Dutch speakers

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Distribution

THE NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM, Surinam, Dutch Antilles; about 20 million people. (Its mutually intelligible descendant Afrikaans, spoken by about 6 million native speakers and used as a *lingua franca* by about 15 million people in South Africa and Namibia, is now officially considered a separate language.)

Introduction

Dutch is a member of the (West) Germanic branch of Indo-European, and as such is closely related to Frisian, English, German and the Scandinavian languages. It is the standard language in the Netherlands and in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium, where it is often but unofficially called 'Flemish'. The use of the standard language as the first language is far more widespread in the Netherlands than in Flanders. There most people habitually use one of the many local dialects or an approximation of the standard language. The variation, though diminishing, is still very great. The standard language is understood almost everywhere, but dialects tend to be mutually unintelligible, both in the Netherlands and in Flanders.

Dutch and English being so closely related, they have many similarities in all areas of their grammars, and Dutch speakers regard English as easy to learn, at least initially, when they make rapid progress.

Phonology

General

The Dutch and English phonological systems are broadly similar, so that speakers of Dutch do not normally have serious difficulties in recognising or pronouncing most English sounds.

Many learners may use strong regional accents in their Dutch, and

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their problems with English tend to vary accordingly. Universal features
of Dutch giving rise to a Dutch accent in English are:
– Devoicing of final consonants and a corresponding shortening in the
  length of preceding vowels: *dock* for *dog*, *leaf* for *leave*, etc.
– A much narrower intonation range, not reaching the same low pitch
  areas as English.
– Pronunciation of *r* whenever it occurs in the spelling.

Vowels

iː	ɪ	e	æ	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ
ɑː	ɒ	ɔː	ʊ	aʊ	əʊ	ɪə
uː	ʌ	ɜː	ə	eə	ʊə	aɪə / aʊə

Shaded phonemes have equivalents or near equivalents in Dutch, and
should therefore be perceived and articulated without serious difficulty,
although some confusions may still arise. Unshaded phonemes may
cause problems. For detailed comments, see below.

1. Depending on the learners' region of origin, /ɪ/ may be pronounced
   too close (leading to confusion between pairs like *sit* and *seat*), or
   too open (with confusion between pairs like *sit* and *set*).
2. Standard Dutch /e/ is somewhere between English /e/ and /æ/. This
   results in confusion of the latter two (in pairs like *set* and *sat* or *then*
   and *than*), especially since Dutch has no vowel corresponding to /æ/.
3. Many learners pronounce English /ɑː/ very far back; it may sound
   similar to /ɔː/ (which is often very open), leading to confusion
   between pairs like *part* and *port*.
4. /ɒ/ and /ʌ/ may not be distinguished, leading to confusion in pairs
   like *not* and *nut*. Some learners may also pronounce /ʌ/ rather like
   /ə/.
5. Dutch speakers find English /ɔː/ and /əʊ/ difficult, and may confuse
   pairs like *caught* and *coat*.
6. Dutch has no equivalent of /ʊ/, as in *book*. It may be pronounced
   rather like /ʌ/ (with confusion between *look* and *luck*, for example),
   or like /uː/ (making *pool* similar to *pull*).
7. /ɜː/ (as in *heard*, *turn*) is usually pronounced with lip-rounding by
   Dutch learners.

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Consonants

p	b	f	v	θ	ð	t	d
s	z	ʃ	ʒ	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
m	n	ŋ	l	r	j	w	h

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1. The lenis ('voiced') consonants /b/, /d/, /v/, /ð/, /z/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ do not occur at the ends of words in Dutch. Learners will replace them by their fortis ('unvoiced') counterparts: *Bop* for *Bob*; *set* for *said*; *leaf* for *leave*; *cloth* for *clothe*; *rice* for *rise*; *'beish'* for *beige*; *larch* for *large*. (Most learners also fail to make the English distinction in the length of vowels before voiced and unvoiced consonants.)

2. In other positions in words, too, many Northern Dutch learners pronounce /f/ instead of /v/, /s/ instead of /z/, and /ʃ/ instead of /ʒ/: *file* for *vile*; *sue* for *zoo*; *'mesher'* for *measure*.

3. Dutch lacks the phoneme /g/ as in *get*. Learners will use either /k/, the fricative /x/ (as in Scottish *loch*), or its voiced equivalent /ɣ/.

4. /p/, /t/ and /k/ are not aspirated at the beginning of a word in Dutch; this can make them sound rather like /b/, /d/ and /g/: *bay* for *pay*; *den* for *ten*; *goat* for *coat*.

5. /tʃ/ is often reduced to /ʃ/ and /dʒ/ to /ʒ/ (or /ʃ/): *shop* for *chop*; /ʒæm/ or *sham* for *jam*.

6. /θ/ is usually pronounced /s/ or /t/: *sank* or *tank* for *thank*. /ð/ is usually pronounced /z/ or /d/: *zen* or *den* for *then*.

7. Northern Dutch speakers may make /s/ rather like /ʃ/: *sheet* for *seat*.

8. Learners may make /w/ with teeth and lip, leading to confusion with /v/: *vile* for *while*.

9. Dutch /r/ exhibits a lot of variety; none of the versions are like English /r/.

10. Dutch postvocalic 'dark' /l/ is very 'dark', with the tongue further back in the mouth than in English, especially after /iː/, /ɪ/ and /e/. Some Dutch accents have 'dark' /l/ before vowels, where English has 'clear' /l/.

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11. /h/ can be a problem for learners with a dialect background from the coastal provinces of Belgium: they produce a /x/-like fricative.

Consonant clusters

English clusters are not in general difficult for Dutch speakers. Students may insert /ə/ between /l/ and certain other consonants: *'fillum'* for *film*; *'millock'* for *milk*.

Influence of spelling on pronunciation

1. The Dutch system for spelling vowels and diphthongs is fairly simple and consistent. Learners have great difficulty therefore in dissociating a word's spelling from its pronunciation.
2. Learners tend to pronounce the letter *r* wherever it occurs, leading to mistakes if they are aiming at standard British English.
3. Dutch lacking a /g/, the combination *ng* is always pronounced /ŋ/ in Dutch. This leads to problems with words like *finger*, *hunger*, etc.
4. Even very advanced learners will pronounce the letter *o* in words like *front* and *mother* as /ɒ/ instead of /ʌ/.
5. The letters *u* and *w* in words like *caught* and *saw* lead many speakers to use an /əʊ/-like sound instead of /ɔː/.
6. Final *-w* is often pronounced as /w/: *how* pronounced /haʊw/; *saw* pronounced /sɔːw/; *draw* pronounced /drɔːw/, etc.
7. Learners will tend to pronounce the silent letters in words like *knot*, *gnaw*, *comb*, *bomb*, *half*, *sword*, *psychiatrist*, etc.

Stress

Dutch and English stress patterns in words and sentences are quite similar. There are some problems, though.
1. Dutch compounds regularly have stress on the first element, leading to problems where an English compound does not. Hence **'appletart* for *apple 'tart* (Dutch 'appeltaart).
2. Dutch stress patterns are not susceptible to variation depending on grammatical category, as in *con'vict* (verb) vs *'convict* (noun). This leaves learners very uncertain about the stress patterns of many words.
3. Dutch does not have as many weak forms as English, nor does it use them so consistently. Many speakers will overstress words like *and*, *but*, *than*, etc., using strong forms throughout.

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Intonation

Dutch intonation moves within a much narrower range than English. The Dutch intonation range is on the whole relatively high and does not reach the same low pitches as English. Learners trying to widen their voice range tend to move it upwards rather than downwards.

Juncture and assimilation

1. Dutch does not have final voiced stop or fricative consonants. Learners who have acquired final /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /ð/, /z/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ will still tend to make them unvoiced if the next word begins with an unvoiced sound. Conversely, Dutch word-final unvoiced sounds will often become voiced before a word beginning with a voiced stop or a vowel. This leads to problems in English. For example:
   Dad comes pronounced '*Dat comess*'
   if it is Tom pronounced '*iv id iss Tom*'
   this is Kate pronounced '*thiz iss Kate*'
   back door pronounced '*bag door*'
2. In Dutch, a sequence of two identical or similar stop consonants is usually reduced to one:
   sharp pins pronounced '*sharpins*'
   hard times pronounced '*hartimes*'

Punctuation

Dutch puts a comma after restrictive relative clauses; hence mistakes like:
   *The concern they show, is by no means exaggerated.
Commas may be used between unlinked clauses:
   *This is somewhat surprising, as they are forbidden in Dutch too, they nevertheless occur regularly.
Quotation marks are written like this:
   * ,,I am thirsty,'' he said.
Abbreviations entirely in lower case or ending in lower case are normally followed by periods: hence *Mr.* and *Mrs.*, even in texts that try to write British English. And *ie* for traditional *i.e.* may be found confusing.

   With some exceptions, Dutch compounds are written as one word, no matter how long they are, even when they are borrowed from or inspired by English (e.g. *marketinginformatiesysteem*). This leads to spellings like **marathonrunner*, **satellitechannel*.

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Grammar

General

Typologically speaking, the Dutch language occupies a position midway between English and German. Word order is virtually the same as in German; Dutch still has grammatical gender, and a high percentage of its vocabulary betrays its Germanic origin.

However, Dutch is not a variety of German. Apart from a fair number of language-specific differences, its morphology comes close to the English system. The inflectional system is relatively simple; neither verbs nor prepositions govern 'cases'; there are only a few relics of the old subjunctive.

Interrogative and negative structures

1. Dutch has no *do*-support. Interrogatives are formed by simple inversion; negatives by placing niet (= *not*) after the verb or before the first non-finite verbal element:
     **What mean you?*
     **Thank you, I smoke not.*
     **I have her yesterday not seen.*
2. Preposition-stranding in questions is unknown in Dutch (see however section 3 and 'Relative pronouns', section 5), and has to be taught explicitly. It takes a while before Dutch speakers will naturally produce *Who are you talking to?* instead of *To whom are you talking?*, a stilted construction that is liable to persist in their speech.
3. Dutch uses interrogative adverbials beginning with the equivalent of *where* to ask questions about things (see also 'Relative pronouns'). They are separable and thus might inspire preposition-stranding, but the substitution of *where* for the pronoun is a real danger:
     **Where are you thinking of?* (for *What are you thinking of?*)
     **Where do you need that for?*
4. Questions with inversion can have falling intonation in Dutch. This is sometimes transferred to English, which can make a simple, innocuous enquiry like *Are there no theatres open in London?* sound almost belligerent.

Tags, short answers and reply questions

Dutch has no construction comparable with the English question tag; instead it uses particles and adverbs:

> **She is your best friend, eh? / or not?* (for *She is your best friend, isn't she?*)

Unlike Dutch, English has quite a number of fixed subject-plus-auxiliary patterns which are frequent in conversational exchange. The over-short answers of a Dutch speaker may sometimes give an impression of abruptness, aggressiveness or rudeness.

> *'Are you coming with us?' 'Yes.'* (for *'Yes, I am.'*)
> *'Your glass is empty.' 'Oh, yes.'* (for *'So it is.'*)
> *'They never listen to good advice.' 'No.'* (for *'No, they don't.'* or *'No, they don't, do they?'*)
> *'You can't speak without a regional accent.' 'Yes!'* (for *'Yes, I can.'* or *'But I can.'*)

Auxiliaries

The general perfective aspect-marker, in Dutch as in English, is hebben (= *have*). However, zijn (= *be*) is used to form the perfect tenses of zijn, of blijven (= *remain*, *stay*) and of common intransitive change-of-state verbs:

> **He is been here, but he isn't stayed long.*
> **He is left ten minutes ago.*

The Dutch marker of the passive voice is worden (= *become*) in the simple tenses; however, in the perfect tenses Dutch uses the simple forms of zijn (= *be*). Speakers of Dutch tend to translate this zijn as a present tense, all the while thinking that the English verb in, e.g., *the report is published*, is a perfect tense and that they will be understood as having said *the report has been published*. Their problem is compounded by the existence, in English, of constructions like *the article is written in a racy style*, which seems to provide a model for **the article is translated by John*. This type of mistake is very persistent, even in the English of fairly advanced learners.

Time, tense and aspect

A. Past time

To refer to a past event Dutch can use both a past tense and a perfect tense, without much difference in meaning. The latter is the more usual form. Conversely, Dutch can use a past tense where English would use a present perfect:

> **I have seen him yesterday.*
> **All my nineteenth-century ancestors have lived here.*

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> **Since I made my report last year, there was a steady improvement in the company's trading position.*

B. Present time

To express how long a present state of affairs has been going on, Dutch normally uses a present tense, not a present perfect:
> **I know him for five years.*
> **I live in Amsterdam since I was a child.*

C. Future time

1. Even though Dutch has a future tense formed with an auxiliary (roughly equivalent to the *shall/will* future of English), it often uses the present tense to refer to the future:
   > **I promise I give it to him tomorrow.*
2. To express how long a future state of affairs will have lasted, Dutch often uses a simple future or even a simple present:
   > **In 2015 I will work here for 17 years.*
   > **Tomorrow I work here for five years already.*
3. Dutch can freely use the future in a subclause of time:
   > **He'll be an old man when he'll get out of jail.*

D. Aspect

Dutch does not have progressive verb forms:
> **I lived in London at that point in my life.*
> **I have a lot of trouble with John at the moment.*

'Progressive' meanings can however be expressed, if necessary, by the use of certain adjectives and adverbs:
> **What were you busy with yesterday?* (for *What were you doing yesterday?*)
> **You've worked on this non-stop this last week, eh?*

Some beginners overgeneralise the English progressive:
> **The house is belonging to my father.*

Conditionals

1. There are no such sharp distinctions between the use of verbal forms in the Dutch subclause and main clause as there are in English; apart from the equivalents of the normal English forms, Dutch allows those of *shall/should/would* in the subclause, and past tenses of full lexical verbs in the main clause. Hence mistakes like:

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> **If I shall see him, I shall tell him.*
> **If you would know him, you wouldn't* (or even *didn't*) *say such things.*
> **If he would have worked harder, he had succeeded.*

2. It is common in Dutch to use the adverb dan (= *then*) in the main clause of a conditional construction:

> ?**If you see him tomorrow, will you then tell him I won't be at home next week?*
> ?**Had I known in time, then I would have come along.*

Modal verbs

On the whole, the Dutch and English systems of modal verbs are similar. But:

1. English *must* is deceptively like Dutch moeten (= *must*, *have to*, *be to*); hence the frequent use of *must* when this is not the appropriate modal:

> **When must you take up your new appointment?* (for *When are you to . . .?*)
> **In Venice people must go everywhere by boat.* (for *. . . have to . . .*)

The negative moest niet means *should not*, *ought not to*:

> **You mustn't smoke too much, if I may say so.*

2. More specifically, learners may take *must* to be the equivalent of the Dutch past tense moest (= *had to* or *was to*).

> **I must go to London yesterday.*
> **The wedding must have taken place yesterday, but it was postponed.*

3. In Southern Dutch moet niet means *don't have to*, *needn't*, and is therefore completely different from *must not*:

> **Parking here is free today so you mustn't pay.*

4. Dutch kan (infinitive kunnen) denotes all types of possibility; there is no equivalent of English *may/might* used in this sense:

> **It can rain tonight: don't forget your umbrella.*
> **I can have told you already.*

5. The past tense of Dutch kunnen, kon (sg) / konden (pl), when denoting ability, usually implies more than mere ability: it almost invariably suggests that the action expressed by the main verb was actually carried out. Even advanced Dutch speakers may be misled by this:

> **Yesterday he could just catch the 7 o'clock train.* (for *. . . was able to catch . . .*)

6. Permission is mostly sought and granted in Dutch by means of the

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modal mag (infinitive mogen), even in informal registers, leading
students to overuse *may* and avoid *can*. English *might* looks like the
past tense of mag, which is mocht (= *could*, *was allowed to*):
> *She might go out every night when she was sixteen.*

7. Dutch zou has several different meanings, only a few of which can be
expressed by 2nd or 3rd person *should*:
> *They did not know they should never see each other again.* (for
> . . . *would never see* . . . or . . . *were never to see* . . .: destiny)
> *He should leave on Sunday, but there was a problem with his
> visa.* (for . . . *was going to leave* . . .: unfulfilled intention)
> *Andrew should be ill.* (for *Andrew is said to be ill.*: rumour)

Non-finite forms

Dutch uses considerably fewer non-finite forms than English. This
causes various problems, especially in the area of verbal complementa-
tion. This varies from word to word, both in English and in Dutch, and
a Dutch speaker must pay special attention to learn the English
complementation of a word if it differs from its Dutch equivalent.

1. Dutch speakers will substitute *that*-clauses or adjectival or adverbial
constructions for infinitives and gerunds after verbs:
> *He wants that I go.*
> *I've always gladly gone there* or *I have always been glad to go
> there* (for *I've always loved going there.*)
> *This entails that the whole configuration changes.*

2. Dutch has no equivalent of the English gerund, and will often
substitute a *to*-infinitive for one. A few very typical examples:
> *I don't mind to do it.*
> *If you can't avoid to go, you risk to upset your dad.*
> *I suggest to go to the pictures instead.*
> *It's no use to ask her.*
> *I am used to do this.*
> *I look forward to hear from you.*

Incidentally, the absence of a gerund equivalent will also lead to the
occurrence of *to*-infinitives after prepositions: *Instead of to fight,
they laughed.*

3. There is no equivalent of the structure 'verb + object + past
participle', whose meanings are expressed in a number of different
structures:
> *I hear my name call.*
> *I like that it is done quickly.*
> *Try to make yourself understandable.*

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