

The effects of a regional accent on the listener's evaluation of radio product and service commercials

De effecten van een regionaal accent op luisteraars evaluatie van product- en
servicereclames op de radio

Bachelor's thesis Communication and Information Sciences

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Abstract

In multilingual advertising, marketers use foreign languages or accents to associate a product's quality with the qualities of a place. When products 'fit' a place, like the case of a car and Germany, advertising in the country's language can make a product seem more valuable and desirable. However, in radio commercials it should be noted that the use of accents affects the listener's perception of the speaker, which has shown to influence message effectiveness. Speakers with a regional accent can be perceived as warmer, but also as less competent. Previous literature found that especially in service advertising, the image of the speaker determines the success of a service. Therefore, the following research question was examined:

What are the effects of a regional versus a standard accent on the listener's Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence, Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and Purchase intention of the regional product/service being advertised?

A 2 (accent: standard/regional) x 2 (type: product/service) in between subject design was used. Four radio commercials were recorded with a product and a service that can be linked to the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant and the accent *Brabants*. A number of 185 native Dutch participants rated one of the four commercials by an online questionnaire. Manipulation checks included Recognition of the speaker's accent, Attitude towards the accent *Brabants* and Comprehensibility of the speaker. Manipulation checks included Recognition of the speaker's accent, Attitude towards the accent *Brabants* and Comprehensibility of the speaker. The results show that a regional accent did not significantly affect any of the variables. It was found that comprehensibility of the speaker positively influenced all main variables. This research provides insight into multilingual advertising on the radio in the Netherlands. Research limitation and recommendation for future research are given.

Keywords: *Multilingual Advertising, Stereotyping, Product and Service Marketing, Regional accents, Language Expectancy, Social Identity Theory, Theory Accent Prestige Theory.*

Introduction

Hornikx and Hof (2008) report that marketers use advertising in attempt to persuade the target group to buy a product or make use of a service. A method globally employed to reach this goal is by multilingual advertising (Hornikx, Van Meurs & Starren, 2007); Hornikx, Van Meurs & Hof, 2013). This type of advertising is defined by Kelly-Holmes (2005, p. 25) as “the appearance of a number of different languages or voices in a market-discourse situation”. According to Kelly-Holmes (2005) the use of different languages in commercials can vary from one word to the entire message. She distinguishes five types of multilingual advertising: (1) commercials using both native and foreign lexical items; (2) commercials using only a foreign language instead of the native language; (3) a situation in which a commercial in native language that is followed by another one in a foreign language; (4) commercials with a language known to one market or group but not to another due to the cultural communicative context; (5) commercials that presents a language in an accent or a dialect to represent either ‘the self’ or ‘the other’ to the audience.

The first key reason why multilingual advertising is employed, is because it attracts the audience’s attention (Piller, 2001; Hornikx et al., 2007; Hornikx & Hof, 2008). Hornikx et al. (2007) argue that through the element of surprise, the audience can pay more attention to the message. The second key reason for marketers to use multilingual advertising, is to create a positive brand and product image (Piller, 2001; Hornikx et al., 2007; Hornikx & Hof, 2008). This is achieved through its symbolic function (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). In this case, the stereotype associations with the other language are more important than the content of the message itself (Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Hornikx et al., 2007).

According to Kelly-Holmes (2005), the German car brand *Audi* provides one of the best examples of employing German language in advertising for its symbolic value. Since the late 1980’s, Audi has kept its slogan (*Vorsprung durch Technik*) German in its foreign advertising even though the non-German audience is most likely unable to translate it (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). Kelly-Holmes (2005) states a non-translatable slogan still has meaning to the audience, as a result of its symbolic value. She notes the communicative value (the actual translation of the slogan) becomes irrelevant when the symbolic value is achieved.

To achieve symbolic value through language, the audience needs to associate the language with certain stereotypical characteristics (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). For example, research has

shown that French is linked to 'beauty' and 'elegance', Spanish relates to 'modern' and 'passionate' while German is associated with 'reliable' and 'technical' (Hornikx et al., 2007). The favourable associations can transfer to a brand and its product when the particular language is used in advertising (Hornikx et al., 2007; Hendrik, Van Meurs & Van der Meij, 2015). Remembering Audi's German slogan, the car company can benefit of being associated with 'reliable' and 'technical'. When German stereotype associations are transferred to the product, the audience can consider Audi cars to be safer and more technically advanced than other cars (Piller, 2001; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Hornikx & Starren, 2006).

Theoretical Background

In order to transfer favourable associations, the strong qualities of countries are required to correspond with the product's characteristics (Roth & Romeo, 1992; Usunier & Cestre, 2007). The associations between countries and products were first defined by Roth and Romeo (1992) as 'product-country matches'. According to Usunier and Cestre (2007), a match can be found in various ways. Besides the earlier mentioned stereotype associations of a country, Usunier and Cestre (2007) state a product-country match can be found because of the product's place of origin (vodka and Russia), the place of development (scooters and Italy) or the place of use (tea and England). To illustrate, Kelly-Holmes (2005) notes German brewers often use the word *Bier* (beer) in foreign advertising, emphasizing the product's place of origin.

The match between a country and a product is often referred to as 'congruence' or 'fit' (Usunier & Cestre, 2007; Hornikx and Hof, 2008). In a promotional context, marketers can benefit from congruence when using a country's language in advertising (Hornikx & Hof, 2008). Positive evaluations of a product-country match can lead to higher purchase intentions and better product attitude (Usunier & Cestre, 2007; Hornikx et al., 2013). Next to that, Hornikx and Hof (2008) found that a good fit triggers more positive associations than a bad fit. Congruence can make the product seem more valuable and desirable as the positive features and stereotypical images of a country transfer to the product (Hornikx et al., 2007; Hornikx & Hof, 2008). The audience takes the degree of congruence between the product and the country into consideration when judging a product's quality (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), the product itself and to a lesser extent, the message (Hornikx & Hof, 2008).

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Several studies show that like foreign languages, regional and foreign accents also evoke stereotypes in the mind of the listener (Piller, 2001; Hornikx et al., 2007; Mai and Hoffmann 2014). The German car company *Opel* advertised one of its cars by presenting a car seller with a German accent in a Dutch television commercial (Opel Nederland, 2015). According to Lynch and Schuler (1994), the use of accents can lead to a more effective advertisement when the product is congruent with the speaker's characteristics. In case of Opel's television commercial, the car was claimed to be 'totally German' (Opel Nederland, 2015), referring to both the German accented car seller and the German stereotype associations (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). However, when commercials feature an accented speaker, marketers should consider the fact that the audience does not only evaluate the message, but also the speaker through his or her speech style (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014).

The evaluation of the speaker

According to Mai and Hoffmann (2014), listeners evaluate speakers based on the way they speak and thereby decide on the message persuasiveness, even before processing any content of the message. This was shown in various settings as Mai and Hoffmann (2014) note that the speech style of employees, salespersons and spokespersons in commercials can all shape the listener's attitude towards the company. Birch and Macphail (2010) found that, in a promotional context, the audience's perception of the speaker is highly relevant as it can influence the attitude towards the advertisement and the attitude towards the brand. Mai and Hoffmann (2014) as well as Birch and Macphail (2010) report that the perception of the speaker affects purchase intentions. As a result, DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (1996) conclude that message effectiveness is determined by the evaluation of the speaker and Mai and Hoffmann (2014) argue advertisement designers should consider the audience's judgements about accents before selecting a speaker.

Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilberts and Giles (2012) describe two types of accents: (1) standard accents, which are considered to be the accepted accents of the majority population, and (2) nonstandard accents, spoken by minorities. Examples of standard accents include BBC English in England and Parisian French in France (Fuertes et al., 2012). Nonstandard accents are subdivided by Mai and Hoffmann (2014) into regional and foreign accents. Mai and Hoffmann (2014) describe a regional accent as a native speaker's variety spoken in a region of a country, like Appalachian English in the USA (Fuertes et al., 2012).

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Foreign accents, on the other hand, indicate the speaker is from a different language community as his or her pronunciation is highly influenced by the sound system of the mother tongue (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014), like the Spanish accent in the USA (Fuertes et al., 2012). According to Dragojevic, Giles and Watson (2013), speakers with a standard accent are generally evaluated more positively than speakers with a foreign or regional accent.

Positive evaluations of speakers with standard accents

Various studies show that the audience's perception of a speaker is triggered by the way he or she speaks (e.g. DeShields et al., 1996; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). Mai and Hoffmann (2011) report that accents activate stereotypes, which in turn evoke assumptions about the speaker. Research in several English-speaking countries, such as England, the USA and Australia, found that speakers with a standard accent are considered to be more competent and prestigious than speakers with a foreign or regional accent (DeShields et al., 1996). Additional support of these findings is noted by Fuertes et al. (2012), who report that speakers with a standard accent are perceived more positively in terms of education, success, social status, attractiveness and even personality. In a promotional context, a standard accent can thus lead to a more convincing commercial because the speaker is perceived as more competent and prestigious than speakers with a regional or foreign accent.

Another reason for marketers to use the standard accent is because it has shown to stimulate recall of the message and comprehension of the content (Ryan & Sebastian, 1980). In a promotional context, a standard accent can be more effective because the commercial is better remembered. In line with these findings, Fuertes et al. (2012) note that the use of foreign and regional accents in commercials can stimulate downgrading of the message in terms of content quality and comprehensibility. Another reason for marketers to avoid nonstandard accents is that the stereotypical images evoked by foreign and regional accents often instigate discriminative behaviour (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982). For example, Fuertes et al. (2012) found that the audience's social evaluations of the speaker grew more negative when his or her accent became stronger.

A theory that explains listeners' preference for standard accents is the Language Expectancy Theory (LET) of Burgoon and Burgoon (2001). According to the LET, the audience holds expectations about appropriate persuasive communication behaviour (Burgoon & Burgoon,

2001). In general, the audience expects standard language (Hendriks et al., 2015). The LET states that if expectations are violated, the message will fail to persuade its listener as they will not change their attitude or change it in the opposite direction of what the message is trying to achieve (Burgoon & Burgoon, 2001). Hendriks et al. (2015) as well as Reinares-Lara, Martín-Santana and Muela-Molina (2016) report foreign and regional accents can be seen as deviations of standard, normative language and therefore have the potential to violate expectations. Hendriks et al. (2015) conclude that due to language expectations, foreign and regional accents can make commercials less striking.

A second theory that discusses accent evaluations is the Social Identity Theory (SIT) of Tajfel and Turner (1986). According to the SIT, listeners ascribe speakers to social groups, based on their speech style (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Through language, the audience receives particular information about the speaker's identity in terms of national or geographical background, cultural characteristics and social class (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Standard accents can be seen as the norm and they function as a reference for listeners during social evaluations (Fuertes et al., 2012; Reiner-Lara et al., 2016). When speakers match the speech characteristics of the dominant group, they can be upgraded in status, social class and competence (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011).

Research has shown a speaker's accent transmits more social information than his or her appearance (Rakíc, Steffens & Mummendey, 2011). Speech style enables listeners not only to determine whether the speaker belongs to the dominant group, but also if the speaker belongs to the same social group as the listener (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). In other words, the speaker can be identified as part of the 'in-group' or part of the 'out-group' (Kelly-Holmes, 2005), based on the degree to which the characteristics of the speaker match with the characteristics of the listener (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Mai and Hoffmann (2011) mention that if the speaker is identified as part of the out-group, it can trigger negative evaluations. They found that if a salesperson speaks with an accent dissimilar to that of the consumer, the consumer evaluates both the company and the products as less favourable.

Positive evaluations of speakers with foreign and regional accents

While several studies thus highlight the negative consequences of foreign and regional accents, other research has shown that they can also have the potential to evoke positive evaluations of the speaker (e.g. DeShields et al., 1996; Fuertes et al., 2012). Fuertes et al.

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(2012) state that speakers with a foreign and regional accent can be perceived as more warm than speakers with a standard accent. These findings are further outlined by DeShields et al. (1996) as they report speakers with a regional or foreign accent are also perceived as more sincere, reliable, generous and friendly than speakers with standard accents. Considering the LET, Mai and Hoffmann (2014) note foreign and regional accents also have the potential to positively surprise the audience and thereby exceed their expectations, which can lead to more positive evaluation of the commercial.

According to the SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), listeners generally favour speakers who belong to the same group as they do and discriminate against speakers who do not. Listeners usually try to enhance their self-image and their in-group prestige by evaluating in-group members more positively (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Mai and Hoffmann (2014) found that if a salesperson belongs to the consumer's in-group, the consumer is more satisfied with the company and more willing to use its services or buy its products. Mai and Hoffmann (2014) found that when listeners share the same foreign or regional accent as the speaker, the speaker can be evaluated as more competent and credible than when his or her accent deviates. Furthermore, Mai and Hoffmann (2014) state that in-group favouring can also lead to higher purchase intention of local products as listeners can try to strengthen the domestic industry. These insights are interesting for marketers and show that positive social identification can lead to more positive evaluations of the speaker and can stimulate the willingness to buy products.

A final theory for the cause of positive evaluations for foreign and regional accents is Giles' (1970) Accent Prestige Theory (APT). This theory proposes that accent evaluations do not only depend on the fact that the accent deviates from the standard language, but rather on the image the listener holds of the specific accent (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). To illustrate this, Mai and Hoffman (2011) report that in the USA, the foreign accent 'British English' is seen as prestigious because it is linked to the upper class. According to Mai and Hoffmann (2014), the British accent evokes a social stereotype in the mind of the American listeners (British people have class), which in turn influences the evaluation of the speaker (the speaker has class and is respectable). Mai and Hoffmann (2011) found this theory applies for foreign as well as regional accents. As a result, commercials with accented speakers can be effective as long as the accent itself has positive connotations.

Foreign versus regional accents in advertising

Although the same theories seem to apply on the evaluation of foreign and regional accents, Mai and Hoffmann (2014) note marketers should differentiate between the two in a market discourse situation. They report foreign and regional accents can have different consequences on business-outcomes, such as the listener's evaluation of the speaker, the evaluation of the message and consumer behaviour which includes purchase intention (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Mai and Hoffmann (2014) state that foreign accents generally affect these business-outcomes negatively, while regional accents can also have positive impacts. In view of the SIT, a foreign accent indicates that the speaker is part of the out-group when speaking in the audience's native language (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). A regional accent however, is more likely to be shared with the listener, which enhances his or her chance to be categorized as an in-group member. As mentioned before, social identification with the speaker can result in positive evaluations of the speaker and influence message effectiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Mai & Hoffmann, 2014).

Additionally, besides the listener's social identification with the speaker (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) Zhang and Merunka (2015) found that listeners can also identify themselves with a brand. Brands can be associated with certain characteristics, such as authenticity, exoticism or rarity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). According to Zhang and Merunka (2015), consumers can choose to buy certain products so they can use the brand image of this product to express their self-identity, to differentiate themselves from others or to become a group member of a group they wish to belong to. Escalas and Bettman (2003) report that in this case the congruence between the brand image and self-image can help consumers to create and reinforce their self-identities. As an illustration, Escalas and Bettman (2003) state that if consumers notice hip people are wearing Versace's clothes, they may choose to buy Versace's clothes as well in an attempt to become more hip themselves.

According to Grayson and Martinec (2004) authenticity is a central demand of consumers. That is to say, an authentic brand image can make its attributes seem more valuable (Escalas & Bettman, 2003) which makes it interesting for marketers to use brand authenticity in a promotional context. According to Zhang and Merunka (2015), regions are more homogeneous in their human and natural environment than countries and therefore regions can be seen as more sincere and unique. For this reason, Zhang and Merunka (2015) claim regional accents have more positive impacts on the audience's perception of brand

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authenticity than foreign accents. Consequently, regional products and services can be viewed as more authentic than foreign attributes (Zhang & Merunka, 2015). Hence, it can be more beneficial for marketers to advertise in regional accents instead of foreign ones.

Mai and Hoffmann (2014, 2011) report that most studies have examined the impact of foreign accents but have neglected regional varieties and call for future research on regional accented advertising in other languages than English. Accordingly, this research will focus on a Dutch regional accent. According to Pinget, Rotteveel and Van de Velde (2014), the Dutch language has many regional varieties and Dutch people are successful in recognising the speaker's regional background. Pinget et al. (2014) investigated regional accents in the Netherlands and showed that speakers from the south of the Netherlands (including the provinces Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg) speak with the strongest and most recognizable accent. Most Dutch listeners (over 80%) in the study of Pinget et al. (2014) could assign the accent to the right part of the country.

Regional accents in service advertising

Besides the particular accent used in a commercial, it seems relevant whether the commercial promotes a product or a service (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Utkarsh, Maurya and Medhavi (2016) state service marketing is a challenging task for marketers because unlike products, services are intangible and heterogeneous. De Vries Jr. and Van Helsdingen (2009) describe intangibility by stating a service is an experience and not a thing or good. They explain heterogeneity by the fact that services are co-created by the consumer and the service representative, which makes standardization of a service a difficult task. Moreover, Mai and Hoffmann (2011, 2014) stress that services often involve personal interaction and because of that, the SIT is more likely to be applied in service selling than in product selling. Aspects of the interaction, including the salesperson's accent, determine the consumer's perception of the service and are taken into account for purchase decisions (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011, 2014). Hence, direct interaction between the consumer and the company largely determines the quality and success of services (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014).

Mai and Hoffmann (2011) note that little research has been done to the paraverbal aspects of service communication and the effectiveness of regional accents in particular have been neglected. The present study tries to investigate the effects of a regional versus a standard

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accent in both product and service commercials. Since regional accents and standard accents seem to trigger different evaluations on certain business-outcomes, the listener's attitude towards the commercial and the attitude towards the product/service will be examined as well as the listener's purchase intentions. Also, this research will investigate the evaluation of the speaker in terms of competence and warmth. To stimulate accent recognition this study will apply the southern Dutch accent *Brabants*, from the province of Noord-Brabant and promote a product and a service that can be associated with the province.

Based on the literature discussed, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: *What are the effects of a regional versus a standard accent on the listener's Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence, Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and Purchase intention of the regional product/service being advertised?*

Method

Research Design

This experiment consisted of a 2 (accent: standard/regional) x 2 (commercial type: product/service) between-subjects design. Participants were assigned to one of the four commercials.

Research Material

The independent variables consisted of accent (standard/regional) and commercial type (product/service). Four commercials were recorded by a native speaker of Dutch who also managed to speak with the regional accent *Brabants* from the province of Noord-Brabant. The speaker was found in personal networks and selected out of two potential speakers. She was decided to be most convincing in both speech styles. Lambert's (1967) matched-guise technique was applied. This technique involves one speaker to record all versions of the commercial, using different accents (Lambert, 1967). The commercials promoted a product and a service associated with the province of Noord-Brabant and with Den Bosch, one of its largest cities. The product concerned the *Bossche Bol* (a famous pastry from Den Bosch) and the promoted service was a *city tour* through the city Den Bosch with a local tour guide.

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Previous research found that a product's place of origin can be a factor for the audience to associate a product with a place and the language spoken in this place (Unusier & Cestre, 2007), which can stimulate positive attitudes towards the product and purchase intentions (Unusier & Cestre, 2007; Hornikx et al., 2013). The commercial texts were kept identical, apart from the manipulation and can be found in Appendix I.

Participants

A total of 185 participants took part in this research of which 55.4% were female (age: $M = 38.78$, $SD = 17.00$, range: 18 – 73). Following the reasoning of Pinget et al. (2014), only native speakers of Dutch were included in this study in order to stimulate accent recognition. Occupation varied from working professionals (58.0%), to students (36.6%), unemployed (3.2%) and retirees (2.2%). The most frequent level of highest education was university of applied sciences (36.0%, range: primary school/high school - postdoctoral), followed by intermediate vocational education (23.7%). The majority of participants was born in de province Gelderland (46.2%) and for most participants, Gelderland was their current province of residence (57.5%). A small group was born in Noord-Brabant (9.1%) and 5.4% reported Noord-Brabant was there current province of residence. A minority of 40.5% of the participants indicated they spoke with an accent themselves, of which most frequent accents were from the provinces Gelderland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg.

Demographic characteristics of the listeners were equally distributed across commercial versions (gender: $\chi^2 (3) = 2.49$, $p = .477$, age: $F (3) = .168$, $p = .918$, education: $\chi^2 (18) = 15.97$, $p = .594$, province of residence: $\chi^2 (27) = 19.85$, $p = .837$).

Instrumentation

Five dependent variables were examined: (1) Attitude towards the commercial, (2) Attitude towards the product/service, (3) Evaluation of the speaker's competence, (4) Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and (5) Purchase intention. Additionally, manipulation checks included Comprehensibility of the speaker, Recognition of the speaker's accent, and Attitude towards the accent *Brabants*.

All variables have been measured on semantic differential 7-point Likert scales. The full questionnaire can be found in appendix II.

Attitude towards the commercial has been measured by the degree to which participants agreed with the statements 'I believe the commercial is

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nice/fascinating/original/attractive/interesting' (1= *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*; Hendriks et al., 2015). The reliability of attitude towards the commercial based on five items was excellent ($\alpha = .93$).

Attitude towards the product/service has been examined, based on Hendriks et al. (2015): 'I believe the product/service is nice/fascinating/original/attractive/interesting (1= *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The reliability of attitude towards the product/service based on five items was excellent ($\alpha = .94$).

Evaluation of the speaker's competence was measured by 7-point scales with five items based on Fiske et al. (2002) from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*: 'the speaker seems competent/confident/independent/competitive/intelligent'. The reliability of evaluation of the speaker's competence was good ($\alpha = .89$).

Evaluation of the speaker's warmth was examined by the statements: 'the speaker is tolerant/warm/good natured/sincere (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*; Fiske et al., 2002). The reliability of evaluation of the speaker's warmth, based on four items was good ($\alpha = .87$).

Purchase intention was examined by presenting the following statements of Hornikx et al. (2013): 'I would like to buy the product' (1 = *something I would never do* to 7 = *something I would certainly do*) 'I would recommend the product to friends' (1 = *absolutely not* to 7 = *absolutely*) and 'I think this product is really something for me' (1 = *absolutely not* to 7 = *absolutely*). The reliability of purchase intention, based on three items was inadequate ($\alpha = .54$). The results show that, in case the statement 'I think this product suits me' was deleted, the reliability would be excellent ($\alpha = .90$), which is why it will be left out for when conducting analyses.

Recognition of the speaker's accent served as a manipulation check and was investigated as Mai and Hoffmann (2011) emphasized the importance of familiarity with an accent in commercials. Participants were asked: 'from which province do you think the speaker is from?' to which one of the twelve Dutch provinces could be answered.

Attitude towards the accent Brabants also served as a manipulation check as previous research found that accent evaluations can depend on the particular accent (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). It was examined on a 7-point Likert scale with the question 'how do you feel about the accent *Brabants*' (1 = *strongly negative* to 7 = *strongly positive*).

Comprehensibility of the speaker served as the final manipulation check and was measured on a 7-point Likert scale as manipulation check by the statement: 'I believe the

speaker is comprehensible' (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), based on Hendriks et al. (2015).

Procedure

The data were collected in the period between 12th of April 2017 and 25th of April 2017. The questionnaire was distributed via the online tool Qualtrics. Participants were approached via personal networks on Social Media, for example via Facebook and WhatsApp. Participants were then provided with a link to the questionnaire online. A cover story presented the questionnaire as a means for researching the evaluation of radio as an advertising tool. Besides the cover story, it was communicated that all participants stayed anonymous. These two strategies were also applied by Mai and Hoffmann (2011) to avoid socially desirable answers in their study of the effects of a salesperson's regional accent in service selling. Participation was voluntarily and there was no reward. Participants completed the survey online, individually and in their own time. It took three to eight minutes to listen to the commercial and fill in the questionnaire.

Statistical Treatment

The online data was analysed with SPSS using chi-squares, t-tests, one way Anova's, two way Anova's and a Manova.

Results

The present study examined the effects of a regional versus standard accent in radio commercials for a regional product and service on listener's Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence and the speaker's warmth, and Purchase intention.

Attitude towards the commercial. A two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on Attitude towards the commercial showed a significant main effect of type of commercial ($F(1, 181) = 7.79, p = .006$). The analysis showed no significant main effect of accent ($F(1, 181) < 1$) and there was no interaction effect between type of commercial and accent ($F(1, 181) = 1.61, p = .207$). Listeners of the product commercial ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.28$) had a more positive attitude towards the commercial than listeners of the service commercial ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.36$).

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Attitude towards the product/service. A two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on Attitude towards the product/service found a strong significant main effect of type of commercial ($F(1, 181) = 11.90, p = .001$). No significant effect was found of accent ($F(1, 181) < 1$) and no interaction effect occurred between the variables ($F(1, 181) < 1$). The listener's attitude towards the product ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.27$) was more positive than the attitude towards the service ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.39$).

Evaluation of the speaker's competence. A two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on Evaluation of the speaker's competence showed a significant main effect on type of commercial ($F(1, 181) = 4.63, p = .033$). It showed no significant main effect of accent ($F(1, 181) = 1.59, p = .209$) and there was no interaction effect between type of commercial and accent ($F(1, 181) < 1$). Listeners who had heard a product commercial ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.15$) perceived the speaker as more competent than listeners of a service commercial ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.30$).

Evaluation of the speaker's warmth. The two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on Evaluation of the speaker's warmth showed no significant main effects of type of commercial ($F(1, 181) = 2.78, p = .097$) or accent ($F(1, 181) = 1.71, p = .193$). Nor was an interaction effect found between type of commercial and accent ($F(1, 181) < 1$). Listeners seemed not to be influenced by commercial type or accent when evaluating the speaker's warmth.

Purchase intention. Lastly, the two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on Purchase intention showed a significant main effect of type of commercial ($F(1, 181) = 25.85, p < .001$). There was no significant main effect of accent ($F(1, 181) = 1.97, p = .162$) and no interaction between type of commercial and accent was found ($F(1, 181) < 1$). Listeners who heard the product commercial ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.67$) showed stronger intentions to buy the product/service than listeners of the service commercial ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.40$).

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the main variables per accent (standard/regional) and type of commercial (product/service).

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the product and service commercials with a regional and standard accent for Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence, Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and Purchase intention (1 = negative/low, 7 = positive/high)

	Attitude towards the commercial <i>M (SD)</i>	Attitude towards the product/service <i>M (SD)</i>	Speaker's competence <i>M (SD)</i>	Speaker's warmth <i>M (SD)</i>	Purchase intention <i>M (SD)</i>
Standard accent					
Product (<i>n</i> = 51)	3.04 (1.12)	3.50 (1.23)	3.97 (1.16)	4.32 (1.00)	4.25 (1.58)
Service (<i>n</i> = 48)	2.74 (1.35)	2.88 (1.40)	3.61 (1.13)	4.13 (1.05)	3.02 (1.45)
Regional accent					
Product (<i>n</i> = 39)	3.32 (1.46)	3.46 (1.34)	3.77 (1.14)	4.20 (1.47)	3.86 (1.79)
Service (<i>n</i> = 47)	2.52 (1.37)	2.70 (1.38)	3.35 (1.45)	3.76 (1.57)	2.78 (1.36)

The multivariate analysis of variance on listener's province of birth and province of residence on Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence, Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and Purchase intention showed no significant multivariate main effects on any of the dependent variables (p 's > .079).

Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks involved Recognition of the speaker's accent, Attitude towards the accent *Brabants* and Comprehensibility of the speaker.

Recognition of the speaker's accent. Out of the 86 participants who listened to a regional accented commercial, 78 recognized the accent as *Brabants* and 8 participants did not identify the accent correctly. Of the 99 participants who heard the standard accented commercials, 37 listeners identified the speaker as *Brabants*.

Attitude towards the accent Brabants. To find whether the listener's Attitude towards *Brabants* influenced the overall outcomes, a two-way analysis of variance for type of commercial and accent on attitude towards *Brabants* was conducted. It showed no significant main effects of type or commercial ($F(1, 181) < 1$) or accent ($F(1, 181) = 1.88, p = .172$) and no interaction between the variables was found ($F(1, 181) < 1$).

Comprehensibility of the speaker. Pearson's correlation check was conducted to see if the Comprehensibility of the speaker influenced the dependent variables. The correlations showed positive significant main effects of comprehensibility and all five variables: Attitude towards the commercial ($r(185) = .24, p = .001$), Attitude towards the product/service ($r(185) = .30, p < .001$), Evaluation of the speaker's competence ($r(185) = .28, p < .001$), Evaluation of the speaker's warmth ($r(185) = .32, p < .001$) and Purchase intention ($r(185) = .24, p = .001$). When listeners found the speaker more comprehensible, they showed a more positive attitude towards the commercial and the product/service. Listeners also found a comprehensible speaker more competent and warm than an less comprehensible speaker. Furthermore, listeners showed higher purchase intentions when they listened to a more comprehensible speaker.

Conclusion and discussion

This study was conducted to examine the effects of a regional versus a standard accent in product and service radio commercials on the listener's Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence, Evaluation of the speaker's warmth and Purchase intention.

Before discussing the study's outcomes, it is important to note that the overall evaluation scores were rather low, as could be seen in table 1 of the previous chapter. This may indicate that the listeners did not appreciate the commercials in general, which possibly affected other outcomes. Also, the present study did not measure congruence between the promoted attributes and the place. However, considering the fact that Noord-Brabant is the product's place of origin and the service's place of delivery, it is assumed that the attributes fit the place to a certain extent.

It was found that a regional versus a standard accent had no significant effects on any of the five depending variables. Services are intangible and heterogeneous of nature and often involve personal interaction (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). However, despite Mai and Hoffmann's (2011) call for the need for different marketing approaches, similar effects of accent were found in product and service commercials.

Attitude towards the commercial

This study first investigated the effects of a regional versus a standard accent on the listener's Attitude towards the commercial. Previous literature found that a good match between the promoted attribute and the place triggers positive evaluations of the message (Hornikx & Hof, 2008). Since no significant effects of accent were found, it is possible that the listeners felt that the product/service did not match the place. Other studies found that standard accents have positive effects on the evaluation of the message and that regional accents can cause downgrading due to language expectations (e.g. Fuertes et al., 2012; Burgoon & Burgoon, 2001). In contrast, previous research also found that unexpected use of language can make a message stand out and exceed the audience's expectations (Hornikx et al., 2007; Hornikx & Hof, 2008). The present study does not correspond with these previous findings as the regional accented and standard accented commercials were equally evaluated. One explanation can be that Dutch listeners do not hold strong expectations about appropriate persuasive language or they find the regional accent in particular suitable. It would therefore be interesting to examine different Dutch accents in the future.

Attitude towards the product/service

Secondly, this study investigated the listener's Attitude towards the product/service. Previous literature indicated that a good fit between a product and place stimulates a positive attitude towards the promoted attribute (e.g. Hornikx & Hof, 2008; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999; Hornikx et al., 2013). As mentioned before, the results of this study show no significant effects of accent on the evaluation of the product/service as there might have been a lack of congruence. Another reason may be that the attributes in this study were not appreciated in the first place. Future research could focus on multiple products and services. For instance, attributes that include food and attributes that do not.

Evaluation of the speaker's Competence and Warmth

Next, the listener's evaluation of the speaker was investigated. Regional and standard accents can both cause the speaker to be upgraded in social dimensions (Fuertes et al., 2012). It is argued that speakers with a standard accent are upgraded in competence because they use the normative language or because they belong to the same social group as the listener (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; DeShields et al., 1996; Fuertes et al., 2012).

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Additionally, previous literature indicated that regional accents can make a speaker seem more warm or trigger more positive evaluations on competence when the listener shares the same accent (Fuertes et al., 2012). In addition, regional accents that deviate from the listener's speech style often instigate downgrading of the speaker (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). According to Giles' (1970) APT, some accents are associated with high class and prestige, affecting the evaluation of the speaker in a positive manner. The present study did not show significant effects of accent on the evaluation of the speaker. The results show that the speaker was perceived equally as competent and warm when speaking with a regional accent or in standard Dutch. It was also found that the listeners' origin did not affect their evaluation of the speaker, even though speech style can be used to ascribe the speaker as part of the in-group or out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The results of this study lead to assuming that *Brabants* does not carry high prestige, but it does not lack prestige either. One explanation can be that due to the high variety of Dutch accents (Pinget et al., 2014), listeners hear regional accents on a daily basis and have stopped seeing standard Dutch as the normative language. Future research could investigate this by examining the effects of different accents in the Netherlands.

Purchase intention

Finally, the listener's Purchase intention was examined. Previous studies showed that a regional accent can positively and negatively impact purchase intention. A match between a language and a place can lead to higher purchase intentions (Usunier & Cestre, 2007; Hornikx et al., 2013). As mentioned before, there might have been a perceived lack of congruence since no effects of accent were found. Furthermore, the SIT claims individuals favour their in-group and try to strengthen the domestic industry by buying local products (Mai & Hoffmann, 2014). Thus, when listeners share the same accent as a salesperson, they can be more willing to use a service or buy a product (Mai & Hoffmann). In this research, accent did not affect listener's purchase intention and the findings contradict with previous literature. It was also found that listeners who belonged to the in-group of the regional accented speaker did not show higher purchase intentions than other listeners. As mentioned before, one possibility may be that the product/service was not to their likings. Future research can therefore examine the effects of accent on multiple attributes.

Alternatively, this study did find a significant effect for type of commercial on four out of five variables: Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Evaluation of the speaker's competence and Purchase intention. For all four variables, the product commercials received more positive evaluations than the service commercials. This can be explained by the fact that the product concerned a famous pastry and listeners already held positive associations with it while the service was unknown. However, as accent did not affect the variable, the regional accent *Brabants* did not stimulate these positive associations.

Manipulation checks

As manipulation checks, the listener's Recognition of the accent, Attitude towards the accent *Brabants* and Comprehensibility of the speaker were examined. The results show that 90% of the participants who listened to the regional accented commercial, ascribed the accent to the correct province. This indicates that the listener's evaluations of the speaker were indeed applicable to speakers from Noord-Brabant.

Subsequently, the perception of the regional accent did not influence other variables. According to Giles' APT, some accents carry prestige, influencing the audience's perception of the speaker (and thereby the message) in a positive manner. It can be stated that the image of the regional accent in particular, did not interfere with the outcomes.

Finally, it was found that the Comprehensibility of the speaker influenced all five variables. When listeners perceived the speaker as more comprehensible, they gave more positive evaluations on other variables. These findings stress that marketers should always watch comprehensibility in commercials, regardless of the speaker's accent.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The first limitation of the present study is that the speaker was not convincing enough when speaking standard Dutch. It was noted that 37 listeners identified the speaker as *Brabants* when speaking with a standard accent. This has possibly influenced the results, as listeners might have evaluated the standard Dutch commercial as if it was a regional accent, but the evaluations were not treated as such.

A second limitation is that listeners were found in personal networks via Social Media, impacting the randomisation of this study. It was found most participants were born (46.2%)

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or living (57.5%) in the province Gelderland. This has possibly affected the reliability of this study, as the sample is not equally disturbed across the all twelve provinces. Next to that, the questionnaire was filled in online and in the participants' own time. This way external influences could not be excluded and distractions might have affected the participant's attention or interfered with their answering.

Further limitations of this research are the use of only one product and only one service. The results show significant higher appreciations for the product commercials, leading to think the product might be popular on itself as it is a famous pastry while the service is unknown and therefor unpopular. Personal favouring or familiarity with the type of product and service might have influenced the outcomes of this study. Another possible explanation could be that the product concerned food and the service non-food. Future research should run a pre-test before choosing the attributes. Moreover, it is advised to use more than one product and more than one service in future research.

Finally, future research can investigate several regional accents in the Netherlands. Such a research could show whether the outcomes of this study occur with all regional accents or only with *Brabants*. It might be possible that the accent from Amsterdam, for example, triggers different stereotypes association, affecting the competence or warmth.

In general, this study provides insight for marketers into the use of regional accents for the means of multilingual advertising in the Netherlands. This study found that Dutch people are not influenced by the accent *Brabants* when evaluating a radio commercial.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Radio commercial texts

Text 1: Product

Bourgondisch Brabant. Waar beter te ontdekken dan in Den Bosch? Kom langs en ervaar de geschiedenis van geuren, kleuren en smaken in het hart van Brabant. Beleef Den Bosch nodigt u uit om de lekkerste Bossche Bollen te komen proeven. Deze hele maand: twee voor de prijs van één! Ga naar www.beleefdenbosch.nl. Super gezellig!

Text 2: Service

Bourgondisch Brabant. Waar beter te ontdekken dan in Den Bosch? Kom langs en ervaar de geschiedenis van geuren, kleuren en smaken in het hart van Brabant. Beleef Den Bosch nodigt u uit voor een gezellige dagtrip om de sfeer van Den Bosch te komen proeven. Deze hele maand: twee voor de prijs van één! GA Naar www.beleefdenbosch.nl. Super gezellig!

Appendix II: Questionnaire

Note: The questionnaire was translated to Dutch for the purpose of this research.

Beste deelnemer. Heel erg bedankt voor uw tijd. In opdracht van een reclamebureau doen wij onderzoek naar radio als reclamemedium. Wij willen u daarom graag vragen uw mening te geven over een radioreclame die u zo meteen te horen krijgt. Daarna vragen wij u een aantal vragen te beantwoorden. Er zijn geen foute antwoorden, wij zijn puur geïnteresseerd in uw mening. Uw antwoorden blijven volledig anoniem en worden alleen voor dit onderzoek gebruikt. Het invullen van dit onderzoek zal ongeveer 5-10 minuten duren. Uw mening is erg waardevol voor ons en wij willen u daarom vragen de vragenlijst niet vroegtijdig af te breken. Wij vragen u deze vragenlijst zo mogelijk op een laptop of pc in te vullen omdat het programma niet door elk tablet of mobiele telefoon ondersteund wordt. Wij danken u nogmaals hartelijk voor uw deelname! Klik nu op de pijl om met het onderzoek te beginnen.

Geslacht:

- Man (1)
- Vrouw (2)
- Anders (3)

Leeftijd (in jaren): _____

Mijn huidige woonplaats ligt in...

- Groningen (1)
- Friesland (2)
- Drenthe (3)
- Overijssel (4)
- Flevoland (5)
- Gelderland (6)
- Utrecht (7)
- Noord-Holland (8)
- Zuid-Holland (9)
- Zeeland (10)
- Noord-Brabant (11)
- Limburg (12)

Hoeveel jaar woont u al in uw huidige woonplaats? _____

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Mijn geboorteplaats ligt in...

- Groningen (1)
- Friesland (2)
- Drenthe (3)
- Overijssel (4)
- Flevoland (5)
- Gelderland (6)
- Utrecht (7)
- Noord-Holland (8)
- Zuid-Holland (9)
- Zeeland (10)
- Noord-Brabant (11)
- Limburg (12)

Hoeveel jaar heeft u in uw geboorteplaats gewoond? _____

Mijn hoogst genoten opleiding

- Basisonderwijs/middelbaar onderwijs (1)
- MBO (2)
- HBO (3)
- WO bachelor (4)
- WO master (5)
- WO postdoctoraal (7)
- Anders, namelijk: (6) _____

Wat is uw beroep? Indien u nog studeert, vul dan 'student' in: _____

Nu volgt de radioreclame. Klik alstublieft hieronder op de link om deze af te spelen. Let op: u kunt de radioreclame slechts één keer beluisteren. Zorg dus dat uw geluid aanstaat.

Beantwoord nu alstublieft de volgende vragen over de radioreclame die u zojuist hebt beluisterd.

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Ik vind deze radioreclame...

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Leuk (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Boeiend (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Origineel (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aantrekkelijk (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interessant (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ik vind dit product...

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Leuk (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Boeiend (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Origineel (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aantrekkelijk (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interessant (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Dit product kopen is...

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
iets wat ik nooit zou doen (1) - iets wat ik zeker zou doen (7)	<input type="radio"/>						
iets dat ik helemaal niet zou aanraden aan mijn vrienden (1): iets dat ik zeker zou aanraden aan mijn vrienden (7)	<input type="radio"/>						
Echt iets voor mij (7) Helemaal niks voor mij (1)	<input type="radio"/>						

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Ik vind de spreker van deze radioreclame...

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)
Competent (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Zelfverzekerd (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Onafhankelijk (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competitief (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intelligent (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tolerant (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Warm (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Goed gemanierd (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oprecht (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ik kan deze spreker makkelijk begrijpen

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Helemaal mee oneens (1)	<input type="radio"/>						
Helemaal mee eens (7)	<input type="radio"/>						

Uit welke provincie denkt u dat de spreker van deze radioreclame komt?

- Groningen (1)
- Friesland (2)
- Drenthe (3)
- Overijssel (4)
- Flevoland (5)
- Gelderland (6)
- Utrecht (7)
- Noord-Holland (8)
- Zuid-Holland (9)
- Zeeland (10)
- Noord-Brabant (11)
- Limburg (12)

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Spreekt u zelf met een accent/dialect?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (2)
- Weet ik niet (3)

Spreekt u zelf met een accent/dialect?

Zo ja, welk accent/dialect?

Hoe staat u tegenover het Brabantse accent?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Zeer negatief (1)							
Zeer positief (7)	<input type="radio"/>						

Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst. Heel erg bedankt voor het invullen. Indien u nog vragen, opmerkingen of klachten heeft, horen wij dat graag. Tevens is het mogelijk om op de hoogte te worden gehouden van het onderzoek. Hiervoor kunt u contact met ons opnemen via el.smeets@student.ru.nl BELANGRIJK: Klik nog één keer op de pijl hieronder om de resultaten te verzenden.