C O N T E N T S
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P R O N U N C I A T I O N

1. INTRODUCTION

This Pronunciation module consists of this Description and a set of computerised listening exercises: it teaches you all the speech-sounds of Dutch. The variety taught is Standard Dutch as spoken by the urban middle classes in Holland.

2. INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

2.1. Consonants

2.1.1. Plosives

p Voiceless bilabial plosive, unaspirated.
  Like English *p*, but without the following puff of breath. pɑk *package*.
b Voiced bilabial plosive.
  Like English *b*, but with more buzz. bɑk *tray*.
t Voiceless alveolar plosive, unaspirated.
  Like English *t*, but without the following puff of breath. tɑk *branch*.
d Voiced alveolar plosive.
  Like English *d*, but with more buzz. dɑk *roof*.
k Voiceless velar plosive, unaspirated.
  Like English *k*, but without the following puff of breath. kɑp *cap*.
g Voiced velar plosive.
  Like English *g*, but with more buzz. ɪg ˈbɛn *I am*.
ʔ Glottal plosive.
  The sound in Cockney *bu'er* (for *butter*). bəˈʔaːmə *to agree*.

2.1.2. Affricates

tɕ Voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate.
   Halfway between *ts* in English *tsetse* and *ch* in English *church*. ˈbeɪtɕə *a little*.
kɕ Voiceless palatal affricate.
   Like the *ky* sound in English *cue*, when said with a lot of breath. ˈkukɕə *biscuit*.

2.1.3. Nasals

m Voiced bilabial nasal.
  Like English *m*. mɛt *with*.
n Voiced alveolar nasal.
  Like English *n*. nɛt *tidy*.
ɲ Voiced palatal nasal.
  Like the *ny* sound in English *onion*. ˈkɑɲə *can you?*.
ŋ Voiced velar nasal.
  Like *ng* in English *long*. lɑŋ *long*.

2.1.4. Trill and Tap

ʀ Voiced uvular trill.
  A sort of gargle, made by bouncing the uvula up and down between the tongue and the roof of the mouth. ˈleɪʀə *learn*.
ɾ Voiced alveolar tap.
  Like a very old-fashioned pronunciation of English *r* in *very*, made by tapping the tongue against the ridge behind the teeth. ɾɛxt *justice*.

2.1.5. Fricatives

f Voiceless labio-dental fricative, endolabial.
  Like English *f*, but with the upper teeth brushing the inside of the lower lip. fɛɪf *five*.
s Voiceless alveolar fricative.
  Like *ss* in English *hiss*. sɛɪn *signal*.
z Voiced alveolar fricative.
  Like *z* in English *lazy*. ˈzeɪkɵɻ *certainly*.
ç Voiceless alveolo-palatal fricative.
  Like the *h* sound in English *Hugh*, when said with a lot of breath. ˈdoʊçɵ *little box*.
x Voiceless velar fricative.
  Like the *ch* sound in Scottish *loch*. xaːn *go*.
ɦ Breathy glottal fricative.
  Like English *h*, but said in a warm, breathy, unctuous way. ɦɑnt *hand*.

Traditionalists claim that there is a voiced labio-dental fricative *v* that contrasts with the voiceless f, and a voiced velar fricative ɣ that contrasts with the voiceless x. But since very few speakers of Standard Dutch use either of these sounds, they do not feature in this course.

2.1.6. Approximants

ʋ Voiced labio-dental approximant, endolabial.
  Like English *v*, but with the upper teeth approaching the inside of the lower lip without touching it. Like a non-resonant *w*. ˈʋaːtɵɻ *water*.
l Voiced alveolar lateral-approximant.
  Like English *l*. lɑnt *land*.
j Voiced palatal approximant.
  Like *y* in English *yoyo*. jʌʊ *your (informal)*.
ɻ Voiced retroflex central-approximant.
  Like an American 'hard r', with the tongue squeezed into the back of the mouth. The *r* sound used by pantomime pirates and people pretending to come from the West of England. ɦɑɻt *hard*.
ɣ̞ Voiced pharyngeal approximant.
  Pull the tongue towards the back wall of the mouth as in *Ugh!*, but don't pronounce the *g*. ˈʊɔɣ̞k *cloud*.

2.2. Vowels

'Checked' monophthongs (below) are so called because they must be followed by a consonant in the same syllable: in this they resemble their English counterparts in *kit*, *dress*, etc. 'Free' monophthongs, by contrast, can come at the end of their syllable. Unstressed monophthongs are found only in unstressed syllables.

2.2.1. 'Checked' monophthongs

ɪ Close front unrounded vowel, lowered.
  Like *i* in English *kit*. dɪŋ *thing*.
ɛ Open-mid front unrounded vowel.
  Like *e* in English *dress*. bɛt *bed*.
ɑ Open back unrounded vowel.
  Like the vowel-sound in English *path*, but shorter. dɑx *day*.
ɔ Open-mid back rounded vowel.
  Like the vowel-sound in English *thought*, but shorter. tɔp *top*.
ʏ Close front rounded vowel, lowered.
  Like *i* in English *kit*, but said with rounded lips. dʏs *so, then*.

3. SOUNDS IN FLUENT SPEECH

3.1. Mouth position

All languages have a characteristic position of the mouth, a way of holding the vocal organs that colours the overall sound. For Dutch, the back of the mouth is stretched and hollow, as though you were trying to swallow a whole potato, and the corners of the lips are drawn in in a slight pout. This gives more prominence to the velar consonants and rounded vowels.

3.2. Rhythm

Dutch, like English, makes a strong contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables. It has a 'stress-timed' rhythm, which means that the intervals of time between stresses are approximately equal, irrespective of the number of syllables spoken during each interval. Some syllables are therefore considerably drawn out, while others are very short, barely articulated. This rhythm is very different from, for example, that of Cantonese or Punjabi, where the syllables are uttered at a steady rate.

3.3. Stress

Getting the stress on the right syllable is important if you are to understand and be understood. In Dutch it usually falls on the root of the word, rather than on prefixes or suffixes, but this is not always true, and in any case you need to have some familiarity with word-formation to distinguish roots from prefixes and suffixes. So to start with, you have to learn the stress with each word. In this course, stress is shown by the ', which means that the immediately following syllable is stressed.

Speakers will change the stress within the sentence (as opposed to the stress within the word) to produce a particular effect, just as they do in English:
  ɪk kɑn 'nit 'xaːn *I can't go*
  ɪk 'kɑn nit xaːn *I CAN'T go!*

4. SOUND-CHANGES IN CONNECTED SPEECH ("SANDHI")

In all languages, sounds get changed when words are joined together: in English, for example, the final *t* of *west* is pronounced when the word stands alone, but not in such phrases as *West Country*. The linguistic term for such changes is "sandhi". Sandhi changes can make the language unintelligible if you are not prepared for them.

The list below includes most of the changes made in Standard Dutch. Not all speakers consistently make all the changes described here - people make fewer changes on more formal occasions, for example. In this course, these changes are made in some examples but not in others, as seems appropriate in the immediate context. This mimics what you will hear from native speakers.

4.1. *r* sounds

The *r* sound takes various forms in Dutch. The scheme used in this course is as follows:
- at the beginning of a word, the voiced alveolar tap ɾ is used. ɾɛɪst *rice*.
- between vowels, the voiced uvular trill ʀ is used. ɛ'ʀɔp *up there*.
- before a consonant, or at the end of the word, the voiced retroflex central-approximant ɻ is used. xɛɻt *Gert (name)*.
- after a consonant, the voiceless velar fricative x is used. txɛɪn *train*.

There is however a great deal of individual variation - *r* can be omitted in some positions; some speakers use an English *r*; some use a voiced uvular fricative ɣ; a voiced alveolar trill r is typical of Amsterdam (these sounds are not further

discussed in this course). A further problem is that x is an independent sound as well as a sort of *r*, so that xxaːn *grain* (where the first x is a sound in its own right, but the second is a variety of *r*) sounds the same as xaːn *to go*. This is a difficulty for native Dutch speakers as well as for learners.

4.2. Voiceless and voiced consonants

When a voiceless and a voiced consonant occur together, one of them will change to match the quality of the other. English shows a similar phenomenon when for example *newz-paper* (with z) is pronounced as *newce-paper* (with s). The Dutch consonants that are affected by this change are p ~ b, t ~ d, k ~ g, s ~ z and ɕ ~ j, since they form pairs in which one member is voiceless and the other voiced. The rules that determine which consonant is modified are as follows:

a. If both consonants are plosives, then both become voiced:
  ˈɔp dɑt becomes ˈɔbdɑt *so that*

b. If both consonants are fricatives, then both become voiceless:
  ˈʋɑs jə becomes ˈʋɑsɕə *were you (informal)?*

c. If one consonant is plosive and the other fricative, the fricative takes on the plosive's voicing type:
  ˈɾɛɪs ˈbyʀoʊ becomes ˈɾɛɪzbyʀoʊ *travel agents*

A resultant tɕ may further change to ɕ:
  xɛɻt jɑn becomes ˈxɛɻtɕɑn, ˈxɛɻɕɑn *Gert-Jan (name)*

4.3. Double consonants

When two identical consonants come together, one of them is removed. A similar change occurs in English, as when *some mothers* is pronounced *some others* (one of the *m* sounds is removed):
  ɪk kɑn nit becomes ɪˈkɑnit *I can't*
  ɐʏt tə ˈkoʊmə becomes ɐʏtə ˈkoʊmə *to come out*

Note that two different consonants can become identical by the change of voicing noted above, with the result that one of them can be removed:
  ˈʋɑs zə becomes ˈʋɑssə, ˈʋɑsə *was she?*

4.4. l and n

When l occurs before a consonant or at the end of the phrase, it changes to the voiced pharyngeal approximant ɤ̞. This is similar to the English change in pronunciation of e.g. *milk* to *miook*:
  fɔl becomes fɔɤ̞ *full*

An alternative strategy is to interpolate ə between the l and a following consonant. English does this too, in such cases as *fillum* for *film*:
  ˈtʋaːlf becomes ˈtʋaːləf *twelve*

When n occurs before a consonant, it can be deleted and the preceding vowel made nasal. (˜ means that the sound is produced partly through the nose.) ɦɛɪ ˈkʏnt becomes ɦɛɪ ˈkỸt.

A number of words ending in ə are pronounced with final ən in very careful speech. You can tell which words they are because they end in *en* in the spelling. All the infinitives of regular verbs fall into this class: ˈkoʊmə, ˈɦɛbə (in very careful speech ˈkoʊmən, ˈɦɛbən).

4.5. Glottal plosive

The glottal plosive ʔ is inserted when aː, ə or ɐ is preceded by another vowel. This can happen when two words come together in one phrase:
  də ˈɑndəʀə becomes də ˈʔɑndəʀə *the other*

the roof of the mouth.
Monophthong: a vowel that stays the same, and does not glide into another vowel. See 'Diphthong'.
Nasal: of a consonant, one in which the breath passes through the nose (the articulators block the passage through the mouth). Of a vowel, one in which the breath passes partly through the nose and partly through the mouth. See 'Oral'.
Open: a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is near the floor of the mouth.
Open-mid: a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is lower than halfway between the roof and the floor of the mouth.
Oral: a vowel that is pronounced wholly through the mouth (i.e. no breath passes through the nose). See 'Nasal'.
Palatal: the tongue articulates with the palate, the hard middle part of the roof of the mouth.
Pharyngeal: the tongue articulates with the back wall of the mouth.
Plosive: the air-stream through the mouth is blocked: pressure is built up and released suddenly.
Retroflex: a consonant where the tongue-tip is curled back, so that its underside strikes the roof of the mouth.
Rounded: a vowel where the lips are rounded (by pulling in the corners of the mouth).
Tap: a consonant where one articulator touches the other briefly while in movement.
Trill: a consonant where one articulator vibrates against the other.
Unaspirated: an unaspirated plosive does not have the puff of breath that accompanies most plosives in English. See 'Aspirated'.
Unrounded: a vowel where the lips are spread, not rounded.
Uvular: the tongue articulates with the uvula, the waggly appendage hanging down in the middle of the back of the mouth.
Velar: the tongue articulates with the velum. See 'Velum'.
Velum: the soft back part of the roof of the mouth.
Voiced: with a voiced sound, the vocal chords vibrate: the sound can be sung; if you put your hands over your ears, you can hear a buzz; if you touch your larynx lightly, you can feel vibrations. See 'Voiceless'.
Voiceless: with a voiceless sound, the vocal chords do not vibrate: the sound cannot be sung; if you put your hands over your ears, you do not hear a buzz; and if you touch your larynx lightly, you feel no vibrations. See 'Voiced'.

6. SOURCES

Mees, I., and Collins, B. (1982). 'A phonetic description of the consonant system of Standard Dutch (ABN)'. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, 12.1: 2-12.

Mees, I., and Collins, B. (1983). 'A phonetic description of the vowel system of Standard Dutch (ABN)'. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, 13.2: 64-75.