First, answers given by the group of high school students are discussed. The answers given by the group of university students are then looked at, followed by a comparison between the two groups. To ensure anonymity for the respondents but also retain a coherent structure, respondents will be labeled from A to E for the high school students, and F to J for the university students.

4.1 The High School Students

Although the group of fourth year HAVO students was given eight questions to answer, not all these questions served to answer the research question. Rather, questions 1 (*When I say the word 'accent,' what do you think about?*), 2 (*Can you provide an example of an accent in Dutch?*), and 3 (*Can you provide an example of an accent in English?*) were used to ensure respondents knew enough about the topic to be able to answer the more substantive questions. Therefore, these three questions will not be analyzed, since all respondents gave appropriate answers that revealed a sufficient level of knowledge on accents. Questions 4 to 8 will each be analyzed according to the answers provided by respondents.

4. In school, are you asked to learn a specific accent of English?

Generally, respondents gave similar answers to this question. According to most, they were not asked to learn any specific accent; rather, it mattered most that students could communicate in English: “they do teach me to speak English well.” Respondent A did remark that teachers “[try] to erase the really Dutch accent”; this stands in line with previous studies that noted the erasure of non-native accents is still deemed important in the EFL classroom (Gerritsen et al., 2016;

Jenkins, 2010, p. 926; van den Doel & Quené, 2013). However, three out of five respondents (B, C, and D) also stated that “we’re kind of expected to learn a British English accent, but it isn’t always forced upon the students to speak with a British accent” (C). Thus, British English seems to still hold a certain influence within the EFL classroom in the Netherlands. Respondent E stated that “when a teacher has a certain accent, I tend to start adopting that accent.” This points to a degree of classroom influence through teachers’ accents.

5. How do you feel about this?

Most respondents agreed with the aforementioned school policies on accent choice. Respondent C stated that “it gives you the freedom to speak the way you want to,” whilst respondent A voiced that “it’s quite nice when you’re in a foreign country you don’t sound like a language noob.” When asked to elaborate, the respondent added that “you know you can fit in a bit, instead of everyone noticing he’s Dutch because of the way he talks.” It was also pointed out by respondent B that “when you watch a lot of Netflix, what you see and hear is often American, and I think that you can develop your own language through this”; as such learning accents through Netflix, rather than school. Respondent D expressed that they were annoyed by the prevalence of British English: “[U]sually when you look at TV or just Netflix or something, it’s always in American English and not British so I kind of mess up with that a lot on my tests.” This conforms to statements made by Modiano that American English is a variety students are more familiar with (1996, p. 208).

6. Do you have any preference for what English accent you want to learn the most?

Interestingly, answers to this question diverged quite a bit; respondent A stated they preferred Scottish English. British English was the preferred accent for respondents B and E; American English also received one vote (respondent D). Whilst speaking with and acknowledging their

British accent, respondent C did not give a definitive answer; rather, they expressed that they would “like to pick up the local accent [...] if [they] decide to maybe study abroad,” whilst also stating that they liked something “a bit more Celtic-ish; Scottish, Irish.”

7. Why this accent?

Respondent A, who chose Scottish English, stated that they “have a radio in my room, and one time I was just playing around with it and I actually picked up a Scottish channel, and I just really liked it.” Respondent B reasoned that Britain “is closer to us geographically” and that “a lot of neighboring countries use more British than American.” Respondent E found British English to sound “more chic, and just more beautiful.” When asked whether this was mostly just down to the sound of the accent, they responded with yes. Contrary to respondent B’s answer, respondent D, advocating for American English, expressed that “the majority of the people talk American English, so that would make more sense.” Moreover, they found that “Netflix is American and every documentary in English—almost all of the things are American English and not in British.” This very much complies with previous research on the domination of American English on European TV and the subsequent influence on accent choice (de Bens & de Smaele, 2001; Gerritsen et al., 1999; Sjöholm, 2003; Modiano, 1996). Respondent C expressed about British English that “It might be easier to pick up. We’re geographically closer to the UK than any other English-speaking county in the world, so there’s more communication between us.” They also expressed that they had British friends, and that this influenced their current accent.

8. What is it about this accent that you like?

Respondent C found Celtic accents to “sound interesting.” Upon further questioning, however, they admitted to liking Celtic culture more too, expressing that “the English are basically the base, aren’t they?” Respondent A stated that everyone has a taste (using favorite colors as an

example), and that Scottish was simply their taste. They liked “how they pronounce words,” but also “how recognizable it is,” adding that “ I just said it’s nice to not be recognizable in foreign countries but with Scottish, if I could do a proper Scottish accent I would be really proud of it.” When asked whether they also liked Scottish culture, they responded that they think it “is nice, but I don’t know a lot about it.” Thus, this respondent’s preference for Scottish English seemed to do almost solely with the sound of the accent, and not with its culture. Similarly, respondent E stated that they “simply find British more beautiful than American in terms of sound.” They also added that because they are so often exposed to American English, they prefer British: “you hear more American, so I think I like British more because I don’t hear it as much.” This goes against points made by Modiano that the exposure to American English would lead learners to prefer this accent (1996, p. 208). Respondent D, who favored American English, said that they “find [American English] easier, but also I prefer it since I think it sounds better than British.” Respondent B voiced their doubts about their preference for British as soon as they expressed that “Netflix is more American, so I think I would sooner speak American.” Ultimately, they were torn between the facts that geographically, Britain is closer, but they are still exposed more to American English through TV (more specifically, through Netflix). Table 1 shows a summary of answers given by the respondents.

	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
RA	“Asked to erase the Dutch accent”	“Nice [not to] sound like a language noob”	Scottish English	“Everyone has their taste”	“A feeling, a taste”
RB	“Not really, but still British > American”	“Good that it’s not strictly British or American”	“British English if I had to choose”	Geographical proximity	“Would sooner speak American because of Netflix”

RC	“Expected to learn British, but not forced”	“Gives you the freedom to speak the way you want to”	Likes to pick up local accents	British English easier to pick up due to proximity	“More of a passive choice”
RD	“Usually in British”	“It annoys me”	American English	“Because of Netflix and more people speaking it	Easier, and likes sound of AmE more
RE	“Only teach me to speak English well”	“I like to learn it”	British English	Prefers the sound of British English	Dislikes AmE because of how much they hear it

Table 1: A summary of responses given by the group of high school students.

4.2 The University Students

Because the group of university students have all actively pursued the English Language and Culture study for at least a year, no testing of knowledge was needed, and all questions were substantial. Therefore, all six questions for this group are analyzed, and each of the respondents’ answers are discussed.

1. In your first year at university, were you allowed to choose from more than one accent of English to learn?

Respondent G studied at the University of Amsterdam during her first year, and so their answers for questions one and two were excluded. All other respondents answered this question with a “yes.” However, answers did differ slightly. Three out of four respondents stated that they were allowed to choose between British English (RP) and General American (GA). These respondents specified that whilst they were technically also allowed to choose from other accents, a shortage

on teachers with these accents ensured they would “have to teach ourselves and still be graded the same way as the others, so nobody wanted to choose that” (respondent J). Respondent F added that even for GA, “there was only one teacher who was remotely qualified for [it], because she had a Canadian accent and that was deemed close enough.” Therefore, they pointed out, “[w]hile you are implicitly encouraged to do other stuff, there is a much stronger suggestion that you just stick to NRP and if you don’t want NRP that you at least keep your head down long enough to pass the courses.”

2. Were you allowed to choose your preferred accent?

Again, all respondents answered with a “yes.” Respondent J did, however, add that between British and American English they preferred British English and were allowed to make this choice, but if they had not been “demotivated to pick a different answer” for reasons specified in the first question, they “would probably have picked Irish English.”

3. In high school, were you allowed to choose from more than one accent?

All respondents generally agreed that in high school, it was mostly just about being “intelligible” (respondent F) and being able to “communicate” (respondent H): “[a]ccent was only relevant as far as comprehension” (respondent F). However, respondent G did note that they were “not allowed to write in any other accent than British English,” and J expressed that “British was the standard but if you spoke with a different English accent, nobody frowned upon you.” These answers are in line with the answers given by the high school students.

4. What accent do you currently aim for?

Respondent G stated that they aim for American English; respondents F and H aimed for British English. Interestingly, respondent I voiced that whilst they “used to aim for RP” and “still try to conform a little bit to the RP standards,” they also “kind of let go of trying to force myself to use

a certain accent.” Respondent J, aiming for a “neutral British-Dutch mix,” stated that they “don’t want to sound Dutch” and “aim to speak British-like, but I don’t try to be perfect on all aspects.” Therefore, it appears that whilst a pressure not to sound Dutch is still present, there is more openness to the idea that one does not have to aim for a perfect, native-sounding accent.

5. Do you feel like this accent was influenced exclusively by your own choice, or do you feel like classroom influences, such as teachers’ or maybe other students’ accents, may have played a role as well?

All respondents ultimately stated that classroom influences impacted their choice. Two respondents (F and I) expressed that they were heavily influenced to learn British English through the school system; one respondent claimed that they felt “forced [...] to speak it perfectly” because they were “punished” if they did not. Respondent J voiced that “the standard is British,” and that in university, they were “discouraged to take on Irish English.” Moreover, they felt discouraged by fellow students and teachers because “when I tried to speak British, [...] they kept saying I sounded ‘too Dutch.’” Respondent H claimed that whilst they did actively chose to pursue British English, they were also influenced by “specific teachers who have a specific accent, which you might like” and the thought that, “[like] many people, [...] I think it sounds more sophisticated and when I wanted to study English I thought, okay, British might be better then.” According to respondent F, their “resolve to stick to [NRP strengthened] because people said ‘oh, that actually sounds close,’ or ‘that sounds reasonably good.’” Ultimately, they state, “[i]t was more of a host influence, like the feedback I got from something I already had, or was developing myself.” Respondent G, who aims for American English, stated that “the association with school might have made me choose for something that wasn’t related to school: American English.” The latter response upholds claims made by Gerritsen et al. (1999) that

British English tends to be disfavored due to an association with school” (n.p.).

6. *What are some experiences or encounters of any nature that you had before choosing your target accent, that you think might have influenced your accent choice?*

Respondent J expressed that it was their experiences in university where they felt discouraged by remarks from teachers and peers that they sounded “too Dutch,” that shaped their decision to not aim as much for a native-sounding British English accent anymore: “I don't want to speak perfectly British anymore.” Moreover, they voiced that they “want to put some of [their] Dutch identity into [their English accent].” Respondent I stated that they have been “obsessed with England.” They added to this that experiences such as “going to the UK and watching a lot of British television,” as well as the fact that their mother was also “obsessed with England,” and “used to watch British television from [sic] as long as I can remember.” However, they also voiced that they simply “thought it was really the most beautiful variety,” and that to them, American English feels like “the lazy way of speaking English.” Similarly, respondent H stated that “what friends say and family say, like when you had to choose for the accent it was just like, oh yeah British sounds smarter.” This respondent added that studying in England influenced their accent choice as well, as did British TV: “I can remember I watched Sherlock Holmes as well and I really liked the main character.” This respondent was not the only one influenced by British TV: respondent F answered that their “accent was mostly influenced by Harry Potter,” and that prior to watching Harry Potter, they conformed more to American English from watching American television. They added that they “sort of tipped at some point where I went, ‘yes, NRP, you’re the superior accent,’ when it’s obviously not.” This mindset was influenced by the aforementioned positive feedback given within the classroom when they spoke NRP.

Respondent G stated that, “there's a stigma around British English that is hard to let go of. People often find it posh or unnatural,” and this led to it gaining “a reputation as being stuck up or thinking you're better than everyone else, while with American English it seems like people are more interested in what you have to say instead of how you say it.” They also expressed that they initially chose American English “because I watch a lot of American television shows.”

Table 2 shows a summary of answers provided by the university students.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
RF	Significantly more strain on people who wish to learn anything else than NRP	Yes	More about communication and being intelligible	NRP	Definite influence from teachers and peers	TV the biggest influence, specifically Harry Potter
RG	/	/	Restricted to BrE for writing	American English	Association with school for BrE influenced choice AmE	Stigma BrE, American TV as influences
RH	Able to choose accent	Yes	Mostly BriE, but also just about communication	British English	Teachers' accents influenced preference	British TV, peer feedback, prestige BrE
RI	RP & GA	Yes	Just about grammar, no	Used to be BrE, no longer	Definite influence by teachers	Mother's obsession with

			specific accents	matters as much	deeming BrE the best	England, British TV
RJ	RP & GA	No	British standard, but other accents OK	A neutral British/Dutch mix	Demotivated by negative teacher and peer feedback on Dutch accent	Conflict caused by multiple language affiliations & inheritance

Table 2: A summary of responses given by the group of high school students.

4.3 The Two Groups Compared

Between the group of high school students and the group of university students of English, similarities exist mostly in their high school experiences with classroom regulations, with both groups expressing that communication skills mattered more than accent skills, as well as their reasonings for choosing (or not choosing) particular accents; seven out of ten respondents brought up the influence of television at least once during the interview. The most notable difference between the groups relates to their accent choice; even with two respondents expressing that they eventually strayed away from trying to hold to a perfect-sounding, natively-like accent, all but one of the university students stated that the British English (N)RP was their target accent. The high school group showed more variation, with accent preferences ranging from the ‘standard’ British English (2) and American English (1), to Scottish and Irish English.

4.4 Analysis

Even though answers showed a fair degree of variation, specifically for the group of high school students, there are still observations worth noting. The respondents from both groups generally

agreed that in high school, there was not so much a focus on learning one specific accent such as British English, which scholars such as Gerritsen et al. (1999) and Modiano (1996) did find in their study; rather, communication skills and, as respondent A states, “being able to speak English well” and “erasing the really Dutch accent” mattered more. However, the majority of respondents did note that British English was still somewhat of a ‘standard’: they were “kind of expected” to learn it, or to adhere to British English spelling on tests. Although respondents I and J from the group of university students expressed having more or less come to terms with their not-entirely-native accents, there did seem to be a general consensus that it was more desirable to learn a native variety of English, as previous studies already showed (van den Doel & Quené, 2013; Gerritsen et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2010). The influence of television on language affiliations and subsequent accent preferences was big, with seven out of ten respondents bringing up television as a factor that shaped their preferences. Three of these respondents expressed that it was not American but British television that influenced them the most. Although, as respondents generally agreed, they were exposed to a lot of American television – with three out of five high school respondents bringing up the American online media-services provider Netflix – they did not all find that it made them more inclined to learn American English. In fact, one respondent outright stated that this heavy exposure to American English made them *not* want to learn it. The influence of major franchises with a primarily British cast should not be underestimated: both Harry Potter and Sherlock Holmes were used as examples that influenced respondents’ choice to learn British English,

Interestingly, multiple respondents claimed to have their preference merely because of the sound of the accent; one respondent simply found the sound of Irish English to be their

“taste,” while another stated they simply found British English to sound “more beautiful.” This may point to a growing separation of the English language and its distinct varieties from its cultures for learners of English as a Foreign Language, especially younger generations. As a lingua franca, many speakers of English do not actually live in English-speaking countries. With such a large population of confident EFL speakers, the Netherlands may serve as an example of a country that, whilst not quite in the Outer Circle yet, prefers native varieties of English not because of any cultural factors, but merely because of their aesthetics. This reveals a growing detachment from the English language and its cultures.

In their article on “the idealized native speaker,” Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) argue that the concepts language expertise, affiliation and inheritance (p. 555-56) should be taken into consideration within the classroom. Based on answers given by respondents from both demographics, this thesis wants to point out their usefulness within the EFL classroom just as much. Language inheritance can be linked to answers such as those by respondent J, who stated they have family in Canada, as well as respondent I’s stating that her mother’s “obsession with England” passed down to her. Likewise, respondent C claimed their current British-like accent was “more of a passive choice,” based in part on his friendship with Britons. Language expertise can be linked to answers stating the importance of “speaking English well” (respondent A), and the continued value of approximating native varieties as pointed out in the previous paragraphs. However, language expertise can also be linked to the interesting phenomenon explained by respondents I and J that no longer has them attach as much value to native speaker varieties of English. The concept of language affiliation, in turn, can be found in many statements, from respondents’ love for British television shows, Netflix, and Scottish radio channels, to merely the aesthetics of the language stripped down to its sound alone, to time spent

abroad in English-speaking countries. This goes to show that rather than one specific standard of English within the classroom (such as RP or GA), attention to individual language expertise, affiliation and inheritance may be more beneficial to EFL learners.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study looked at the influences of cultural factors on accent preferences for two groups of people: one group of 4 HAVO high school students, and another of English Language and Culture students at Utrecht University. Previously conducted research revealed that native varieties of English tend to be preferred over non-native varieties (van den Doel & Quene, 2013; Gerritsen et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2010), and that due to the influx of American culture through popular culture streams such as music and television, amongst other factors, high school students tend to prefer American English (de Bens & de Smaele, 2001; Gerritsen, 1999; Modiano, 1996; Sjöholm, 2003). Moreover, research by Rampton (as cited in. Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997) was used to relate the concepts of language expertise, affiliation and inheritance to learners of English as a Foreign Language.

Whilst data collected in this study cannot be conclusive, the variation in answers from the respondents does make one thing very clear: even though there does seem to be a trend away from British English as the standard, to make American English the standard would not necessarily be in the best interest of learners of English in the Netherlands. This study showed that there are many factors, from accidentally picking up a Scottish channel on one's radio to one's mother's obsession with England, that have influenced learners' preferences for distinct varieties of English. Even with the growing exposure to American English through American television, which most respondents acknowledged to be a potential influence on accent choice,

students in the Netherlands do not seem quite ready yet to unanimously vote for any one variety of English, including American English, to become the new standard.

This study may serve as a pilot study for future research that focuses on the factors that shape and influence accent preferences for learners of English. Future research could also take into account the influence of specific major franchises within popular culture, such as Harry Potter or perhaps the currently popular Game of Thrones, both of which have a predominantly British cast, on accent preferences and choice. One major limitation in this study was the number of respondents: with only five high school students and five university students, neither groups can be considered representative of the demographic group as a whole and therefore no definitive conclusions could be made. Although qualitative approaches may still be useful, future research may benefit from a larger number of respondents. Quantitative research on this topic, particularly through questionnaires, may also be worthwhile. Future research may also benefit from analyzing the extent to which the American online broadcasting company Netflix has influenced learners of English in foreign countries, specifically amongst younger generations, seeing as how this company was brought up by more than half of the high school students in this study.

6. References

- Admiraal, W., Westhoff, G., & de Bot, K. (2006). Evaluation of bilingual secondary education in the Netherlands: Students' language proficiency in English. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 12*, 75-93. doi:10.1080/13803610500392160
- de Bens, E., & de Smaele, H. (2001). The inflow of American television fiction on European broadcasting channels revisited. *European Journal of Communication, 16*, 51-76. doi:10.1177/0267323101016001003
- van der Brug, L. (2019). (Why) do English students prefer British English accents? An ethnographic study. Unpublished manuscript, Utrecht University.
- van den Doel, R., & Quené, H. (2013). The endonormative standards of European English: Emerging or elusive? *English World-Wide, 34*, 77-98. doi:https://doi.org/10.1075/eww.34.1.04van
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, A. (2014). The progressive aspect in the Netherlands and the ESL/EFL continuum. *World Englishes, 33*, 173-194. doi:10.1111/weng.12080
- van Elteren, M. (1996). Conceptualizing the impact of US popular culture globally. *Journal of Popular Culture, 30*, 47-89. Accessed from <https://search-proquestcom.proxy.library.uu.nl/docview/195362148/fulltextPDF/E74A4841A9EC46C8PQ/1?acountid=14772>
- Gerritsen, M., Korzilius, H., van Meurs, F., & Gijsbers, I. (1999). Engels in commercials op de Nederlandse televisie. Frequentie, uitspraak, attitude en begrip. *Center for Language*

Studies. Accessed from

<https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/2066/104620/104620.pdf?sequence=1>

- Gerritsen, M., van Meurs, F., Planken, B., & Korzilius, H. (2016). A reconsideration of the status of English in the Netherlands within the Kachruvian Three Circles model. *World Englishes*, 35, 457-74. doi:10.1111/weng.12206
- Jenkins, J. (2011). Accommodating (to) ELF in the international university. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43.4, 926-36. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.05.011
- Leung, C., Harris, R., & Rampton, B. (1997). The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31.3, 543-60.
doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/3587837
- McKay, G. (Ed.). (1997). *Yankees go home (& take me with u): Americanization and popular culture*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd.
- Modiano, M. (1996). The Americanization of Euro-English. *World Englishes*, 15, 207-215.
doi:10.1111/j.1467-971X.1996.tb00106.x
- Sjöholm, K. (2003). English as a third language in bilingual Finland: Basic communication or academic language? In C. Hoffman & J. Ytsma (Eds.), *Trilingualism in family, school, and community* (pp. 219-238). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: High school student interviews

Respondent A

1.

The way people pronounce words.

2.

Plat Arnhems, Brabants, Amsterdams.

3.

Scottish, Australian, Irish. Normal English.

What is normal English for you?

The people who actually live like in London and around there. I see that as normal English.

So like British?

Exactly.

4.

No. They're trying to prevent you from, like, ... that somebody would notice that he's Dutch, trying to erase the really Dutch accent, but not really learning you one particular accent.

5.

I think so, because I think it's quite nice when you're in a foreign country you don't sound like a language noob. You know that you can fit in a bit, instead of everyone noticing he's Dutch because of the way he talks.

6.

Scottish. Like, I have a radio in my room, and one time I was just playing around with it and I found this actually I picked up a Scottish channel, and I just really liked it—they were playing a football game, and I didn't understand for the most part but I really liked the accent, I don't know.

So just like a feeling?

Exactly.

7.

It's like everyone has their own taste—favorite color, design of houses you like, and I also have that with language. Scottish is just my taste.

I hate American.

Because of the country or the media?

No just how it sounds. It's too much. Just... like a bit exaggerated.

8.

A feeling, a taste. Like how they pronounce all the words, and maybe also how recognizable it is. I just said it's nice to not be recognizable in foreign countries but with Scottish, if I could do a proper Scottish accent I would be really proud of it.

Do you also like Scottish culture?

I think the culture is nice too, but I don't know a lot about it.

Respondent B

1.

Aan Fries ofzo, of Amsterdams, Rotterdams.

2.

^

3.

Brits en Amerikaans.

4.

Niet echt, maar volgens mij hebben ze wel liever meer Engels, dus Brits dan Amerikaans. Maar niet echt. Het wordt niet fout gerekend als je [Amerikaans gebruikt.]

5.

Opzich vind het altijd wel goed dat je niet per se alleen Engels of Amerikaans wil—als je ook veel Netflix kijkt, wat je ziet of hoort is ook vaak Amerikaans en ik denk dat je ook zo wel je eigen taal kan ontwikkelen. Ze begrijpen je wel in Engeland. Het is mooier of je echt helemaal het Engels of het Amerikaans kan, maar dan moet je die ook echt helemaal leren, dus het is wel prima zo.

6.

Ik denk dan wel gewoon, eigenlijk niet echt, maar dan toch wel Brits. Maar maakt me eigenlijk niet zoveel uit.

7.

Ik denk omdat het toch iets meer in de buurt is, gewoon. Ik denk niet per se dat het meer wordt gesproken, maar iedereen kan je gewoon makkelijk begrijpen en veel landen in de buurt praten eerder Brits dan Amerikaans.

8.

Niet per se omdat ik dat mooier vindt ofzo. Eigenlijk maakt het me ook niet echt heel veel uit. Ik kan het zelf ook allebei verstaan. Allebei duidelijk, en het lijkt opzich ook best op elkaar. Dus maakt me niet veel uit.

Netflix is toch wel weer meer Amerikaans, dus ik denk dat ik daarom zelf eerder Amerikaans zou praten. Omdat ik dat gewoon het meeste hoor en zie.

Maar je zou dan toch voor Brits kiezen als je moest kiezen?

Ja.. dat is dus eigenlijk misschien. Ik weet het niet, het maakt me dus eigenlijk echt niet zoveel uit. Het is wel, dat buurlanden dat spreken. Maar ik hoor zelf wel meer Amerikaans, dus daarom zou ik dat misschien wel sneller leren.

Respondent C

1.

Localized way of speaking.

2.

Fries.

3.

Quite a lot. Australian.

4.

Well, kind of but not really. We're kind of expected to learn a British accent, but it isn't always forced upon the students to speak with a British accent.

So you can also learn American?

Yeah.

5.

It's okay. It gives you freedom to speak the way you want to.

6.

Not really, but preferably something... I'm not quite sure but if I decide to maybe study abroad I'd like to pick up the local accent. I think my accent is somewhere in between British and Dutch.

You do have a really good British accent already? Yeah, I'm trying to.

Are you actively trying for that British accent?

I think it's more about communicating with British people, and the psychology behind it is you learn that's the right accent, so it's easier to...

Do you think it's the right accent? No.

Not necessarily.

But there's a bit of a mindset? In school, yeah.

7.

It might be easier to pick up. We're geographically closer to UK than any other English-speaking county in the world, so there's more communication between us.

Others also talked about TV, and the influence of TV. Do you also feel that? Do you feel any influence from American English?

Might be. I mean, it's gonna influence your learning language, but I don't think it necessarily has to influence the way you learn an accent.

So you do know people from Britain?

Yeah, a few. I don't talk to them that much anymore, but I used to.

Do you think that influenced your choice too? It's never been an active choice... much more a passive one.

Do you like your British accent?

I'm fine with it. Maybe something a bit more Celtic-ish, Irish, Scottish. I'm not sure but I think it sounds, well, interesting.

So that's only the sound? So not for example for the culture? Do you like Scottish or Irish culture more perhaps?

Yeah, definitely. Well, the English are basically the base, aren't they?

So if you could choose any accent, you would choose a Celtic one like Irish or Scottish? Probably.

Respondent D

1.

Accents of different regions, and different countries of course. Because in different areas you have different accents.

2.

Limburgs. Of course you have some types of cities that used to have accents.

3.

Of course you have American, and British, which does it... but for the rest I have no clue.

4.

No, not really but sometimes you have certain words that you have to know. But English class is usually with British.

But you're not forced to learn British or anything?

Sometimes they do, on tests, sometimes they approve an answer that's American English, but usually they just want to know the British.

5.

Well, it annoys me because usually when you look at TV or just Netflix or something, it's always in American English and not British so I kind of mess up with that a lot on my tests.

6.

Yeah, American English, since like the majority of the people talk American English. So. That would make more sense.

7.

Yeah, because Netflix is American and every documentary in English, or almost all of the things are American English and not in British.

8.

I think it's easier, but also I prefer it since I think it sounds better than British. Just the way it sounds, like the tone and the voice are a little bit different but I think it's a better way of speaking, but that's maybe just my opinion.

Respondent E

1.

Ik denk dat ik dan denk aan een andere manier van praten, en dat is dan denk ik een bepaalde stad, het is per omgeving anders. En dat eigenlijk.

2.

Fries.

3.

Brits. Vind ik ook heel mooi.

4.

Nee. Maar ze leren me wel goed Engels praten, en ik denk dat als een leraar een accent heeft, dat ik dan ook sneller dat accent aanneem. Maar niet bewust dat hij mij Brits leert praten of iets.

En wat voor accent hebben de meeste docenten bij jou?

Ik denk een beetje Amerikaans.

5.

Mooi. Ik vind dat heel leuk om te leren. Ik heb altijd een beetje het idee dat als je een accent kan, dat je dan beter Brits kan. Dat klinkt beter in mijn oren. Dus ik vind het ook belangrijk dat een leraar goed Engels kan praten. Soms laat een leraar ook het verschil aan mij horen, tussen Brits en Amerikaans, en dat vind ik wel leuk.

Dus ze laten je ook Amerikaans horen en Brits? Ja.

6.

Brits vind ik mooier. En soms probeer ik het ook een beetje te praten, maar klinkt nog een beetje anders soms.

7.

Beetje chiq-achtig vind ik het. Ik vind het gewoon een mooi accent—het accent spreekt me meer aan.

Dus het gaat vooral om de klank van het Brits?

Ja, de klank.

Denk je dat het feit dat Engeland dichterbij ligt dan Amerika of het feit dat je veel Amerikaans op TV hoort, dat dat ook nog uitmaakt? Of gaat het vooral om de klank?

Ik hoor natuurlijk wel meer Amerikaans, want op de series en alles dat ik kijk, die zijn vaak Amerikaans. Ik dnek dat ik daarom juist Brits wel mooi vind, omdat je Amerikaans vaak hoort. Je krijgt meer te maken met Amerikaans, dus ik denk dat ik Brits wel mooier vind omdat je dat minder vaak hoort.

Je maakt bijvoorbeeld niet de associatie tussen Brits en school? Nee, eigenlijk niet. Ik vind dat juist eigenlijk—Brits en school.

Ik vind Brits gewoon een mooier accent dan Amerikaans, en ik vind het leuk dat we dat op school leren. Interessant ook. Ik denk dat het ook belangrijk is, want dan hoor je en leer je ook verschillende accenten op school.

Hoor je ook wel iets anders dan Brits of Amerikaans?

Ja, Schots. Netflix serie: The End of The Fucking World. Is eigenlijk hetzelfde als Brits omdat je dat ook niet zovaak hoort, maar Brits... dat heeft gewoon iets. Ik vind het gewoon mooi. Schots is dan net weer iets teveel.

7.2 Appendix B: University student interviews

Respondent F

1.

“Okay, so... you were technically allowed to pick any accent you wanted that was... you could pick from any accent, but... no wait, that’s not entirely true. You could pick from any accent that was associated with a style of English. For instance, if you spoke with a very strong Dutch accent, it well, well, not frowned upon, but *** would try to dissuade you from it by pointing out that it’s not necessarily an accent that would be positive in your career. And they told you that you could pick between American and NRP, and you could pick other accents. I knew somebody, there was this guy who has a Scottish accent. he was Dutch, he learned it from Scottish people by going there and stuff, and knowing people who spoke with a Scottish accent. Because I asked one professor at some point if that was possible to learn and he said, if you have your connections – and that was kind of the limitations of the uni I went to, is that while you could pick most of the accents you could think of, barring a few that were stigmatized by society, which is a very prescriptive way of looking at it. A uni-pardox. Only gave training for GA and NRP and there was only one teacher who was remotely qualified for GA, because she had a Canadian accent and that was deemed close enough. While you are implicitly encouraged to do other stuff, there is a much stronger suggestion that you just stick to NRP and if you don’t want NRP that you at least keep your head down long enough to pass the courses.

2.

Yes. I already came with my accent.

3.

I don’t think in high school, anyone can. I went to multiple high schools, and most what they cared about was that you were intelligible when you read out loud in spoken class. They would focus more on the syntactical aspects of language. Accent was only relevant as far as comprehension.

4.

NRP.

5.

My accent was mostly influenced by Harry Potter. Before that, I must have sounded more American... or rather, the Dutchified version of American. I had an American friend in primary and high school at VMBO, and I tried to speak English with her a lot and she was American. Her mom was American, she was from Baltimore. So I would practice. But that also meant that I was probably leaning more towards tht. But then I came across more and more of Harry Potter...

cause I saw Harry Potter at twelve and I had already been talking with my friend at that point, but slowly it definitely shifted because I would try to speak like the people who spoke in England. What I perceived as people who spoke in England was from the BBC. Some people spoke in Harry Potter. There was this line in Harry Potter that I was constantly thinking about: isn't that grammatically wrong? Cause the line was "But Hagrid, I haven't any money." I was like, but that's a very different way of saying that, is that correct? But I thought about it so much that I suppose at some point my brain went, "it must be correct, we must speak like that." I have sort of tipped at some point where I went, "yes, NRP, you're the superior accent," when it's obviously not, but you know I was in... the only place the classroom did improve... no, not improve. Strengthen my resolve to stick to that one accent, because people said "oh, that actually sounds close," or "that sounds reasonably good," and I just doubled down on it. It was more of a host influence, like the feedback I got from something I already had, or was developing myself.

And you didn't get that feedback when you were trying to sound more American?

No, I think my teachers were already very glad that had somebody that was so overly enthusiastic.

6.

The whole thing with Harry Potter was when I was about eleven. Before that, my first influence with English was Cartoon Network, because Cartoon Network at the time did not have any dubbing. And so I began watching CN at around the age of four, like obsessively. That TV came to my room, and mind you, I was 4 years old. It was the best thing in the world ever. I could turn it to any channel. So I would watch CN even when I wasn't watching, it would just be on while I was playing in my room. And I kept watching stuff and then I think my brain realized that I understood it. Because I kept watching and reading and... well, reading came later. Cause it kind of slowly developed from that. And that background allowed me to learn English in a very instinctual way. I didn't have to go back and learn all the rules, because I knew all the rules. I made mistakes, but all children do. So that influenced – that gave me a headstart. And I kept that head start for a very long time. It was only when I got to university that I was equalized. But it really helped me by – watching CN as a kid without dubbing, would also resort to me listening to English so much every day. And that's why I imagine, I don't remember it, that my initial accent would be more Dutchified American, because that's what I was listening to at the time. It's only after I watched Harry Potter that my brain did a switch, and was like, "okay, we need to focus on that now."

So both your first experience with American and then with British through HP, was both through TV, then?

Yes. For a very long time I was ahead in school because of that. In primary school we began with English in group 8, and that was ... time. So by the time I was 11, I had watched so much and had actually started reading in English. So by the time I'd learned all that at school it was like, "say that it's 10 o'clock, Charlie is under the table," stuff like that. I'm not trying to say that I'm high and mighty and pompous, I was ahead of the curve because they began teaching

English later than I'd begun learning it. And also finding out my American friend, in, I think it was group 7 or something, that we became friends, was invaluable because she lived very close to me so I would drop by and then talk to her mom a lot. And then her mom would say, "you can speak Dutch to me, I speak Dutch too," and I was like "I know, but you speak English. One more. So there was this, I don't know if you ever heard of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but when I began watching it around the age of 10/11 as well, it would've been around the same time, but I was obsessed with it. So I would watch... even though I was more inclined to look at British English and NRP, I was consuming a lot of media that included American media. And I was enthralled... because it was like, all these stories, and I think my love of English is very much connected to my love of stories. I associate English with stories and I associate stories with me, as it were. That's what media does, it feeds you stories. Even in the news, it's stories.

Respondent G

1.

I went to the University of Amsterdam in my first year, and we were not allowed to choose. Our phonetics courses and linguistics courses were in British English, as were most teachers. We were allowed to speak in our preferred accent and were also allowed to write in our preferred accent.

2.

We were not restricted to simply one accent - you could choose from whichever you liked, but the courses were in British English

3.

We were allowed to speak with whichever accent, but we were not allowed to write in any other accent than British English

4.

I aim for American English at the moment, because I find it the easiest to pronounce

5.

I think I chose it because I watch a lot of American television shows. In high school and at university I was mainly taught British English, but the association with school might have made me choose for something that wasn't related to school: American English

6.

I think there's a stigma around British English that is hard to let go of. People often find it posh or unnatural, as if you're putting in a lot of effort. While with American, it sounds more 'natural' and as if you're not trying so hard. British English has really gained a reputation as being stuck up or thinking you're better than everyone else, while with American English it seems like people are more interested in what you have to say instead of how you say it.

Respondent H

1.

Yeah, it was before we started the study that we had to choose for what kind of accent we wanted to learn, because it was in the first year that we already focused on one specific accent and get those headphones on. So it was especially before the study.

2.

Yes. Basically, there were two main accents, so there was British and American English. They said they would be OK if we wanted to learn an Australian accent for example, or an Irish one, but because they didn't have enough teachers that the two main ones they teach you, would be the option for American and British. So, yeah, you were able to choose, but then within those two, and if you wanted another one, then that's OK but they couldn't really teach you.

3.

My high school, I think we had the British accent mainly – and I think that's different from the Netherlands because I think in the Netherlands it's the American accent mainly – but we had in the last two or three years, we changed it, because then you could change to an American accent. So first it was the British accent, and then change, I think in two years. And then in the last year you kind of just did what you were used to, it didn't really matter if it was American or British English. Because I had – it's also different in Germany, I had kind of a specialization in languages, so I had English as my first course let's say, and then it wasn't really an American or British accent but you could choose, ok, what you wanna talk was a lot of communication, and discussions and stuff, so it was really based on what you wanted to do.

4.

Would be the British one. Because I studied the British accent for my bachelor's and I went to Canterbury for half a year, so yeah.

5.

Yeah, definitely. So firstly was just, I think it was just my own preference, because I liked the British accent, and I think as many other people do, I think it sounds more sophisticated, and when I wanted to study English I thought, okay, British might be better then. And throughout the years, I've studied in Canterbury, and because of specific teachers who have a specific accent, which you might like, for example, then I think that really influences how you talk as well, and I also know that when I talk to my friends, that I try not to put on a British accent because they make fun of it, so. So it influences it a little bit as well. I think it's just the people around you that in England it was a bit more because you kind of had influence from the people around you and when you're in a Dutch environment it might be a little bit less. So yeah, it really influences you, yeah.

6.

That would be school, for example, because mainly, we were taught to learn the British accent. I think also maybe series and stuff, cause I can remember I watched Sherlock Holmes as well and I really liked the main character, so. So TV maybe. Also what friends say and family say, like when you had to choose for the accent it was just like, oh yeah British sounds smarter, I don't

know. I think that's just, it's your own preference because of a sound but also what other people say and what you encounter on TV and music and stuff.

Respondent I

1.

Yeah. RP and GA.

2.

Yeah.

3.

No, not at all. I don't even think they said that there were multiple accents. It was just like grammar and stuff but they didn't really pay attention to it.

4.

I used to aim for RP when I studied English, but I think I kind of let go of trying to force myself to use a certain accent. But I think I still try to conform a little bit to the RP standards.

5.

I was definitely influenced by the teachers during my English program. For RP. One teacher especially really forced us to speak it perfectly I guess? And who really punished us during presentations. That caused me to really pay attention to the features and stuff. I was definitely heavily influenced by this.

6.

I was obsessed with England, so I knew from the start that if I had to choose, then it would be for RP or any British accent.

So it was cultural?

Yeah, definitely.

I think experiences were going to the UK and watching a lot of British television... and I just always really liked the accent, I thought it was really the most beautiful variety. To me, American still sounds a bit disturbing. I feel like it's the lazy way of speaking English.

So why were you obsessed with England?

I think I just grew up with a lot of British influences? Like my mom used to watch British television from as long as I can remember actually. And she was obsessed with England so it was just in my genes.

So its like cultural, but also down to the accent itself that you like the accent itself?

Yeah, I think so. Maybe that was influenced by me liking England, but I think I really like the accent more than the American one.

Respondent J

1.

Yes I was allowed to pick either British or American English. Instead of one of those, we had the option to pick a different accent (Scottish, Irish, etc) but we would have to teach ourselves and still be graded the same way as the others so nobody wanted to choose that. So in the end I picked British.

2.

Well that depends. I preferred British over American, and I was allowed in that course. However, as I described in question one I was demotivated to pick a different accent. (I would probably have picked Irish English).

3.

Not that I was aware of. British was the standard but if you spoke with a different English accent nobody frowned upon you.

4.

I would say a kind of neutral British-Dutch mix. When I teach my students, I aim for British. When I'm not teaching, I aim to speak British-like but I don't try to be perfect on all aspects (especially fortis/lenis th sound). Then I aim to not be retracable. I don't want to sound Dutch. However, when I have to speak English hours and days after each other then I don't care because it costs me too much energy to keep up the accent.

5.

It's my own choice not to want to sound perfect British. However, the choice was strongly influenced by our Dutch school system where the standard is British. In university I was discouraged to take on Irish English. And I was extremely discouraged by my peers and a couple of teachers in university when I tried to speak British because they kept saying I sounded "too Dutch" (when can you ever sound "too Dutch"?). Then I sucked it up, improved myself and now aim to sound British-Dutchlike because I don't want to speak perfectly British anymore because of this incident in university. I want to put some of my Dutch identity into it.

6.

Described in answer 5. Mostly the criticism of sounding 'too Dutch'. And being a perfectionist also helps. I've been confused with my accent because I want to speak Irish, I have to speak British, I hear American around me, I have Canadian relatives and I sometimes just mix it all up while trying to maintain my Dutch identity as well while being conflicted that I might sound 'too Dutch'.

