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## 8 CONSEQUENCES OF THE DUTCH INTEGRATION POLICY: LITERACY AS ENTRANCE CRITERION

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### Abstract

This article describes how during the last decennia the Dutch integration policy changed from fairly foreigner-friendly into a policy that, in our view, seems designed to discourage low-educated people to immigrate to the Netherlands. According to the latest amendments in the language-related legislation, applicants not only must have acquired some spoken Dutch and knowledge of the Dutch society, but also reading ability in Dutch to get access and obtain a temporary residence permit. To test this reading ability, a new literacy test was developed and implemented. Since no courses are offered to prepare migrants for this entrance exam, the Dutch government provides a self-study toolkit. In this contribution, the new literacy test and the toolkit are described and analyzed to assess the appropriateness for true beginners. In our view, both do not take into account the double cognitive load involved in learning to read and write in a new language.

Keywords: integration policy, literacy testing, second language learning.

### 8.1 Introduction

Since the nineties of the last century, the Civic Integration policy of the Dutch government has developed from a more or less foreigner-friendly policy, which supported migrants in building a new life in the Netherlands, to a much more

restrictive policy, which requires migrants to pass several exams even before entering the Netherlands. This illustrates that proficiency in the national language has more and more become a cornerstone of the integration policy in the Netherlands (as in other European countries).

In this contribution, we first give an overview of the history of the Civic Integration legislation in the Netherlands since the mid-nineties of the last century (Section 8.2) and the recent amendments to these laws in 2012. In Section 8.3, we discuss the consequences of the most recent amendment to the Civic Integration Act: the Dutch Literacy test, which requires migrants to pass a reading test in Dutch to get an entrance visa for the Netherlands. Since no courses are provided by the Dutch government in the home countries of the migrants, a self-study toolkit has been developed, which migrants intending to settle in the Netherlands can buy and use to prepare themselves for the exam in their home-country. This toolkit is described in Section 8.3, in which special attention will be paid to the first 20 lessons aimed at beginning reading for non-literates. Both the literacy test and the toolkit will be critically analyzed from the perspective of the true beginner who is learning to read and write in a second language. In section 8.4, we present some statistics that illustrate how the latest amendments decreased the chances for low-educated migrants in particular to pass the new integration exam that includes the literacy test discussed above. Section 8.5 closes off with some conclusions about the impact of the recent amendments to the integration act: a more restrictive integration policy, especially affecting the unschooled and/or low-literate potential migrants.

Since the required proficiency is defined in levels of the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (Council of Europe 2001), we start by briefly introducing this framework.

The main aims of the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR) were to offer a frame of reference to evaluate the linguistic and communicative proficiency of people in another language than their mother tongue, to facilitate comparisons and cooperation between different European countries, to support learners, teachers, educational institutes, curriculum- and test-developers, and to create transparency in describing levels of proficiency for oral and written communication in several domains (Council of Europe 2001).

The CEFR distinguishes a qualitative and a quantitative dimension. The first dimension describes language proficiency in (among other things) several domains (e.g., school, family, work), functions (e.g., requests, explanations), situations (e.g., meetings, phone calls), locations (e.g., school, market) and roles (e.g., audience, participant in a discussion). The second dimension describes the level of efficiency, i.e. how proficient people are at using the language in the several domains and roles. Six levels are described, ranging from the lowest level A1, standing for the ability to communicate in short and simple sentences in a very familiar context, to the advanced and independent level C2, corresponding to near-native use of oral and written language (but see Janssen-van Dieten 2006 for a critical reflection on the implications for LESLLA learners).

## 8.2 Legislation on Civic Integration

### 8.2.1 History

Until the mid-nineties of the last century, there was no language-related legislation for admission and civic integration of migrants in the Netherlands, although many migrants did actually attend courses in Dutch as a second language or Dutch L2 literacy courses, provided by adult education centers. In several places, these centers also offered literacy courses in Turkish or Arabic, partly based on the assumption that learning to read is easier in a first language and learning Dutch as a second language might be more successful if people had already learned to read in their first language (Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990)<sup>24</sup>. Starting in 1998, an official integration policy with attendant legislation came into force, which subsequently kept being changed in the past fourteen years. Figure 1 presents an overview of the legislation on admission and civic integration in the Netherlands since 1998.

- 1998: Law on Civic Integration (WIN):
  - Obligation to participate in integration courses, no requirements with regard to the level to be attained
- 2000-2004: Changes in the public and political climate: preparing new legislation
- 2006: Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB)
  - Admission dependent on passing the exams on Spoken Dutch and Knowledge of Dutch Society
- 2007: Law on Civic Integration (WI)
  - Residence permit dependent on passing exams on spoken and written Dutch and knowledge of Dutch Society
  - Exam: central exam and practice assessments
- 2011: Amendment to Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB)
  - Spoken Dutch: criterion for passing raised to A1 level
  - Literacy test (GBL) added
  - No provision of courses, self-study toolbox
  - Costs: Toolbox € 110,- Exam € 350,-
- 2012 Amendment to Law on Civic Integration (WI)
  - Required level of Dutch A2 (future B1?)
  - Time-limits reduced to 3 years (+ 2 for unschooled).
  - Possibility of applying for dispensation for literacy requirements abolished
  - Central exam only
  - Funding stops from 2013 onwards

FIGURE 1 Dutch legislation on admission and civic integration.

<sup>24</sup> Estimations of the proportion of non-literate adult migrants at the time ranged from 15–20% for Turkish men and 40–45% for Turkish women, to 50–70% for Moroccan men and 70–90% for Moroccan women.

In 1998, the first Law on Civic Integration was passed, which required migrants to participate in courses of Dutch as a second language and familiarization with Dutch society and work in the Netherlands. All courses were provided by adult education centers with only minor costs for students. Familiarization with Dutch society and with work was regularly offered in a language familiar to the migrants, such as Turkish, Arabic or English.

In the period between 2001 and 2005, the public and political climate changed radically, due to major events like 9/11, the murders of Islam-critical politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and equally if not more critical controversial interviewer/film-director Theo van Gogh in 2004, culminating in anti-Muslim and anti-migrant populist political party like Geert Wilders' PVV (Party for Freedom). This change in climate is reflected in two new laws that were much more restrictive with regard to the admission of new arrivals (newcomers) and quite a bit more demanding as far as the requirements for civic integration were concerned than was the case in the 1998 law. These two laws were the Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB), which was passed in 2006, and the Law on Civic Integration (WI), which was passed in 2007.

The 2006 Law on Civic Integration Abroad required migrants from non-western countries wanting to settle in the Netherlands to pass an exam on spoken Dutch and a test on knowledge of Dutch society (next to several other requirements). It introduced an entrance examination for the Netherlands: only those migrants who had passed the test on spoken Dutch at a level slightly below A1 (called A1-minus) and on knowledge of Dutch society were declared admissible to the Netherlands. The exam (a computerized phone-pass test<sup>25</sup>) is called the basic integration exam and is to be taken at the Dutch Embassy or Consulate in the candidate's country of origin. The Exam on Spoken Dutch (TGN) tests oral skills and consists of four parts: sentence repetition, answering short questions, naming antonyms of given words and retelling stories. The exam on Knowledge of Dutch Society (KNS) consists of 30 questions in Dutch (out of the 100 than can be prepared for) based on a booklet with 30 illustrations that are to be answered in Dutch as well. The questions include topics like geography, history, the Dutch constitution and legislative system, parenting and education, work and income, the health care system and the Dutch language.

In 2007, the second law was passed, the Law on Civic Integration (WI), which required migrants after entering the Netherlands to pass another three exams, two central exams (oral and written Dutch, and Knowledge of Dutch Society) and a local practice exam (assessments by certified assessors or portfolio proofs) before getting a permanent residence permit. In the practice assessments, candidates could choose assessments that were best suited to their role in daily life (for example related to work or parenting). Newcomers were

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<sup>25</sup> The fully computerized exam, making use of automatic speech recognition, is taken by using a telephone connection that links the candidate to a computer at the ministry in the Netherlands. The candidate will hear questions through the headset and will give answers by speaking into the microphone.

required to pass the Level A2 (CEFR) exams (spoken and written skills) of the common European Framework of Languages. For long-term residents, level A1 for written Dutch sufficed. For refugees, only the requirements of the second law (WI) applied. The separate citizenship test, which existed until 2007, was replaced by the Civic Integration Exam. Migrants who had already passed another exam at a higher level (for example a regular high school exam or a State Exam on Dutch as a second language) did not have to take the Civic Integration Exam. Migrants with less than elementary education in their home country could apply for an exemption (dispensation) for the written part of the requirements to get Dutch citizenship, provided they could prove they had made a considerable effort trying to reach the required literacy levels. Migrants got three and a half years to pass the exams; unschooled migrants were allowed to take two more years.

### 8.2.2 Recent Amendments

Recently, there have been several amendments to the two laws introduced above. In 2011, the Law on Civic Integration Abroad (WIB), which regulates admission to the Netherlands, was adjusted: the criterion for passing the test on spoken Dutch was raised to level A1 (CEFR) and a new test was added: A literacy test.<sup>26</sup> The exam on Knowledge of Dutch Society remained unchanged. From April 2011, migrants who want to get an entrance visa for the Netherlands not only have to prove that they can speak and understand Dutch, but also that they can read Dutch in Roman script at level A1 of the European Framework, i.e., that they are able to read and understand simple and short texts in Dutch. No courses are provided, but instead a self-study toolkit has been developed (by order of the government) to help potential immigrants people to learn to read and comprehend written Dutch by themselves, with help of their relatives in the Netherlands (see also section 4). Taking the whole test costs 350 euros, which comes on top of the other costs migrants have to make to prepare themselves for the exam and to travel to a Dutch Embassy or Consulate in their country or a neighboring country. The self-study toolkit costs 110 euros. The website of the Dutch government states: "You can prepare for the basic integration exam with the self-study toolkit *Naar Nederland* ('To the Netherlands'). It contains all you need to learn to speak, understand and read in Dutch and to pass the basic integration exam abroad."<sup>27</sup> The toolkit consists of a DVD with the film 'To the Netherlands' and an accompanying photo book with an audio CD, a workbook, a learner's guide in Dutch and English (or some other language already available), a DVD with digital exercises, log-in codes for the online practice program and TIN-codes for two practice exams on spoken Dutch and literacy in Dutch. Students who want extra practice and want to do more practice exams can buy another four practice tests for 75 euros.

<sup>26</sup> Although in the explanatory memorandum to the 2006 law the Dutch Government stated that a test on written Dutch was left out of the law in order not to discriminate unschooled migrants for admission.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/inburgering>

Candidates have to pass all three parts (Spoken Dutch, Knowledge of Dutch Society, and Literacy and Reading Comprehension) to pass the examination in full. "If you fail either part, you must retake the entire examination", so the official brochure *The Dutch Civic Integration Examination Abroad* (p. 13) clearly states, and every re-examination costs another 350 euros.

In 2012, the Law on Integration (WI) for migrants who have already been admitted and got a temporary residence permit was also adapted. The obligation to pass the exam now only applies to new residents, and no longer to long-term residents with low levels of Dutch. The time limit allowed to migrants to pass the exams has been reduced to three years (plus two years for unschooled migrants) and the possibility of applying for dispensation for the literacy requirements for migrants with less than six years of elementary education has been abolished. According to the ministry, the main reason behind this is that as a result of the adaptations to the Law on Civic Integration Abroad migrants are already supposed to be able to read Dutch at level A1 (but see below). Besides this, the funding for integration courses has been terminated completely (as of January 1, 2013 for new arrivals) and the type of exam for Dutch as a second language is reduced to one central exam only for spoken and written Dutch. The practice-related assessments are no longer taken and the exam is no longer adapted to the several roles migrants have in society (such as workforce, education or parenting).

Summarizing, in the new situation migrants need to pass exams on level A1 to be able to enter the Netherlands with a provisional (temporary) residence permit, and within 3–5 years after arrival they need to pass exams on level A2 to be able to stay in the Netherlands and get a permanent residence permit. The Netherlands is not the only country changing its migration policy this way. The same tendencies can be recognized across Europe (see Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet 2009) and the implications of the power of language tests are discussed more and more broadly (see for example Shohamy 2006).

In the next sections, we will explore more extensively the new literacy test and the part of the self-study toolkit intended for migrants who never went to school before and have to learn to read and write by themselves (for the first time in life) in Dutch as a second language.

### 8.3 The New Literacy Test

The new literacy test, called *Geletterdheid en Begrijpend Lezen* ('Literacy and Reading Comprehension') is one of the three tests migrants have to pass in order to be declared admissible and receive a temporary residence permit in the Netherlands. Like the other two parts of the exam (Spoken Dutch and Knowledge of Dutch Society), the exam has to be taken at the Dutch Embassy or Dutch Consulate in the country of origin.

The test consists of five parts:

- Word reading: four word lists
- Sentence reading: eight sentences
- Text reading: three texts
- Sentence completion: 28 sentences
- Text comprehension: three texts with questions

These five parts are included in the so-called phone-pass test (see footnote 2). The instructions in the learner's guide for practicing the computerized phone-pass test, first ask the student to enter the telephone number, after which the computer answers in Dutch *Dank u voor het bellen met het toetsysteem van Ordinate. Toets uw ToetsIdentificatieNummer in.* ('Thank you for calling the Ordinate test system. Please type in your Test Identification Number'). After this, the candidate has to enter the personal TIN-code he got, follow the instructions for each of the parts, and read out the words, sentences or texts after hearing a tone.

For word reading, the candidate is asked to read aloud four lists of Dutch words, ranging from short monosyllabic words like *gat* ('hole'), to more complex multisyllabic words like *grapje* ('joke'), *oplossing* ('solution') or *veranderen* ('to change'). Sentence reading requires the candidate to read aloud eight Dutch sentences, such as *Jan viert een feest op zeven mei* ('Jan has a party on May 7'), or *De kapotte bank staat nog in de woonkamer* ('The broken sofa (or couch) is still in the living room'). For text reading, the candidate has to read out loud three texts of about 50 words each in 30 seconds. One of the texts is written in a letter font that resembles handwriting. In sentence completion, the candidate is asked to read out loud 28 sentences and to complete the sentence with the appropriate word (to be chosen from three alternatives). For example: *Maarten koopt bij de bakker een ... bank, brood, vis* (Maarten buys at the baker's a coach, bread, fish). *Ik heb heel hard gewerkt, maar nu heb ik een rustige... drukte, kast, week* ('I worked very hard, but now I have a quiet ... pressure, cupboard, week'). For reading comprehension, the candidate needs to read a text and answer a few questions about the text. An example is presented in Figure 2.<sup>28</sup>

<p>Tekst</p> <p>Oma heeft Lotte een mooi cadeau gegeven. Ze heeft Lotte een schrift gegeven. Alle vrienden van Lotte mogen erin schrijven. Haar beste vriendin Mila schrijft als eerste in het schrift. Sommige vrienden maken ook nog een tekening, zoals Anna. Zij heeft een paard getekend bij een klein gedicht. Lotte is heel blij met het schrift. Als ze later oud is, is het een mooie herinnering. Dan weet ze nog steeds wie vroeger haar vrienden waren.</p> <p>Vragen</p> <p>Van wie heeft Lotte het schrift gekregen?</p> <p>Wie is de beste vriendin van Lotte?</p> <p>Wat is het schrift voor Lotte als ze later oud is?</p>
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FIGURE 2 Sample text with questions (source: Ministerie van Binnenlandse zaken 2011).

<sup>28</sup> All examples are from one of the official practice tests that are included in the self-study toolkit, provided by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom relations.



The text informs the reader about Lotte who got a notebook from her grandmother and invites her friends to write something in it. Lotte is very happy with the notebook and assumes it will help her remember who her friends were, when she was young. The reader has to answer three questions: From whom did Lotte get the notebook? Who is Lotte's best friend? What will the notebook be for Lotte when she has grown old?

According to the test developers (Van Emmerik, Schot, & Tijssen 2011), the first three reading aloud parts measure accuracy and fluency. This part determines 50% of the score on the test. Sentence Completion and Text Comprehension are supposed to measure comprehension and determine the other 50% of the score. The literacy test is a computerized phone-pass test (a speech recognition device automatically generates a literacy score), because it had to fit in with the software and frame of the test already developed for spoken Dutch.

One could argue that perhaps speech recognition is not the most valid and reliable method to measure reading accuracy and comprehension for second language learners. For mother tongue speakers, accuracy and speed in oral reading are reliable predictors of beginning reading proficiency (Adams 1990; Byrne 1998). This however, is not automatically the case for beginning readers in foreign language. Due to differences in the phonological repertoires of the various languages, a test taker might be able to apply the alphabetical principle easily, being still unable to pronounce words as expected when they do not consist of sounds or sound patterns that are familiar to him.<sup>29</sup> As said before, no courses are offered to migrants who want to join their partner or family in the Netherlands, but migrants can buy the self-study toolkit *Naar Nederland* ('To the Netherlands') to prepare themselves with help of their partner-to-be or their family in the Netherlands. Another possibility that is offered at Dutch language institutes is that of visiting the Netherlands on a tourist visa and taking a four-week course that may cost up to € 840.

### 8.3.1 The Toolkit for Self-study

By order of the Dutch government, a self-study toolkit was developed to prepare the student for the exams on Spoken Dutch, Knowledge of Dutch Society, and Reading and Reading Comprehension. The toolkit consists of:

- Guidelines with instructions and on-line translations in several languages.
- For Knowledge of Dutch Society: a DVD with a film on eight topics, a book with stills of the video and 100 questions and answers, one for each of the stills.

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<sup>29</sup> One indication to this effect is that, compared to other nationalities, Chinese candidates passed the exam least often (59%) in the first half of 2012 (Moroccans showing a pass rate of 79%, Russians of 97%), a situation that is not very common for Chinese students in general (Van Esch, van de Grift, & Tazelaar 2012: 24).

- For Spoken Dutch, Reading and Reading Comprehension: a Workbook with an audio-CD and a DVD (or online exercises), 65 lessons with exercises and a wordlist.

According to the Guidelines, the first 20 lessons introduce the basics of reading and writing in Dutch in the Roman alphabet for the unschooled students, and the other 45 lessons aim at learning written and spoken Dutch up to the required A1-level. From lesson 21 onwards, the basic content is on reading aloud words and sentences and on sentence and text comprehension. On the DVD and the online version of the program, instructions can be read in one of the five different languages (English being one of them) that are currently available, and it is also possible to get an oral translation of words in one of these languages. In this contribution, we only focus on the first twenty lessons.

### 8.3.2 Teach Yourself to Read and Write in Dutch

The first 20 lessons provide a basic literacy course for candidates who either never went to school before or are literate in another script, and who are true beginners in Dutch as a second language. With those lessons they are supposed to learn the Roman script and the symbols for the numbers. According to the Guidelines, lessons 1-4 present basic information on numbers, colors, time and people: the symbols for the numbers from 1-20, the names of basic colors and the Dutch equivalents of kinship terms such as mother, daughter, child, and time concepts like day, hour and week. Lessons 5 to 19 pay attention to the following subjects: phoneme-grapheme correspondences, word recognition, reading aloud, sentence comprehension and text comprehension. Lesson 20 is a repetition of the letters and numbers.

The material includes fourteen different instruction icons for exercises, such as an eye for 'read', a mouth for 'repeat or read aloud', a hand with a pointing finger for 'choose', a pencil with a line for 'draw a line', a mouse for 'drag', the numbers 1, 2, 3 for 'count' and different arrows for 'left to right' or 'top to bottom'.

In the Guidelines, unschooled learners are addressed as follows: "For those who cannot read and write or those who use another form of script: In lessons 1 to 20, you will learn Latin script, all the sounds in the Dutch language and your first Dutch words. When you have completed these lessons, you can now read Dutch at beginner's level" (Guideline, p.25). To us, this sounds too optimistic. To illustrate why we have this opinion, we will now present an impression of the first few lessons (about numbers, colors and people) and show where things become – in our view – problematic. The instruction for pre-literates for these lessons in the workbook is as follows:

- "Listen carefully and repeat what you hear.
- Look at the pictures for the meaning.
- Do the exercises.
- Remember how to pronounce Dutch sounds." (Workbook p. 7)

The instruction looks simple, but experienced teachers know that it is not always clear to true beginners how to distinguish the intended meaning from other possible interpretations of a picture. And we wonder what a beginner is supposed to do when trying to 'remember how to pronounce Dutch sounds', particularly sounds that do not exist in his/her mother tongue. It is a well-known fact that late foreign language learners have difficulty acquiring the phonology and morphosyntax of a foreign or second language. Likewise, unschooled adults do not (yet) possess the skills usually measured in language aptitude tests, such as phonetic decoding ability or language analytic skills (Service 1992; Skehan 1998).

We now take a look at some of the exercises in Lesson 1. On the first page, the numbers 1-12 are presented on rummikub tiles against a background consisting of many more tiles (as shown in the bottom row in Figure 3). The second page adds pictures of numbers of persons. Figure 3 presents a part of the second page of lesson 1, with the accompanying e-learning exercises.



FIGURE 3 Lesson 1, second page (Workbook, p.10).

The Guidelines indicate this lesson as being a lesson about numbers. In the top-row of Figure 3, three pictures of different numbers of children are presented.



FIGURE 4 E-learning exercise lesson 1.

The accompanying online voice in the e-learning program (Figure 4) says for example *drie* ('three') and the online instruction asks the student to 'count the words' and tick the right number.

On the basis of the pictures one would expect something else, the most obvious task being to count the number of people or things shown in the pictures. But instead the student has to click on/tick the number of words he has heard. In the workbook, the instructions are symbolized by pictures of an ear (listen), a hand (tick) or a mouth (say/repeat). In short, the student hears the word three and has to choose the number 1, since 'three' is one word, or see three persons on the picture and has to tick the number 5. We think that this must be quite confusing for an unschooled student who thought this would be a lesson about Dutch words for numbers or numerals. Immediately below this, the learner sees another picture with three numbers on them, but now the accompanying voice says 'Het getal drie' (the number three), the accompanying instruction being to count the number of words and tick the number of words heard (three in this case). Now the student has to tick the number 3, not because that was the number indicated, but because he is expected to listen carefully and to mark word boundaries in one of the first clauses he hears in Dutch. 'Het getal drie' actually is an utterance with two stressed and two unstressed syllables. Nevertheless the beginning learner might interpret this outcome as fitting in nicely with his expectations about choosing the right number for the Dutch numeral that is heard. He might feel relieved: this is what he thought he had to do in the first place (learning the numbers and the spoken words for them in Dutch). In the third picture on this page, however, he sees a picture of two girls, but he has to choose the number 1, because the voice says *meisjes* ('girls') which is plural in meaning but still only one word.

The next online page presents the same type of exercises. The student sees the same picture with three children twice (see Figure 4), and is expected to choose as the right answer the number 2 for the first picture, because he hears 'three children' (which is two words). In the next picture (the same one) he has to choose the number 5 because now it says 'een jongen en twee meisjes' (a boy and two girls), which is five words. And to make things even more confusing for a true beginner, the next picture shows four persons, while the voice says 'Ik heb drie kinderen' (I have three children) which leads to the right answer 4.

In short, we think that exercises like these must be quite confusing to a true beginner starting on his first exercises in Dutch in a self-study toolkit. Or to put it less politely: In our view, everything that could have gone wrong in designing these first exercises actually did go wrong. The student sees pictures of numbers of people and of numbers in a sometimes confusing background, expecting to be practicing correspondences between numbers of people in the picture and the number he has to tick (associations between the number and the digit) or the association between a spoken Dutch word (*drie*) with either a picture of a number of three people, or the number/numeral 3. But what he gets instead is a mixture of spoken, visual and graphic representations of the number three, together with the instruction to do something completely

different: counting the number of Dutch words he heard. Even if the latter part had been designed properly, it would have been nearly impossible to count the words because it is hardly possible to hear word boundaries in a language you are not familiar with (Fromkin & Rodman 1993). Moreover, several studies have convincingly revealed that for illiterate people it is impossible to hear word boundaries even in their mother tongue (Olson 1997; Kurvers 2002; Onderdelinden, Van de Craats, & Kurvers 2009). People develop the ability to mark word boundaries as a result of having learned to read and write in a writing system that marks word boundaries by spaces. Moreover, if it had been possible to count the number of words in the Dutch utterances, the students could have carried out these exercises without becoming familiar with the Dutch words for numbers, because digits like 3 or 5 can be recognized without any knowledge of their pronunciation in Dutch.

Lesson 5 is the first lesson in the toolkit that pays attention to written words, to graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds) and to the relation between graphemes and phonemes. The lesson starts with five of the basic key words that are used to teach the alphabetical principle: *-mes* ('knife'), *bel* ('bell'), *kam* ('comb'), *bal* ('ball'), *kip* ('hen') and *lip* ('lip'). The words are short and monosyllabic, which we think is fine for beginning readers, but the choice for the combination of the first nine Dutch phonemes might have been selected more carefully for unschooled foreign language learners: the closed vowels /ε/ and /I/ and sometimes also /ε/ and /a/ are difficult to distinguish for first-time learners of Dutch, as is the difference between the voiced and unvoiced bilabials /b/ and /p/ for speakers of several languages in which these two are not distinguished (Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990).




The basic instruction in the workbook gives the following advice:

- Listen carefully and repeat what you hear.
- Look at the pictures and make sure that you understand what you hear and read.
- Do the exercises.
- Remember how to write the Dutch sounds (Workbook, p. 7)


The lesson is about the phonemes and graphemes of the six key-words presented before. In the workbook (and on the DVD), the student sees pictures that are alternately combined with sentences and words, and in the workbook the learner also sees written words segmented into single letters (*b-a-l*), into onset and rime (*b-al*), into (actually more often) something like the opposite of onset and rime (*ba-l*). Sometimes single words are written together with the article (articles differ in Dutch, depending on word gender). During the three different exercises on this page, the student successively hears sounds (*b-e-l*), onset-rime (*b-el*, but also *be-l*), words (*bel*), and sentences (*ik hoor de bel*; 'I hear the bell'). In our view it is problematic that the student, who has never learned to read and write before, has come to the fifth lesson and is now required to repeat, to count words, count sounds and count letters. And he also needs to


realize that he had better not look at the pictures too closely to get a grasp of the meaning, because it is not very easy to decide which picture goes with which utterance.

Another problem, in our view, has to do with comprehensible input for beginning second language learners. To illustrate this, we take a look at exercises 33 and 34 from Lesson 5 (Figure 5) and analyze them from the perspective of the learner.

Exercise 33:  
Listen and count the words  
The bell rings (picture on the right)  
Could you open the door please? (picture on the left )


b-e-l    .....


b-e-l  
be-l  
bel  
  
de bel

Exercise 34:  
Listen and count the sounds  
Read and point to the letter

FIGURE 5 Exercises Lesson 5.

In exercise 33, the student sees four pictures in a row (two are presented in Figure 4), one of them being a picture of a doorbell, the other one of a woman opening a door. The voice on the DVD says *Ik hoor de bel* ('I hear the bell'), and according to the instruction for lesson 5, the student has to look at the pictures and decide which picture fits this utterance. But the written instruction next to these four pictures is: 'Listen and count the words'. We already saw that it is hardly possible for unschooled learners at this stage to mark word boundaries in spoken utterances.

The exercise immediately after that (exercise 34) asks the student to focus his attention on the number of sounds in a spoken word and the number of letters: 'Listen and count the sounds. Read and point to the letter.' In exercise 33, the student has to count the words he heard; now he suddenly has to count the sounds he has heard. The implied suggestion that counting sounds is easy and can be done right from the start in beginning reading in an alphabetical writing

system betrays another telling misunderstanding about what it takes to be able to do this. A pre-literate person is not aware of phonemes as linguistic entities in spoken language. Learning that a spoken word consists of different sounds is actually one of the cognitively most challenging parts of learning to read, let alone learning to read in a second language with a different repertoire of phonemes (Adrian, Alegria, & Morais 1995; Bryant 1995; Byrne 1998; Kurvers & Van der Zouw 1990). In another exercise in this same lesson, the student first has to listen to and read a sentence (*Ik heb het mes nodig*, 'I need the knife') and is asked to count the letters 'e' (this is only on the DVD) and immediately after that he hears the same sentence and has to report the number of words in that sentence.

The next example shows even more clearly how confusing we expect these exercises to be for beginning readers and beginning second language learners (Figure 6). The student sees four pictures in a row and hears four sentences, one going with each of the pictures (this at least we suppose is what is intended, because the general instruction is to match pictures with utterances). The sentence belonging to the first picture is *Kam je haar eens* ('Come on, comb your hair') while the picture shows a girl combing her hair. The sentence belonging to the second picture (a comb) is 'I need a comb' and for the third picture (again a comb) the voice presents the utterance 'I do not see a comb' (but we do see the comb in picture 3). In the paper workbook, the student has to circle the word *kam* ('comb') in the four sentences. This is a familiar word recognition exercise for beginning readers, but in the instructions for this exercise on the DVD and also in the workbook the student is also asked to count the words again.

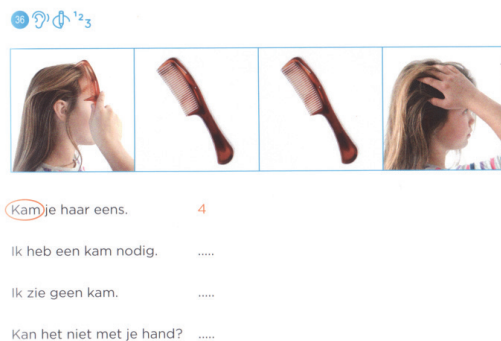


FIGURE 6 Exercise Lesson 5, workbook.

All ten lessons up to lesson 15 follow the same pattern. From lesson 15 onward, the first texts appear. They are short texts of about 50 words, with three to four multiple choice questions, as in the literacy test the toolkit is preparing for. An example is presented in Figure 7. The text is about a woman from Thailand, with a ten-year-old son, who is looking for a house in Amsterdam with a maximum rent of 1000 Euros a month.

Text	Questions:
Ik ben een vrouw van 40 jaar.	De vrouw komt uit
Ik heb een zoon van 10 jaar.	o Thailand
Ik kom uit Thailand	o Amsterdam
Ik zoek een huis in	De zoon is... jaar
Amsterdam.	o 10 jaar
Huur tot 1000 euro.	o 5 jaar
Per maand.	1000 euro huur per ...
Voor 2 jaar.	o maand
Wie helpt mij?	o jaar
Bel mij.	
Mijn nummer is 064323869.	

FIGURE 7 Text with questions, lesson 15 Workbook (p.102).

The text is written from the first-person narrative viewpoint. First-person narration, however, is not an easy viewpoint for unschooled readers and quite confusing for first-time text readers (Chall, Bissex, Conrad, & Harris-Sharples 1996). The 'I' in the text is not the same as the 'I' of the reader; to the reader, it is a he or she. The third person or narrator's viewpoint might have been easier for texts for beginning readers. Up to Lesson 20, the workbook presents only four texts, some of which are also presented in a handwriting-like font. We expect that this total of four texts up to Lesson 21 most likely will not be enough to fulfill the promise in the Guideline (p. 25): "When you have completed these lessons, you can now read Dutch at beginner's level." We think that true beginners in learning to read and write in a second language will need significantly more time and practice with more extended content and less confusing/more appropriate exercises to achieve the required level.

## 8.4 Some Statistics

In an evaluation of the Integration Exam Abroad of 2011 (Van de Grift, Remmerswaal, & Tazelaar 2012), some statistics are presented about the examinations taken before and after the implementation of the New Basic Integration Examination on April 1, 2011. We will show that these statistics confirm our expectation as formulated above.

In 2011, a total of 7122 toolkits were sold. In total, 6514 Examinations were taken for the first time (about 1200 fewer than in 2010), 3339 of which were taken in the three months before April 1, and 3175 in the nine months after April 1 (see Table 1).



TABLE 1 Exams taken and pass rates, divided for low- middle- and high-educated

	Jan.-March 2011		April-Dec. 2011		Jan.-June 2012	
	Exams taken:	Pass rate:	Exams taken:	Pass rate:	Exams taken:	Pass rate:
Total:	3339	92%	3175	75%	2575	78%
Low-educated	783 (25%)	87%	628 (20%)	61%	454 (18%)	64%
Middle-educated	1451 (46%)	93%	1412 (45%)	73%	1116 (43%)	78%
High-educated	908 (29%)	97%	1077 (35%)	87%	947 (37%)	87%

(Based on Van de Grift et al. 2012, and Van Esch, van de Grift, & Tazelaar 2012)

Subdivided by educational level: before April 1, 783 low educated people (elementary school or less) took the Exam (about 255 a month), 1451 people with a middle (secondary school) education (500 a month) and 908 highly educated people (tertiary education) (300 a month). In the nine months after April 1, these numbers were 628 (70 a month), 1412 (155 a month) and 1077 (120 a month) respectively. The numbers have decreased by nearly 70% (from an average of 1100 a month, to an average of about 350), a drop that was probably mainly caused by the addition of the literacy test.<sup>30</sup>

The pass rate before April 1 was 92%; the pass rate after April 1 (although fewer people actually took the exam) was 75%. The chance of passing the exams for those who actually took them, decreased by 17%. If these data are specified for educational level, the data we get are the following: Before April 1, the chances of passing the exam were 87% for the low educated, 93% for the middle educated and 97% of the highly educated. After April 1, this pass rate was 61% for the low educated, 73% for the middle educated and 87% for the high educated. To recap briefly: while on average the number of people that actually took the exam decreased considerably, even this reduced number showed a decrease in the overall pass rates of some 17%, the drop for those with a low education being as much as 26%. We can safely add to this overview that it is highly unlikely that any of the completely unschooled potential migrants will have taken the exam, although exact numbers cannot be deduced from the data, since no further subdivision of the low educated category (standing for 6 years of education or less) is available.

The evaluation of the first half of 2012 more or less shows a continuation of the picture that emerged for 2011 (Van Esch et al. 2012). In total, 2575 exams were taken during the first half of 2012 (about 400 a month). Of these, a total of 484 participants were lower educated (a still smaller part of all candidates) and their pass rate was 64%, compared to the 87% pass rate for the highly educated and 78% for the middle educated participants.

<sup>30</sup> For a small part, the reduction will be caused by the increase in the numbers taking the test in the last months before April 1 and also because it became clear that according to an already existing bilateral treaty between The Netherlands and Turkey, migrants from Turkey after September 2011 no longer could be obliged to take the Examination abroad.

## 8.5 Conclusions and Discussion

Since the mid-nineties of the last century, the Dutch Integration policy has developed from fairly foreigner-friendly into more restrictive. While until those years unschooled migrants were even offered mother tongue literacy classes to increase their linguistic awareness in order to facilitate the acquisition of the Dutch language (see section 2.1 above), the current policy is one that is unrecognizably different. To obtain a temporary residence permit, applicants now must have acquired before entrance not only spoken Dutch at A1 level and knowledge of the Dutch society, but also reading ability in Dutch at level A1. After this, within three to five years, a second examination has to be taken on spoken and written Dutch at level A2 of the CEFR, and a more advanced test on knowledge of Dutch Society. The free market principle has also entered integration policy: no free courses are provided by the government and from 2013 onward the migrants have to pay for the whole trajectory themselves.

The self-study toolkit that was developed by order of the government, as we have tried to demonstrate, does not take into account the perspective of the true beginner in learning and the double cognitive load involved in having to learn to read and write for the first time, and having to do this in a new language. Research has shown convincingly that learning to read is not just a matter of beginners being supplied with letters, written words and texts, and needless to say the process is obviously complicated further by having to learn to read in an unfamiliar language. The exercises and subsequent tests that are part of the current Integration Policy are, in our view, confusing and difficult, to say the least, and seem to be based on wrong assumptions about the (meta)-linguistic and analytical skills of unschooled learners and about true beginners in second language learning. The evaluations of the first year after the new legislation was passed seem to reveal that it is not so much the highly educated migrants (the knowledge workers) that are hampered by this new policy, but rather the unschooled and low-educated migrants. We have to conclude that since April 2011, the Dutch borders are practically closed to the LESLLA learners among the potential migrants. We have called this 'Double Dutch'<sup>31</sup>: while all practitioners in the adult education field have been working very, very hard for the last twenty years to develop a literacy framework for Dutch as a second language, introducing a portfolio to support teachers and students in contextualizing second language (literacy) teaching, developing tailor-made and practically relevant teaching materials and finding ways and facilities to continue schooling and professionalizing LESLLA teachers, the Dutch government decided in favor of an, in our eyes, extremely restrictive integration policy for unschooled and low-educated migrants.

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<sup>31</sup> Double Dutch, apart from its regular meaning in English, is also the name of a children's rope game in which one rope moves in one direction, and the other in the other direction. It also refers to a language game: only those who speak and understand the secret language (like Pig Latin, for example 'Depouble Deputch' for Double Dutch) belong to the in-group, the rest is excluded.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference of Languages
WIN	Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers (Law on Civic Integration of Newcomers)
WIB	Wet Inburgering Buitenland (Law on Civic Integration Abroad) ( <a href="http://www.eerstekamer.nl/behandeling/20060131/publicatie_wet_3/f=/w29700st.pdf">http://www.eerstekamer.nl/behandeling/20060131/publicatie_wet_3/f=/w29700st.pdf</a> )
WI	Wet Inburgering (Law on Civic Integration) ( <a href="http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/geldigheidsdatum_27-03-2013">http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/geldigheidsdatum_27-03-2013</a> )
GBL	Geletterdheid en Begrijpend Lezen (Literacy and Comprehensive Reading)
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)
TGN	Taaltoets Gesproken Nederlands (Language Test Spoken Dutch)
KNS	Kennis van de Nederlandse Samenleving (Knowledge of the Dutch Society)
TIN	Test Identification Number