Chapter 9

A Frisian Update of Reversing Language Shift

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Introduction

The general meeting of the Provincial Council of Friesland on 24 April 1985 was an important milestone for language policy for the Frisian language. On that day the politicians adopted the conclusions and recommendations of the language planning report ‘Fan Geunst nei Rjocht’ (From favour to right), a title significant of the message they wanted to get across. The Frisian provincial representatives were well aware that their acceptance of this report was going against the views of the central state government. The vote symbolised the wide divergence on the development of a language policy for Frisian as a minority language (Van Dijk, 1987). As a solution to the ensuing deadlock – in good Dutch tradition – a compromise was worked out between both layers of government. It took shape in the form of a covenant. However, that document was only going to be signed after four years of long and tedious negotiations. Then, on top of all that, the highest court in the Netherlands rejected the heart of the covenant within a year, when it found the provisions for translations of official documents not applicable. Although there were no provisions on official language use in the system of laws, the court ruled that Dutch had to be taken for granted as the only language of all administrative affairs, until a law specifically would declare otherwise. In retrospect, the debate in April 1985 demarcates the end point of a process, which began in the mid-1960s, of increased political priority for language matters. In the 1990s issues surrounding the promotion of the Frisian language have gradually become less of a priority and are more and more incorporated into the daily business of ‘doing politics’.

At the threshold of the new millennium, on the basis of survey research (Gorter & Jonkman, 1995b), one may claim that in absolute numbers the Frisian language has more speakers than ever before. Even though such a statement has limited scientific value, it scores well in the media and it also
gives new heart to RLS activists. The claim about the absolute number of speakers also partially answers the main question of this article. On the surface things have not really changed in the position of the Frisian language over the last 25 years. The basic percentages of people who have the ability to understand (94%), speak (74%), read (67%) or write (17%) Frisian have remained more or less the same. Those four percentages have only changed a little between the first general sociolinguistic survey of 1967 (Pietersen, 1969) and the most recent one of 1994. Gorter and Jonkman (1995b: 55) concluded that the preliminary results of their survey, in terms of language ability, usage in intimate and more public settings and language attitudes, point to a stable situation for the Frisian language.

In this article I will look back over a period of roughly a decade and a half of Reversing Language Shift efforts on behalf of Frisian, in order to update the chapter on Frisian by Fishman (1991). I will first characterise this period of well over a decade by three major developments: (1) internationalisation in a European context, (2) legitimisation inside a framework of laws and regulations, and (3) stabilisation of the language situation. Subsequently, I will discuss step by step each of the eight stages of the GIDS model as Fishman presented them in his RLS book. I will apply the model again to Frisian using the most recent data.

Internationalisation

‘Europe’ has become part and parcel of the everyday reality of speakers of Frisian. This is true in the general sense as it would be for many inhabitants of the member states of the European Union (think only of the introduction of the common currency the ‘Euro’). It is also true in the sense that the Frisian language has become officially recognised as a European, autochthonous minority language in the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. The international context is conspicuously missing from Fishman’s model of the GIDS, even from the highest Stage 1, which is limited to ‘nationwide levels’. However, in my opinion the developments of European unification, in particular those aimed at the promotion of minority languages, do hold relevance for the way in which RLS efforts take place, also for the Frisian case. I can mention a few of those developments.

Numerous publications, symposia, study days, letters to the editor and discussion programmes have been filled with the consequences for the Dutch language of a ‘Europe without borders’. Leading up to the magic year ‘1992’, a lasting public debate arose in the Netherlands surrounding issues of national identity and language. Many opinion leaders have
painted a bleak future for Dutch. According to some, Dutch itself was likely to become some sort of threatened minority language. Or, as was sometimes said, the future position of Dutch in Europe can be compared to the position of Frisian as a minority language in the Netherlands. It has to be admitted that in line with the general lack of pride about their national language, quite a few people in the Netherlands would not mind at all if Dutch were cast in such a subordinate role, or even completely disappear and be replaced by English as a common language. Others rightfully point out that the chances of Dutch disappearing in the short run are quite small, as the language has some 20 million speakers and a strong infrastructure in two national states, the Netherlands and Belgium. This debate on national language and identity started in the late 1980s and has continued for over a decade now. As recently as 1998, the European Cultural Foundation (based in Amsterdam) launch a new programme under the title ‘Which languages for Europe?’. This programme is mainly concerned with the problems of the use of a multitude of languages in the institutions of the European Union (with 11 official languages). The programme also deals with ways to maintain the pluralinguality of Europe as a whole and it devotes some attention to minority languages such as Frisian. Another recent example is the initiative of the Dutch Language Union (Nederlandse Taalunie), which is the joint Belgian–Dutch governmental body responsible for the development of the Dutch Standard language. Early in 1999 this organisation initiated a project to discuss the ‘Institutional Status and Use of National Languages in Europe’. The project emphasises the contributions that smaller national languages such as Dutch can make to a European language policy. It is feared that these languages may become ‘crushed between the smaller minority languages and the “big three” (English, French and German)’.

Another development, which has already been mentioned, is the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages of the Council of Europe. After about 10 years of preparatory work the Charter was opened for signature by the member states in 1992. The Netherlands were among the first signatories. After ratification by five member states the Charter became effective in 1998. The Charter has been fully ratified for Frisian.

An important outcome of the process of internationalisation is the enormous increase in contacts among speakers of minority languages across Europe. Since the beginning of the 1980s the European Union has taken a lively interest in the question of minority languages. One significant measure was the introduction of a special budget line in 1982. This budget line enables support of projects to preserve and promote minority languages. For instance, the first international conference organised from
this budget line took place in Ljouwert (Friesland) in 1985. Later on many projects were carried out in Friesland with European Union support, among them the Mercator-Education project. 4

Although we may observe a general increase in awareness of the importance of language issues in the Netherlands, this has not really changed the basic attitude of the majority of politicians and civil servants towards Frisian. Ignorance seems to dominate and, even when there may be some goodwill, this is not easily translated into positive measures for Frisian.

Legal Framework

Alexander Schmidt (1997: 30) of the Max Planck institute of International Law in Heidelberg recently concluded: ‘the Frisian language underwent an important increase in prestige’ . In his article he describes what has happened in Friesland in terms of building a legal framework over the last decade. This legal framework can be summarised in four parts: (1) the Covenants between the State and the Province in 1989 and 1993; (2) the General Act on Administrative law in 1995; (3) the Act on Frisian in the Courts in 1997; and finally (4) the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1998. Each of these four parts of the legal framework will be briefly amplified below.

(1) In 1989 a Covenant on Frisian language policy was entered into between the State and the Province (as referred to in my introduction). The covenant was renewed in 1993 and negotiations began in 1998 for a new covenant with a long-term perspective of at least 10 years. These covenants include provisions for education, media, culture and scientific research, but also for public administration and the use of Frisian in the courts. Every section contains specific agreements and provisions for a budget for several parts of the ‘infra-structure’ of the Frisian language. Thus, for instance, arrangements are outlined for the only professional theatre company ‘Tryater’, the broadcasting organisation ‘Omrop Fryslân’ and the centre for scientific research – the ‘Fryske Akademy’. The advantage of a covenant is clear. It provides an exception and protection to statewide rules which otherwise would not easily apply to Frisian organisations. It also provides some safeguard against cutbacks. On the negative side one has to mention that the covenant has a limited duration and has to be renegotiated again and again. Moreover, it is only a weak form of legal protection and provided no guarantee. This was almost immediately made clear by the rejection by the highest court of the arrangements in the first covenant about the use of Frisian in public administration, which made the new legislation of 1995 necessary.
(2) Until recently the official language of the Netherlands was not established by law. Therefore, a motion was introduced in parliament to change the constitution, which is also a sign of the increased language awareness in the Netherlands. However, in the debate over the protection of Dutch, nothing even remotely near a two-thirds majority was to be found among the parliamentarians. The majority did rightfully think that formulating a phrase such as ‘Dutch is the language of the Netherlands’ would not in any way protect the language in a unified Europe. Thus the constitution was not going to be changed. A compromise was found in changing the Act on Administrative Law. In 1995 regulations were accepted that Dutch is declared to be the official language of public administration. Frisian has picked some fruits of this debate, as it has been included with some specific provisions in the same law. The Act has made it possible to use Frisian in most administrative affairs, both in written and in spoken form.

Still, such legal arrangements are only a first step, as can be illustrated by an example from the practice of language policy. As part of their language policy, the provincial government and many municipalities in Friesland ostensibly accept the rule of ‘following language choice’. This means that local government does not want to take the first step when using Frisian, and, in principle, only gives an answer in Frisian when addressed in that language. However, some research among civil servants showed what happens in reality. Of the few letters written by citizens in Frisian (less than 5% of all letters), these letters were not answered in Frisian in about two-thirds of cases (Gorter & Jonkman, 1994). There are several reasons why they were not answered in Frisian. I can give a few examples. The civil servant who had to write the answering letter could not write Frisian and he did not want to go to the translation service. Perhaps he just took an old example from his files of a similar case, or he was insecure about the Frisian legal terminology. He may also have felt that a Frisian letter would be disapproved of by his colleagues, etc. (Gorter, 1993). In this way, many practical reasons make civil servants almost always choose Dutch. Thus far, little has been done to change this phenomenon of ‘silent obstruction’, neither by the provincial administration nor by the municipalities.

(3) Similar problems existed with the official use of Frisian in the courts. Frisian was allowed to a limited extent by a law dating from 1956. According to that law, if one insisted, one could use Frisian before a court, at least when the presiding judge allowed one to do so. Therefore, only in a few cases would a person actually use the Frisian language. In 1997 a new law became effective which contains better provisions. Today, one does indeed have the full right to use the Frisian language in court. Whether many persons will now actually use it remains uncertain, seeing the hardi-
ness of traditions. Practice will tell how this law works and what jurisprudence will need to be added in order to implement it.

(4) The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is perceived as quite important by the Dutch State. After signing it in 1992, the Netherlands were among the first to ratify the Charter in 1995. One reason why the Dutch government wanted to be among the first signatories was the opportunity to play a leading role in European moral affairs, a role which it likes to play anyway. Thus, parliamentarians mentioned in their statements the importance of supporting the Charter in the light of developments of new democracies in Central Europe. Another reason was that by codifying the existing situation for Frisian it was possible to realise some minimal Frisian aspirations.

The Charter consists of three parts. Part I contains general considerations; in Part II the languages are entered for which the Charter will be applied; and Part III consists of a long list of more than 90 articles with specific provisions to preserve and promote minority or regional languages. When a state decides to sign Part III for a specified minority language, it has to choose a minimum of 35 articles which it will apply. In the case of the Netherlands five languages were brought under Part II (along with Frisian, the languages are Low-Saxon, Limburgish, Romani and Yiddish) but Part III has only been applied to Frisian. The approach chosen by the Netherlands is one of codification. The Charter was ratified by the Netherlands in such a way that specific provisions were chosen which were already being implemented.

Thus, the Charter affirms existing language policy drawn from the covenants and existing laws. Still it has a positive symbolic effect because the Dutch member state is binding itself in this way to international law. It also becomes more difficult to reverse existing measures. For Frisian RLS activists the hope of the Charter is that in the future it will be possible to sign additional provisions.

Stable Language Relationships

The common expectation in Friesland seems to be that the Frisian language is decreasing in use. There is a general sense of a ‘threatened language’ underlying the development of language policy and all kinds of other RLS efforts. In 1994 the Fryske Akademie carried out a new language survey among the population, in which many questions were repeated from earlier surveys in 1967 and 1980. The first results were eagerly awaited, but they were also quite surprising to many people. The survey did not find that Frisian was diminishing in use. Stability over the last
decade proved to be a characteristic of the language relationships in many ways. This can be illustrated by a central variable such as home language. The proportions for ‘language usually spoken at home’ are shown in the Table 9.1.

The outcomes of the table do make clear that the use of Frisian as a home language declined sharply between 1967 and 1980, from 71% to 56%.

Dutch as a home language in Friesland increased substantially between 1967 and 1980 to about one-third, but afterwards remained at about the same level. Migration is an important factor in this regard (see below).

Compared to home language, on average, the figures for proficiency in Frisian have changed less over time. In 1980 and 1994, three-quarters of the Frisian population could speak Frisian, whereas in the period 1967–80 a decrease of about 10% in speaking Frisian occurred. For understanding and reading Frisian the decline was small, within margins of error of the samples. Ability to write remained stable for the period 1967–80, while from 1980–94 an increase of over 5% was observed.

The distribution of language use of Frisian over different social domains shows an uneven pattern. A majority of the population habitually uses Frisian in the domains of the family, work and the village. Frisian holds a relative strong position there. In the more formal domains of education, media, public administration and law, the use of Frisian has made some inroads during the last decades, but overall it is still fairly limited.

Figure 9.1 contains a summary of 12 situations in public life for which the respondents have stated the language they ordinarily use. The situations can be distinguished according to the degree of formality and the familiarity with the interlocutor. A cross-tabulation has been made with language background: those respondents who have learned Frisian as their first language (L1) are distinguished from those who indicated that they could speak Frisian, but it was not their mother tongue (L2) (those who cannot speak Frisian are excluded).

At the bottom of the figure we find that 85% of Frisian L1-speakers habitually speak Frisian in the shop where they do their daily shopping, whereas only 42% of L2-speakers use Frisian. So language background

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seems to determine much more which language will be used in public than language ability by itself. In climbing this ‘mountain graph’ the gap between L1 and L2 speakers narrows in terms of the percentage that does use Frisian in the selected situations. For instance, when we look at language used with a medical specialist all seem to agree that this is a formal situation with status differences between both interlocutors and thus less ‘fit’ for Frisian.

Still, in the situation of language spoken with Dutch neighbours second-language learners barely use Frisian with their Dutch-speaking neighbours, where first language speakers do so in about one-fifth of the cases (19%). At the top of the graph there is very small difference between first-language speakers and second-language speakers of Frisian. Speaking to a ‘Dutch tourist’ is obviously something for which Frisian cannot be used. Of course, these results have informed us only about a limited number of situations of language choice. It is quite obvious that the language of the interlocutor is an important factor. Language choice is ‘person bound’.

Figure 9.1 Use of Frisian in 12 situations: as first language (L1) and as second language (L2)

On the basis of systematic participant observation a set of four rules for interactional language behaviour has been formulated which is a sort of ‘linguistic etiquette’ (Gorter, 1993: 167–81). The first rule is: [1] ‘Dutch is the
common language for everyone’. This rule does not take bilingualism into consideration. Because everyone can speak Dutch, everyone could – theoretically – act in accordance with this rule. There is a second, contrasting rule, which is [2] ‘Everyone may speak his/her own language’. Because almost all inhabitants can understand Frisian, in principle all Frisian-speakers could act in accordance with such a norm and speak Frisian all the time without making communication impossible. However, the rule of the right to speak their own language is only applied cautiously. Thus, additionally, a third rule can be formulated: [3] ‘Frisians must speak Dutch to Dutch-speakers and only Frisian to Frisian-speakers’. This rule seems quite simple and straightforward but, as could be shown, is not without problems when applied. For instance, second-language learners are a complicating factor. In case of a conversation with three or more participants still another rule is put forward: [4] ‘A speaker will have to accommodate to the language of conversation in the company of others’. There is a preference for one language in one conversation (Feitsma, 1984).

These four rules do not predict the language choice precisely in all cases. Interaction generally is a process of negotiation where not everything is arranged beforehand. The rules are part of the normative ideas about appropriate language use: what language is marked in certain cases and what is not. Frisian is usually the noticeable, the marked language and Dutch is the expected, the unmarked language. This is an indication of an underlying power process. Dutch sets the tone in the community, a fact which is very much taken for granted. The persistent alternation of Frisian and Dutch in one conversation usually costs an extra effort. A person who continues to speak Frisian to a non-Frisian person runs the risk of being labelled a ‘Frisian activist’ or, in other situations, as ‘someone who can’t even properly speak Dutch’.

The language situation is faced with a paradox: there is stability for the minority language Frisian, but at the same time an increase in the presence of the dominant language Dutch. One of the reasons is that bilingual speakers have learned to speak and use Dutch better, but at the same time have not ‘unlearned’ their Frisian.

**GIDS Stages for Frisian**

In my description of the eight stages of the GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) I will follow Fishman’s description of Frisian RLS efforts and update or criticise it where necessary. In his chapter Fishman (1991: 149) states that the province of Friesland as a ‘moderately prosperous region’ has ‘as a result . . . experienced relatively more in-
migration than out-migration for many years. ’This seems to be too general, because this was only true during the 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s the migration pattern changed again to what it had been for over a century: more people leaving than settling.

From 1960 till today the number of persons leaving the province every year has remained fairly constant, averaging ± 25,000. However, the number of newcomers has fluctuated from just over 20,000 in 1960, going up to a high point of almost 35,000 in 1974, decreasing to 22,000 in 1984 and settling at almost 27,000 in 1997. The outcome has been a surplus of immigrants between 1971 and 1982 and a negative departure balance in most other years. During the last two years (1997 and 1998) there was a slight positive balance again, mainly due to higher figures for immigrants from abroad (refugees). The population has increased from 508,000 in 1980, 580,000 in 1990, to 621,000 in 1999. Growth has come predominantly from a surplus of births.

There is also internal migration in the province, to and from the countryside. Living in towns has become more important. The effect of this relocation of the population on the distribution of the language has been substantial. Both processes of migration have made geographic differences related to language less distinct.

Stages 8 and 7: Reassembling Xish, learning it as a second language during adulthood and enriching the ethnocultural and ethnolinguistic experiences of those who are already Xish-speaking

As Fishman says, Frisian RLS efforts are ‘more focused on stage 7 than 8’. The Frisian ‘language is still well and naturally spoken by . . . speech networks engaged in many activities’. Stage 8 is not really at stake in the Frisian case, notwithstanding discussions on the quality and development of the standard language, where some seem to oppose the re-introduction of older speech forms.

The expressions of culture mentioned by Fishman (theatre, Frisian festival, film, music and literary evenings) do, in a sense, flourish more than ever. For instance, open-air theatre performances in Frisian are enormously popular: the most famous annual theatre in Jorwert has a series of 10 evenings, for which tickets are sold out through special phone-lines within hours. In literature there are still no real literary ‘big young talents’ or ‘discoveries’, but there is an ongoing discussion between the older ‘grey-hair’ establishment (over 50) and a younger generation (under 40), which seems to gain momentum and may become quite interesting. Because open-air theatre and also music are so popular, today it would be harder to
conclude that ‘most of stage 7 reaches only those already committed to Frisian’ as Fishman did. One of the ‘breakthroughs’ for Frisian has been its remarkable acceptance in pop music over the Netherlands as a whole: two top-10 hits over the last two years. Also the language has been used as a commercial gimmick in Dutch TV and radio, stressing humour for selling a traditional Frisian alcoholic beverage. Part of the reason for this success certainly lies in the ‘Eleven cities tours’ (Alvestêdetocht) in 1985, 1986, and 1997. This ice-skating tour of some 200 kilometres can only be organised in very severe winters. These tours were mass media events of mega size and as a result the province of Friesland, but also the Frisian language and culture, became a bit more popular in the rest of the Netherlands.

Stage 6: The intergenerational, demographically concentrated family-home-neighbourhood-community sphere: the basis of transmission

The slow decline of percentages of mother-tongue speakers in the traditional rural areas has continued and there has been a slight increase in the towns. Today, on average some 70% in the countryside and some 40% in the towns are Frisian L1 speakers. This means that the speakers are geographically more evenly distributed (during the 1950s these percentages were over 90 and below 30, respectively). Migration from rural areas to the towns is, of course, an important factor. It also means that almost all neighbourhoods and most families have become linguistically mixed. Here lies a potentially dangerous situation for Frisian, because research tells us also that in mixed marriages by far the majority will opt for Dutch as the language for the next generation. Against this goes the finding that quite a few persons learn to speak Frisian as second language (20% of the total population) and will use it to some degree, even if much less than first-language speakers. Another surprising finding was that Frisian-speaking parents, on average, have slightly more children than non-Frisian speakers, this birth surplus has compensated somewhat for the loss due to mixed families (Gorter and Jonkman, 1995a).

Also of some apparent importance is a process of ‘mental urbanisation’ of the rural areas (Van der Vaart, 1999; Mak, 1997) which leads to further Dutchification of everyday life. As Fishman already rightfully observed, the few cultural manifestations of Frisians ‘cannot repair damage to foundations’. Similarly the religious domain cannot do much repair. In particular not because there have been few if any changes in the use of Frisian in the church (which is generally low), although an organisation of ministers is rather active.
Stage 5: Schools for children (that do not meet the requirements of compulsory education) and courses in language and literacy acquisition for adults

In his original chapter Fishman (p. 166) mentions the Afûk organisation that provides adult courses in the Frisian language. Ten years ago Afûk was perhaps a somewhat old-fashioned operation, but it now has renewed its courses and has diversified its products, also catering for special target groups such as legal professionals, workers in health care and an intensive course for foreigners. Afûk is also working on a general course on CD-ROM, but, other than advertising its products, is not yet active with courses through the Internet, although this can be expected in the years to come.

As Fishman (p. 166) states ‘every RLS movement will have its “great dictionary” project’. When he wrote his chapter the Larger Frisian Dictionary had published five volumes. Ten years later there are 15 and the Fryske Akademy has almost finished this monument to the language. In total either 22 or 23 volumes will appear. Other more applied dictionary projects are also nearing completion, such as the Frisian–Frisian desk dictionary and the Frisian–English dictionary. In 1985 work began on the establishment of a Language Data Bank for Frisian, which now contains over 15 million tokens from written texts. A reverse dictionary and a spell-checker were the few directly usable products of the Language Data Bank. In terms of computational linguistics results are below original expectations. Of more recent date, a new project has begun in the field of spoken language. Following the model and procedures for the Corpus of Spoken Dutch, a major project in the Netherlands launched in 1998, the Fryske Akademy is attempting to set up a parallel, although smaller project for a Corpus of Spoken Frisian. This will result in a cross-section of the Frisian language as it is in use by the end of the 20th century. Probably it will also have some new applications in speech technology. The relevance of this work lies in keeping a language such as Frisian at least in a minimal way up to date with so many new technological developments related to language.

Stage 4a: Schools in lieu of compulsory education and fully under RLS control

In his chapter Fishman (p. 169–71) outlines a brief historical account of developments in education, which I will not have to repeat here. There have not been serious new developments in the teaching of Frisian in primary schools during the last few years (Zondag, 1993). The great majority of primary schools comply with the requirement that they teach the subject of Frisian. A survey by the Inspectorate in 1988 showed that
about 30–45 minutes a week were spent on teaching Frisian as a subject. The same survey told us that one-fifth of the primary schools used Frisian as a medium of instruction with other subjects. In 1993 the central government published official ‘key objectives’ for Frisian, which describe the knowledge and skills pupils should have at the end of primary school. It was striking that the objectives for Frisian and Dutch were exactly the same.

Although the data were collected before the key objectives were published, studies by De Jong and Riemersma (1994) and Ytsma (1995), made it very clear that school practice was not reaching those ideal objectives for Frisian at all. The studies, however, reaffirmed the conclusion that teaching Frisian as a subject or using Frisian as a medium of instruction has no detrimental effect upon the results obtained in Dutch. Children in Friesland, on average, have the same level of achievement in Dutch at the end of primary school as do other children in the rest of the Netherlands. Their achievements in Frisian tend to lag behind their achievements in Dutch.

A seeming ‘breakthrough’ came in 1993 when Frisian became a compulsory subject in the first, basic stage of secondary education. But the obligation turned out to be light as a feather. Much dissatisfaction remains among RLS activists and responsible policy-makers about such a minimal implementation.

**Type 4b schools: The object of RLS affection as a distinctly part-time ‘guest’ in the public school arena**

There were no alternative schools of their own of whatever type. In 1989 an initiative was taken by a group of parents to establish all-Frisian language playgroups (’pjutteboartersplakken’), aiming both at Frisian-speaking and Dutch-speaking children. The first playgroups were established in larger towns because parents were dissatisfied with the fact that existing pre-school provisions took no account of the Frisian language background of their children. In 1999 the Frisian playgroups organisation was responsible for 11 groups; not a very spectacular number considering that over 200 other playgroups exist in Friesland. As Fishman (p. 173) concluded ‘The many weaknesses of Frisian that we have encountered at levels 6, 5 and 4 constitute a very serious handicap [to] future possibilities in the RLS arena, particularly insofar as the improvement of the inter-generational transmissibility of the language is concerned.’

A new development in 1998 was an experiment with ‘trilingual education’. That is, some primary schools have started to develop a curriculum where Frisian and Dutch are used on a 50–50 basis during the first 5–6 grades and English is introduced as subject and medium at the upper stage...
as a third language for about 20% of teaching time. This experiment is being scrutinised by intensive research (Ytsma, 1999), but it is premature to predict any of the outcomes.

**Stage 3: The world of work, both within the ethnolinguistic community (among other Xmen), as well as outside it (among Ymen)**

Frisian plays a small role in trade and industry (Fishman, p. 173). As a spoken language its use is quite common on the workfloor, but may be quite exceptional at the management level. In all kinds of client-service situations, with unknown interlocutors, there is an expectation that Frisian will be understood. The figure of 94% of the population being able to understand the language, makes clear why this expectation is almost always fulfilled. Every now and then there may be a small riot over this issue. For instance, in a public meeting when someone asks that Dutch be used. Whereas 30 years ago the chairman of such a meeting would immediately yield to a request for Dutch, today such concession runs the risk of protests by Frisian speakers and usually some negotiation takes place. Spoken Frisian may be generally accepted, written Frisian still stands out as something special. Thus, in some advertisements that fact is used to attract attention. All in all Frisian is spoken in the work environment, outside the neighbourhood, without any problems, but the domain of work is not an area of any RLS efforts, except for civil servants and teachers.

**Stage 2: Xish in regional mass media and government services**

Quite a bit of energy in Frisian has been devoted to developments in the domains of media (Radio / TV) and the government (‘official domain’). For this reason I will discuss it more elaborately. ‘Radio Fryslân’ had 20 hours per week in 1988 and almost no TV (30 hours per year). Ten years later the media position has improved substantially. Today there are daily TV broadcasts in Frisian (one hour original production early in the evening of every day, with reruns). These broadcasts are quite popular: the ‘viewer-density’ is the highest of all channels in Friesland at that hour. This is regarded a big success by most RLS activists. Opinions differ on how much it serves as an example and influences the use of Frisian by its speakers. Moreover, in both regional newspapers the same weak position of 10 or 20 years ago still continues, where Frisian is used very marginally in less than 5% of all texts. Frisian is just a prominent ‘topic’ for regional journalists, especially for ‘human interest’ (e.g. a student from Vienna writing a doctoral thesis on Frisian) or a ‘riot’ (e.g. civil servants protesting against the language policy for Frisian). In 1999 a new monthly magazine will be
launched. There are some prudent developments in multimedia (e.g., a CD-ROM with the history of Friesland). On the Internet there is a ‘Frisian ribbon campaign’ promoting the use of Frisian for web pages, there is even an all-Frisian search engine (‘Frysk’), but not yet any on-line course in Frisian or even an on-line dictionary.

As Fishman (p. 177) rightly observed ‘a great deal of attention has been given to the legalistic niceties of language legislation and policy statements, and the overcoming of Dutch resistance in these areas is greatly stressed as a matter of principle’. The legal framework which has been described above is the outcome of this ‘attention’ and may be seen as a victory over Dutch resistance. However, Fishman also already observed that the ‘implementation of new opportunities leaves much to be desired’. Policy plans have been retarded and plans have not been implemented (a lot of attention was given to the highly symbolic, but really non-issue of Frisian place-names). Language policy has lost its prominence on the political agenda. The Charter for European minority or regional languages was important to keep policy development going. That Charter is mainly of symbolic importance to Frisian, but at the same time the Dutch government has recognised ‘Low Saxon’ (a collection of dialects), among others, as a regional language. Such recognition has stimulated new initiatives in other regions of the Netherlands, but at the same time has helped to keep Frisian ambitions down.

‘The Hague’ (the central state government) has acceded to demands from the provincial government very slowly and especially when it would cost little to nothing. Fishman used the term ‘blockage’, which might be less applicable these days. A turn of policy in The Hague took place in the period 1989–93 when there was an Under-Minister for the Interior who was of Frisian descent and who was proud of it. Moreover, she was made explicitly responsible for ‘coordinating Frisian affairs’ at the central state level. The Council of Frisian movement, an organisation of volunteers, has attracted some young persons, but has not yet been able to obtain a clear new profile. Activism for Frisian RLS efforts still has quite a low profile.

Stage 1: Government, employment and education at the highest levels

Fishman (p. 178) observed that the Frisian scene was far less promising and far less coordinated and vigorous than the Basque counterpart, considering the highest levels. Not much has changed and there still is no ‘well-considered set of urgent priorities’ defined by the Frisians themselves. Language policy plans have to a large degree indeed been ‘public
posturing and the adoption of well-meaning and good-sounding resolutions'; implementation has turned out to be difficult.

There is still no ‘leading intellectual centre’ in Friesland because the plans for a university have failed. Even where the differences between colleges for higher vocational training and universities are becoming smaller, the three institutions for higher education in the capital of Friesland have not provided anything like ‘intellectual leadership’ to the community. They are involved in a ‘battle to attract students’ from all over the Netherlands (or from abroad), thus Frisian is usually more seen as a nuisance than as an asset.

Cutbacks in Dutch higher education have resulted in the disappearance of two of the five chairs in Frisian linguistics outside Friesland. The full chair at the University of Amsterdam could be saved through close collaboration with the Fryske Akademy and fulfils more or less the function of a Frisian embassy in the Dutch capital.<sup>8</sup> During the 1990s four doctoral dissertations were published in Frisian and another eight dealt with a specific Frisian topic from linguistics or literature studies. The Fryske Akademy underwent a small reduction of staff, notwithstanding a very positive peer review by a committee of international experts in 1995.

**General Conclusion**

As far as the effect of the RLS book by Fishman is concerned, I find it hard to judge its impact. The chapter on Frisian and Basque was translated into Frisian and separately published, but it did not get any further attention in the public debate. The provincial advisory body on Frisian (Berie foar it Frysk) has looked into it seriously. I have come across it several times in the ‘scientific literature’, but it has not become a ‘handbook’ for RLS activists. Fishman (p. 180) concluded that things may not be entirely bleak for Frisian. ‘The basic problem seems to be in activating the goodwill’. This is most certainly the case and I doubt whether much has changed over the last decade. ‘The struggle is far from over. Indeed, it may go on forever, ineffective though it may generally be insofar as intergenerational transmissibility of Frisian as mother tongue is concerned’ (p. 181).

My conclusion is that things have, on the whole, not gotten worse for Frisian. Of course, there are also some real threats today, especially in mixed families and neighbourhoods as well as for the continued erosion of the language itself. The quality of the language is deteriorating and Frisian may at a certain point run the risk of dissolving into Dutch. In Friesland both languages are used and they are sometimes in conflict. The norms for language use can also be seen in terms of a power process. The Frisian speakers are still a quantitative majority in their own area, but the Dutch
speakers are the group with most power. There is an unequal chance for Frisian speakers to realise their language preference *vis-à-vis* the Dutch speakers. So, the rule that ‘everyone may speak his/her own language’ is really restricted in practice. Dutch is the common language of everyone because all Frisian-speakers are bilingual and most Dutch-speakers are only passively bilingual. You can always say as a kind of powerplay, ‘let us all speak Dutch’ and only few diehards will not comply. Frisian is allowed, and its use must be possible, but other mechanisms are doing the work of constraining its use.

The well-known concept of *diglossia* may still be of some use to describe the relationship between Frisian and Dutch. Application of the concept is a matter of some debate among scholars of the Frisian language situation (Gorter, 1993: 24–7). It is clear that the older static ‘division of functions’ between the two languages has given way to new patterns. There used to be some sort of stable diglossia relationship, where Dutch was the higher and more prestigious language, and Frisian was the language of the home and of the family. Today Dutch enters into and cannot be kept out of the intimate spheres of the home, friends, family and neighbourhood. At the same time Frisian seeks to ‘conquer’ some of the higher domains of education, media and public administration. Frisian has made inroads in areas where it was not used 50 years ago. This implies that it is far less clear what language to use, at what moment in time, or who is going or not going to use Frisian. Dutch is the language that is taken for granted, Frisian is the marked language most, but not all, of the time. Conscious speakers of Frisian or RLS activists may find themselves frequently in a situation of ‘competing bilingualism’. However, as a written language Frisian has remained quite marginal, thus there is still a diglossic distribution between spoken and written language functions. A number of structural power processes work against the use of Frisian. This is not only at the level of society as a whole, but also in personal interaction between people. It implies at the same time that, in these conflicts between the two language groups, some positive tensions are also created that lead to more dynamism in society, a dynamism which is lacking in monolingual societies.

**Notes**

1. The province of Friesland has roughly 340,000 mother-tongue speakers of Frisian or 460,000 inhabitants who claim to have at least ‘reasonable proficiency’. Respectively 55% and 74% of 621,000 inhabitants (1 January 1999). Take note, these percentages are based on survey-research among the population of 12 years and older from 1994. The sample size was 1368 successful interviews.
2. Fishman’s chapter in the original RLS book on Frisian (and Basque) was based on visits to Friesland in 1982, 1983 and 1989 (Fishman, 1991: 183). Mine is based
on (almost) continuous presence as a professional sociologist of language, working for the Fryske Akademy (and since 1994 part-time for the University of Amsterdam). Fishman’s chapter was translated into Frisian and published in the scientific journal of the Fryske Akademy, *It Beaken* (jrg 53, 1991, nr 3/4, pp. 120–49). Comments were added by Jansma, Jelsma, and Van Rijn and by Van der Plank (pp. 150–60). Even though *It Beaken* has a circulation of 3000, to my knowledge, it did not attract any further response.

3. In cooperation with the European Parliament and the Ministry for Culture of Luxembourg; based on a ‘need for improved communication’.

4. The Mercator Education project is concerned with information, documentation and research in the field of education involving autochthonous minority languages in the European Union. It is part of a network including Mercator Media and Mercator Legislation. For further information: www.fa.knaw.nl \ mercator.

5. There are eight member states of the Council of Europe, thus far, that have ratified: Finland, Norway, Hungary, the Netherlands, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Germany.

6. From this list it becomes clear that certain variants that were earlier regarded as dialects have now been officially declared (regional) languages.

7. One point of caution is in place: the 71% comes from the sample by Pietersen where Frisian may have been somewhat oversampled. Due to random draw he did not include a number of municipalities where less Frisian has traditionally been spoken, whereas in 1980 and 1994 all municipalities were represented proportionally.

8. Although right next door to the university building in the centre of Amsterdam there is an arts gallery cum antiques and books shop that is literally called the ‘Embassy of Friesland’ (*Ambassade van Friesland*).

References


