

Speaking with an accent: the current status of the /o:/ and /e:/ in Twents

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A very distinctive feature of the accent that derives from the dialect Twents is the monophthong that is used when pronouncing /o:/ or /e:/. In Standard Dutch these two vowels have become diphthongs: /e:/ is realized as [e:i], /o:/ is realized as [o:u]. This research focuses on two sociolinguistic factors that might play a role when a person born and raised in Twente speaks in a formal setting: migration and the level of education of the parents. Which factor brings a person to utter the Standard Dutch variety of the /e:/ or /o:/? This research does not focus on the language system itself, like many others do: it focuses on which factors bring a person to speak the way he does.

People born and raised in Twente, now in the age of 18 to 30 years (all of them highly educated) were asked to read aloud sentences. The studied vowels were measured at 25% and 75% of the realization of the vowel. This way the diphthongisation could be measured. Two control groups were used: Standard Dutch speakers and Standard German speakers. This way non-Standard Dutch realizations could be compared to the Standard German generalizations as well.

Our study does not find an effect of migration, but this might be caused by the relatively recent migrations (2-5 years). Our study did find a large effect of the education level of the parents. When participants with highly educated parents started to read sentences, they immediately changed their pronunciation to a formal, Standard Dutch way of speaking, even when they had lived in Twente their whole life. This research thus indicates that education level of the parents plays an important role in dialect pronunciation.