An impression of foreign language teaching approaches in the Netherlands

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As a Latin high school teacher from San José, California, the first author was curious to see how foreign languages are taught in the Netherlands, the country that is supposed to be known for people who speak foreign languages so well. A project was set up to find out how foreign languages are taught at Dutch schools with classroom observations of the most commonly taught languages in the Netherlands (English, French, German, Latin, and Ancient Greek) and a student survey. To create a rubric with which to objectify the classroom practices as well as possible, the literature was examined to discover what L2 researchers consider good language teaching and what approaches have proven to be effective. Students were also surveyed on how they perceived their teacher and how motivated they were to learn their languages.1)

A focus on recent scholarship in the field of second language acquisition suggests that a balanced classroom experience is necessary for the successful language learning of students (Ellis, 2008). Students need to have opportunities for both meaning focused input and output, for fluency development, and for form focused learning. The importance of target language input is high. Input, however, is not enough. Students should have occasions to produce the target language in a communicative, meaning focused way.

In their popular textbook for future foreign language teachers, Lightbown and Spada (2013, Ch. 6 and 7) review the most commonly known foreign language teaching approaches in the world, with differences in how much attention is paid to meaningful input, meaningful interaction and focus on grammar. Focus on grammar may be achieved incidentally within a meaningful context (for example by means of repeating what the learner is trying to say in the correct form) or purposely within a structure-based syllabus and giving many explicit explanations and meta-linguistic terms. Below, the approaches are ordered according to the degree of focus on grammar or meaning that may occur. In parentheses, some other common features are given.

- I. Grammar-translation (Has a structurebased syllabus; focus on grammar forms and accuracy; little meaningful input or use of the language)
- 2. Task-based learning (Is a form of communicative language teaching; Has commu-

nicative activities with a focus on meaningful interaction among learners; has some focus on grammar when needed to prevent fossilization)

- 3. Communicative language teaching (Similar to task-based learning but with less focus on tasks; it also has meaningful interaction and some focus on grammar. The Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM), in which the target language is used exclusively with gestures to scaffold for meaning, or Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) in which stories, questions and answers are the central focus of the class, are specific methods that can also be subsumed under communicative approaches)
- 4. Comprehension approach (Has a heavy emphasis on meaningful, comprehensible input but little interaction, and no explicit attention to grammar)
- 5. Content-based language teaching (Has a subject or several subjects taught in the target language such as in immersion, bilingual, or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs, in the Netherlands common in Tweetalig Onderwijs (TTO); often there is very little attention for grammar or errors).

After a solid and nuanced overview of how different linguistic and psychological theories have influenced these second language teaching approaches over the last 60 years, Lightbown & Spada (2013) end each section with a review of the empirical studies that do or do not support these approaches. They conclude in the end that a communicative approach has the best chance to be effective in language teaching, when language is used meaningfully, is taught with a large amount of input – preferably as authentic as possible – and some attention to grammar is given. Moreover, they provide several examples of what empirically have proven to be the most

effective approaches: the reading comprehension approach, in which learners read books instead of receiving explicit instruction, and a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach, in which L2 learners are taught subject content (such as history) in the target language. They conclude that these truly communicative methods are much more effective than structure-based programs. However, despite the evidence of the efficacy of approaches that focus on input and meaning, Lightbown and Spada point out that the use of communicative approaches remains rare in the foreign language classroom, while the use of structure-based teaching methods remains widespread.

With commonly known teaching approaches and empirical evidence for most effective teaching approaches in mind, the current study set out to explore the following two questions:

- I. What instructional approaches are used in the foreign language (FL) class in Dutch schools?
- 2. To what extent is there communicative language teaching in the foreign language class?

During the classroom observations, it became evident that in some classes students were not at all interested in the lesson and in others they participated actively and enthusiastically. To see whether learners are more motivated and engaged by communicative teaching practices, the students were surveyed to answer the following question:

3. What is the relationship between the type of instruction students receive and how they perceive their foreign language classes?

Method

To answer the questions above a variety of language classes was observed and students

were surveyed on how they perceive the FL and their classes.

Schools visited

As the first author is teaching at a college preparatory high school in the US, she was mainly interested in comparable school types. Therefore, a total of 49 language classes were visited at the VWO (preuniversity) and HAVO (general secondary education) levels. The schools were mainly in the north of the Netherlands, both in the city of Groningen and in more rural areas. One school in Amsterdam is included. The VWO has different streams such as regular (VWO), gymnasium, with Latin and Greek (VWO-G) and a form of bilingual education called Tweetalig Onderwijs (VWO-TTO). The gymnasium and TTO are generally more selective and attract the highest level students (Verspoor, De Bot, & Xu, 2015). For the current study, TTO schools have been looked at separately because according to De Bot and Maljers (2009), TTO schools have been the best innovation in foreign language teaching in the Netherlands in the

LANGUAGE	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	GRADE 6	TOTAL
		VWO		VWO	VWO	VWO	4
ENGLISH		HAVO		HAVO			2
	VWO-TTO (2X)	VWO-TTO	VWO-TTO	VWO-TTO			5
GERMAN		VWO (2X)		VWO	VWO		4
GERIAR	HAVO		HAVO	HAVO			3
	vwo	VWO			VWO	VWO	4
FRENCH	HAVO	HAVO	HAVO (2X)				4
	νωο-μο	VWO-TTO (2X)	VWO-TTO	VWO-TTO	νωο-μιο		6
LATIN	VWO-G (2)	VWO-G	VWO-G (2)	VWO-G	VWO-G (2)	VWO-G	9
LATIN	νωο-μιο						1
ANCIENT		VWO-G (2X)	VWO-G		VWO-G	VWO-G	5
GREEK		VWO-TTO	VWO-TTO				2

Table 1. Number of classes visited by language and grade

past decades. Not only do they require that 50% of classes are taught in English, but also the extra English as a language class and other foreign languages are supposed to be taught in the target language. Presently there are 130 schools with TTO of the 642 VWO schools, but these numbers are not quite representative as many schools with TTO have only one or two classes in the TTO stream and a greater number of regular classes. Of all classes visited, 29% were in the TTO stream. Table 1 shows the breakdown of class visits.

Teachers and classes observed

The classroom observations concerned 28 different teachers teaching 49 classes in French, English, German, Ancient Greek, and Latin courses at Dutch high schools (9 HAVO and 40 VWO at all levels). A minimum of one example of each grade of each language was observed, with the exception of German 6. The student survey concerned 316 students in 15 classes taught by 10 different teachers observed.

Materials

For the classroom observation, a tool and rubric were developed reflecting teaching approaches mentioned by Lightbown and Spada (2013). First, a self-created observation tool catalogued information regarding the activities observed, characteristics of the learning environment, engagement level of the students, and the language and approaches used. Then, the observations were scored by the first author in a rubric consisting of 5 domains: teacher use of target language, presence of communicative activities, student engagement, learning environment and classroom management, and opportunities for assessment of student learning. The rubric exists in two versions, one for classical languages and another for modern languages (See Table 2).

The student survey, adapted from a previous survey used by Sulis (2015), consisted of a set of twenty statements with Likert scale response choices. The twenty statements aimed at gauging students' attitudes towards the class and the teacher, interest in the subject and language, and comfort level with using the language.

Procedure

Classes were identified that could be used as subjects by contacting as many teachers as possible. Then, visits of the classes were scheduled. Prior to the beginning of class, teachers were asked whether it would be possible to survey the students during the last 5-10 minutes of class. In the case that this was not convenient, teachers were asked to share a web link with the class so that the students could complete an online survey at a later time.

Through the instructional period, the observation tool was used to record what took place in the classroom. During the observation of classes, the first author noted which language teaching approaches were employed by the teacher such as a grammar translation or communicative approach. Among the communicative approaches there were general ones that included communicative activities in class and more specific ones such as Task Based, AIM or TPRS.

The language of instruction was defined as the language in which the teacher conducts the class. All tasks such as greeting students, giving instructions, providing explanations, and offering feedback fall under this heading. The degree of target language use was put into three general categories such as plentiful and consistent input in the target language (TL), some input in the TL, and very minimal input in the TL. The other aspects in the rubric were also put into three general categories with

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RUBRIC DOMAIN	MODERN LANGUAGES	CLASSICAL LANGUAGES			
TEACHER USE OF TL	 3: plentiful and consistent input in TL 2: some input in TL 1: very minimal input in TL 	 rich written input, full sentences, reinforced orally some full sentence input input was limited to isolated words 			
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES (MODERN)	3: communicative orientation was strongly present throughout the class	3: students had multiple varied opportunities to practice their lan- guage skills			
VARIATION OF ACTIVITIES (CLASSICAL)	2: some presence of communicative activities1: no communicative activity was present	2: some variation in practice oppor- tunities1: no variation of practice			
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	 3: learning environment was focused, productive, and student centered 2: learning environment was somewhat focused and productive 1: environment was largely unfocused and chaotic 				
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	 3: students were actively participating, interested in, and following the activities of the teacher 2: students were engaged for a portion of the lesson 1: students were off-task and non-participatory 				
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASSESSMENT	 3: teacher had plenty of opportunities to assess the degree to which students understood 2: teacher had 1-2 opportunities to assess student understanding 1: no opportunity for assessing was present 				

Table 2. Scoring rubric

PRIMARY APPROACH	MODERN LANGUAGE AT TTO SCHOOL	MODERN LANGUAGE AT REGULAR SCHOOL	CLASSICAL LANGUAGE
Grammar-Translation		45 [%]	73%
Communicative total	100%	55 [%]	27%
General communicative	38%	28%	
AIM	38%	9%	
TPRS			9%
Task-Based	24%	18%	18%

Table 3. Primary approach used

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scores from 1-3, as can be seen in Table 2.

Finally, the students were surveyed using a hardcopy survey administered at the conclusion of class or via an online version of the same survey.

Analysis

First descriptives are used to present the results. To analyze the teacher observation rubric and student survey, correlational and factor analyses were conducted. All analyses were done in SPSS.

Results

Teaching approaches used in the classroom Table 3 shows the use of approaches, as a percentage, for the three different categories of classes. It is important to note that AIM, TPRS, and Task-based learning are all approaches to language teaching that have varying levels of communicative focus.

Table 4 provides the average score from 1-3 for each domain of the rubric broken down into three streams: TTO, Regular – Modern, and Classical.

To see to what extent the five different domains were related to each other, correlations were calculated. Table 5 shows that the five domains in the rubric all correlated significantly with each other. There was a significant positive correlation among all the domains, suggesting that they are all highly interrelated. Of course, the number of communicative activities and learning environment are related to the teaching approach

RUBRIC DOMAIN	πο	REGULAR - MODERN	CLASSICAL
TARGET LANGUAGE USE	3.00	2.14	2.35
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES	2.45	1.86	1.95
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	2.82	2.14	2.24
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	2.82	2.14	2.24
ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES	2.82	2.43	2.47
AVERAGE OVERALL SCORE	2.78	2.14	2.25

Table 4. Score for each rubric domain

	TL	CA	LE	SE	As
TL					
CA	0.474***				
LE	0.407**	0.435**			
SE	0.408**	0.593***	0.678***		
AS	0.387**	0.415**	0.387**	0.451***	

TL = (teacher use of) Target Language, CA = (presence of) Communicative Activities, LE = Learning Environment, SE = Student Engagement, AS = (opportunities for) Assessment (* p < .05, ** p < .01 *** p < .001)

Table 5. Correlations between the five domains

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APPROACH	AVERAGE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
Grammar-Translation ONLY	2.00
Grammar-Translation AND additional approach	2.42
Communicative, AIM, Task-Based, CLIL	2.73

Table 6. Average student engagement by approach

chosen. Table 6 shows that the more communicative the method is, the higher the student engagement.

Target language use

In TTO schools, the target foreign language was the language of instruction in all classes observed; in other words, the teachers spoke exclusively in the TL so the average rubric score for language of instruction in modern language classes at TTO schools was 3 (compared to 2.14 at regular schools, and 2.35 for classical language classes).

In non-TTO classes, 55% of the classes were conducted mainly in Dutch, but there is variation in the language of instruction depending on the language taught. All English classes observed were taught in the TL, but few German and French were. Latin was taught in the TL in two cases, but all Greek lessons were conducted in Dutch.

Table 7 shows to what extent the teacher and students use the TL. Teachers in TTO pro-

grams always use the TL in class. TTO students use the TL very frequently, but their regular peers much less. The table also demonstrates that teachers who use the target language exclusively have students who often use the TL. Teachers who use the TL less often have students who also use the language very little.

Student survey

A questionnaire based on the AMTB (Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery), developed originally by Gardner (1985) and adapted for Dutch students by Sulis (2015) was used to survey the students. It was meant to test the following constructs: interest in the FL, motivational intensity, FL anxiety, FL teacher evaluation, attitude towards learning the FL, desire to learn the FL, FL course evaluation, and instrumental orientation.

Results factor analysis

A factor analysis on the twenty items of the questionnaire was conducted (See Appendix).

	Teacher t	Teacher to Student		Student to Teacher		Student to Student	
	TTO	Regular	ττο	Regular	ττο	Regular	
Always uses TL	100%	33%	91%	10%	18%	-	
Sometimes uses TL	-	43 [%]	9%	43 [%]	82%	14%	
Rarely uses TL	-	24%	-	33 [%]	-	38%	
Never uses TL	-	-	-	14%	-	48%	

Table 7. Student use of TL in modern language classes

The results seem to indicate that the questions related to four main categories: teacher and method, interest in language learning, learner anxiety, and motivation. These four factors explain 53.1% of the variance. The first category explains 16.8% of the variance, the others respectively 13.7%, 12.1% and 10.5%.

To see whether there is a relation between overall good, communicative teaching (high total rubric score) and the evaluation of the students (total score), a correlation was run between the total rubric score and the total questionnaire score. There was a weak, but significant positive relationship between communicative teaching and the students' attitude towards the class, $\rho = 0.2$; p < 0.001 (two-tailed).

We also wanted to know if there was a correlation for total student scores on the questionnaire and the total score on the class observation rubric per teacher. However, no significance was reached ($\rho = 0.068$; p > 0.05). But when the scores of the questions in the factor Teacher/Method were totaled and correlated with the total scores on the class observation rubric, there is a significant correlation between communicative FL classes and students' perception ($\rho = 0.392$; p < 0.001).

Similar correlation tests were run with the other four main factors, interest in language learning, learner anxiety and confidence, learner anxiety, and motivation, but the correlations were not significant.

Discussion and conclusion

To get an impression of foreign language teaching approaches in the Netherlands, this study focused on the particular approaches teachers used and the extent of target language use. The authors were also interested in understanding what students in the Netherlands thought about their foreign language classes.

The first question investigated the approaches that teachers use in their foreign language classes. Teachers were observed using a variety of approaches (grammar-translation and communicative approaches, which included AIM, task-based, and TPRS), and often more than one approach was used in a single class. In TTO schools a communicative method, either AIM or other, as the primary method was predominant. This result is not surprising given that it is a requirement in this type of school. In regular schools, however, the predominant approach was grammar and translation, for both classical and modern languages. Interestingly, there were two classes in Latin that used a communicative approach, suggesting that it is very well possible to use such a communicative approach even if the students have not been exposed to the foreign language before. Still it was very surprising to see the extent to which the grammar-translation approach is favored among teachers of modern languages in the Netherlands.

When the approach data is compared with the data on observed student engagement, some noteworthy patterns arise. In our correlation analysis of the rubric we found that there were significant correlations between all five domains of communicative activities: target language use, presence of communicative activities, learning environment, student engagement, and opportunities for assessment. In classes where communicative activities were present the level of student engagement was higher. In turn, the higher the engagement level, the more positive the learning environment was. These findings can offer motivation for classroom teachers to use the target language and include more communicative activities in the lessons they plan. The findings of this study offer good evidence that communicative activities lead to a more positive learning environment, and

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not, as many teachers may fear, a more chaotic environment.

An approach itself does not determine completely what happens in the classroom as teachers can implement it in different ways. Research (cf. Lightbown & Spada, 2013) has indicated that in order to foster the best possible conditions for language learning, students need to have lots of access to rich target language. Therefore, the second question examined the degree to which the target language was used. The target language as language of instruction was much more common in TTO schools than in the regular schools. The TTO schools visited provided students with lots of rich target language, while the regular schools offered far less. Our findings confirm De Bot and Maljers' assertion that TTO schools are indeed a very positive innovation.

In the regular schools, the target language was the language of instruction in all English classes visited. The same was certainly not true for French and German classes. One possible reason for this difference is the high degree of exposure to English that students receive on a daily basis in the Netherlands. The increased opportunities to hear and use the language have raised the base level proficiency of students to the level that teachers feel comfortable conducting their classes in English. De Bot notes that English has a very high value in Dutch society and that its value is responsible for the excellent achievement of students in this subject (Law 2014). However, in regular schools, the extensive use of Dutch in French and German classes was striking. Students in these classes have few opportunities to hear the language in use and, as a result, their own ability to use the language really suffers.

The approach and the use of target language has to do with the number and type of communicative activities and students producing the target language. The teacher use of the target language has a bearing on its use by students. Students at TTO schools were much more likely to use the target language in class when addressing their teacher or their peers than their counterparts at regular school. When students hear the language frequently, they are more apt to use the language. This effect was particularly notable in French classes using the AIM approach. In the French AIM classes observed, input was provided only in French. The students were able to comfortably follow the lesson and interact with each other and their teacher using French.

The final question considered the extent to which there is a correlation between communicative FL classes and the way students perceive those classes. Indeed, there was a weak, but significant correlation between the total score on the observation rubric and the score on the items in the teacher and method factor of the student survey. The teacher/method correlates significantly with how much students enjoy the class. This is an important piece of data as it demonstrates that the approach that teachers choose really is a critical factor in how students react to a class. Not only does the approach impact the kind of skills that students will have in the language, but it also has a bearing on their engagement in the class and overall assessment of that class. For secondary school students to have a positive response to a language class, the current study shows that language teachers need to consider not only what they are teaching, but also how they are teaching it.

There are several limitations to this study that are worth noting. First of all only VWO and HAVO schools were observed, and the situation may be quite different at VMBO schools. Also, there was only one observer who gave an impressionistic score and more objective methods of scoring could have been used, and not all students of every class responded to the survey. Most of the schools visited are located in the north-east of the Netherlands. It is possible that visits to schools in other areas of the country would yield a somewhat different data set. Additionally, the method used to identify the subjects for the study offers some limitations as the teachers were not selected randomly; moreover, some teachers were observed for a number of classes at different levels, which may have skewed the results. Contact was made with individual teachers at local schools via a teacher educator. This is potentially problematic in that the teachers who have a connection with the teacher education program are more likely to be experienced educators as they are asked to serve as models for pre-service teachers. Further research is needed to confirm that the grammar-translation approach is prevalent in German, French, Latin and Ancient Greek classes in the Netherlands.

End note

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Appendix

Results correlations between student perceptions, method, and teacher (Rotated Component Matrix*)

	Teacher/ Method	Interest in language learning	Learner Anxiety/ confidence	Motivation
I look forward to this class because my teacher is so good	.705	.160	.046	.214
This language class is a waste of time	466	481	.024	097
This language teacher teaches in an interesting and varied way	.833	006	008	.073
The method my teacher uses is fun	.886	.007	.123	.056
Because of the method, I do enjoy this language very much	.783	.202	.200	.156
Learning this language is important because I might need it in my career	072	.784	.024	.186
I wish I could spend all my time learning this language	.306	.686	065	.168
I practice my language skills every day	.051	.389	.004	·431
I want to continue taking classes in this language in grade 4	.143	.609	.143	.054
I worry that the other students in my class are better with this language than I am	.081	043	723	151
I am afraid that the other students will laugh when I try to use this language	056	.074	711	.069
I have great confidence in my ability to use this language.	.148	.480	.605	006
I feel very comfortable using this language outside the classroom	053	.550	.431	033
I am confident when I have to use this language in class	.206	.171	.725	.111
I think that it is important to get good grades	.132	101	107	.663
Foreign languages are very interesting	.220	.241	.182	.430
I work hard to learn this language	.430	.109	272	·437
It is important to learn foreign languages	.113	.152	.184	·597
Learning this language is important because it means I can get a better degree	045	·347	003	·594
When I don't understand something, I ask my teacher for help	.293	193	.292	.442

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

* Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Homofoondominantie veroorzaakt dt-fouten tijdens het spellen en maakt er ons blind voor tijdens het lezen

NINA VERHAERT & DOMINIEK SANDRA

Fouten tegen de spelling van de werkwoordvormen zijn hardnekkig. Leerlingen en studenten slagen er niet in om die fouten systematisch te vermijden. Zelfs professionele taalgebruikers, zoals journalisten of verantwoordelijken voor ondertitels, ontsnappen er niet aan. Geen enkele andere spelfout doet de gemoederen zo hoog oplaaien en zorgt voor zoveel polarisatie in de standpunten als deze fouten. Doorgaans leiden ze tot onbegrip en veroordelende uitspraken, waarbij de termen 'lui', 'nonchalant' en 'onverstandig' vaak in de mond worden genomen. In dit artikel laten wij zien dat er meer aan de hand is dan nonchalance en gebrekkig taalinzicht: sommige dt-fouten ontstaan door de (normale) werking van onze cognitieve processen. Daardoor kan iedereen in bepaalde omstandigheden dt-fouten maken.

De hardnekkigheid van fouten tegen de spelling van de werkwoordvormen blijkt uit de titel van een pr oefschrift dat al zestig jaar geleden geschreven werd: De tragedie der werkwoordsvormen (Van der Velde, 1956). De negatieve aandacht die deze fouten te beurt valt, heeft hen zelfs een eigen naam opgeleverd: dt-fouten. De situatie is sinds het onderzoek van Van der Velde niet veranderd. Leerlingen aan het eind van de middelbare school kunnen integralen en differentialen oplossen, maar maken dtfouten in hun opdrachten en examens. Universiteitsstudenten verwerken abstracte cursussen, maar leveren papers en eindwerken in met dt-fouten. Zelfs taalstudenten doen dat, ook studenten neerlandistiek.

Dt-fouten zijn berucht, zowel binnen als buiten het onderwijs. Doorgaans leiden ze tot onbegrip en veroordelende uitspraken, waarbij de termen 'lui', 'nonchalant' en 'onverstandig' vaak in de mond worden genomen. Wie een dt-fout maakt, is vaak ook zelf gegeneerd om zo een 'domme' fout niet opgemerkt te hebben. Wie echter een fout maakt tegen woorden als elektronica (niet electronica), applaudisseren (niet aplaudisseren), tezamen (niet tesamen), analist (niet analyst) krijgt zelden kritiek.

Waarom veroorzaken dt-fouten zoveel meer commotie dan andere spelfouten? Spelfouten worden blijkbaar wel getolereerd als de spelling van een woord gememoriseerd moet worden, maar niet als die spelling via duidelijke regels kan worden afgeleid. Omdat arbitraire informatie moeilijk te onthouden