



Have a Say is a series in which we talk to experts and internationals about a subject that causes debate in the international community.

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It's a frequent topic in international circles. Should you learn Dutch? The mastery of the English language amongst the Dutch population is a double-edged sword. When you first arrive, despite knowing little of the local tongue, you can still converse with your neighbours and ask questions of your doctor. If you start to learn Dutch, however, you quickly discover that the Dutch are much more comfortable speaking their fluent English to you than stammering through your broken Dutch. Should you invest the time, energy and money into learning the language? In this edition's Have a Say, we ask language professionals whether or not internationals need to learn Dutch and we talk to internationals about their experiences with learning the language.

BENNY LEWIS, FLUENT IN THREE MONTHS

Benny Lewis, author of *Fluent In Three Months*, recently gave a lecture on language learning at the ABC Treehouse in Amsterdam. While in town, he says he had a strict 'no English' policy and that made Dutch easier to learn. Though Dutch is not one of the eleven languages he speaks, he dispels the notion that any language is easier or more difficult to learn. 'Japanese is easier than most European languages for Koreans, Spanish is easier for Italians etc.', says Lewis. For him, Spanish was the most difficult language to learn because it was the first language he attempted to speak, other than his native English. He strongly recommends internationals, regardless of how long you plan to stay, to learn the language. 'I lived the English speaking international life for a few months before getting into language learning. It's fun for a short time, but gets old quickly and you start to really feel isolated from the culture you live in.'

BARRY BAKKER, THE SMILING DUTCHMAN

Barry Bakker encourages his clients to learn the language so that they can better blend into Dutch society. He worked at several language schools before starting his own language company, The Smiling Dutchman. He offers tutoring and classes for those who want to learn Dutch and is even helping former residents maintain their Dutch. 'Most of my clients are highly educated internationals who are working for international companies and organisations,' he says. As such, they don't typically need the language for work. But, he says, 'They want to take part in Dutch culture and make friends.' He also counts the children of internationals amongst his students. 'If they are attending an international school, they often don't learn enough Dutch to continue their studies or get a job.'

MARIJE BATTJES, ABC DUTCH

Marije Battjes started giving Dutch lessons not in the Netherlands, but in Spain. The founder and director of ABC Dutch found that there were quite a few Spanish people who were interested in learning the language. 'Most of my students want to study Dutch because they want to live, work or study in the Netherlands,' she says. Now based in the Netherlands, her clients are mostly middle-aged expats who are well educated. She advocates for those who are staying here for the long term to learn the language. But is Dutch useful when living in the Netherlands? 'It depends on your job,' she says.

ASTRID VAN LAAR, DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Astrid van Laar teaches Dutch at every level, from beginners to advanced students at Delft University of Technology. Most of her students are somehow affiliated with the university, either as students themselves, or the partners of students or staff members. 'Some of my students are required to learn the language, but most just want to learn the language because they are living here and want to speak with their neighbours or their child's teacher,' she says. Even international master's students, who only plan to stay in the country for two years, take her courses. 'They want to be able to understand what is happening around them, in the shops, on the train, in restaurants,' she says. She knows you can get by here without speaking Dutch. 'I have students who have lived in the Netherlands for five years before starting a course. The value in learning the language is really dependent on where you are working,' she says.

ISOLATED FROM THE CULTURE YOU LIVE IN



RENÉE VELDMAN-TENTORI, AUSTRALIA

Renée Veldman-Tentori may benefit in her language acquisition from having a Dutch husband, but despite now having lived in the Netherlands twice, she admits she still struggles with the language. 'I'm still learning and probably always will be,' she says. Beyond being able to converse and work, she also says she can argue in Dutch, thus she feels justified in calling herself fluent. Overall, not being a native Dutch speaker does impede her ability to work here, though, she finds that her status as a native English speaker is sometimes beneficial. 'Learning a language is more a time commitment than I initially realised. In the Netherlands, since you can get by in English, if you're only here for the short-term, it's probably not worth it.' In order to do more work in Dutch, she plans to continue refining her skills.

SIMA TARASHIOON, IRAN

Sima Tarashioon was in the difficult position of needing to learn Dutch to continue living in the Netherlands after her work contract as a PhD candidate ended. She passed the exam to qualify for a residency permit but hasn't found it useful when searching for a job. Regardless, she thinks internationals that will stay in the Netherlands for the long-term would find it beneficial to learn Dutch. It's nice, she says to 'not be dependent to the other people all the time for reading tax letters.' She plans to continue learning Dutch, at least until she's capable of speaking to the locals.

JOANNA IOANNIDOU, GREECE

Joanna Ioannidou counts herself lucky that, as an EU citizen, she doesn't have to learn Dutch for her visa. Despite not being obligated to learn, she feels that 'Learning at least basic Dutch is worth investing in, though the level of knowledge to aim for and the level of investment worth putting in depends on the necessity of Dutch in your daily life.' She's taken several years of lessons but only feels comfortable speaking in basic conversations. 'I wish that it was easier to practice Dutch outside of a teaching setting.' She's currently looking into taking more courses.

GRAHAM WHYTESSIDE, SCOTLAND

'In my profession,' says Graham Whytesside, 'being able to speak and write English at a native-level is very important. So not speaking Dutch isn't a hindrance for me.' Despite that, he has learned some Dutch. 'I took a course sponsored by the Municipality and I can speak some basic Dutch, enough to order in a restaurant and hold a basic conversation.' He thinks that whether or not you need to learn Dutch depends on the profession you work in. 'For some jobs, you need more of it. For my work, I don't,' he says. 'Socially,' he adds, 'and for making everyday life less stressful, it might be worth it.' He doesn't have plans to continue learning Dutch.