

# Pronunciation

This introductory chapter will assume that the reader will either be working in class under the guidance of an instructor who can illustrate the sounds of the spoken language, or has access to some of the many tapes, CDs, broadcasts and other audio means that are readily available. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 27.

In the presentation of sounds that follows, every Dutch sound discussed will be transcribed in the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. We will follow the usual custom of always enclosing IPA symbols in square brackets.

## **I.1** Vowels

### **I.1.1** *Front, rounded, front-rounded vowels*

Front vowels are those pronounced with the tongue more or less raised in the front of the mouth such as “eat,” “it,” “date,” “end.” IPA symbols for front vowels are [i], [ɪ], [e] and [ɛ].

Back vowels are those pronounced with the tongue raised in the back of the mouth, such as “food,” “foot,” “code.” IPA symbols for back vowels are [u], [ʊ] and [o].

Front-rounded vowels occur in Dutch but not in English. They involve the raising of the tongue in front of the mouth while keeping the lips rounded or puckered at the same time. Front-rounded vowels occur in French (**vu, deux**) and German (**müde, dünn, Söhne, können**). IPA symbols for front-rounded vowels are [y], [ʏ], [ø] and [œ].

### 1.1.2 High and low vowels

“High” means that in the sound in question the tongue is raised close to the roof of the mouth. “Low” means that the tongue is further away, i.e. more “relaxed.” So we say that the vowel of “eat” is high, “end” a mid-vowel and “add” a low vowel. The equivalent IPA symbols would be [i], [ɛ] and [æ].

### 1.1.3 The vowels

Vowel in Dutch spelling	Example		IPA	Remarks
<b>ie</b>	<b>ziek</b>	sick	[i]	Like English “seek” but rather short in Dutch.
	<b>hier</b>	here	[i:]	Same quality as the previous example, but about twice as long before <b>r</b> .
<b>i</b>	<b>dit</b>	this	[ɪ]	
<b>ee</b>	<b>steen</b>	stone	[e:]	Has a tendency toward a diphthong, less strongly so than English “main” but more than German <i>zehn</i> . This is especially true in the western cities in the Netherlands.
<b>e</b>	<b>met</b>	with	[ɛ]	
<b>oe</b>	<b>boek</b>	book	[u]	Pronounced shorter than English “boot.”
	<b>boer</b>	farmer	[u:]	Like Dutch <b>ie</b> , roughly twice as long before <b>r</b> .
<b>oo</b>	<b>boon</b>	bean	[o:]	As Dutch <b>ee</b> , tends to a diphthong, less so than English “bone” but more than German <i>Bohne</i> .
<b>o</b>	<b>pot</b>	pot	[ɔ]	

<b>aa</b>	<b>kaas</b>	cheese	[a:]	
<b>a</b>	<b>dat</b>	that	[ɑ]	You will hear that this vowel is pronounced much further back than the preceding one.
<b>uu</b>	<b>minuut</b>	minute	[y]	Resembles French <i>minute</i> .
	<b>buur</b>	neighbor	[y:]	As Dutch <b>ie</b> and <b>oe</b> , this vowel sounds more or less twice as long before <b>r</b> .
<b>u</b>	<b>nul</b>	zero	[ʏ]	Similar to German <i>müssen</i> .
<b>eu</b>	<b>neus</b>	nose	[ø:]	Like French <i>deux</i> , German <i>Söhne</i> .

#### 1.1.4 Summary

Dutch vowels are all distinct from one another by virtue of their differences in what we might call “vowel color,” usually termed their quality. It is also useful to note that they differ in quantity, meaning their duration: some are always short, others always long, and still others short or long depending on the surrounding sounds.

<b>a e i o u</b>	always short [ʌ ɛ ɪ ɔ ʏ]
<b>aa ee oo eu</b>	always long [a: e: o: ø:]
<b>ie oe uu</b>	long, but only before <b>r</b> [i:r u:r y:r] (rather) short everywhere else [i u y]; this includes when they end a syllable or word, such as <b>zie, hoe, nu</b>

#### 1.1.5

A neutral vowel, which is comparable to the last syllable of English “soda” or “sofa” occurs in unstressed (unaccented) syllables in many words. In Dutch, the neutral vowel sounds like the short **u** [y]. It has several spellings, the most common of which are:

<b>e</b>	<b>behalve</b>	except	(the most usual spelling)
<b>ij</b>	<b>mogelijk</b>	possible	
<b>i</b>	<b>twintig</b>	twenty	

## 1.2 Diphthongs

A “diphthong” can be defined as the succession of two different vowels in a single syllable. Examples in English are “how,” “boy,” “time.” Notice that in the third example the spelling does not suggest the diphthong that is there, the sound that we misleadingly call “long i.” The IPA symbols for these three diphthongs would be [aʊ], [ɔɪ] and [aɪ].

Spelling	Example	IPA	Remarks
<b>ei</b>	<b>trein</b> train	[ɛi]	([e] + [i]). Note that <b>ei</b> and <b>ij</b> are two spellings for the same sound.
	<b>dijk</b> dike		
<b>ou</b>	<b>koud</b> cold	[ɔu]	([ɔ] + [u])
<b>au</b>	<b>blauw</b> blue		
<b>ui</b>	<b>huis</b> house	[œy]	([œ] + [y]). This is a front-rounded diphthong.
<b>oei</b>	<b>moeite</b> trouble	[ui]	([u] + [i])
<b>ooi</b>	<b>mooi</b> nice	[o:i]	([o:] + [i]). The first component of this diphthong is long.
<b>aai</b>	<b>haai</b> shark	[a:i]	([a:] + [i]). Note the difference between this and the first diphthong above; first component long.
<b>ieu</b>	<b>nieuw</b> new	[iy]	([i] + [y])
<b>eeu</b>	<b>leeuw</b> lion	[e:y]	([e:] + [y]). First component long.

### 1.3 Consonants

Consonants are either voiced (vocal cords vibrating) or voiceless (vocal cords not used).

Consonant in Dutch spelling	Example		IPA	Remarks
<b>p</b>	<b>paal</b>	post	[p]	The first three consonants are voiceless stops, and in Dutch they are unaspirated, meaning they are not followed by the little puff of breath that we hear in English “peel,” “team,” “cool.”
<b>t</b>	<b>tien</b>	ten	[t]	
<b>k</b>	<b>kat</b>	cat	[k]	
<b>b</b>	<b>been</b>	bone	[b]	The two voiced stops are always pronounced voiceless at the end of a word, in other words identical to the voiceless stops.
	<b>heb</b>	(I) have	[p]	
<b>d</b>	<b>deze</b>	these	[d]	Voiceless at the end of a word.
	<b>had</b>	had	[t]	
<b>f</b>	<b>feit</b>	fact	[f]	At the beginning of a word, the sound resulting from the juxtaposition of <b>s</b> and <b>j</b> occurs in borrowings from other languages; it occurs in the middle of Dutch words.
<b>s</b>	<b>saai</b>	dull	[s]	
<b>sj</b>	<b>sjaal</b>	scarf	[ʃ]	
	<b>meisje</b>	girl		