

# Pronunciation of Dutch Bilingual- Education Pupils

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# Introduction

## Problems

The Netherlands is a country that prides itself in being able to speak many different languages. Apart from Dutch, English, French and German are all compulsory subjects in secondary schools. Many people claim that the Dutch will use any excuse to show off their talent in languages. Allegedly, people eager to learn Dutch and trying their best to use the language as much as possible, but who are still afflicted by a foreign accent, tend to get an enthusiastic English response. In addition, the Dutch are also fervent business people, who invented the multinational. In this area they are also keen to show off their linguistic skills (Bolt 59). English is mostly the lingua franca between them and people with a different mother tongue; as it is between many foreigners (Jenkins 32). Apparently, the Dutch government see this international language as a great means of attracting even more international success. By educating its citizens, the Netherlands intends to stay at the top of their international businesses. Schools play an important part in ascertaining this aspiration. English is the first foreign language taught at schools. Furthermore, there are currently secondary educational tracks available which are almost completely taught in English. These are so called Bilingual Schools and known as *tweetaalig onderwijs* (tto) schools in the Netherlands. Pupils following this education will henceforth be referred to as BLE-pupils. BLE is an abbreviation of the term Bilingual Education. These tto schools provide about 50% of their teaching in English. This means many subjects such as History and Geography are taught in English, whereas subjects as Dutch and French are still taught in Dutch. There has been much research into the effects of this amount of English input into English- and Dutch-language learning. These studies have indicated that BLE pupils perform better than

monolingual pupils in grammatical aspects and vocabulary in written and spoken English without too much explicit grammar teaching (Verspoor et al. 69). However, the main emphasis of these researches lies in the grammatical aspect of language learning. Phonetics and phonology, which focuses on pronunciation, do not appear to be covered. There is no question that there is output from the pupils – they are encouraged to speak the language in class. However, there is more to speaking than grammar and vocabulary. In the speech act theory, Grice’s conversational maxims indicate that, in the maxim of manner, clarity is always to be adhered to (Ross 40). If the production of speech is not clear – either grammatically, semantically or phonetically – the listener may not understand the speaker. Consequently, pronunciation is also important for the teaching of English, or any other language learning. However, this is generally not explicitly taught at schools. Subsequently, the question arises whether BLE pupils also achieve better pronunciation than their monolingual peers, like they do in grammar and vocabulary. Considering that BLE pupils have better vocabulary and more English input, expectations are that they will.

## Importance

Some researchers have claimed that there is no need for schools to focus on either a British or American (pronunciation) standard (Cook 1999, 2002; Firth and Wagner 1997). Some say this is because this standard does not take the learners’ different cultural background into account (McKay 1992; Preisler 1999). Others claim this native speaker-standard is unattainable to second language learners and a standard that is attainable should be taught (Kirkpatrick 81; Tan et al. 80). Nevertheless, speaking English with a foreign accent will not always work in favour of the speaker. According to Dinnes, “most accents are charming, interesting and distinctive. Unfortunately, some accents are distracting, irritating

and penalizing” (1). Problems occur when more attention is paid to the speaker’s accent than to what is said. As stated above, the conversational rules state that the speaker is expected to be clear in his or her utterances. In the workplace, accents can hamper performance, interfere with career goals and advancement and may be a source of concern and embarrassment (Dinnes 1). English native speakers are used to encountering foreign accents of their mother tongue. However, if a second language speaker comes across as unclear, this might possibly harm (business) relationships. This is not the best start of an international career. Pronunciation lessons are, consequently, crucial to BLE. Investigating whether BLE-pupils have better pronunciation than their monolingual contemporaries, will give a more complete representation of the (dis)advantages of the Dutch BLE system.

## Expectations

Pronunciation is important for language learning in BLE. With more English input compared to their monolingual peers, the question is whether BLE-pupils achieve better pronunciation. The expectations are that they would at least show some improvement after 4 years of BLE compared to monolingual pupils have not received this sort of input after 4 years. However, even though BLE-pupils do obtain more input, the quality of the input is not always native-speaker like. This is because not all teachers of BLE are native speakers of English and most do not have a first degree in the language either. Even though schools aim to have as many English native speakers teaching the varied subjects in their schools, this is often an unattainable goal. Expectations will be that most teachers do not speak good enough English to have a positive effect on their pupils’ pronunciation. If BLE-pupils acquire better pronunciation, this could mean that even though some quality is poor, the amount of English input would have a positive effect. A survey could investigate if any alternative

factors could influence the pronunciation. If BLE-pupils have parents with a native language other than Dutch, they could be more linguistically aware. This could influence their pronunciation too. BLE-pupils may also differ in their affinity with the English language and culture. If they like it, they may have more motivation for learning the language at school. If the pupils score better, this could mean that their motivation is an important factor for achieving better pronunciation. The discussion of the results will try to investigate these matters.

# Chapter 1 – Dutch education

## Primary schools

Compulsory education in the Netherlands starts at the age of 5. Children will spend 8 years at primary school. In 1986 the government legislated that it is compulsory to offer one hour of English lessons per week in the last two years of primary education. Schools have the freedom of choice in whether they want to offer their pupils more lessons. Since 2005, schools offering more hours of English have risen enormously. However, there are still many differences between schools; some start English lessons as early as in the 3rd year of primary school at around the age of 7. There are specific schools in the Netherlands who are associated with the EarlyBird-programme. This programme aims to teach children English while playing games and singing songs instead of providing them with lessons. Furthermore, this happens from around their 2nd year at primary school at the age of 6 up until they leave for secondary school (Birdie). Consequently, these days not every pupil starts secondary school with the same amount of English input. The effect of this on future education and pupils' English is the topic of new research projects such as FLIPP - Foreign Languages in Primary schools Project. The researchers in this project are Liv Persson, Sieuwke Rietsma, Kees de Bot and Sharon Unsworth. Although not all pupils may have had the same amount of input at the start of secondary school, their linguistic knowledge is triggered by the English lessons in primary school. The lessons obtained in primary schools are the foundation of the lessons in secondary schools. However, some academics have claimed that the knowledge obtained by the end of primary school does not attune to the knowledge secondary schools require or think their pupils start off with at the beginning of their school track.

## European rules and regulations

Secondary schools have much more limitations to their teaching. They have to adhere to the rules and regulations of the Dutch government as to what the pupils are expected to learn in specific subjects and how to obtain that knowledge. What these rules and regulation are, will be discussed in the next section. However, the government has to adhere to the rules and regulations of the European Union. Languages are an important topic in the European Union. A core value is that (language) diversity should be respected. The 2002 European Union decided that at least two foreign languages should be taught from a very early age. However, they do not specify as to what age this should be. The long-term objective is that every European citizen should have practiced skills in at least two languages other than their mother tongue. In 2005 the Framework Strategy for Multilingualism of the Commission of the European Communities stated how multilingualism was to complement communication between European citizens and institutes. In other words, they want to improve communication between Europeans by having them speak as many languages as possible. That way there is less chance that two individuals will not understand each other. The Framework Strategy also connected the European aims for language learning to the international business market. It stated that there is some evidence that European companies lose business because they are unable to speak their costumers' language(s) (9). The EU believes that in order to accomplish a more effective (European) market, language learning is of great importance. However, it is up to the Member States to establish national plans and give structure, coherence and direction to the ways in which the EU wants to promote multilingualism (15). In addition, the Member States are encouraged to implement the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (9). CLIL is language learning through



the teaching of both the subject and the language. This encompasses all sorts of different approaches to language learning: immersion, BLE, language as a medium of instruction, etc. In the Netherlands the CLIL approach is done via the BLE school system. The EU has no specific rules or regulations as to what should be taught in the English lessons and how. The only objective is that citizens should learn at least two foreign languages.

## **Dutch rules and regulation**

The Dutch government has the responsibility to work out how language learning should be taught in the Netherlands. How this is regulated in primary schools was mentioned above. Secondary education policies state that at the end of their education pupils should have acquired certain objectives. These objectives are set for monolingual secondary schools. For English this means that the focus lies on the communicative skills and the international interest. Moreover, the pupils should:

- become familiar with the sounds of the language,
- acquire strategies for increasing their vocabulary,
- be able to use strategies for obtaining information from written and spoken sources,
- be able to use and find digital sources and be able to evaluate their value,
- be able to give others an idea about their life orally,
- be able to have general conversations about enquiries, and shopping,
- be able to keep informal contact via letters and e-mail,
- learn the important role of English in the international community (SLO)

There are no specific objectives for other foreign languages, e.g. French and German (SLO). However, there are no specific guidelines for BLE enforced by the Dutch government itself. This is done by the European Platform.

## **BLE and the European Platform**

BLE is an educational approach in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language. Most BLE schools in the Netherlands have chosen English to be that foreign language, although there are some that teach non-language subjects in German. In the 1990's, 23 schools came up with a concept for BLE schools. They were supported in this by the Dutch Ministry of Education. They each indicated what their idea of the ideal BLE school was; this led to a standard. This standard entails the idea that there should be some native speakers of English present in the school who are able to teach the pupils in a subject other than English. However, this is only a suggestion and not a requirement. Another objective is that both pupils and teachers should achieve or have a certain level of English, at least 50% of classes should be taught in English, and at least one European project should be organized each year. The proficiency level is indicated by the objectives of the Common European Framework (CEF). The levels range from low to high, each with two stages; the lowest level starts at A1, followed by A2, B1, B2 up to the two higher levels of C1 and C2. Each level includes objectives of speaking, listening, writing and understanding and each objective is assessed and graded separately. Ideally, a BLE school has teachers with a B2 level and pupils who will have obtained this level by the end of their BLE track. However, the BLE standard requires its pupils to achieve an average of B2 for these all of these objectives. This means that the grade speaking – which includes some questions about pronunciation –

could be low, but the overall average high, if the student scores high on the other topics. The European Platform has no guidelines for teaching pronunciation.

The European Platform came into existence in order to mediate between the BLE schools and other schools that wished to join the BLE system. Unlike the name implies this is a Dutch organisation, not a European one. The European Platform checks whether BLE schools and schools wishing to join the BLE system of teaching adhere to the standard. In addition, they also support the BLE schools in looking after the educational goals set by the government. They gather data about pupils' progress and report these to the Dutch government. The European Platform is there to give advice to BLE schools and support them, but cannot alter the standard. Schools will obtain a BLE standard label if they meet the standardized targets. There are two different types of labels schools can obtain. One is the junior BLE school label, which teaches 50% of the school subjects in English up until 4th grade. The second is the BLE school label which provides students with a bilingual education until they leave secondary school. The latter will, in addition to teaching 50% in English up until 4th grade, teach 1150 hours of school time in English during the last 3 years of secondary school. This has to do with the fact that it is compulsory to sit the Dutch national exams for Dutch pupils. BLE schools will decrease their teaching in English and focus more on helping their pupils attain their Dutch diploma, as this is completely in Dutch. However, BLE pupils will receive both a Dutch diploma as well as an IB (International Baccalaureate) diploma. The latter is their evidence that they successfully completed their secondary BLE.

# Chapter 2 – Methodology

## Subjects

In order to separate the effects of age and (English) language input four different groups were chosen for this research. The influence of input alone was reviewed by comparing 4th year BLE pupils with 4th year pupils following the monolingual school tracks. These latter pupils will henceforth be referred to as monolinguals. To review the effect of age, 1st year monolinguals and 4th year monolinguals were compared and so were 1st year BLE and 4th year BLE pupils. In addition, by comparing 1st year monolinguals and 1st year BLE's, differences in BLE teaching could be checked. Testing took place at the school Slingerbos in Harderwijk. All groups consisted of 10 pupils. In order to check differences between the classes, the pupils had to fill in a questionnaire. To view the full questionnaire, see Appendix 1. All pupils were from a monolingual background, were female and had not resat or skipped a school year. The average age of the 1st year monolingual class was 12;3, that of the 1st year BLE 12;1, the 4th year monolinguals had an average age of 15;2 and the 4th year BLE class had an average age of 15;1. For a full overview see Table 1. According to this data, age should not contribute to differences when comparing the results for the two 1st year classes and the two 4th year classes.

Table 1: Average age per class in years;months

	Average age
1 <sup>st</sup> monolingual	12;3
1 <sup>st</sup> BLE	12;1
4 <sup>th</sup> monolingual	15;2
4 <sup>th</sup> BLE	15;1

## Materials

The test consisted of 7 sentences which were chosen on the criteria that they should capture the most important pronunciation errors made by Dutch speakers of English. According to Collins et al. one such error is the confusion of strong and weak consonants, especially in final position (102). The Dutch language has no word-final weak/strong contrast (Collins 50). In other words, they pronounce a written weak, or voiced, phoneme as a strong, or voiceless, phoneme at the end of a word. This phenomenon is called final devoicing which Dutch speakers tend to transfer into their English. However, the English language does distinguish between weak/strong consonants in this context (Collins 51). This then causes confusion between e.g. *lab-lap*, *had-hat* and *log-lock* (Collins 102). Other consonant phonemes causing problems are /θ/, /ð/ and /r/. Dutch lacks the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, and Dutch speakers tend to replace them with /t/ or /s/, and /d/, respectively (Collins 102). This results in confusion between e.g. *thin-tin* or *thin-sin* and *they-day* (Collins 102). In addition, /r/ in Dutch spelling tends to be pronounced. However, in RP (British) English, the /r/ is only pronounced before a vowel (Collins 104). American English does pronounce /r/ whenever it occurs in the spelling. For example, British people pronounce *car* as /kɑ:/, whereas Americans pronounce this as /kɑ:r/. Dutch speakers of English tend to sound more American, pronouncing the example above as /kɑ:r/. Originally the idea was to ask the raters if they thought the pupils spoke American or British English in order to see if the pupils had a good understanding of their own pronunciation. However, there was too little time in which the raters had to grade the pupils as well.

Vowels cause problems for Dutch speakers of English too. /æ/, as in *trap*, often gets confused with /e/, as in *dress*, which results in Dutch speakers pronouncing *met* like *mat* (Collins 104). Furthermore, /ʌ/, as in *cut*, is often replaced by the Dutch vowel /ʉ/, as in *nut*

(use). Because /ʌ/ can be spelled as 'o', /ʌ/ also gets confused with /ɒ/, as in *lot*, so that e.g. *colour* sounds the same as *collar* (Collins 104). English spelling and pronunciation are not always coherent with each other. This can be misleading and brings about the mispronunciation of this phoneme by Dutch speakers of English (Collins 60-61). Another common pronunciation problem for Dutch speakers of English is that they tend to confuse /ʊ/, as in *foot*, with /u:/, as in *goose*, (Collins 106) and mispronounce /ʊ/ as Dutch /u/, as in *moe* (tired) (Collins 104). Confusing /ʊ/ with /u:/ leads to a loss of contrast between e.g. *look* and *Luke* (Collins 104).

The test sentences were as follows:

- Her mother is rather concerned about their behaviour.
- Every month I save up some money for two new books.
- It is a bad idea to believe that bats live under beds.
- My son has done a wonderful job during his five years in Holland.
- It will cost the earth to fix that smashed windscreen of yours.
- Harry Potter's invisible robe will keep him safe.
- Put that jug back in the sideboard cupboard.

These sentences were largely inspired by the practice sentences in *Sounding Better* by Collins, et al.

## Procedure

The tests were completed one by one in a separate meeting room by recording the utterances using an audio recorder. These utterances were then presented to six lecturers of the English department at the University of Utrecht (namely Bert Schouten, Merel Keijzer, Elise de Bree, Rias van den Doel, Simon Cook and Syreetha Domen) and Beverly Collins, one of the authors of *Sounding Better*. They had to assess the pronunciations of the pupils. They were asked to ignore intonation, stammering and any personal preference for a specific type of voice. Each pupil was given a mark on a scale from 1 to 10 by each rater. In order to give an indication of the range of English spoken by the pupils and in order to assist the raters with their marking, I chose the best-sounding pupil and the worst-sounding one, based on my own personal criteria. These criteria were based on the pronunciation errors discussed previously. In addition, some attention was paid to whether the speech portrayed natural flow. These two pupils were presented to the raters first. Subsequently, the raters listened to the 40 recordings. Most listened to all recordings uninterrupted. I sometimes stopped the sound file when the rater asked for a short 2 minute break or when a new item had already started but the rater had not finished grading the previous one. In order to check whether order had effect on the grades, there were two different orders. The 2nd order was exactly the reverse of the 1st. Each rater was either given the 1st or the 2nd order. For the full assessment sheet see Appendices 2a and 2b.

## Chapter 3 – Results

### Data

In Table 2 the individual averages per student are given. It also indicates the large variation of scores within a class; though the highest score is about the same in each class, the lowest scores vary a bit more to one another. Table 2 also shows the averages per class at the bottom. This is also shown in figure 1, which shows both class averages and standard deviations. The standard deviations were calculated on the basis of all grades raters gave to pupils of a class, not the class averages.

Table 2; Grades per class from lowest to highest

	1 <sup>st</sup> monolingual	4 <sup>th</sup> monolingual	1 <sup>st</sup> BLE	4 <sup>th</sup> BLE
	3,6	1,9	4,1	2,4
	3,7	2,4	4,4	3,6
	3,9	2,9	4,4	4,6
	4,3	4,0	4,9	4,9
	4,7	4,6	5,6	6,4
	5,0	6,1	5,9	6,4
	5,9	6,3	6,4	6,7
	6,4	7,9	6,6	6,9
	8,0	8,0	6,7	7,1
	8,1	8,9	7,4	8,9
<b>Average per class</b>	<b>5,36</b>	<b>5,29</b>	<b>5,64</b>	<b>5,79</b>



Figure 1; Average per class with standard deviation indicated

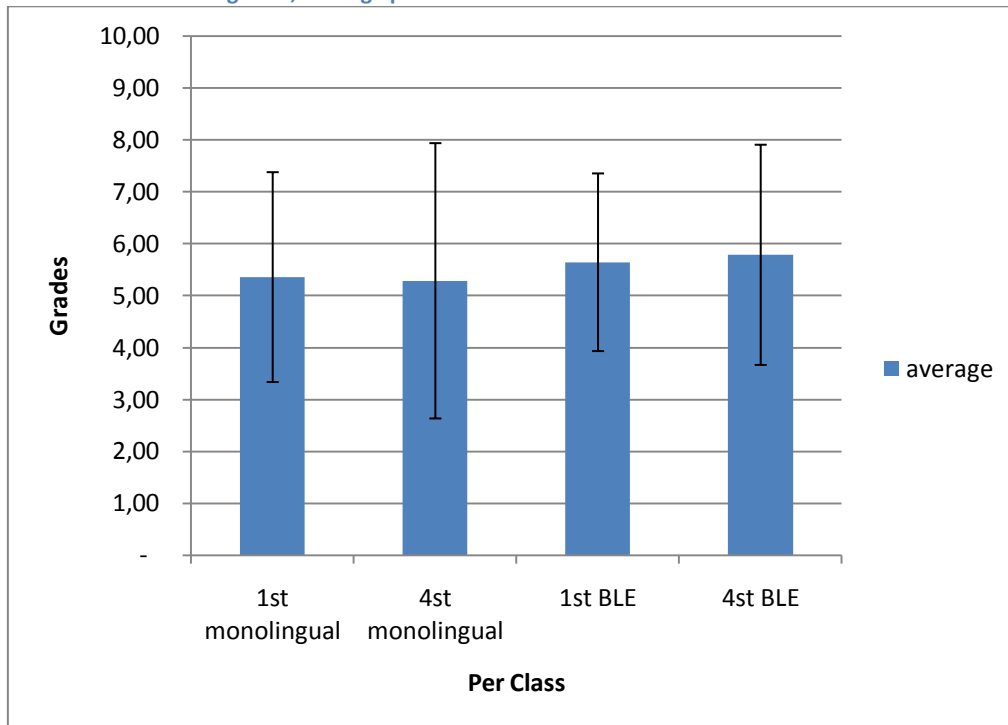


Table 3 shows the standard deviation per pupil per class. The standard deviation indicates how close the grades were to the individual average; the smaller the number, the closer to the average grade it is. The higher the standard deviation, the more the data is spread out. The numbers in Table 3 show how much the raters on average varied in the average grade of an individual. The highest standard deviation for an individual pupil was in the 1st year BLE class. This indicates that the raters' grades varied substantially for this individual. Consequently, her average score may not be entirely representative for her pronunciation skills. This then may influence the overall class score. However, this possibility was only noted afterwards and this individual was kept in the data. In addition, most pupils had a high standard deviation and variation in grading will always be present in any such study. The 1st year BLE class also has the largest difference between the lowest and highest standard deviation for the 10 pupils. This may indicate that the average grade of this group

does not reflect the real proficiency in pronunciation, although this may be true for the other groups too.

**Table 3; Standard deviation per class from lowest to highest**

1 <sup>st</sup> monolingual	4 <sup>th</sup> monolingual	1 <sup>st</sup> BLE	4 <sup>th</sup> BLE
0,82	0,58	0,90	0,69
1,15	0,69	1,13	0,79
1,21	1,07	1,13	0,79
1,25	1,21	1,25	0,95
1,27	1,25	1,27	1,13
1,27	1,27	1,27	1,21
1,35	1,35	1,40	1,27
1,38	1,35	1,57	1,35
1,50	1,40	1,72	1,51
1,57	1,73	2,12	1,57

The average overall score for each rater is shown in Table 4. The higher this score the higher overall scores he or she gave to individual pupils and the lower the average rater's score the lower the overall scores assigned to individuals. However, if half the raters give low grades, but the rest grant overall high grades, the average would not be significantly high or low for an individual. This may mask the true differences between classes. In order to discard these differences, the grades can be normalised by deducting the rater's own average from the grades he or she gave to a pupil. This would not have had any effect on the magnitude of the differences per student; all results would just have shifted in a linear way. Individual (normalised) results would still have been the average of the scored assigned by 7 raters. Even if the scores would have been normalised, the differences between classes would have differed.

Table 4; Average score per assessor

	Average	S.D.
Bert Schouten	6,33	2,31
Merel Keijzer	5,73	2,61
Elise de Bree	4,78	2,19
Rias van den Doel	4,88	1,87
Simon Cook	5,23	1,53
Beverly Collins	6,35	1,99
Syreetha Doomen	5,35	1,96

As the goal of this research was to establish whether BLE input has an effect on pronunciation and to what extent maturation plays a part, comparisons were made between the two 4th year classes in order to determine the effect of input, between the 1st year classes and their 4th year counterparts in order to ascertain the effect of age and between the two 1st year classes in order to determine differences in BLE teaching. From Table 2 and figure 1 we can see that there was, contrary to expectations, not much difference between the selected groups which were compared. A negative score means that it was in the direction opposite to the expected one. The difference between the two 4th year classes was -0.5, that between the 4th and 1st year monolinguals was -0.07, the difference between the 4th and 1st year BLE classes was 0.15, and that between the two 1st years was -0.28, as shown in Table 5. The biggest difference was between the two 4th year classes, but in the wrong direction. It is also worth mentioning that 1st year monolinguals perform better than 4th year monolinguals, although the difference between them was only small. However, this may be due to individual learner characteristics. Another remarkable fact is that the 4th year monolingual class included both the highest and the lowest individual score.

Table 5; Difference per compared groups

	difference
4 <sup>th</sup> mono - 4 <sup>th</sup> BLE	-0.50
4 <sup>th</sup> mono - 1 <sup>th</sup> mono	-0.07
4 <sup>th</sup> BLE - 1 <sup>th</sup> BLE	0.15
1 <sup>st</sup> mono - 1 <sup>st</sup> BLE	-0.28

In order to establish whether these differences were significant, Student's t-tests were performed on them. This is a statistical test which checks to what extent the two averages vary. The results showed that there was no significant difference between any of the groups. The comparison that came nearest to a significant result was between 4th year monolinguals and 4th year BLE pupils, with a p-value of 0.14. Since these were the classes that had the lowest and the highest overall average, respectively, this is not such a surprise.

## Questionnaire

When checking whether the pupils were really from a monolingual background, they were asked where they were born. The results were more interesting than expected. The average distance from the school at the time of birth was 4.28km for 1st year monolinguals, 31.2km for 1st year BLE pupils, 15.9km for 4th year monolinguals and 63.9km for 4th year BLE's. In the 4th year BLE class one pupil was born in Paramaribo and this was not taken into account when calculating the average distance. The average current distance to the school in Harderwijk was 1.5km for 1st year monolinguals, 1.7km for 1st year BLE pupils, 8.9km for 4th year monolinguals and 7.5km for 4th year BLE's. The overall average was 4.89km for the current distance to the school. For a full overview see Table 6. BLE pupils seem to have been born further away than monolingual pupils. This may be caused by the fact that most BLE pupils indicated that at least one of their parents had a different nationality, were from another country or worked in an international company and consequently travelled and lived all over the world. These parents now seemed settled in or near Harderwijk. As Slingerbos is almost the only BLE school in the neighbourhood (the other being in Ermelo), this might indicate that the parents and their children chose this school because they

thought an international oriented education is important. That Slingerbos is the nearest BLE school for pupils from Flevoland might contribute to the fact that 4th year pupils will travel so far in order to get to Harderwijk.

**Table 6: Average distance from Harderwijk**

	Time of birth	S.D.	Currently	S.D.
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	4.28 km	13,53	1.5 km	4,78
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	31.2 km	55,75	1.7 km	2,73
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolingual	15.9 km	20,56	8.9 km	14,09
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	63.9 km *	56,97	7.5 km	9,31

\* divided by 9

In addition, the average number of years during which each class had previously enjoyed English lessons was 2;9 for 1st year monolinguals, 3;2 for 1st year BLE's, 5;2 for 4th year monolinguals and 5;6 for 4th year BLE pupils. Each class had at least one pupil who had already benefited from English lessons prior to their 7th year in primary school. All 1st years commented on the small amount of English they had been taught previously at primary school. For a full overview see Table 7. Overall the average amount of English lessons experienced by pupils of the same year varied only a couple of months. This should not contribute to a huge difference in class scores.

**Table 7: Average of English lessons in years;months**

	English lessons	S.D.
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	2;9	0,88
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	3;2	1,40
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolingual	5;2	1,81
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	5;6	0,84

Moreover, when asked if they liked English, only 3 pupils said they did not. One of these was in the 1st year monolingual class and 2 were in the 4th year monolingual class. All pupils from BLE said they liked English. Of the 40 pupils that were tested 13 had never been to an English-speaking country. Per class this number was 6 out of 10 for the 1st year monolinguals, 3 for the 1st year BLE pupils, 4 for the 4th year monolinguals and none for the 4th year BLE's. For a full overview see Table 8. Most of the pupils took the opportunity to go to England on a trip organised by the Slingerbos school. The school organises 1-day and 3-day trips to the UK each year. Others had also been on holiday to an English-speaking country with their family.

Table 8: "Have you ever been to an English-speaking country?"

	No	Yes
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	6	4
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	3	7
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolingual	4	6
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	0	10

The average amount of time spent in an English-speaking country by pupils who answered had answered the previous question positively was 12 days for 1st year monolinguals, 9 days for 1st year BLE's, 9 days for 4th year monolinguals and 20 days for BLE pupils. This includes the total number of days spent on holiday and school trips. For a full overview see Table 9. If the 4th year BLE pupils score better, their time spent with native speakers could be an indication as to why. They have spent considerably more time in English-speaking countries than the other classes.

**Table 9: Total amount of time spent in English-speaking country**

	Days	S.D.
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	12	20,35
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	9	13,09
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolingual	9	13,52
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	20	20,45

When asked if they had any non-Dutch speaking family or friends, 14 pupils answered positively. Two of them were 1st year monolinguals, 4 1st year BLE pupils, 4 were 4th year monolinguals and 4 were 4th year BLE's. For a full overview see Table 10. Not all non-Dutch family and friends were English native-speakers. However, pupils indicated that they themselves and their non-Dutch speaking family and/or friends spoke at least some English; this was the language spoken between them. Of those pupils who did speak some English with their family and/or friends, the average time a week spent talking to them was 0.15 hours for 1st year monolinguals, 0.25 hours for 1st year BLE's, 0.20 hours for 4th year monolinguals and 1.3 hours for 4th year BLE pupils. For a full overview see Table 11. Most pupils indicated that their parents mostly kept contact with family and/or friends and that they themselves rarely speak to them. Only a few pupils kept e-mail contact of their own with non-Dutch speaking family and/or friends. This should not affect pronunciation, as the amount of contact is so small.

**Table 10: "Do you have any non-Dutch speaking family and/or friends?"**

	No	Yes
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	8	2
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	6	4
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolinguals	6	4
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	6	4

**Table 11: Time spend talking to non-Dutch family and/or friends a week**

	Hours	S.D.
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	0.15	0,34
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	0.25	0,35
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolinguals	0.20	0,26
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	1.3	3,12

All 40 pupils were also asked whether they thought they had British English or American English pronunciation. A total of 4 pupils did not know at all, even after they had been probed for an answer. In the 1st year monolingual class 5 answered British English, 4 American English and 1 did not know. In the 1st year BLE class 7 answered British English, 2 American English and 1 did not know. In the 4th year monolingual class 3 said they had a British English pronunciation, 5 said they had an American English and 2 did not know. In the 4th year BLE class 7 said they had a British English pronunciation and 3 said they had an American pronunciation. For a full overview see Table 12. Especially BLE pupils answered British English because they knew that is what is taught at school. According to these facts BLE pupils could have better (British) pronunciation, as they seem more aware of the language they are taught.

**Table 12: What sort of English pupils think they speak**

	British	American	Do not know
1 <sup>st</sup> year monolingual	5	4	1
1 <sup>st</sup> year BLE	7	2	1
4 <sup>th</sup> year monolinguals	3	5	2
4 <sup>th</sup> year BLE	7	3	0



## Conclusion

Comparing the data to the results of the questionnaire, the conclusion is that international parents, family and/or friends do not influence the pronunciation. Neither does the time spent in an English-speaking country with native speakers. Both BLE and monolingual pupils seem to acquire their pronunciation mostly at school. As the average age and the average number of years the two 1st year and the two 4th years have been taught English do not differ considerably, there is hardly any difference in their pronunciation. No indication could be found in the questionnaire as to why the 4th year monolinguals seem to score the worst of all in absolute figures, except for the fact that 2 pupils of this group indicated not to like English lessons. Their lack of motivation might cause them to not even try their best and therefore score lower. This, however, cannot be true as these two pupils scored an average of 6,3 and 8,9.

## Chapter 4 – Discussion

The answer to the hypothesis is clear: BLE pupils of this study do not achieve better pronunciation than the monolingual pupils. The hypothesis has been falsified. This was not expected to happen, even while testing. Personal impression indicated a pattern in which the two 1st year classes seemed to score about the same, the 4th year monolingual class seemed to score better and the 4th year BLE class seemed to score best of all. There seemed to be a great deal of pronunciation errors and only few good pronunciations with little errors in them in the 1st year classes and there seemed to be a great deal of good pronunciations and only few pronunciation errors in the 4th year BLE class; the 4th year monolingual class seemed to score somewhere in between. However, individuals performance do not account for the whole class.

However, in hindsight this research was not perfect. Future research could make use of more natural circumstances. While testing it was observed that most pupils had a tendency to pronounce words the way they were written. *Behaviour* was one such word which proved difficult for some, especially for 1st year monolinguals. They tended to pronounce every letter. This may have been caused by too small a lexicon at this stage of L2 learning. Another such word was *cupboard*; almost every pupil pronounced this the way it is written. Two students confessed that they did not know the word “bats”, yet pronounced it correctly. Another common error I noticed while testing was that some pronounced the –e– in verbs ending in –ed. For example, /smæʃt/ (*smashed*) became /smæʃet/. This may have been caused by too little positive evidence or instruction on how the written form is pronounced. *Live* was a difficult word for most and was pronounced like /laɪf/ instead of /lɪv/. This may have something to do with transfer from the phrase “live TV”, which is not uncommon to Dutch ears. However, the test was not about the ability to turn written English

into spoken English. A naturalistic study, research on spontaneous speech, may eliminate this problem of pupils producing incorrect pronunciations of words they do not know.

The difficulty with naturalistic research is that each pupil may produce completely different sentences. The possible sentences are endless. If a similar test were to be conducted, it would need some sort of regulation in which all pupils would produce almost the same sentences. This would keep assessing pronunciation fair in that the raters would not raise or lower marks on the basis on just a personal preference for a certain topic. A possible option for obtaining more naturalistic data would be to use a picture description task or a story telling task. This would control the topic. However, it would be impossible to control the sentences this way. This would have to be taken into consideration. There is the question of what would get the best results: a controlled environment or a natural environment. Both have their positive and negative aspects.

In addition, a future related study should make use of a practice session for raters. Some raters indicated that they would have liked one in order to get a feel for what and how they were grading. Presenting only the best and worst pupil may not be sufficient. Moreover, pupils might also benefit from a practice session, especially with a picture description task. However, pupils might not have benefited from a practice session in this research; they were allowed to take their time in reading all the sentences before the start of the recording.

In future research it would be interesting to see if different pupils from different schools produce the same results as these pupils did. This would be a study on a much larger scale. However, asking raters to grade more than 40 pupils would be much to ask; as most raters in this research indicated, assessing more pupils after one another would not have been a pleasant task. With more than 40 pupils, the assessments would have to take place

over a longer period with more breaks. Another option would be to make a selection of all the recorded pupils and have only these graded, presenting each rater with a different selection. Each rater would be presented with one of the two selections in order to grade all pupils. Alternatively, future research could investigate fewer pupils from each class from each school. However, this does not seem such a good idea as even now individual alterations could have clouded the results. Regardless, the selected pupils need to be representative of the monolingual and BLE population in general. The options are either more schools with as much as 40 pupils per school or more schools with fewer pupils per school.

An alternative option for grading more pupils would be with the use of software programmes available for pronunciation assessment, which could prove helpful in assessing pupils without the help of raters. These automated speech recognition (ASR) programmes are usually used for computer-assisted language learning (CALL). However, not all are suitable for this type of research. Most are targeted at learners with a specific L1, Chinese or Spanish. Others require the learner to evaluate his or her own pronunciation and some programmes are limited only to a certain level of proficiency (Calico). The best one currently on the market is *Eyespeak*. This programme was made especially for English language learners. It is a multimedia programme, created by Visual Pronunciation Software Ltd in 2005. This software is able to evaluate and give visual feedback from learners' vowel and consonant quality. The program provides a choice of four regional varieties of English: British, American, Australian, and New Zealand. *Eyespeak* automatically recommends a pronunciation model which has the same gender as the learner and which uses a regional variety of English corresponding to what would probably be used in the learner's country of

origin (Tao). Future research could make use of this software programme. It was not used in this research as time did not permit it in this BA research dissertation.

It would also be interesting to test male pupils to see if this study could make a difference in the average score of a class. The present female-only study is not entirely representative of the whole BLE population. As mentioned above, this study witch studied females only, in order to eliminate the gender variable. In addition, it is generally perceived that females are better at language learning than men (Guimond and Roussel 289). However, Severiens and Ten Dam suggest that genders differ only in aptitude (12) and not in ability; females are more interested in learning languages than, for example, mathematics, but are just as able to learn both subjects. Moreover, they also imply that the difference with men and women is psychological in every respect, including language learning. The two genders deal with things differently, but this does not mean that one is better than the other. Expectations are that no different results would appear if males had been taken into account in this research. Nevertheless they would have given a better representation of the BLE population.

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# Appendix 1

## Questionnaire

VRAGENLIJST – Onderzoek Engels

Geboortedag: .....

Nationaliteit: .....

Geboorteplaats: .....

Woonplaats: .....

Hoe veel jaar krijg je al Engelse lessen: .....

Bij de volgende vragen omcirkel je wat voor jou van toepassing is.

Ik vind Engels Leuk / Niet leuk .

Ik denk dat ik Brits / Amerikaans spreek.

Ben je wel eens naar een Engelstalig land geweest? Ja / Nee

Zo ja; hoe vaak en hoe lang?

.....

Heb je niet-Nederlandstalige vrienden en/of familieleden? Ja / Nee

Hoeveel uur per week spreek je Engels met hem/haar/hen?

.....



## Appendix 2a

### Assessment sheet 1

File

1.01	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.02	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.03	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.04	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.05	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.06	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.07	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.08	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.09	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.13	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.14	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.15	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.17	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.18	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.19	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.20	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

1.21	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.22	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.23	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.24	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.25	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.26	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.27	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.29	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.32	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.33	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.34	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.35	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.36	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.37	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.38	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.39	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.40	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

## Appendix 2b

### Assessment sheet 2

File										
2.01	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.02	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.03	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.04	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.05	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.06	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.07	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.08	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.09	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.11	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.13	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.14	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.15	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.16	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.17	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.18	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.19	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.20	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.21	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2.22	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.23	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.24	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.25	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.26	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.27	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.29	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.32	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.33	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.34	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.35	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.36	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.37	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.38	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.39	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.40	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10