

## Dutch Fricatives

Dutch is an Indo-European language of the West Germanic branch, closely related to Frisian and English. It is spoken by about 22 million people in the Netherlands, Belgium, Aruba, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles, nations in which the Dutch language also has an official status. Additionally, Dutch is still spoken in parts of Indonesia as a result of colonial rule, but it has been replaced by Afrikaans in South Africa.

In the Netherlands, Algemeen Nederlands is the standard form of the language taught in schools and used by the government. It is generally spoken in the western part of the country, in the provinces of Noord and Zuid Holland. The Netherlands is divided into northern and southern regions by the Rijn river and these regions correspond to the areas where the main dialects of Dutch are distinguished from each other.

My consultant, Annemarie Toebosch, is from the village of Bemmelen in the Netherlands. Her dialect is called Betuws Dutch because Bemmelen is located in the Betuwe region between two branches of the Rijn river. Toebosch lived in the Netherlands until the age of 25 when she relocated to the United States for graduate school. Today she is a professor of linguistics at the University of Michigan-Flint and speaks only English in her professional career. For the past 18 months she has been speaking Dutch more at home with her son, but in the 9 years prior to that, she only spoke Dutch once or twice a week with her parents and other relatives who remain in the Netherlands.

The standard dialect of Dutch is characterized by eight fricatives, two of which are not native phonemes: voiceless and voiced labiodental [f] [v], voiceless and voiced alveolar [s] [z], voiceless and voiced post-alveolar [ʃ] [ʒ], voiceless uvular [χ], and voiced glottal [ɦ]. These fricatives are produced with a pulmonic egressive airstream mechanism, pushing air out of the

lungs and through the oral tract, and with a constriction of airflow through a narrow channel by the articulators in the mouth.

The labiodentals are produced by the constriction of air passing through a narrow gap between the upper teeth and lower lip, with the vocal cords pulled apart for [f] and close together and vibrating for [v]. The voiced labiodental fricative [v] is rapidly disappearing in standard Dutch and being replaced by a voiced labiodental glide [ʋ]. In addition, a recent tendency to devoice is causing the voiceless labiodental fricative [f] to be more commonly used at the beginning of a word, regardless of the spelling of the initial letter as "f" or "v."

The voiceless and voiced alveolar fricatives [ɕ] [ʒ] are laminal in Dutch, meaning the sounds are made with the blade, rather than the tip, of the tongue near the alveolar ridge. The vocal cords are open for [ɕ], but closed and vibrating for [ʒ]. Gussenhoven explains, "there is a narrowing between the blade of the tongue and the teeth-ridge, the tip being so low that it often touches the inside of the lower teeth" (88). English speakers generally perceive these sounds as closer to [ʃ] or [ʒ] than [s] or [z]. And similar to the labiodentals, there is a tendency to use the voiceless alveolar fricative [ɕ] more often than the voiced, especially at the beginning of a word, regardless of the spelling of the initial letter as "s" or "z."

The voiceless and voiced post-alveolar fricatives [ʃ] [ʒ] are produced by the blade of the tongue raising near the back part of the alveolar ridge, with the body of the tongue domed at the palate. [ʃ] is produced without vibrations of the vocal cords, and [ʒ] is produced with vibrations. These sounds are not native phonemes of Dutch and occur mainly in loan words from English and French, such as *show* and *bagage*. However, the diminutive suffix -je also causes the

pronunciation of [ʃ] as in *huisje* [hœyʃœ] (little house) or *poesje* [puʃœ] (kitten), as well as in loan words that begin with *sj-*, such as *sjaal* [ʃal] (scarf) or *sjouwen* [ʃouwœn] (to lug).

The voiceless uvular fricative [χ] is represented in the orthography by "ch" or "g." This sound is made by constricting the air flow between the back of the tongue and the uvula and it is produced without vibration of the vocal cords. This sound does not exist in English. In the Amsterdam dialect, which is only slightly different from the standard, the voiced uvular trill [ʀ] is often pronounced as the voiced uvular fricative [ʁ] (Fehringer, 90).

The voiced glottal fricative [ɦ] also does not exist in English, which uses the voiceless glottal fricative [h] instead. However, Ladefoged regards these glottal sounds as "state[s] of the glottis without a specific place" and not as fricatives since their "place of articulation depends on the surrounding sound" (254). The voiced glottal fricative [ɦ] is breathy voiced, with the vocal cords loosely apart and vibrating with considerable airflow. But Ladefoged prefers the term "murmured" to voiced as "there certainly is no voicing in the usual sense" (124).

In comparison to the standard dialect of Dutch, another main dialect is spoken south of the Rijn. In this dialect, the voiceless labial-velar glide [w] is used instead of the voiced labiodental fricative [v]. In addition, the voiceless and voiced velar fricatives [x] [ɣ] are used in place of the voiceless uvular fricative [χ] of the north. The velar fricatives are produced by constricting the airflow between the back of the tongue and the velum. The vocal cords are open for [x], but closed and vibrating for [ɣ]. This voicing distinction is largely allophonic, with the voiced occurring after long vowels word-medially and the voiceless occurring elsewhere (Kooij, 143). However, there are some instances of phonemic distinction, such as *looehen* [loxœn] (I

deny) and logen [loyœn] (to soak in lye). This distinction was historically represented in the orthography as "ch" for the voiceless velar fricative [x] and as "g" for the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] (Donaldson, 5).

The realization of the voiceless velar fricative as palatal and the voiced velar fricative occurring in word-initial position are also characteristics of the southern dialect. Furthermore, in some dialects of the southwest, the voiced glottal fricative [ɦ] is dropped word-initially: hoek is pronounced [uk] instead of [ɦuk] (Kooij, 143).

Toeboesch's dialect, which is neither the standard nor southern variety discussed above, uses [v] only allophonically, before voiced obstruents: levde [levdœ] (lived). In all other environments, she pronounces words spelled with the letters "f" or "v" as [f]. Toeboesch also does not make the southern variety velar fricative contrast between voiced and voiceless, but her dialect is closer to the southern variety in that she uses a voiceless velar fricative [x] and not a voiceless uvular fricative [χ] as in the north.

In all varieties of Dutch, voiced obstruents cannot occur in word final position. This is represented in the orthography with fricatives but not with plosives in cases of singular and plural nouns as well as conjugations and infinitives of verbs. For example, the letters "v" and "z" are not written in final position, but the letters "b" and "d" are, even though these letters are always pronounced as voiceless word-finally. Assimilation also causes the initial consonant of the following word to become voiceless: het vee [œtfe] (Donaldson, 2; Wikipedia).

*Singular noun - Plural noun**Third person singular - Infinitive*

duif [dœyf] (dove) - duiven [dœyvœn] (doves)

leef [lef] (lives) - leven [levœn] (to live)

huis [hœys] (house) - huiven [hœyvœn] (houses)

reis [REis] (travels) - reizen [REizœn] (to travel)

rib [Rɪp] (rib) - ribben [Rɪbœn] (ribs)

heb [fɛp] (has) - hebben [ɛbœn] (to have)

baard [bɑrt] (beard) - baarden [bɑrdœn] (beards)

wed [vɛt] (bets) - wedden [vɛdœn] (to bet)

Because of final devoicing, constructing minimal pairs in Dutch is difficult for syllable or word-final positions. However, this devoicing does not apply to sounds in morpheme-final position, so that *kazen* [kazœ] (cheeses) does occur. The allophonic use of [v] after voiced obstruents also creates restrictions in Toebosch's dialect because the initial and final positions cannot occur. The tendency to devoice in other environments rather than just word final is also increasing across most varieties of Dutch, especially in Amsterdam, so that [v] and [z̥] are more often pronounced [f] and [s̥], reducing the overall possibility of minimal pairs.

Several discrepancies in describing the fricatives of Dutch can be found throughout the literature. For the standard dialect, some sources (Donaldson, Fehringer) describe just the voiceless velar fricative [x], whereas others (Kooij, Wikipedia) include both voiceless and voiced velar fricatives [x] [ɣ]. Toebosch describes the sound as a voiceless uvular fricative [χ], but Gussenhoven argues that the voiceless uvular [χ] only occurs as an allophone of the voiceless velar [x] in non-standard and non-southern varieties of Dutch (97). Donaldson also includes that "northerners pronounce ch/g with the 'ch' of German ach [x], but usually with even more rasping than in German" (5). But the confusion over the transcriptions of the voiceless uvular fricative in the north [χ] and the voiceless velar fricative [x] in the south may lie in the

recent devoicing phenomenon of standard Dutch. Assumptions of the existence of a voiceless velar fricative [x] in standard Dutch may derive from the devoicing of the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] in the south.

Furthermore, in instances of the southern dialect using a palatal fricative instead of a velar fricative, Kooij states that it is the voiceless "palatal fricative as [ç] as in German *ich*" (143), while Wikipedia maintains that it is the voiced palatal fricative [j].

Only Toebosch and Gussenhoven explicitly state that the voiced and voiceless alveolar fricatives [ʒ] [ʒ̥] are laminal rather than apical. Donaldson does, however, refer to this by explaining "s tends to be pronounced with a sh-like quality" (3) and is thus perceived more like [ʃ] than [s] by English-speakers.

Toebosch and Wikipedia mention the voiced glottal fricative [ɦ] but the other sources either make no mention of it (Donaldson), state that the sound is the same as the English voiceless glottal fricative [h] (Kooij), or state that the sound is "roughly equivalent" to English (Fehringer, 89). Gussenhoven maintains that the sound is different from English /h/ because "it really is a vowel produced with breathy voice" (89) but he still uses the same IPA symbol to represent it.

Although the Netherlands is a small nation, several dialects exist within its boundaries. Toebosch's dialect is from a region located between two branches of the Rijn river, so that it is neither north nor south of the dividing line between the two major dialects. Her variety of Dutch exhibits characteristics of both of the major dialects, but it is still different enough to be distinguished from them.

## References

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**Fricatives of Betuws Dutch**

/ f /	voiceless labiodental fricative
/ v /	voiced labiodental fricative
/ s̺ /	voiceless laminal alveolar fricative
/ z̺ /	voiced laminal alveolar fricative
/ x /	voiceless velar fricative
/ ɦ /	voiced glottal fricative

## Recording List

		<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Orthography</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
/ f /	initial:	/fel/	veel	“much, many”
	medial:	/bœlɔftœ/	belofte	“promise”
	final:	/lef/	leef	“I live”
/ v /	initial:	none		
	medial:	/bœlovɔdœ/	beloofde	“promised”
	final:	none		
/ ʃ /	initial:	/ʃaj/	saai	“boring”
	medial:	/deʃœm/	desem	”leaven”
	final:	/kaʃ/	kaas	“cheese”
/ z /	initial:	/zaj/	zaaj	“I sow”
	medial:	/dezœ/	deze	”this one”
	final:	/kazœ/	kazen	“cheeses”
/ x /	initial:	/xef/	geef	“I give”
	medial:	/zexœ/	zegen	“blessing”
	final:	/lax/	lach	“laugh”
/ h /	initial:	/hɔnt/	hond	“dog”
	medial:	/xɛɦat/	geɦad	“had”
	final:	none		

Illustration of (near) minimal pairs:

Initial:	/ʃaj/	saai	“boring”
	/zaj/	zaaj	“I sow”
Medial:	/bœlɔftœ/	belofte	“promise”
	/bœlovɔdœ/	beloofde	“promised”
	/deʃœm/	desem	”leaven”
	/dezœ/	deze	”this one”
(Morpheme) Final:	/kaʃ/	kaas	“cheese”
	/kazœ/	kazen	“cheeses”