I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates whether nonnative listeners can be more flexible than native listeners in their use of perceptual cues for making phoneme distinctions. In a previous study (Broersma, 2005), Dutch and English listeners categorized English obstruents at the end of nonwords as voiced or voiceless. Like English, Dutch has an obstruent voicing distinction, but unlike English, it has no voiced obstruents at the end of words in isolation (Booij, 1995). Thus, although Dutch listeners are familiar with the voicing distinction from their native language, they are not familiar with making this distinction in final position, or with the use of preceding vowel duration as a cue for this distinction. Preceding vowel duration is a perceptual cue for word-medial voicing distinctions in Dutch (Van den Berg, 1989), but a less prominent one than for the final voicing distinction in English (e.g., Raphael, 1972). Dutch listeners seem to be able to generalize their knowledge about vowel duration and word-medial obstruent voicing to word-final obstruents, as they categorize the duration of vowels differently depending on the underlying voicing of Dutch word-final obstruents (Jongman et al., 1992).

Previous results (Broersma, 2005) showed that Dutch listeners accurately distinguished English final voicing contrasts, but that they did not use vowel duration in the same way English listeners did. In an experiment where vowel duration was made uninformative and even misleading, English listeners persisted in using this cue for making final /v/-/f/ distinctions, whereas Dutch listeners did not use the cue significantly. Vowel duration was made uninformative to preclude the possibility that the Dutch listeners used vowel duration only as a result of the nature of the stimulus materials. This leaves open the possibility, however, that Dutch listeners did not use vowel duration only as a result of the nature of the materials. Thus, the Dutch listeners might have more flexibly adapted to the information in the stimulus materials than the English listeners.

In the Broersma (2005) experiment, an 11-step /v/ to /f/ continuum was combined with a phonetically long and a phonetically short vowel. However, each participant heard only one of the vowels throughout the experiment. Thus, vowel duration was not informative and, moreover, mismatched the voicing information in the fricatives for some of the items, as v-like fricatives were sometimes preceded by a short vowel and f-like fricatives by a long vowel. In order to assess the use of vowel duration as a cue for final fricative voicing, 50-percent crossover points in the conditions with long and short preceding vowels were compared. For the English listeners, there was a significant shift in the 50-percent crossover point, with more “voiced” responses in the Long Vowel condition than in the Short Vowel condition. For the Dutch listeners, there was a small trend in the same direction, but this was not significant. Further, the Dutch listeners’ categorization curve was steeper than the English listeners’ curve in the Long Vowel condition. (There was no difference in the Short Vowel condition.)

In the same experiment, for a final /z/ to /s/ continuum, no shift in the 50-percent crossover points in the Long Vowel versus the Short Vowel condition was found, for the English
TABLE I. The 50-percept crossover point and steepness of the categorization curve at that point (with lower values indicating steeper slopes), for Dutch and English listeners, in the Long Vowel and Short Vowel conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Dutch Long</th>
<th>Dutch Short</th>
<th>English Long</th>
<th>English Short</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. RESULTS

Each subject’s categorization curve was fitted with logistic regression to determine the 50-percent crossover point and the steepness of the curve at that point. First, the results of the practice part and the main part of the experiment were analyzed together (Table I, part 1-6), with an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with 50-percent crossover point as the dependent variable and vowel duration and native language as independent variables. There was a significant interaction between vowel duration and native language ($F(1,41) = 5.67, p < 0.05$), showing that the effect of vowel duration was larger for the English listeners than for the Dutch listeners. However, the main effect of vowel duration was significant not only for the English listeners ($F(1,18) = 32.51, p < 0.001$), but also for the Dutch listeners ($F(1,23) = 4.74, p < 0.05$). Thus, in contrast to Broersma (2005), when the practice part was included, Dutch listeners showed significant evidence of the use of vowel duration for final fricative voicing decisions.
Next, the practice part was analyzed separately (Fig. 1 and Table I, part 1). There was a main effect of vowel duration \((F(1,47)=15.15, p<0.001)\), no main effect of native language \((F(1,47)<1)\), and no interaction between native language and vowel duration \((F(1,47)=1.84, p>0.1)\). Thus, in the practice part, Dutch and English listeners’ responses depended similarly on the duration of the preceding vowel.

Finally, the change in the use of vowel duration over time, in particular from the practice part to the main part of the experiment, was assessed. The main part of the experiment was split into parts of the same length as the practice part (44 trials). The practice part was called Part 1, and the main part was divided into Parts 2–6, with Part 2 containing the first 44 trials of the main part, Part 3 the next 44 trials, and so on. Part 6 contained only 33 trials. There was a three-way interaction among Part, vowel duration, and language \((F(5,205)=2.40, p<0.05)\). Crucially, comparing the results of the practice (Part 1) to those of Part 2 (Fig. 1 and Table I, part 2), for the Dutch listeners, there was an interaction between Part and vowel duration \((F(1,25)=4.46, p<0.05)\). For these listeners, the effect of vowel duration was significant in Part 1 \((F(1,25)=5.63, p<0.05)\), but not in Part 2 \((F(1,26)=1.2, p>0.1)\). For the English listeners, there was no interaction between Part and vowel duration for Part 1 versus 2 \((F(1,21)=1.97, p>0.1)\). Comparing all consecutive Parts in a similar, pairwise manner (i.e., Part 2 with 3, 3 with 4, 4 with 5, and 5 with 6), there were no other interactions between Part and vowel duration for the Dutch or for the English listeners. Thus, for the Dutch listeners, the use of vowel duration decreased from Part 1 to Part 2, and then stayed the same until the end of the experiment, while for the English listeners the use of vowel duration did not change throughout the experiment.

To assess how categorical the listeners’ perceptual performance was, ANOVAs on the steepness of the categorization curves were performed. Recall that in the main part of the experiment, the Dutch listeners’ categorization curve was steeper than the English listeners’ curve in the Long Vowel condition, and there was no difference in the Short Vowel condition. In the practice part, there was also an interaction between native language and vowel duration \((F(1,47)=5.88, p<0.05)\). Here, however, the English listeners’ categorization curve was steeper than the Dutch listeners’ curve in the Short Vowel condition \((F(1,24)=6.54, p<0.05)\), and there was no difference in the Long Vowel condition \((F(1,23)<1)\). Comparing Part 1 and Part 2, there was an interaction between Part and native language \((F(1,46)=5.40, p<0.05)\), and there were no such interactions for any other set of consecutive Parts. Thus, whereas the Dutch listeners’ perception was less categorical than the English listeners’ perception in the practice part, it was more categorical than the English listeners’ responses in the main part of the experiment.

**IV. DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the practice part shows that the Dutch listeners initially used vowel duration as a cue for final /v/-/f/ categorization to the same extent as English listeners did. However, their use of it rapidly diminished over time. The English listeners, on the other hand, did not change their use of vowel duration as a voicing cue throughout the experiment. The English listeners, who initially categorized (some of the) fricatives more categorically, later categorized (some of) them less categorically than the Dutch listeners: In the practice part they perceived the fricatives in the Short Vowel condition more categorically than the Dutch listeners did, whereas in the rest of the experiment they perceived the fricatives in the Long Vowel condition less categorically than the Dutch listeners did. This change occurred at the same time that the Dutch listeners changed their use of vowel duration (between the practice part and the first 44 trials of the main part of the experiment), and may be related to the Dutch listeners’ decreased use of this misleading cue and the English listeners’ persistent use of it. This confirms the conclusion from Broersma (2005) that the nonnative listeners did not use vowel duration as a voicing cue in the same way the English listeners did. It seems, however, that they were no less capable of using it, but that they adapted to the nature of the stimulus materials better than the native listeners did. Generally, nonnative listeners might be less certain about which perceptual cues to use than native listeners are. Further, the Dutch listeners’ limited experience with the use of vowel duration as a voicing cue might have made it easier for them to ignore this cue than for the native listeners, with their extensive experience with it.

While insecurity about the perceptual relevance of phonetic information and less practice with a perceptual cue might sometimes hinder speech perception, in this study, the nonnative listeners’ greater flexibility proved to be an advantage over the native listeners’ firmer and presumably more secure cue weighting strategies. For nonnative listeners, who
are trying to work out how phonetic information indicates phonological distinctions in a particular second language, which may be very different from their native language, a large degree of flexibility indeed seems useful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Sarah Schimke for suggesting these analyses, to Anita Wagner for help with spectral measurements, and to two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.