Learner English

SECOND EDITION

A teacher's guide to
interference and other problems

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Contents

Notes on contributors vii
Introduction ix
Note for teachers of American English xii
List of phonetic symbols xiv
Acknowledgements xvi

Dutch speakers 1
Speakers of Scandinavian languages 21
German speakers 37
French speakers 52
Italian speakers 73
Speakers of Spanish and Catalan 90
Portuguese speakers 113
Greek speakers 129
Russian speakers 145
Polish speakers 162
Farsi speakers 179
Arabic speakers 195
Turkish speakers 214
Speakers of South Asian languages 227
Speakers of Dravidian languages 244
Speakers of West African languages 251
Swahili speakers 260
Malay/Indonesian speakers 279
Japanese speakers 296
Chinese speakers 310
Korean speakers 325
Thai speakers 343

The cassette and CD 357

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

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.

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

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. 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/.

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 *ˈ*appletart* for *apple ˈtart* (Dutch ˈappeltaart).
2. Dutch stress patterns are not susceptible to variation depending on grammatical category, as in *conˈvict* (verb) vs *ˈconvict* (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.

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*.

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.*

**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:

**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

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 complementation. 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.*

Finally, present participle clauses are rare in Dutch. Dutch learners are liable to replace postmodifying participle structures, like *the girl sitting in the corner*, by relative clauses (*the girl who is sitting in the corner*). Also, it takes a while to get them to use adverbial present participle clauses, like *Realising that she was pregnant, she panicked*. Making them write present perfective participle clauses, like *Having secured his position, he did not fail to proceed* (which has no Dutch equivalent at all) will take even longer.

Word order

Word order in Dutch is less simple than in English. Some of the most striking differences will only interfere at an elementary level, but other Dutchisms may be so deeply rooted that they will yield problems at a more intermediate or even advanced level.

A. Main clause

1. In Dutch, the subject and the finite form of the verb are not separable:
   **He works sometimes on Sundays.*
2. The Dutch finite verb group tends to be separated from the rest of the verbal group (infinitives, past participles):
   **I must at once my sister see.*
   **They were of everything robbed.*
3. In contrast to English, Dutch can have its verb and (simple) objects or complements separated by adverbials:
   **I hear every day the bells ring from my bedroom.*
   **Bill loved passionately his wife.*
   **She kept fortunately her mouth shut.*
4. Inversion always occurs in Dutch if the sentence opens with a constituent other than the subject or a conjunction:
   **Tomorrow shall I see him.*
   **Incredible is that!*
   **This have we already examined.*
5. The internal order of adverbials is also different, time adverbials tending to precede those of place:
   **She has already been living for two years in London.*
6. The adverb particle tends to come at the end of the clause:
   **He got quickly up.*
7. In Dutch, the article can be separated from its noun by a complex participial clause or by an adjective and its complement:

**The by the Senate with unanimity voted down proposal.*
**He is a hard to convince man.*

8. For word order in interrogative clauses, see the section 'Interrogative and negative structures'.
9. Dutch often begins sentences with the equivalent of *also* and *already*:
   **We told the Smiths. Also they were shocked.* (for *They too were shocked.*)
   **Already in 1992 I went there.*

B. Subclause

A verb or verbal group comes at the end of a subordinate clause:
**He asked whether we John had seen.* (or even **. . . seen had*)

Constructions with it *and* there

1. Clauses identifying people and things begin with het, the Dutch equivalent of *it*. But het is followed by a plural verb form when a plural noun follows. Even advanced students will persist in producing sentences like:
   **It are the Joneses.*
   **It were the soldiers that shot first.*
2. Dutch also uses het in initial position of *be*-sentences to introduce information about persons mentioned previously.
   *'Is Ralph a friend of yours?' *'No, it's just a colleague.'*
3. Dutch er is used in far more constructions than its English equivalent *there* /ðə/, which is almost invariably followed by a form of *be*. Dutch speakers will overuse *there* and say and write things like:
   **There lay twelve books on his night table.*
   **There were made many mistakes.* (sometimes **There were many mistakes made.*)
   **There happened a lot of accidents that night.*
   **There is said in the paper that the government will not survive.*

Articles

The Dutch system of definite and indefinite articles is basically the same as in English. Apart from a number of differences of an idiomatic nature, the main points to note are:

1. Dutch sometimes uses a definite article with uncountable and plural nouns referring to something/things/people in general:

**The wages have been rising recently.*
**the life in modern Britain*

2. Dutch has no indefinite article in a subject complement with a countable noun denoting a profession, occupation or status, a religion or a nationality; nor after the equivalents of *as* and *without:*
   **She is professor, Buddhist and Swede. She's also widow.*
   **As basketball player he is hopeless; as friend he's wonderful.*
   **She came to the party without friend.*
3. There are many words in English (like *bed, church, prison*) which are preceded by the article when they denote what seems to be their primary meaning, a place, but which lack the article when the sentence is rather about the activity for which that place is typically used. Though Dutch has some parallel phrases without the article, like naar bed/school gaan (= *go to bed/school*), they are far fewer; hence mistakes like:
   **to go to the church* (for *to go to church*)
   **be sent to the prison*
4. Names of meals and seasons are normally preceded by an article. This leads to a reluctance to use *in winter* rather than (rarer) *in the winter* and leads to mistakes like:
   **Let's talk about that during the lunch.*
5. The numerals 100 and 1,000 have no article in Dutch; hence **hundred* and **thousand.*

Adjectives and adverbs

Adverbs are identical with the uninflected form of the corresponding adjective. This use of unmarked adverbial forms is so deeply rooted in the Dutch speaker's competence that even advanced learners tend to make mistakes like:

**She drives very careful.*
**You speak English very good.*

or in noun phrases:

**an economic weak theory*

Quantifiers and determiners

1. Dutch does not use different quantifiers with countable and uncountable nouns; hence mistakes like **much books* and, less often, **little persons* (for *few persons*).
2. The distinction between *some* and *any* will have to be taught

explicitly, as there is nothing that comes close to these quantifiers in Dutch. The same holds for *either/each/every*. Some typical mistakes:

**I don't have some books*. (beginners only)
**. . . too expensive to buy some*
**Can I have any more cake?*
**Take a ball in every hand.*

Interrogative pronouns

Here the only problem is the appropriate use of *which*, there being no exact equivalent for this in Dutch; hence:

**What is your second language, English or French?*

Relative pronouns

1. Dutch does not have different relative pronouns for people and things. The use of *which* with a personal antecedent (**A person which . . .*) is difficult to eradicate.
2. There being no distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses as far as the choice of pronouns is concerned, beginners often do not understand why structures like **My parents, that were born in France* or **My father, you met in Amsterdam* are ungrammatical.
3. Wat has a much wider coverage than English *what*: it is used with clause antecedents, with quantifier antecedents, and in very recent usage also with neuter nouns. This explains the use of *what* in a number of cases where English requires *which*:
   **John went to Brussels, what explains everything.*
   **This is all what I know.*
   Occasionally also:
   **The picture what I was drawing . . .*
4. Contact clauses (clauses without overt relative pronouns) and preposition stranding are totally unknown in Dutch syntax; therefore beginners tend to make excessive use of structures like:
   the woman whom I met in Glasgow the other day
   the pen with which Jane was writing yesterday
5. Instead of relative pronouns + stranded prepositions, Dutch often uses compound relative adverbials of a type that is now generally obsolete in English, viz. *where-* + preposition. In informal Dutch they are even used after human antecedents. They are optionally separable, which would be a great help in teaching preposition stranding, except that it leaves *where* instead of (zero) relative:

**The technology where he had relied on proved to be untrustworthy.*
**The man whereof I speak is a good friend of mine.*

6. For commas with relative clauses, see 'Punctuation'.

Reflexive pronouns

Dutch does not inflect the second half of reflexive pronouns for number, hence mistakes like **ourself*, **yourself* and **themself* (for *themselves*; **theirself* and **theirselves* also occur). And they are overused, in combination with what are normally middle verbs (simple intransitive verbs referring to things that people do to themselves) in English, which have no Dutch equivalent:

**He never shaves himself after he has washed himself.*

The indefinite pronoun one

Men is not nearly as formal as its English equivalent *one*, and Dutch speakers should be told that it has a range of stylistic equivalents:

**In the Middle Ages one actually believed that.* (for . . . *it was actually believed that* or . . . *people actually believed that*)
One could just as well claim . . . (for less formal *You could just as well claim . . .*)
**One intends to build a skyscraper here.* (for *They intend . . .*)

Gender

The natural gender system of English has no match in Dutch: Southern Dutch speakers have mostly preserved the tripartite Germanic system (just like the Germans), while speakers of Northern Dutch now use a binary system (masculine and neuter) with a limited and shrinking number of feminine nouns. Whichever system is adhered to, Belgian and Dutch students are often inclined to treat certain inanimate nouns as either masculine or feminine, in agreement with their Dutch equivalents:

**The English language . . . she . . .*
**The state . . . he . . .*

Countability and number

1. In Dutch, collective nouns are always followed by singular verbs. It takes a while before students are willing to let English ones be followed by plurals when appropriate; they will go for *the entire family has decided* rather than *the family have all decided*. A collective that requires a plural verb will keep trapping speakers into errors like:
   **The police has arrested him.*
2. Pair-plurals are unknown; *jeans* has been re-interpreted as a singular in the borrowing process, leading to:
   ** Where's my jeans? I can't find it.* (or *him*; see 'Gender')
   A more common type of error involves the plural formation: **two pyjamas* instead of *two pairs of pyjamas*.
3. Dutch also distinguishes countable and uncountable nouns, but not all equivalents belong in the same category; hence mistakes like **an information, *an advice, *give me two breads, please*.
4. If the first element of a noun + noun compound denotes a plural, it is mostly singular in English. In Dutch the number can vary, leading to mistakes like **a books shop* and **a ten-miles trip*.
5. Students need to be told the difference between, for example, *They'll all go to another university* and *They'll all go to other universities*, for in Dutch the singular phrase would be used in both cases. Hence mistakes like
   **They fell on their face.*

Conjunctions

The only real problem here is the common confusion between *if* and *when*:

** When it rains the trip will have to be cancelled.*

Prepositions

Though it is possible to indicate rough equivalences between Dutch and English prepositions, there are so many instances where there is no match that students will have to learn many prepositions in their collocations. A few common mistakes, by way of example:

**on the party*
**He lives on number 9.*
**with/by my aunt* (for *at my aunt's*)
**good in games*

**on the meadow*
**on sea*
**That is typical for him.*
**There's no proof for that.*
**to discriminate women* (for *to discriminate against women*)

The list is endless. However, a few systematic remarks can be made:

1. Sinds translates as either *for* or *since*; students tend to use *since* only:
   **I've lived here since four years.*
2. Achter translates as either *after* or *behind*; students confuse them:
   **He stood after me.*
3. In translates as either *in* or *into*; students tend to use *in* only:
   **Go in the room.*

Vocabulary

Dutch and English share the same basic Germanic vocabulary (e.g. voet = *foot*, groet = *great*, zien = *see*, mij = *me*, in = *in*), which greatly facilitates learning, in spite of the numerous false friends. Learning the Romance part of the vocabulary is facilitated by the fact that Dutch has borrowed fairly extensively from Romance and that many educated people know French (especially in Belgium) and even some Latin.

False friends

The close genetic relationship and the geographical proximity between Dutch and English plus the fact that both have borrowed extensively from Romance necessarily results in the existence of numerous false friends. Many of those mentioned in the chapters on related languages and on French apply to Dutch as well, as do the following:

English word used like	**Dutch**	**to mean**
dramatic	dramatisch	tragic
solicit	solliciteren	apply (for a job), go job-hunting
become	bekomen	get, acquire
mark	merk	brand, make
bring	brengen	take
camping	camping	camping-site
parking	parking	car park, parking lot
smoking	smoking	dinner jacket, tuxedo
chance	chance	luck
technique	techniek	technology

concurrence	concurrentie	competition
control	controleren	check (up on)
nephew	neef	cousin
niece	nicht	cousin
actual	actueel	current
actually	actueel	at present, currently
defect	defect	defective
ride	rijden	drive (a car)
amuse oneself	zich amuseren	enjoy oneself
eventual	eventueel	possible
learn	leren	teach
miss	missen	do without
fault	fout	error
novel	novelle	short story
stage	stage	traineeship
backside	achterkant	back

Some typical mistakes with high-frequency words

make vs *do*	**I still must make my homework.*
what vs *how*	**How do you call that?*
own	**She has an own room.*
please	*'Can I have your book?'* (handing it over:) **'Please.'*
already vs *yet*	**Have you finished already?* (for *Have you finished yet?*)
though vs *however*	**Though, he was still in trouble.*
a(n) half	**a(n) half hour ago*
just now ≠ *just*	**I have seen him just now.*
once	**I must once talk to her.* (for *I must go and talk to her.*)

Compounding

English compounds less frequently than Dutch and students will make such odd compounds as **life-habits*.

Multi-word verbs

They exist in Dutch, too, but they are used far less than in English, and it will often be necessary explicitly to draw the students' attention to

everyday prepositional verbs that they will otherwise fail to notice and use:

Dutch	*Simple verb*	*Multi-word verb*
zoeken	*seek, search for*	*look for*
beschouwen	*consider*	*look on*
verdragen	*bear*	*put up with*

(Many multi-word verbs fortunately pose no problem, as they are matched by similar or compound but separable verbs in Dutch.)

A sample of written Dutch with a word-for-word translation

Vele malen heb ik al meegemaakt, als in een gezelschap
Many times have I already experienced, when/if in a company

iemand zo onhandig is te verklappen dat ik taalkundige
someone so unhandy [clumsy] is to betray that I linguist

ben, dat men reageert met: 'Oei, dan mag ik wel op
am, that one reacts with: 'Oops, then may I well [I'd better] on

mijn woorden letten!'. Misschien dat een politiecommissaris dat
my words watch!'. Maybe that a police commissioner that

wel herkent, maar de wijnkoper, de hondenfokker of de
well recognises, but the wine buyer, the dog raiser or the

leraar wiskunde heeft zoiets niet. Hoe komt het
teacher (of) maths has so something not. How comes it

toch dat de taalkundige of de leraar Nederlands in
yet [on earth] that the linguist or the teacher (of) Dutch in

hetzelfde schuitje zit als de politiecommissaris? Ik weet
the same boat [diminutive] sits as the police commissioner? I know

het niet, maar Nederlandstaligen, aan beide zijden van de grens, zijn,
it not, but Dutchophones, on both sides of the border, are,

als het om hun taal gaat, vóór alles onzeker, voorzichtig,
when it about their language goes, before [above] all unsure, careful,

bang. Bang gemáákt, lijkt me. Terwijl de meesten
scared. Scared made, (it) seems (to) me. Whereas the most [most people]

toch minder reden tot schrik hebben dan in de
yet less reason to fear *[noun]* have than in the

nabijheid van de politiecommissaris. Vreemd genoeg zijn het
nearness of the police commissioner. Strange(ly) enough are it

juist de leraren Nederlands en de taalkundigen die
just the teachers (of) Dutch and the linguists who

in taalkwesties veelal het meest tolerant zijn. Veel
in language questions mostly the most tolerant are. Much

toleranter dan vele anderen buiten hun kring. Niet
more tolerant than many others outside their circle. Not

vreemd wegens hun opleiding, maar wel vreemd
strange owing to their education, but well [yet] strange

omdat het ijzeren schrikbewind dus uit andere
because the iron fear government [tyranny] thus out (of) other

bron moet voorkomen. Lag het aan de doorsnee-
source must forthcome. Lay it on [Were it up to] the average

taalgebruiker, men zou onze taal onmiddellijk tot kerntaak
language user, one would our language immediately to core task

uitroepen van een minister tot Bevordering van de
proclaim of a minister to [for] (the) Furthering of the

deugdzaamheid en Preventie van het kwaad.
virtue and Prevention of the evil.

('Joops column' by Joop van der Horst, in *Over taal* 37 (1998) p. 62.)