**The sound of Utrecht**

To our knowledge no studies that focus on the sound of Utrecht have been carried out. Therefore, we asked people in our own network to tell us what they hear in Utrecht, what the city sounds like. The sketch below is based on personal impressions from 20 people living and/or working in Utrecht. Although they are short, personal and subjective impressions, there are some striking similarities in the observations, and together they give an indication of the sound of Utrecht. We owe the respondents much gratitude for their help!

*Dutch*

Almost all respondents hear a lot of ABN (Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands – Standard Dutch) and the local urban variety Utrechts, although at least half of them mention a decline in the use of Utrechts in the past ten or so years.

Five people explicitly mention the use of Brabants, a dialect from the south of the country. Three people mention both Brabants and Limburgs (from even further south). The southern dialects share some characteristics, and people from other parts of the country sometimes don’t distinguish between Brabants and Limburgs.

A few times other Dutch dialects are mentioned as well, and they are mentioned together: ‘I hear Brabants, Zeeuws, Zuid-Hollands, Rotterdams, Twents, Gronings.’ Flemish is also mentioned, but only once.

The use of Dutch with a foreign accent is mentioned several times: five people mention Dutch with a Moroccan accent. One respondent refers to it as Dutch with ‘zzzz’ and ‘ssss’, which is seen as characteristic. Another respondent mentions a ‘vette Z’ (fat Z) used by Moroccan girls. A Chinese respondent was struck by people who speak Dutch but don’t look like Dutch.

*Foreign languages*

Although Dutch and its varieties are the absolute number one languages, a lot of other languages are heard in Utrecht. Several people mention both Turkish and Arabic. One person wrote that she doesn’t hear the difference and it is my experience that except those who actually speak Turkish or Arabic/Berber, there are only few people who are aware of the differences between the two. In general, among members of the Moroccan community Dutch is used more often than the native languages Berber and Moroccan Arabic, in particular among the younger generations. But beside Turkish, Moroccan languages do play a role in the sound of the city. The difference between Berber and Moroccan Arabic is mentioned only once.

People mention languages they don’t recognize ‘so it must be something east-European’, or ‘an east-European language, maybe Polish or Rumanian’. Someone else used to hear a lot of Polish in the supermarket but it seems to have disappeared now (from the supermarket). Another person mentions ‘east-block languages’ and Bulgarian.

Supermarket-girls with headscarves are reported to speak Dutch without an accent and someone mentions that poor Dutch or ‘Turkentaal’ (Turks language), referring to a variety of Dutch with strong Turkish influences, is disappearing. Again, in practice these Turkish influences may be Moroccan as well.

Another foreign language that is often mentioned is English, both native and accented, which means that it is used a lot as a lingua franca. (‘Japanese people speaking English and Spaniards speaking a little bit of English’) Only a few people don’t mention English. Other languages that are mentioned are German, French, Frisian, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, Croatian, Somali, Japanese and Surinamese. A language that I hear sometimes but nobody mentioned is Papiamentu.

*Parts of town*

Some people don’t distinguish between parts of town and others explicitly make a distinction between the city center and other areas, such as Kanaleneiland, Overvecht , Zuilen, Lunetten and Wilhelminapark. Kanaleneiland, Overvecht and Zuilen have large migrant populations so one would expect that migrant languages will be heard there.

The city center attracts a lot of tourists and that is probably one of the reasons why relatively many languages other than Dutch are heard there. Particularly the presence of Japanese tourists is striking: one explanation might be that an annex of the Central Museum is completely dedicated to the work of Dick Bruna (the creator of ‘Nijntje’, or Niffy’) who is extremely popular in Japan.

Lunetten is socially diverse but ethnic diversity is less than in Overvecht, Kanaleneiland or Zuilen. Compared to those two parts of town there are many students in Lunetten, and many of them have a non-native Dutch background. In the supermarkets in Lunetten some people report to hear English and German. Others mention about Lunetten that Dutch is dominant but some Arabic/Turkish and English can be heard. Everyone agrees that there is more diversity in the city center.

The so called ‘Gooise r’, which refers to a posh pronunciation of r, is heard in the richer areas such as Wilhelminapark but also, increasingly, among students and other young people.

*Straattaal*

Finally, some respondents specifically refer to ‘Straattaal’, street language, or youth language, a variety of Dutch with features from English and migrant languages such as Sranan and Arabic: they refer to ‘(…) this strange Dutch/Moroccan street language’ or ‘a nice mix of Dutch, Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese words and expression’ (and the respondent’s children help him to understand it). Straattaal is also heard in public transport (mainly the bus), and in Kanaleneiland. This does not mean that it is not used elsewhere: as I mentioned in the beginning, this was only an impression by a small group of people.