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Pronoun Mixing in Netherlandic Dutch Revisited: Perception of 'u' and 'jij' Use by Pre-University Students

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Abstract

Prescriptive grammars of Netherlandic Dutch usually explicitly warn against mixing T- and V-pronouns. Although the prescriptive norm opposes mixing, pronoun mixing does occur, and its use can often be interpreted as strategic, in the sense that mixing pronouns might help to balance conflicting needs such as signaling respect and formality to the addressee on the one hand as well as expressing closeness on the other hand. This article explores the perception of pronoun mixing among high school students who were in the process of acquiring the norm. As part of a student science project, we asked students to categorize real-world examples of pronoun mixing that they themselves had gathered as a strategy or as a mistake. Based on the students' responses, we extrapolated that the most acceptable forms of mixing were brief switches to V in a T-context to express humor or urgency and—if there was no clear default pronoun—that mixing was most acceptable (1) when the text was free of spelling errors and other signs of sloppiness, (2) when the mixing was intersentential, (3) when the number of switches was infrequent, and (4) when there was a clear division of tasks between the pronouns. As an offshoot of this student science project, we designed a brief follow-up survey to gain insight into domains and consensus and variation among the students' perceptions of pronoun mixing. This follow-up survey revealed that if not explicitly asked, most students do not notice pronoun mixing. We asked students to rank four real-life examples of address pronoun mixing that they had gathered during the student science project. We expected that with respect to their perception of the mixing of address pronouns all students would rank examples of mixing in the same order. A primary result of this part of our exploration was that there were large individual differences in the perception of mixing and that there was variation in the ranking of examples among the students. Intersentential mixing yielded the most neutral evaluations by the students, but intrasentential mixing showed the most extreme evaluations. It was disliked most strongly by students who had a general dislike of mixing and liked best by students who appreciated mixing as a style. Briefly switching to V in contexts associated with the T-pronoun was perceived to be humorous by a quarter of the students, and half of the students perceived a switch to the petrified abbreviation AUB ('if you-V please') as expressing urgency.

Keywords: pronoun mixing; folk linguistics; Northern Dutch; individual differences; formulaic speech

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1. Introduction

This article presents an exploratory investigation into the perception of pronoun mixing by teenagers in the Netherlands. By pronoun mixing, we mean the use of an

informal pronoun in combination with a formal pronoun within a single text. Prescriptive norms caution against pronoun mixing, but when mixing occurs, it can often be interpreted as a strategic device, in the sense that mixing pronouns helps to balance conflicting needs, such as signaling respect for and acknowledging the need to observe certain formalities vis-à-vis the addressee on the one hand and expressing closeness on the other hand.

Previous research on pronoun mixing has focused on analyzing the production of pronoun mixing: what motivates language users to mix and in what contexts do we observe mixing? Inspired by the theme of the special issue, we now focused on the perception of pronoun mixing: how do addressees perceive being addressed with both T- and V-pronouns by the same source? We explicitly asked these students about their opinions on mixing as a form of folk linguistics. In Section 2, we provide the building blocks for our article by presenting a characterization of Netherlandic Dutch pronouns, an overview of previous research on pronoun mixing, and background on the student science project and folk linguistics which are the basis for this article. Section 3 presents the methodology of the questionnaire we used to explore perceptions of pronoun mixing in real-life examples as well as questions about briefly switching to V in contexts associated with the T-pronoun to express urgency or to be funny. Section 4 presents the results of the questionnaire, and in Section 5 we discuss the main findings and their implications for future research.

2. Building Blocks

This section provides the building blocks for our exploratory investigation into the perception of pronoun mixing in Netherlandic Dutch by teenagers. It presents a brief overview of Netherlandic Dutch address pronouns (Section 2.1), followed by a discussion of pronoun mixing (Section 2.2).

2.1. Background on Netherlandic Dutch Address Pronouns

We follow Brown and Gilman (1960) in the use of the abbreviation T (derived from Latin *tu*) for informal pronouns and V derived from Latin *vos*) for formal pronouns Netherlandic Dutch three T-forms in Netherlandic Dutch, namely the singular strong form *jij*, the weak form of *jij je* and the explicitly plural form *jullie.* There is one V-form, *u*. The forms *je* and *jullie* each have one form that fulfills all syntactic functions. The form *u* can be used in subject position and as an oblique form. The possessive form of *u* is *uw*. The oblique form of the pronoun *jij* is *jou* and the possessive form is *jou*w.

Table 1 characterizes these four pronouns according to the formal aspect of number and according to functional aspects such as directness, the availability of the address pronoun for generic uses, its association with formal or informal contexts, and the possibility of encoding inner group membership. The characterizations are based on the descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997), supplemented by existing literature that we cite in the clarification of the table underneath the table and, in the case of the use of *jullie*, in formal contexts based on our own observations. Table 1 shows that the four pronouns partly overlap in their usage and that each form has its own strengths and weaknesses. A plus sign indicates that there are no issues with the pronoun in that context, a minus sign that there may be some, +/− means that the form skews towards more rather than less acceptable in that context, and −/+ means that the form is less rather than more acceptable. Hence, the pronouns here appear to be ranked from most to least available in singular contexts, and from least to most available in plural contexts.

Table 1. Dutch second person pronouns and their uses.

Form	Singular	Plural	Informal	Formal	Generic	Outer Group
jij	+	−	+	−	+/−	−
je	+	−/+	+	−/+	+	−
u	+	+/−	−	+	−/+	+
jullie	−/+	+	+	−/+	−	−

Note that Table 1 presents the use of a pronoun to address a singular or a plural entity as separate cases, rather than as opposites of one binary concept: Pronouns vary in the degree to which they can be used in singular and/or plural contexts. Similarly, the fact that a pronoun is acceptable in informal contexts does not necessarily mean that it is unacceptable in formal contexts. Thus, they are not necessarily opposites. Hence, although we follow Brown and Gilman (1960, p. 254) in using the abbreviations T and V (from Latin *tu* and *vos*) to refer respectively to the informal and formal address terms, the use of these address terms is less binary than suggested by the existence of only two abbreviations. Vismans (2013) has also shown that in some situations both the formal and the informal form can be used and writes that when speakers reflect on what form they select, the sentence often begins with "it depends" (2013, p. 184), suggesting that the division of tasks between the pronouns is gradient rather than binary.

Jij is the strong informal singular pronoun. This form is not used for plurals, which makes the form more direct. The form *je* is a reduced form of *jij* and is considered more neutral and weaker than the strong T-form *jij* (Schoenmakers et al., 2024, p. 103). It can be used as an informal term of address, but also as an impersonal pronoun, such as in sentences like *je leeft maar één keer* 'you only live once.' Some literature suggests that only the weak pronoun *je* can be used as a generic form (Vermaas, 2002; Weerman, 2007; Aalberse, 2009; Gruber, 2013). Tarenskeen (2010), however, has shown that this is not true. She investigated the generic uses of address terms in the corpus of spoken Dutch and found that both *jij* and *je* can be used generically. She notes that "we do not tell our hearers much about themselves, as they often know themselves better than we do—at least, that is what we assume" (2010, p. 27). Since it is not often the case that a speaker will tell addressees about themselves, a generic reading is likely in declarative utterances. Unlike other literature, where it is assumed that only the weak T-pronoun je can be used as a generic pronoun and that other address forms are only used deictically, Tarenskeen (2010, pp. 75–76), in her analysis of a subset of the corpus of spoken Dutch, finds that the percentages of non-deictic uses in the weak pronoun *je* and the strong pronoun *jij* are very similar. Out of the 98 instances of the strong pronoun *jij* in her subset, 50 (51%) were used deictically, 33 (34%) generically, and 15 instances (15%) were ambiguous, whereas out of the 467 instances of the weak T-pronoun *je* in her subset, 247 out of 467 instances were used deictically (53%), 83 (39%) generically, and 37 (8%) of the instances were ambiguous. de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015) observe that the V-form can also be used generically, but this use is less frequent. The generic interpretation is easily reached with conditionals and contrasts (Tarenskeen, 2010) but always requires some context for the strong pronouns *jij* and *u*. Using the strong address terms *jij* and *u* out of the blue does not yield a generic interpretation, whereas this out-of-the-blue use is possible for the weak form *je* (Tarenskeen, 2010, p. 76), hence the + for *je* as a generic form in Table 1 and the +/− for *jij*. Since *u* can be used generically, but not very often, this form is characterized as −/+.

Je is not used in just singular contexts. If a group of people is addressed, *je* can also be used to address the group after the group has first been addressed with the explicitly plural form *jullie*. The descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997) suggests that this use is

motivated by the desire to avoid multiple uses of the strong pronoun *jullie,* for example, as shown in (1), taken from Haeseryn et al. (1997, para. 5.2.4).

1.	Ik	weet	wel	dat	jullie	graag	vroeg	vertrekken
	I	know	PART	that	you.PL	keen	early	depart
	maar	zou	je	niet	eerst	even	helpen	opruimen?
	But	should	you	not	first	a little bit	help	clean up?

I know that you are keen to leave early, but shouldn't you help clean up first?

In specific circumstances, this formally plural form can be used to address a singular addressee as a way of defocalizing (Haverkate, 1984, p. 56), avoiding direct reference to the addressee. In (2), taken from Vermaas (2004, p. 65), a patient is trying to persuade a doctor to hospitalize her mother. (3) Although the patient is addressing only one physician, she uses the plural form *jullie* and thus addresses the doctor as a representative of doctors as a collective rather than as an individual.

2.	Jullie	moeten	zorgen	dat	ze	nu	opgenomen	wordt
	You.PL	must	ensure	that	she	now	hospitalized	gets

You (pl) have to make sure that she gets hospitalized now.

The use of a plural pronoun towards one doctor makes the request less direct than if the singular form *jij* had been used, and, at the same time, it is more solidary and informal than the polite form *u*. The pronoun *u* is a polite and formal pronoun that can be used in the singular and in the plural. It is our intuition that interlocutors who are addressed as *u* individually can be addressed as *jullie* in a group, but we did not find a reference to back this intuition. If the pronoun *jullie* is mentioned in the literature, it is characterized as the informal and solidary plural form and in some cases as an indirect form of *jij* (Vermaas, 2002; Haeseryn et al., 1997). If the pronoun *u* is used in the plural, sometimes the plural or dual reference is made explicit by adding the forms *allen* ('all') or *beiden* ('both') to the pronoun *u*.

Both Vermaas (2002) and Haeseryn et al. (1997) suggest that the pronouns *je* and *jullie* function as intermediate politeness forms. They are less direct and more neutral than the strong form *jij* and could function as a bridge to move from the polite and formal address form *u* to a more informal setting (Vermaas, 2004). den Hartog et al. (2022, p. 49) categorize Dutch as a language with a strong T preference. One possible reason for this T preference is the strong desire to belong to the inner group. van Zalk and Jansen (2004, p. 266) show that in Netherlandic Dutch the use of the V-pronoun *u* signals outer group, and hence its use can be face-threatening. This is in line with the observation by Vermaas (2002) that V sometimes signals social distance rather than respect. Table 1 shows that only the pronoun *u* signals outer group membership. The availability of the generic form *je* and the formally plural form *jullie* gives language users the opportunity to avoid outer group categorization of the addressee, while still being indirect and hence less face-threatening.

Associations are also context dependent. Leung et al. (2023, p. 546) have shown that consumers' pronoun preferences and pronoun responses differ according to the type of brand. Brands that are perceived to have cooperative intentions and are associated with friendliness and sincerity are perceived as warm; brands that are thought to possess executive skill sets and that are associated with efficiency are considered competent. If consumers associate a brand with being high in competence and low in warmth, the pronoun that consumers perceive as most pleasant is the V-pronoun. If a brand is perceived as high in warmth and low in competence, the preferred pronoun is T. The T-pronoun

functions as a default form if a brand scores equally high on the two scales (high in both competence and warmth or low in both competence and warmth). Note that it is not only the type of brand that affects the evaluation of the pronoun; the place of origin of the brand also matters. Consumers prefer the T-pronoun for brands from Spain, because consumers associate Spain with warmth, and the V-pronoun for brands from Germany, because consumers associate Germany with efficiency and skill.

2.2. Pronoun Mixing in Netherlandic Dutch: Against the Norm but with Potential Pragmatic Benefits

As we saw in Section 2.1, the formal and respectful pronoun *u* can signal outer group categorization and distance, which creates a barrier to using this pronoun. If the context requires both respect and/or indirectness on the one hand but also inner group membership on the other hand, this combination of communicative needs can be conveyed via the T-pronoun *je*, which, because of its generic use, is less likely to be interpreted as deictic, and *jullie*, because this plural form does not single out one addressee and is thus less face-threatening. Another option to balance conflicting needs vis-à-vis an addressee is to mix the V-form *u* with a T-pronoun (*jij*, *je* and/or *jullie*). Pronoun mixing is against the norm, but previous literature has argued for the pragmatic benefits of mixing. In Section 2.2.1, we briefly show how prescriptive websites warn against pronoun mixing; in Section 2.2.2, we summarize existing research on pronoun mixing.

2.2.1. Prescriptive Websites on Pronoun Mixing

Language prescriptivists tend to favor consistency in linguistic choices; once you make a choice, e.g., stick to the choice and be consistent (cf. Audring & Booij, 2009, p. 34). The desire to be consistent is also very clear in the domain of language advice in selecting address terms. In looking at websites that assist language users in choosing a suitable form of address, we invariably find that they advise consistency within one text. Websites do say that a company does not always have to use one form of address across media platforms: it is okay to use a different pronoun on social media than on the website, for example, but mixing forms within one text is considered undesirable, as can be seen in the following quotes. One website also warns against mixing across media platforms as shown in example 5. These examples are taken from a website that helps secretaries choose terms of address (example 3), the website for the Dutch Association for Professional Copywriters (4), and a company that helps other companies to write professional texts (5), so all contain advice from professional writers and editors.

3.	Het	is	belangrijk	om	consistent	te	zijn	in	je	keuze
	It	is	important	to	consistent	to	be	in	your.T	choice

It is important to be consistent in your choice
(Secretary Plus, 2024)

4. Wat de keuze ook wordt: voer hem consequent door. Dat is een schone taak voor tekstschrijvers en redacteuren. Zeker als een organisatie de overstap maakt van u naar je, want oude formuleringen blijken nog her en der verstopt te zitten (. . .) Consequent gebruik geldt overigens alleen binnen dezelfde tekstsoort van een organisatie; niet per se voor alle teksten van die club. Neem bijvoorbeeld een woningcorporatie. Het is heel goed te verdedigen dat die via de website de lezers met je aanspreekt en in brieven kiest voor u. Tenzij het een brief is aan huurders van studentenwoningen.

> Whatever the choice may be: be consistent. That is a quite a task for copywriters and editors. This is especially the case when an organization changes from you.V to you.T, because old wordings tend to be hidden (. . .) Being consistent only applies to one text genre in an organization, not necessarily to all texts of that group. Take, for example, a housing cooperative. One could successfully argue that the organization address its readers with *you.T* on the website and with *you.V* in letters, unless the letter is written to tenants in student dormitories.
> (van Eerd, 2016)
>
> Wat je ook kiest: wees consequent! En misschien wel het allerbelangrijkst: ga geen 'je' en 'u' door elkaar gebruiken. Welke keuze je ook maakt: voer het consequent door. Niets zo vervelend als een tekst die met 'u' begint, verder gaat met 'je' en weer eindigt met 'u'. Whatever you choose, be consistent! And perhaps most important, don't go mixing *you.T* and *you.V*. Whatever choice you make, apply the choice consistently. Nothing is as annoying as reading a text that begins with *you.V*, continues with *you.T* and uses *you.V* again at the end.
> (Letterdesk, 2021)

5. Online lees je weleens dat het oké is om klanten op de website en via social media aan te spreken met je of jij en bijvoorbeeld bij klachten of een aankoopbevestiging te switchen naar u. Ik vind dit onverstandig omdat het rommelig en wispelturig overkomt. Dus wat je ook kiest, voer de aanspreekvorm consequent door op alle kanalen en in alle geschreven en gesproken communicatie.

   Sometimes you read online that it is okay to address clients on a website and on social media with je (T) and jij (T) and to switch to u, for example, when there are complaints or when confirming an order. I find this unwise, because it comes across as messy and capricious. So, whatever you choose, be consistent by using the same address term in all written and spoken communication.

   https://doorlies.nl/welke-aanspreekvorm-kies-jij/ (accessed on 2 August 2025)

2.2.2. Pronoun Mixing from a Theoretical Perspective

The observation that professional writing websites warn against pronoun mixing is a first indication that mixing does occur in 'the wild,' since one does not have to warn against variants that do not occur. The mixing of address pronouns has been extensively described in medieval European texts and in Shakespearean texts (see Aalberse, 2009; Brown & Gilman, 1960; Vermaas, 2002; Simon, 2003b; Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2003 for overviews). For modern European languages, it has been claimed that mixing no longer occurs due to at least two reasons. Brown and Gilman (1989) show that the default address pronoun between adults who frequently interact with each other has shifted from V to T. During the period where V was the default between adults, a brief switch to the T-pronoun could be used to show affect. Simon (2003a, p. 90) provides an example that shows a switch motivated by affect from Nibelungenlied. Gunther, the Burgundian king, talks with his friend and confidant, Siegfried. At the beginning of the conversation, both Gunther and Siegfried address each other with V, but once Gunther begins to talk about his embarrassing wedding night, both speech act participants switch to T.

Brown and Gilman (1989) refer to the system where the default pronoun is V and T is used in special circumstances to show affect as an 'affect' system. In an affect system, switches to T are briefly made in circumstances of heightened emotion, and interlocutors return to the V-form if the topic changes. Brown and Gilman (1989) argue that the affect system has been replaced by an interactive closeness system. Once adults frequently interact with each other, they switch to T as the default pronoun. The T-pronoun is no longer associated with heightened emotion and intimacy, as in affect systems; rather, the

use of T merely indicates that people know each other. Once the switch to T has been made, there is no reason to switch to V. So, interactive closeness systems have one moment for a switch: the decision to move from V to T; once this decision has been made, there is no longer a reason to switch back.

Apart from the difference between affect systems and interactive closeness systems, Simon (2003b) provides another argument for the observed loss of pronoun mixing in many modern European languages. Simon (2003b) argues that the possibility of mixing pronouns was lost in Standard German and Bavarian German because the concept of respect became grammaticalized, and the grammaticalization of respect impedes pronoun mixing. The use of the third person plural form *sie* towards an addressee to express politeness is a pragmatic strategy. Simon argues that over time this pragmatic strategy became part of the grammar, and the etymologically plural form is no longer considered merely a plural form but a polite form. He provides evidence for the separation of *sie* as a third person plural form and a politeness form by showing that, for example, case marking for the third person plural form *sie* is different from case marking for the second person honorific form *Sie*, although these forms are etymologically the same form. These morphogrammatical differences provide evidence for the hypothesis that the honorific form *Sie* has become grammaticalized into a separate form in the grammar.

Bennis (2007) shows that agreement behavior for the Dutch pronoun *u* is different from any other pronoun which could indicate that respect and is grammaticalized in Dutch as well. Although occurrences of pronoun mixing are indeed less frequent in modern texts than in older texts, pronoun mixing does occur in present-day Netherlandic Dutch. Oosterhof et al. (2017) created a corpus consisting of employment advertisements for highly educated candidates where both the pronoun *je* and the pronoun *u* were used. They found that there is a preference for *u*-forms to be used in non-subject functions. This pattern was expected for the Flemish advertisements, because *u* is the default non-subject form in both formal and informal texts in Belgian Dutch. Interestingly enough, they found a similar pattern in material from the Netherlands, where *u* is both a polite subject and a non-subject form. Oosterhof et al. (2017) relate the higher frequency of *u* in the non-subject position to the historical situation where *u* was only used in non-subject functions in Netherlandic Dutch as well.

Vismans (2016) analyzed switches between T and V in the radio show Casa Luna. He showed that switches can be used to express affect and that they can also be used as a form of irony or banter. The domain that Vismans (2016) analyzed is interesting, because it is in the context of a conversation between adults who do not know each other well (the interviewer and the interviewee may not have met each other before the interview). From the perspective of interactive closeness described in Brown and Gilman (1989), one would expect a symmetrical use of V in this context, but as shown above, present-day Netherlandic Dutch has developed a strong preference for the T-pronoun, even between adults who do not know each other. Vismans (2016) distinguishes three contexts where switching occurs. The first context is what he refers to as negotiation, the second context is the hopeful switcher, and the third context is the spontaneous shift. An example of an address pronoun switch during the address pronoun negotiation is provided in 6; before the interview begins, the selection of the pronoun is negotiated.

6. Interview Antoine Bodar (AB) by Colet van der Ven (CV) (taken from Vismans, 2016, p. 125)
   CV: Welkom Antoine Bodar.
   'Welcome, Antoine Bodar'
   AB: Dankuwel.
   Thank you(V)
   CV: We zeggen gewoon je en jou op dit tijdstip van de dag.
   We just say you (T subject and object form) at this time of day
   AB: Oh ja? Zoals u wilt, zoals je wilt.
   Is this so? As you (V), as you (T) like

The interviewer proposes to use the T-form, and the interviewee is trying to adapt to this new situation. The circumstance in which one speaker in a conversation will suggest being addressed with a certain address pronoun that goes against the intuition of the other interlocutor is also mentioned as a context for switching by Aalberse (2004). Whereas in the negotiation scenario the choice to use an address form is made explicit, Vismans' (2016) concept of the hopeful switcher is more implicit. It refers to someone who tries to address the interlocutor with T without discussing this choice explicitly in the hope that this form will be reciprocated. In some instances when, after a series of exchanges, the use of T is not reciprocated, the participant switches back to V to maintain a symmetrical address pronoun relationship where both interlocutors address each other using the same pronoun. The last context provided by Vismans, referred to as the spontaneous switch, concerns a change in address term after a period of address negotiation. It pertains to the occasion when the form of address appears to have been agreed upon and the conversation is already flowing, but then one of the participants spontaneously switches to another pronoun. One of the examples Vismans (2016) provides of spontaneous switches shows a kind of mock politeness; the interviewer and the interviewee use T with each other, but when the interviewer, Harm Edens, makes a sarcastic comment about the Christian political party's doing well (it is not doing well), the interviewee, Rik Torfs, switches to the V-pronoun, saying:

7. Ja, uw waarnemingsvermogen is bijzonder scherp gebleven.
   Yes, your (v) sentence has remained exquisitely sharp.

Vismans (2016) also shows that affect can play a role in the selection of pronouns. For example, when an interviewee, Ronald Paul, is asked about his personal feelings about a movie, interviewer Ghislaine Plag uses the T-form, but when she refers to his status as a director, she uses the V-form, as shown in (8).

8. Heeft u als directeur dat ook paraat dat soort kennis?
   Do you (V) as director also have that kind of knowledge at hand?

The effect of the type of topic in address pronoun choice is also discussed by Aalberse (2004), where websites from companies that mix address pronouns are discussed. The websites that mix pronouns have a feature in common: they provide services to customers concerning intimate matters, such as a page to help young mothers with their concerns, help for anonymous alcoholics, and a webpage for a swinger club. Both Vismans (2016) and Aalberse (2004) argue that pronoun mixing in these contexts, where the context requires both the T-form because of the private nature of the topic and the V-form to express respect, can be interpreted as strategic. Given that mixing is against the norm but can also be seen as strategic, the question is, how do addressees perceive pronoun mixing. Is it considered bad practice because it goes against the norm or can pronoun mixing help in balancing different needs with respect to the addressee? This article involves two complementary

studies that explore the perception of pronoun mixing among teenagers who are acquiring the norm against mixing.

The first study investigated the answers high school students gave to characterize examples of pronoun mixing as strategic or stupid. The second study tried to determine to what extent we can draw generalizations from the first study and to what extent the arguments that student pairs provided were shared by their peers.

3. Study 1 Student Science Project and Categorizing Mixing as Strategic or a Mistake

Study I focuses on the results of a student science project and in particular on what the results of this project tell us about students' perceptions of pronoun mixing. We first provide information on the general goal and the motivation for the student science project, followed by information on the participants of the project. We then present some general findings related to the examples that the students gathered, and we end by presenting the arguments the students used to categorize mixing as a strategy or as a mistake. This type of information is a form of folk linguistics which helps us to understand the beliefs of the participants about pronoun mixing.

3.1. Student Science Project

Pronoun mixing in present-day Dutch is not a common phenomenon on webpages anymore. Whereas some commercial websites dealing with sensitive topics used mixed address forms in Netherlandic Dutch twenty years ago (cf. Aalberse, 2004), a brief online search reveals that these sources no longer make use of pronoun mixing but have switched to the use of T only. The absence of pronoun mixing on webpages did not align with what we had started noticing in our daily lives, with switches between T and V being common practice in, for example, personalized advertisements in email messages or interactions between customers and cashiers in the supermarket. It seemed that pronoun mixing tended to occur more in personalized emails and advertisements than in more openly accessible forms of text. The observation that examples of pronoun mixing tend not to be openly accessible in combination with a request from the Bertrand Russell High School for a science project led to the student science project. The student science project was inspired by citizen science (Science Europe, 2018, p. 1). Citizen science is defined as "the practice of science by volunteers who are not connected to a research organization as professional researchers, but who cooperate with—or are supervised by—professional researchers." In our case the volunteers were students working on a high school project in order to collect more insightful examples of pronoun mixing 'in the wild.' The project was set up with two goals: (1) to familiarize high school students with doing research, from gathering and coding data to thinking about the meaning of the data found and (2) to build a new corpus of examples of pronoun mixing.

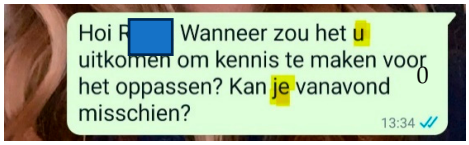
3.2. Participants

The present study was conducted among Netherlandic Dutch-speaking students in the tenth grade of the pre-university curriculum (4 vwo) at the Bertrand Russell College in Krommenie, the Netherlands. The typical student in this class was 16 years of age. The student science project assignment was administered to 72 students divided between two classes, of whom a total of 20 student pairs and one single student emailed us their data to use for our research. The students gathered examples of pronoun mixing in the weeks before 7 December, and they analyzed the data they gathered in pairs in class on 7 December 2023.

3.3. Coding Schema for the Student Science Project

Students were asked to present at least five examples of pronoun mixing in a table in which they copy-pasted examples of pronoun mixing or sketched the situation of pronoun mixing (column IV). Table 2 shows an excerpt of the table we asked students to create. We asked them to indicate in column I the source of the example they found ('where did you read/hear the example'), to date the example in column II ('when did you read/hear the example') and to indicate in column III whether they considered the mixing a strategy or stupid ('strategy or stupid'). We also asked them to code the appearance of a pronoun in their example with a 1 and the absence of a pronoun in the example with a 0 in columns V–IX. Column IV shows a screen of a Whatsapp message which translates as: 'Hi . . ., When would it suit you-V to get to know each other for the babysitting? Are you_T perhaps available tonight?'. Column I indicated the message was created in Whatsapp and that the sender was the babysitter and the recipient the parent who needed a babysitter for their child. Column II indicates the message was sent on 28 May 2023. Column III indicates that the student finds the message strategic (it was a message they themselves created earlier). The formal pronoun is used to show formality at the start and the informal pronoun was used to create a connection between the babysitter and the parent who needed a babysitter. Columns V–IX show that the pronouns *je* (T) and *u* (V) are attested indicated by the number 1 and that the pronouns *jij*, *jou* and *jullie* were not used indicated by the number 0.

Table 2. Example of homework assignment for the collection and analysis of pronoun mixing examples.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
	Waar las/hoorde je het voor-beeld?	**Wanneer** las/hoorde je het voor-beeld?	**Strategie of stom?** Geef argumen-ten voor en tegen strate-gisch gebruik voor het voor-beeld	**Foto/screenshot/situatiebeschrijving**	Jij	Je	jou	u	jullie
1	WhatsApp Afzender: oppasser Ontvanger: oppa-souder	28 mei 2023	Door het gebruik van 'u' kom je in eerste instantie formeel over en door het gebruik van 'je' in hetzelfde bericht maak je een connectie tussen de oppasser en de ouders van het oppaskindje. (Dit was strategisch.)		0	1	0	1	0

Column IV shows a screen of a Whatsapp message which translates as: 'Hi . . ., When would it suit you-V to get to know each other for the babysitting? Are you_T perhaps available tonight?'. Column I indicated the message was created in Whatsapp and that the sender was the babysitter and the recipient the parent who needed a babysitter for their child. Column II indicates the message was sent on 28 May 2023. Column III indicates that the student finds the message strategic (it was a message they themselves created earlier). The formal pronoun is used to show formality at the start and the informal pronoun was used to create a connection between the babysitter and the parent who needed a babysitter. Columns V–IX show that the pronouns *je* (T) and *u* (V) are attested indicated by the number 1 and that the pronouns *jij*, *jou* and *jullie* were not used indicated by the number 0.

By asking students these questions, we hoped to gain more insight into what context pronoun mixing occurs and with what pronouns mixing occurred. Apart from gathering more real-life examples of pronoun mixing, a central goal of the project was to let the students experience doing science both by coding examples of mixing as well as by thinking and arguing about the motivations of pronoun mixing in their selected examples. The arguments the students gave to justify their choices in categorizing mixing as either strategic or a mistake proved to be a form of folk linguistics, as we will discuss below.

3.4. General Results of Student Science Project

A total of 20 student pairs and one single student gathered 117 examples of pronoun mixing. Most of the examples included the pronoun *u* (109 times) and *je* (99 times), and a few included *jij* (7 times), the oblique form *jou* (9 times) and *jullie* (13 times). The examples where the singular form *je* or *jij* was mixed with the plural form *jullie* all included communication that was geared partly towards a group of people (sport team, group of students) and partly towards individual members of the group. Most of the examples gathered came from communications where the student (or their parent) was spontaneously involved; 10 examples resulted from an internet search. Out of the examples that were gathered via an internet search, eight came from the website koningshuis.nl, which provides all the speeches given by the king and queen, and two came from YouTube.

Out of the107 examples that involved real communication with a student or a parent and a company or another person, 96 were written messages: messages on WhatsApp between students and (grand)parents, with the students' friends and between the students and employers, WhatsApp groups for sport teams, personalized ads the students received, messages about cookies on websites, confirmation of an order of sportswear or clothing, digital advertisements frequently on websites where individuals can sell and buy, such as Marktplaats or Vinted. Examples also came from professional emails written to the students or their parents, messages from the school on the school app, messages between teachers and students on Microsoft teams, and from a manual for vacuum cleaners. 13 examples involved experiences with spoken language, including an interaction between a friend of a student and the student's parents, encounters on the train, in the supermarket and the sport canteen, and a conversation between a student and a grandparent. The types of interactions the students gathered overlapped with the examples we gathered, but also showed some domains that we did not have access to. Examples of communications from the school to the students and parents showed examples of mixing *jullie* to address students and *u* to address parents; apps for sport teams tend to vary when addressing the complete team and individual members and show mixing between *jullie* and *je*, and some students struggled when addressing grandparents, who are both intimate contacts as well as deserving of respect because of their age.

3.5. Folk Linguistics and the Perception of Pronoun Mixing

One of the questions in the student science project was how students perceived pronoun mixing in the examples they gathered. We asked them if they thought the mixing in the examples they gathered was strategic or a mistake. The arguments the students gave to justify their choices in categorizing examples of mixing as a mistake or as a strategy proved to be a form of folk linguistics. In contrast to language attitude research, which aims to uncover unconscious attitudes to linguistic variants among language users, folk linguistics 'tries to dig deeper into people's conscious language attitudes on variants by asking them more direct questions' (Oberhofer, 2011, p. 20). Preston (1993, pp. 215–216) writes that: 'It should go without saying that sociolinguistic investigation of any sort, but particularly language attitude measures among respondents who hold such beliefs, will tap into these folk notions. Interpretations which ignore the powerful role that folk notions are bound to play at best lose an opportunity and at worst are very likely to misinterpret the findings of even carefully crafted experiments.' Understanding how students and other language users think about pronoun mixing will help when designing attitudinal experiments on pronoun mixing by including factors that are named as relevant by the students and also by taking into account individual variation among the students.

Before we present an overview of the arguments that students gave in categorizing examples of mixing as a strategy or a mistake, let us mention a caveat. It could be argued

that our questions may have been biased. We may have pressured the students into thinking about pronoun mixing as a pragmatic strategy rather than (just) a deviation from the norm. Despite our efforts to apprise students of the possibility of pronoun mixing being used as a strategy, students still felt that 48 examples were mistakes, 35 examples were categorized as strategic and 34 examples showed arguments in both directions. One could also claim that by mentioning the ideas that mixing could be both strategic and a mistake pressured students into using both labels. If it is true that they all used both labels because they felt pressured to do so, it is still interesting to see what criteria they used to distinguish between the two labels. Note too that students labeled more examples as a mistake than as a strategy.

The arguments students gave for interpreting mixing as a strategy roughly fell into two categories. (1) Either there was no clear default form, and T and V fulfilled separate functions. *Je-T* was perceived as being more friendly and *u-T* as being more professional; another factor was whether it was in an opening or closing statement versus within the heart of the message. (2) V was used in contexts where T was the default form, either as a form of humor or language play or to express urgency. The brief switch to V is facilitated in formulaic use and abbreviations because the pronoun is more likely to be perceived to be part of a chunk, e.g., not analyzed as morphologically complex and hence less associated with a pronoun choice.

The formula *danku* (thank you-V, traditionally with a space between *dank* and *u*, but written as one word in WhatsApp and the woordenlijst.org which lists the official spelling of Dutch includes both *danku* and *dankje* as interjections/a formulaeic like words) was categorized as sounding *leuk* ('fun'), and the abbreviation AUB[1] (if you-V please) was considered to express more urgency. Students characterized switches in utterance without a default pronoun as a mistake (1) when the text contained spelling errors or other indications of sloppiness, (2) when the mixing was intrasentential, (3) when the mixing was frequent, and (4) when the students felt that there was an absence of strategic or conflicting needs and, hence, in their eyes, an absence of the need to employ a mixing strategy. An illustration of point 1 is a student pair who writes about an example that it is a mistake because 'the language errors in the text show that it was typed up too fast and not read back properly.[2] Another student pair writes that mixing was a mistake because the website is unsafe anyway, and the texts on the website contain many mistakes.[3] An illustration of an argument in line with point 2 is a student pair who argues that a particular example was a mistake 'because *u* and *je* are literally used within one sentence.'[4] An argument in line with point 3 comes from a student pair who writes that an example of mixing is a mistake because 'it happened multiple times and was completely illogical to do.'[5] An argument in line with point 4 is a student pair who writes that mixing is a mistake because no distinction is made between occurrences or topics.[6] Another student pair writes that pronoun mixing in a manual for a vacuum cleaner was a mistake because 'there is no need to be strategic, since you already bought the vacuum cleaner.' Arguments in favor of mixing are the different functions or roles of the two pronouns used. For example, a student pair says mixing could be strategic because 'by using je you come off as more personal, but they want to finish it professionally (e.g., using *u*).[7]

4. Study 2 Socrative Questionnaire

The first study gave us some insight into the factors that might play a role in the reception of address pronoun mixing by the students. More accepted it if there was a clear division of tasks between the pronouns, such as using a V-form for an opening or closing remark rather than when the forms seemed to be randomly mixed. Frequent switching back and forth in mixing seems more problematic than a single switch; intersentential

mixing seems more accepted than intrasentential mixing, and other characteristics of the text affect the interpretation of mixing: if the text contains signs of sloppiness, such as spelling mistakes, mixing is more likely to be interpreted as a mistake. Some students also indicated that they perceived or produced V-forms in contexts where T is usually used as a form of mock politeness, as discussed in Vismans (2016), or to be funny or to express urgency. Formulaic speech and abbreviations seem to be most used in mixing. Based on the arguments in the first study, we designed a brief follow-up survey to gain insight into domains and consensus and variation among the students' perceptions of pronoun mixing. Our research questions were: (1) how do students feel about pronoun switching in general? (2) how many students share the intuition that humor and urgency can play a role in the use of V-forms in situations that have T as the default, and (3) do students rank the acceptability of the mixing examples in the same way and, if not, is it possible to determine why students differ in their rankings?

4.1. Participants

Like the first study, the present study was conducted among Netherlandic Dutch-speaking students in the tenth grade of the pre-university curriculum (4 vwo) at the Bertrand Russell College in Krommenie, the Netherlands. The survey was administered to 72 students divided between two classes, of whom a total of 66 students both completed the study and agreed to their responses being used for this study. The questionnaire was filled out on 18 January 2024, which was six weeks after the student science project took place. Although not all of the students provided full responses throughout, we excluded only one participant, as this student answered only the first question. We collected no background data from these participants so that data collection could be integrated seamlessly into the typical classroom setting. Moreover, we had no hypotheses regarding any particular participant characteristic and no further inclusion or exclusion criteria. By collecting no additional information, we also ensured participants' anonymity.

4.2. Socrative Survey

We used Socrative for the survey, an online classroom quiz app that students at this school are all familiar with. The survey consisted of ten questions: four open-ended questions followed by six multiple-choice questions, provided in full in the Appendix A. All questions tapped into the responses students provided during the actual student science part of the project. The first two open-ended questions asked about a student's general opinion of pronoun mixing both before and after their lesson on that topic. The next two open-ended questions asked students to provide examples of pronoun mixing that had a positive or a negative effect on them. The multiple-choice questions asked about the student's perception of the real-world examples of pronoun mixing that the students had previously submitted as homework. We selected these examples based on the criteria for liking and disliking mixing that the students themselves had formulated in the first study, allowing us to formulate expectations of how each example would affect the addressees' perception of the speaker. This combination of questions allowed us to quickly gauge how students perceive pronoun mixing in different contexts.

4.3. Procedure

The students' regular Dutch teachers administered the follow-up survey during a regular lesson. They provided students with introductory information about the study, ensured that students knew that their participation was voluntary, and also provided them with a QR code and web link that led to the survey in the Socrative environment. Students were allowed to use their laptops to complete the survey. Upon entering the survey, students were presented with a written version of the oral information the teacher

had imparted. To continue with the survey and consent to their responses being used for research purposes, students ticked a box affirming they had understood and agreed. To opt out of the study, students could tick *no* or simply close the survey. The teacher then administered the rest of the survey to the class. Because the survey was created and shared using the first author's account, students' responses were shared directly with the researchers, without the teacher or the school's having access to the data. This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the researchers' institution.

Our investigation had four goals: (1) we wanted to know how students evaluated mixing before and after the class, (2) we wanted to find out how their peers perceived the forms of mixing that the students themselves had provided, used to express urgency or to sound funny, (3) we wanted to see to what extent students consciously noticed mixing before and after the class, and (4) we wanted to compare rankings of real-life examples and determine to what extent the criteria mentioned on the student science project predicted the evaluation of the examples.

4.4. Open-Ended Questions: General Perception of Pronoun Switching

After the initial consent question, we started the survey with four open-ended questions about how the students perceived pronoun mixing: did they notice mixing before and after the class, and when do they perceive mixing as positive and when as negative? The first question asked how students felt about pronoun mixing before they had the class on mixing. Out of the 66 students who responded to this question, 43 said that they had never noticed it. Some (also) mentioned that they felt it was wrong. One student said that they were surprised "that adults make such dumb mistakes." A total of 10 students said they considered mixing a mistake, five students felt that it was *raar* 'weird' or *apart* 'unusual,' and 18 mentioned that they did not mind it. Some students (five) also mentioned that they recognized mixing in their own behavior. A total of seven students did not answer the question asked, but instead reflected more generally on how they liked the class. What was interesting is that a large number of students (43/67, so 64%) expressed that they did not consciously notice mixing before the class but were simply focused on whatever the message was.

The next question was how students felt about pronoun mixing after they had had their pronoun mixing class. 19 students remarked that mixing happens more often than one would think, and 17 answered that they were more sensitive to the possibility and hence noticed it more. Nine students literally said that the class had had no effect. Others implied that it did not have an effect on what they thought about mixing. One student wrote: *apart je kunt er toch gewoon 1 kiezen* 'strange you can just select one.' In total, 23 students remarked that they thought mixing was wrong, sloppy or weird; others said that they did not care or were not disturbed by the use of mixing. Five students remarked that they now felt that mixing was a special style. One student said they were sensitive to mixing right after class, but not any longer, because they just listen to the message conveyed. One student did not mention mixing but did say that they learned that when peers use the informal pronoun with older people, this is because of a good connection with these older people and not out of a lack of respect. One student wrote *leuk* 'nice.' It is not clear whether they felt mixing was *leuk* 'nice' or whether this answer was an evaluation of the class itself.

The third open-ended question was about when pronoun mixing had a positive effect on students. 14 students wrote something that did not say anything about mixing but reflected on one address term in particular. 16 students reported that shifting from V to T could have a positive effect on them. This is seen as positive, because it shows the addressee is *jij-waardig* 'you.T worthy.' This type of shift is the type of shift that fits with an interactive closeness system: an interlocutor moves to T because of increased closeness

between the interlocutors. Note that this is not really pronoun mixing in the sense of an affect system. Four students reported that they like emails from companies with informal *jij* so that they feel close, but which ended with the pronoun *u,* because that is *netjes* 'proper' or *zakelijk* 'professional.' 11 students said they could not think of an example, two said that mixing never has a positive effect on them, and two said that mixing has no effect on them. Five students said that they do it when they are joking with older people, and two reported that using *danku* 'thank you' in combination with an informal pronoun is *grappig* 'funny.' Eight students left this question blank.

The final open-ended question asked about when mixing had a negative effect on them. 18 out of 66 students could not come up with an example or left the question blank. Two students said that mixing was always wrong, and 18 students implied that they felt mixing was wrong. They did not name a specific situation but wrote in their answers that mixing was *slordig* 'sloppy,' that it looked *minder professioneel* 'less professional,' that it is an indication of spam or an illegitimate business and/or that it Is *lelijk* 'ugly.' 10 students cited problems with a specific pronoun rather than with mixing in general. Four students said they did not care, and two said they felt it was wrong in a formal context, such as in a school report. 16 students named specific situations or conditions that made mixing wrong for them, including the use in formal contexts such as a school report, an email from the city council, from a large company or a formal text in general (three students in total). Some mentioned that mixing is more wrong when the formal and informal pronoun switch frequently. These answers show that the norm against mixing is acquired and that this norm is considered to be most important in formal texts.

4.5. Perception of Fun and Urgency for V-Use in T-Contexts in Specific Real-World Examples

In the student science project, we asked students to gather examples of pronoun mixing, and we also asked them to hypothesize about the reasons for mixing. Some of the examples provided by the students were brief switches to V in T-contexts that they themselves used for very specific purposes, namely fun and urgency. They reported using the petrified abbreviation *aub* (*alstublieft* 'if you.V please') to express urgency and the use of the form *danku* ('thank you V') in informal texts because it sounded *leuker* ('more fun') than saying thank you with the T-form. Please note that the abbreviation ajb (if you.T please) is very marked and infrequent. We were interested in how peers perceived these brief switches to V in informal contexts that normally require the use of the T-form. Thus, for the present study, we asked all of the students if they recognized these uses. Question 5 concerned the abbreviation with the polite form *u*. We asked if they felt this form expressed more urgency than the abbreviation *ajb* 'if you.T please' with the informal pronoun *je*. We gave them five answer options for this question; Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the responses.

Almost half of the students (29 out of 66) confirmed that *aub* expressed a sense of urgency, whereas about a third of the students (21 of 66) did not feel a difference in urgency, 11 felt no difference whatsoever, 10 others felt a difference but not related to urgency, and 13 indicated that the form *ajb* is infrequent, which makes it hard to compare. The other answers included one student who ticked all five boxes, one who ticked both D and E (which cannot be true together), and one who checked both answer A as well as answer D. This answer is reported under 'other.'

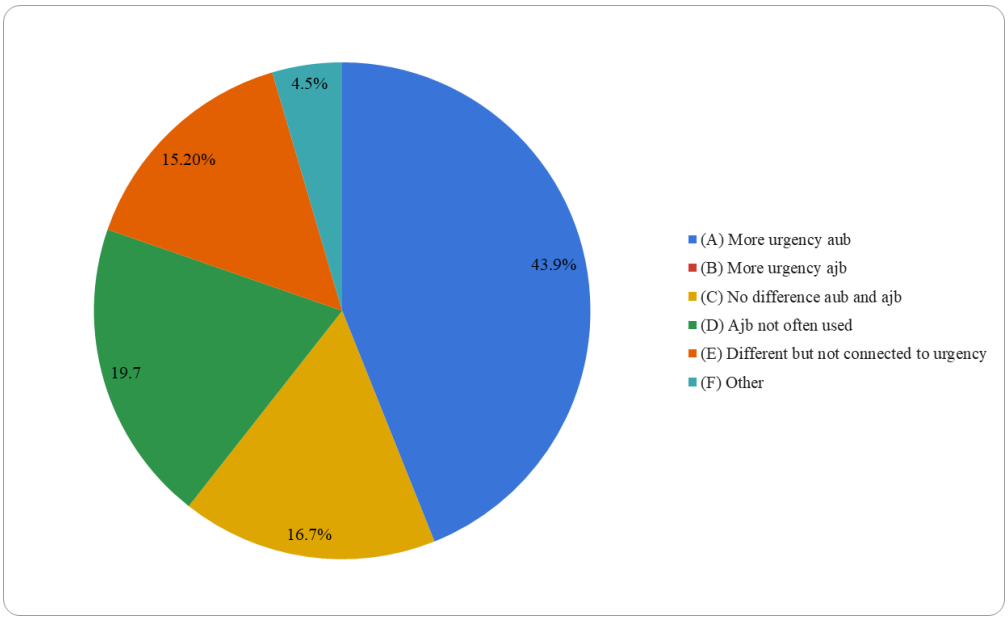


Figure 1. Responses to question 5. "Do you feel more urgency with aub than with ajb?".

The other self-reported type of switching concerned the form *danku* ('thank you V') that students write ('thank you V') to their friends (for example, after sharing information on homework via WhatsApp) because it sounds leuker 'nicer.' We now asked all the students if they perceived *danku* (the students all leave out the space between dank 'thank' and u 'you.V,' which is a deviation from the norm, which requires a space between the pronoun and the verb) as nicer than dank je 'thank you.T.' Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses across all answer options. About a quarter of the students indeed perceived this form as nicer, but most of the students did not care.

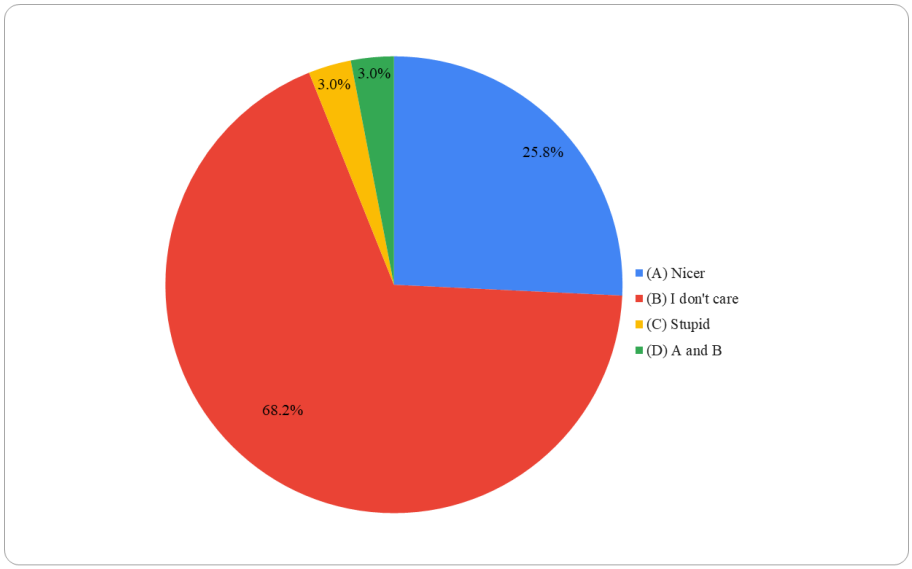


Figure 2. Responses to question 6. "Do you think it sounds nicer if someone says or writes danku 'thank-you.V' rather than dank je 'thank-you.T'"?

Two students replied with answers A and B (*yes, I think it is nicer* and *I don't care*). We did not know what to do with these answers and categorized them under 'other.' Most of the students (45) answered that they did not care. 17 out of 66 students said they did feel that *danku* is nicer, and two students found the use of *danku* instead of *dank je* stupid.

4.6. Ranking Real-World Examples of Mixing

The next questions (8 through 11) made use of the real-life examples the students themselves had shared and analyzed as either a mistake, a strategy or a bit of both. Frequent arguments used to classify mixing as strategic were that the pronouns had a clear division of tasks (opening or closing versus heart of the text) and did not occur within a sentence or when the switched form was part of formulaic speech such as *thank you*. Mixing was more likely to be classified as a mistake when the mixing was frequent, intrasentential or without a clear division of tasks between the pronouns. We selected four examples of mixing and asked students to evaluate them. We expected students to differ in their openness to accepting mixing, so we expected students to vary in how they liked the examples, but we also expected students to rank examples in the same order.

The first real-life example we showed the students (example A) was a bank offering courses in a customer loyalty program. The text is given in (8), with the relevant pronouns in boldface type.[8] The example shows intrasentential mixing in quite an extreme way: the V and the T-pronoun are adjacent to each other. There is no clear division between tasks for the pronouns. Based on the arguments provided by the students while classifying examples, we expected students to have a negative view of this ad.

Bank loyalty program excerpt (Example A)

9.

Heb	**je**	sinds	kort	een	digitale	spiegelreflexcamera	
Have	you.T	since	short	a	digital	single-lens reflex camera	
of	wil	**je**	**uw**	camera	beter	leren	kennen?
or	want	you.T	your.V	camera	better	learn.INF	know.INF?

'Did you.T recently acquire a digital single lens reflex camera or do you.T want to get to know your.V camera better?'

Example B shown in (9) is an advertisement for a dance class. The addressee is first addressed with T, and the formulaic ending uses V. Because there is only intersentential mixing, because there is a division of tasks, and because the use with V is more formulaic, we expected the students to be neutral or positive about this example.

10. Dance lessons (Example B)

Vink aan	voor	welke	les	**je**	een	proefles
Select	for	which	lesson	you.T	a	try-out.lesson
wil	aanvragen.(. . .)					
want	apply.INF.(. . .)					
Voor	actuele	tarieven	en	lestijden	kunt	**u**
For	current	prices	and	lesson.times	can	you.V
terecht	op	onze	website.			
land	on	our	website.			
Voor	vragen	kunt	**u**	contact opnemen	via	(. . .)
For	questions	can	you.V	contact	via	(. . .)l.

'Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (. . .) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (. . .) with questions.'

Example C, as in (10), is an ad in an online marketplace for stickers for a wheelie bin. The beginning of the message uses the weak informal pronoun *je*, the middle of the text uses the V-form *u*, and the very final sentence uses the stressed and very direct informal pronoun *jij* (*welke sticker kies jij* 'what sticker do you.T choose). Because there is switching without formulaic use, we expected appreciation of this example to be in between the previous two: we assumed that it would seem better than the bank example, because there

is no intrasentential switching, yet not as good as Example B (dance lessons), because the division of tasks between the pronouns is less clear.

11. 'Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (. . .) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (. . .) with questions.'

Wheelie bin sticker ad (Example C)

Maak	**uw**	kliko	extra	herkenbaar	met
Make	your.V	wheelie bin	extra	recognizable	with
de	Kliko	stickers.			
the	wheelie bin	stickers.			
De	uitstekende	kwaliteit	van	de	sticker
The	outstanding	quality	of	the	sticker
zorgt ervoor					
ensures					
dat	de	stickers	goed	bevestigd	blijven
that	the	stickers	well	attached	stay
op	**uw**	container.			
on	your.V	bin.			
Uw	kliko	is	zodoende	altijd	te
Your.V	wheelie bin	is	thus	always	to
herkennen	in	een	groep	containers,	
recognize	in	a	group	bins,	
met	**uw**	eigen	persoonlijke	sticker.	
with	your.V	own	personal	sticker.	
Welke	sticker	kies	**jij**?		
Which	sticker	choose	you?		

'Make your.V wheelie bin extra recognizable with the wheelie bin stickers. The outstanding quality of the sticker ensures the stickers remain firmly attached to your bin. Your.V wheelie bin can therefore always be spotted in a group of bins, with your own personal sticker. Which sticker do you.T choose?'

Example D as in (11) was an order confirmation for a web purchase at an international fashion chain, see (6). The message thanks the customer for their purchase and notes that the store will send the customer a notification when their order has been shipped, all using the V-form (three instances). The sender then switches to the T-form (two instances) to add that the customer will receive their shipment soon.

12. Order confirmation (Example D)

Bedankt	voor	**uw**	aankoop.				
Thanks	for	your.V	purchase.				
Wij	sturen	**u**	een	nieuwe	mail	wanneer	**uw**
We	send	you.V	a	new	email	when	your.V
bestelling	onderweg	is.					
order	underway	is.					
Binnenkort	ontvang	**je**	**je**	bestelling.			
Soon	receive	you.T	your.T	order.			

'Thank-you for your.V purchase. We will send you.V a new message when your.V order is on its way. You.T will receive your.T order soon.'

Because there is a lack of frequent switching in this example, the sender should be viewed somewhat favorably, but we also expected some negative views: there is a less clear division of labor, as T and V both precede the noun *bestelling* ('order'), and the order of using T and V could be problematic. When students indicated that they liked it when a store used both T and V, they explicitly indicated that they liked to be addressed with *je* first, to establish social contact and to end with a polite pronoun (in formulaic speech) to indicate professionalism. The ad goes against the order the students indicated they preferred in the citizen science homework (first T, then V) and against their wish to use V in formulaic speech, which would be indicators of opposition to mixing, but there is no intrasentential usage, which we expected to make the use more acceptable.

Figure 3 shows the responses to our questionnaire. The striped bars show the answers we expected based on the students' arguments. The actual answers aligned with our expectations only for example D; we expected students to be either negative or neutral about this example, and this was indeed the case. We expected students to like example B the most; instead, we found that the number of dislikes for this example was the lowest. It might seem as though liking the most and having the least dislikes are the same thing, but there is a subtle difference. Nobody really disliked the example very strongly, but the example was also not evaluated very positively. Mixing seems to be somewhat accepted in this context, but not many students were enthusiastic about the example. If the students indicated that they liked mixing and were positive about mixing in more than one example, they were least likely to be positive about example B. If students indicated that they liked example B, they were not likely to like any of the other examples of mixing. Examples A and C were more often disliked, but also more often liked.

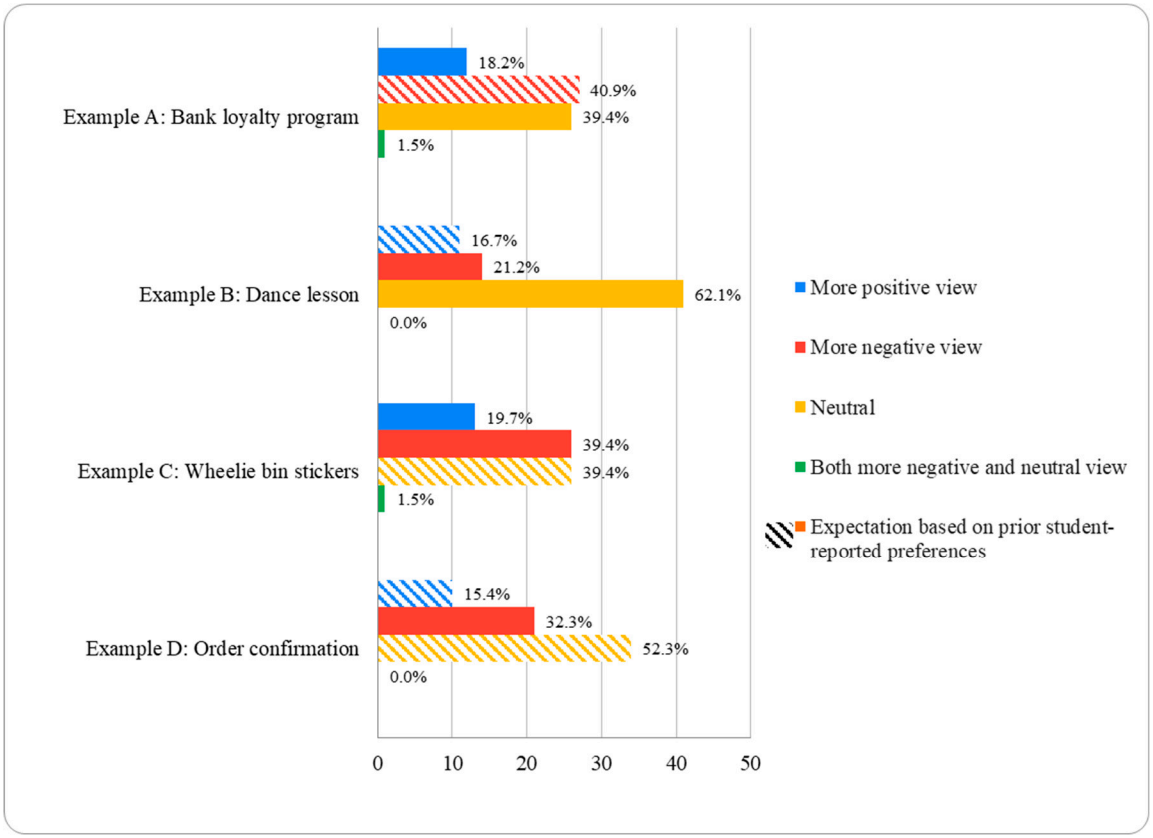


Figure 3. Summary of responses regarding real-life examples of pronoun mixing.

5. Discussion

This article explored the perception of pronoun mixing by Netherlandic Dutch high school students in two studies. The first study reported on arguments students provided to classify pronoun mixing in real-world examples as a strategy or as a mistake. Examples of an acceptable temporary switch to V in contexts that usually require the use of a T-form were humor and the expression of urgency via the petrified form AUB (if you_V please). The first study further suggested that pronoun mixing is most acceptable when (1) there is a clear division of tasks between the pronouns, (2) when the switch is intersentential rather than intrasentential, and (3) when the text is free of linguistic errors. The second study explored what generalizations could be made based on the results of the first study.

The general part of the questionnaire revealed in study 2 revealed that most students had never noticed pronoun mixing before the class, and some stopped noticing it again following completion of the student science project. If students notice mixing, it is easier for them to formulate what makes this unacceptable than acceptable. The observation by some students in the first study that a brief switch to V is possible as a form of humor was recognized by a quarter of the students. The idea that the petrified form AUB ('as you-V please) can express urgency was recognized by half of the students.

When we asked students to rank real-life examples, we expected—based on the results of study 1—that the examples that would be liked best would be in informal texts that would have clearly differential uses of the pronoun, would be intersentential in a neat text, and be moderate in the number of switches. These expectations were not all borne out. Examples that conformed to these characteristics were analyzed in the most neutral way. However, examples with intrasentential mixing were rated by some as most liked and by some as least liked. One finding of the ranking exercise was thus that there was a considerable variation among individual evaluations of mixing and types of mixing. There

were some students who strongly disliked any kind of mixing and others who were quite positive about mixing. If students liked some forms of mixing, they did not necessarily like the same examples. When one of us expressed surprise about the fact that some students indicated liking example A, which involved heavy intrasentential mixing. we asked an adolescent acquaintance if she could understand why students might have indicated they liked example A, and she responded, "It is like mixing sweet and salty popcorn: it works if both flavors are combined, but when you start with one flavor and then move to the other, such as in example B, it makes no sense. It is like you forgot what you wanted, but if you mix them, it is a style. You are nice and you show respect." We concluded that some students may have reasoned in a similar manner and appreciated mixing as a style. Other students reserved mixing for more formulaic use. If students were negative about mixing, they were the least negative about formulaic uses. In the absence of demographic data, apart from the age and the education level of the students, it is impossible to determine whether a factor such as gender played a role in the variation among respondents' perceptions. Future research could focus on these factors, perhaps among older age groups, where ethical permission to gather such data is more easily obtained.

Some of our results align with existing research. The role of humor in short switches to V was discussed earlier in Vismans (2016). For example, the observation that the students often did not notice mixing matches observations made by Rosseel et al. (2024). They investigated to what extent the presence of informal features (use of intensifiers, use of English and informal punctuation) affects the saliency of a pronoun switch in two conditions of business to customer communication. They provided various versions of a letter that informed customers about the benefits of the insurance they had just taken out. Rosseel et al. (2024) found that fewer than 1 in 15 respondents noticed that one of the differences between the versions was the choice of either T- or V-pronoun. This was true both for participants with a language-oriented background and those without a language-oriented background. They write: 'One can question how salient the use of T/V pronouns actually is for the recipient of the message.' Note, however, that Rosseel et al. (2024) investigate Belgian Dutch, whereas our data concern Netherlandic Dutch. For speakers of Belgian Dutch, the *j*-forms that are considered as informal neutral forms in Northern Dutch have an "import" association (Vandekerckhove, 2005, 2007) and are hence neither neutral nor very informal.

Although the Netherlandic Dutch and the Belgian Dutch situation cannot be directly compared, it remains true that the evaluation of mixed forms is often very unconscious. It would therefore be good to test the effect of the ads in a more controlled setting, such as in attitudinal research. Can we observe an effect of mixing on the appreciation of the sender, even if the recipients of the message are not consciously aware of the mixing? Do individual differences in conscious evaluation of mixing, such as liking or disliking intrasentential mixing, affect unconscious effects of appreciation? Controlling for topic engagement would be recommended here, as Jansen and Janssen (2005) report that if readers are not very involved with a topic, the pronoun choice does not matter to them.

Up till now research that has investigated the effect a term of address has on addressees has looked at the use of just one pronoun. As mentioned in the introduction, these investigations show that both T and V have negative and positive associations which are partially context dependent. de Hoop et al. (2023) show that V-pronouns are the preferred pronoun in Netherlandic Dutch HR emails, both in letters of rejection and letters of acceptance. Leung et al. (2023) show that brands associated with high competence align better with the V-pronoun whereas brands associated with warmth align better with the T-pronoun. Although HR tends to favor a V-pronoun in its communications, Sadowski et al. (2024) show that using a T-form can have a positive effect on willingness to donate

money. Leung et al. (2023) show that when a brand is strongly associated with competence and not so much with warmth, the V-pronoun is preferred, and when a brand is strongly associated with warmth and not so much with competence, there is a strong preference for the T-pronoun. If a brand scores low both on competence and warmth, or if it scores high both on competence and warmth, there is a preference for the default T, but the preference is less marked than when warmth is high and competence is low. Given that both pronouns have positive as well as negative associations, it would be interesting to test experimentally if mixed pronoun use could maximize the positive associations of both pronouns. For example, might it be the case that a product could be associated both with friendliness and professionalism if the right mix of pronouns were used? Would requests for a donation in a text that uses mainly *u* work better if a brief switch to *je* were made for the request itself because *je* is perceived as less direct than *u*?

We did not include examples of address titles such as Madam or Sir in our project, but while collecting data we found examples with the use of titles in combination with the pronoun *je*. The descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997) suggests that these formal titles only be used with the V-form, but this no longer seems to be the case, offering another way of balancing different needs vis-à-vis the addressee. Our explorative investigation has shown that mixing occurs in the daily lives of Netherlandic Dutch speakers and that the teenagers tended not to notice when it happened. We assume that not only teenagers but most Netherlandic Dutch speakers do not consciously notice mixing and that despite the fact that pronoun mixing goes against the prescriptive norm, mixing might provide an effective way to balance interlocutors' conflicting needs. If attitudinal research were to show a link between explicit opinions and implicit evaluations, this would imply that knowledge of pronoun preferences in the target audience is relevant and should be incorporated into personalized ads.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. The participants of Study 2 knew of the aim of the study and the data were gathered and stored anonymously.

Data Availability Statement: Data are stored on Figshare and available upon motivated request.

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Appendix A

These are the question-and-answer options students received in the Socrative questionnaire. Questions 6 through 10 also included images of examples of pronoun use; these images are omitted here, but the text is included.

#	Question and Answer Options	
1	Wat vond je vóór de les over aanspreekvormen van het mengen van *u* en *je/jij*? 'Before the lesson about forms of address, what did you think of mixing you.V and you.T?'	
	(Open)	
2	Wat dacht je na de les over aanspreekvormen van het mengen van *u* en *jij*? 'What did you think after the lesson about forms of address mixing you.V and you.T?'	
	(Open)	
3	Kun je een voorbeeld geven van wanneer het mengen van aanspreekvormen op jou een positief effect heeft? Leg uit waarom. 'Can you give an example of when mixing forms of address has a positive effect on you? Explain why.'	
	(Open)	
4	Kun je een voorbeeld geven van wanneer het mengen aanspreekvormen op jou een negatief effect heeft? Leg uit waarom. 'Can you give an example of when mixing forms of address has a negative effect on you? Explain why.'	
	(Open)	
5	Sommigen van jullie schreven dat ze tegen vrienden of klasgenoten normaal gesproken *je* zeggen, maar soms toch *danku* zeggen. Dat doen ze bijvoorbeeld om diegenen te bedanken voor een antwoord op een huiswerkvraag. Iemand van jullie schreef: "*Danku* klinkt leuker dan *dank je*". Vind jij het inderdaad leuker als iemand *danku* zegt of schrijft dan *dank je*? 'Some of you wrote that you normally say you to friends or classmates, but sometimes say thank-you.V. You do this, for example, to thank those who have answered a homework question. One of you wrote: "Thank-you.V sounds nicer than thank you.T." Do you indeed like it more when someone says or writes thank-you.V than thank you.T?'	
	A	Ja, dat vind ik leuker. 'Yes, I think it is nicer.'
	B	Het maakt me niet uit. 'I don't care.'
	C	Nee, dat vind ik stom. 'No, I think it is stupid.'
	D	A and B
6	Iemand schreef dat *aub* misschien gebruikt wordt om duidelijk te maken dat er haast is. Voel jij inderdaad meer haast bij *aub*? (De hoofdletters in het voorbeeld kun je negeren.) 'Someone wrote that if you.V please might be used to make it clear that there is urgency. Do you indeed feel more urgency about please? (You can ignore the capital letters in the example.)' AUB-voorbeeld Whatsapp 'thank-you.V example Whatsapp' WIL JIJ AUB KAARTJES KOPEN? 'WOULD YOU.V PLEASE BUY TICKETS?' Oke 'Ok' Voor twee? 'For two?' JAAA 'YAAAAS'	
	A	Ja, ik voel meer haast bij *aub* dan bij *ajb*. Yes, I feel a stronger sense of urgency with *aub* than with *ajb*.
	B	Nee, ik voel meer haast bij *ajb* than bij *aub*. No, I feel more urgency with *ajb* than with *aub*.
	C	Nee, aub en ajb geven voor mij evenveel haast weer, ze hebben op mij verder hetzelfde effect Nee, aub and ajb express the same sense of urgency; they affect me the same way.
	D	Nee, want *ajb* komt volgens mij weinig voor, dus ik kan het niet goed vergelijken. No, *ajb* is used so infrequently that is hard for me to make comparisons.
	E	Nee, voor mij is er wel een verschil tussen *aub* en *ajb*, en ik kom beide vormen tegen, maar dat verschil heeft niets te maken met haast of urgentie. No, I think *aub* and *ajb* are different, and I encounter both, but the difference is not related to a sense of urgency.
	F	Other
7	Door deze mengvorm denk ik postiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used. Mengvormvoorbeeld (bank) 'Mixing example (bank)' Heb **je** sinds kort een digitale spiegelreflexcamera Have you.T since short a digital single-lens reflex camera of wil **je** **uw** camera beter leren kennen? or want you.T your.V camera better learn.INF know.INF? 'Did you.T recently acquire a digital single lens reflex camera or do you.T want to get to know your.V camera better?'	

#	Question and Answer Options	
	A	postiever 'more positive'
	B	negatiever 'more negative'
	C	geen van beide 'neither'
8	Door deze mengvorm denk ik postiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used. Mengvormvoorbeeld (dansles) Mixing example (dance class) Vink aan voor welke les **je** een proefles wil aanvragen.(. . .) Select for which lesson you.T a try-out.lesson want apply.INF.(. . .) Voor actuele tarieven en lestijden kunt **u** terecht op onze website. For current prices and lesson.times can you.V land on our website. Voor vragen kunt **u** contact opnemen via (. . .) For questions can you.V contact via (. . .)l. 'Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (. . .) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (. . .)	
	A	postiever 'more positive'
	B	negatiever 'more negative'
	C	geen van beide 'neither'
9	Door deze mengvorm denk ik postiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. 'This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used.' Mengvormvoorbeeld (kliko) 'Mixing example (wheelie bin) Maak **uw** kliko extra herkenbaar met de Kliko stickers. Make your.V wheelie bin extra recognizable with the wheelie bin stickers. De uitstekende kwaliteit van de sticker zorgt ervoor The outstanding quality of the sticker ensures dat de stickers goed bevestigd blijven op **uw** container. that the stickers well attached stay on your.V bin. **Uw** kliko is zodoende altijd te herkennen in een groep containers, Your.V wheelie bin is thus always to recognize in a group bins, met **uw** eigen persoonlijke sticker. with your.V own personal sticker. Welke sticker kies **jij**? Which sticker choose you? 'Make your.V wheelie bin extra recognizable with the wheelie bin stickers. The outstanding quality of the sticker ensures the stickers remain firmly attached to your bin. Your.V wheelie bin can therefore always be spotted in a group of bins, with your own personal sticker. Which sticker do you.T choose?'	
	A	postiever 'more positive'
	B	negatiever 'more negative'
	C	geen van beide 'neither'

#	Question and Answer Options										
10	Door deze mengvorm denk ik postiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. 'This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used.' Mengvormvoorbeeld (bestelbevestiging) 'Mixing example (order confirmation)' Bedankt voor **uw** aankoop. Thanks for your.V purchase. Wij sturen **u** een nieuwe mail wanneer **uw** bestelling onderweg is. We send you.V a new email when your.V order underway is. Binnenkort ontvang **je** **je** bestelling. Soon receive you.T your.T order. 'Thank-you for your.V purchase. We will send you.V a new message when your.V order is on its way. You.T will receive your.T order soon.'										
	A	postiever 'more positive'									
	B	negatiever 'more negative'									
	C	geen van beide 'neither'									

Notes

1 The abbrevation AUB stands for alsublieft (if you_V please) and the dictionarry van Dale states that it functions as a 'versterking bij een nadrukkelijk verzoek ('a reinforcement of an emphatic request'). Our personal experience is that the letters of the abbreviation can be sounded out in spoken language as a reinforcement as well.

2 The student originally wrote in Dutch: 'want door de taalfouten in de tekst blijkt dat er te snel is getypt en niet goed is terug gelezen.

3 The student originally wrote in Dutch De website is sowieso al onveilig en de teksten op de website bevatten ook al veel taalfouten.

4 The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'omdat er letterlijk in dezelfde zin 'u' en 'je' wordt gebruikt'.

5 The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'omdat meerdere keren is gebeurd en totaal niet logisch is om te doen'.

6 The students orginally wrote in Dutch: er word niet onderscheid gemaakt in een gebeurtenis of onderwerp'.

7 The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'want als ze je gebruiken dan kan het persoonlijker overkomen, maar ze willen hem wel formeel afsluiten'.

8 The questionnaire contained screenshot images of each example. For privacy reasons, we are only including the text of each example here. The effect of formatting on pronoun use (for example, visual distance between pronouns may also impact how pronouns are perceived or used) falls outside the scope of this paper. The glosses are provided line by line, but the general translation is given for the text as a whole to better approximate the original presentation.

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