



# Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

## **Frisian. Standardization in progress of a language in decay**

Hoekstra, E.

### ***published in***

Germanic Standardizations. Past to Present  
2003

[Link to publication in KNAW Research Portal](#)

### ***citation for published version (APA)***

Hoekstra, E. (2003). Frisian. Standardization in progress of a language in decay. In *Germanic Standardizations. Past to Present* (Vol. 18, pp. 193-209). (IMPACT: Studies in Language and Society). John Benjamins Publishing.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the KNAW public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the KNAW public portal.

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[pure@knaw.nl](mailto:pure@knaw.nl)

# Frisian\*

## Standardization in progress of a language in decay

Eric Hoekstra  
Fryske Akademy, The Netherlands

### 1. Historical background

The first standard of the Frisian language is reflected in documents from the so-called Old Frisian period (c. 1200 to 1550; cf. Bremmer 2001).<sup>1</sup> These surviving manuscripts show a considerable degree of linguistic uniformity. When Old Frisian disappeared from the historical record around 1550, Frisian lost its early standard. During the subsequent Middle Frisian Period (roughly 1550–1800) there are few signs of standardization in the modest written production. The roots of the modern Frisian standard (from 1800 to the present day) lie in the linguistic romanticism of the nineteenth century. Frisian may thus be said to have had an incipient standard language (Old Frisian), to have lost it and to have acquired a new standard. In this paper I will first briefly discuss the Old Frisian standard and then concentrate on the origin and development of the standard of present-day Frisian.

#### Norm selection, codification, acceptance and decay in Old Frisian

Little is known about the process of norm selection in Old Frisian. However, some indirect evidence may be gleaned from the type of texts that were written in Old Frisian. Old Frisian literature comprises mainly legal texts; most of the remaining documents are historical chronicles which were written for political and/or ideological purposes (Johnston 2001 provides a useful overview of Old Frisian law manuscripts; charters are discussed by Vries 2001a). Apart from legal texts, there are also religious texts, historical texts as well as texts dealing with administrative issues. To the latter category belongs a large collection of charters (i.e. manuscripts

recording privileges and property) as well as municipal records written in Old Frisian. The written tradition of Old Frisian begins in about 1200 (Bremmer 2001). However, the oldest parts of some legal texts (*Santjin kêsten* ‘Seventeen Statutes’ and *Fjouwer-en-tweintich lânrijchten* ‘Twenty-four Land Laws’), as far as their content is concerned, date back to the ninth century, and were allegedly given by Charlemagne (Algra 1991: 205–279). It must be kept in mind that the Old Frisian tradition existed next to the older and more influential tradition of Latin. Latin is therefore the first factor that will have influenced the process of norm selection, especially since most scribes may be assumed to have been versed both in Latin and in Old Frisian. Norm elaboration was not an explicitly conscious process as it often is in the modern age. The rules of the language were not codified in grammars and dictionaries, although there probably existed word lists for pedagogical purposes. An indirect example of the latter are the *Psalmglossen* (‘Psalm glosses’). These are Old Frisian inter-verbal glosses to fragments of Latin psalms. Norm elaboration in the Old Frisian period was mainly a function of the development of new genres of written texts. The legal texts are older (ninth century to thirteenth century), but as the knowledge of writing diffused through the community, chronicles and administrative documents came into existence (thirteenth century to fifteenth century; cf. Johnston 2001). These genres contributed to the diversification of the vocabulary. Moreover, the need to communicate different kinds of information led to the development of standards specific to the text genre at hand. Norm acceptance is in the first place a matter of power and prestige. Translated into the social situation of the northern Netherlands between 1200 and 1550, the influence of Old Frisian can be gleaned from the wide geographical dispersion of manuscripts (roughly in the area between the IJsselmeer in the northern Netherlands and the river Weser in northern Germany). The written norm was most likely put into practice by monks and scribes in the service of secular and religious authorities.

The Old Frisian standard was subsequently affected by norm decay and function loss. Due to shifts in power and prestige, Old Frisian gradually lost its position to the rival standards of Low German (see Langer this volume) and Dutch (see Willemyns this volume). This process has been described and analysed by Vries (1993, 2001b). Frisian was replaced by Dutch in the sixteenth century as far as the written language was concerned, but Frisian remained the spoken language of the country. Nevertheless, because of the status associated with written language and because of the immigration of powerful Dutch-appointed officials, the higher echelons of society regularly spoke Dutch. Moreover, in more formal situations such as church services and court sessions, Dutch was also used as the spoken language.

What were the reasons for the decay of Old Frisian as a written language? First, it should be noted that the Old Frisian writing tradition was not particularly strong, since it existed in the shadow of the all-powerful Latin tradition. Second, there was

hardly any religious or secular literature in Old Frisian, and the socio-cultural basis of the Old Frisian writing tradition was thus very small. Accordingly, when printing came to Frisia, there was not much Old Frisian material available for printing. The only printed book of the fifteenth century is a collection of Old Frisian law texts with Latin glosses. Third, the systematic production of charters and other administrative documents begins rather late, roughly in the sixteenth century, although individual documents had already been produced in the fourteenth century. The late beginning of the systematic production of charters is due to the socio-economic development of Frisia at that time. There was no central political power enforcing control through a written administration, and the Frisian nobility was a small and politically insignificant. In fact, Frisia consisted of a number of independent municipalities, which formed a political federation. Frisia was a largely agricultural society and cities, otherwise centres of written administration, developed late and remained comparatively small (on the historical development of Frisian towns cf. Vries 2000). In the years 1499–1504, the municipalities lost their independence to an external power: to the duchy of Saxony (led by Duke Albert of Saxony, later by Duke Georg) until 1515 and to the Burgundian-Habsburgian Empire (led by Charles of Austria, Count of Holland, after Georg sold his rule over Frisia for 100,000 florins) until 1581. Saxony's rule ended municipal independence and is commonly referred to as the end of 'Frisian freedom'. Although Frisian charters are found as early as the fourteenth century, they always exist side by side with Dutch charters, and Dutch was invariably used when charters involved parties from outside Frisia. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Dutch was increasingly used for charters involving parties from within Frisia. Usage varied from city to city. Sometimes the charters were in Dutch, while correspondence about the charters was in Frisian, as was the case with the city of Bolsward. In other words, with the introduction of a centralized government in Frisia (by Charles of Austria, Count of Holland), the importance of administrative writing increased and the language used by that government was Dutch.

#### A slumbering written language: Middle Frisian<sup>2</sup>

In the period from 1550 to 1800, Frisian did not have any official status: it was a spoken language and was used mainly in the countryside. The cities had developed their own language, *Stêdsk* ('Town Frisian'), a mixture of Dutch and Frisian. The oldest Town Frisian text dates from 1768 (a play called *Vermaak der Slagtery* by A. Jeltema). Town Frisian came into existence as a result of Frisians attempting to speak Dutch (Fokkema 1937; Jonkman 1993; Van Bree 2001).

Education in Frisia at the time did not lead to native-like proficiency in Dutch. Little is known about the training of scribes. However, the linguistic insufficiency of

their training can be gleaned from the extent to which they mixed the languages involved. It has been pointed out by, for example, Johnston (2001: 592) that some of the Low German manuscripts produced in Frisia were full of Frisian idioms. As most Frisians had no substantial command of Dutch, they transferred the syntactic structures of Frisian into their Dutch, similar to what second language learners do when they acquire a second language imperfectly. In other words, gaps in the knowledge of the target language are filled in with linguistic structures which came from the learner's mother tongue (Van Coetsem 1988; Hoekstra 1993). Accordingly, Town Frisian shared most of the sound system and the vocabulary of frequent words including irregular verbs with Dutch. With Frisian it shared morphological suffixes, syntax and the vocabulary of infrequent words. The very existence of Town Frisian testifies to the omnipotence of Dutch as a language of prestige and power in Frisia. The Frisian language proper was to a very large extent relegated to the countryside and the lower walks of society.

Nevertheless, some Frisian was still written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although the latest Old Frisian writings almost coincide with the oldest Middle Frisian writings, Middle Frisian completely breaks with the orthography and grammar of Old Frisian and presumably reflects the spoken language of that period much more closely than the archaic Old Frisian standard, which the spoken language in its continuous development had long left behind (i.e. by about 1500/1550). There is also a difference in text genres between Old Frisian and Middle Frisian documents. Whereas Old Frisian texts deal primarily with the law, charters and administration, Middle Frisian texts involve secular and spiritual literature.

An important figure of the Middle Frisian period was the Baroque poet Gysbert Japicx (1603–1666). He is the author of most of the surviving Middle Frisian language material. His *Friesche Rymelarye* ('Frisian rhymings', 1668) contain both pastoral and religious poetry. A later edition of his work also includes correspondence and prose translations. In his work Japicx could not fall back on Old Frisian for either subject matter, choice of words or orthography (Halbertsma 1827: 317–319, cited in Breuker 2001a: 712). Not only was there hardly any literature in Old Frisian, but the language had become obsolete by the seventeenth century and the old manuscripts were not easily available. Japicx had to develop his own orthography and his own diction (including both literary style and lexicon). His personal written variety served as a kind of standard language for himself and a small circle of readers, some of whom adopted his spelling conventions. However, this literary standard was isolated within Frisian society where Dutch and Latin were the dominant written languages. Japicx' importance for the development of the Frisian standard language is fourfold. First, the literary quality of his texts made him one of the most important writers of the time (even when compared with the contemporary Dutch and Latin literature in Frisia). Second, he was the most significant

Middle Frisian writer with respect to sheer quantity of textual production: about half of the surviving Middle Frisian material has been written by Japicx. Third, his work kept Frisian alive as a written language by providing a linguistic ‘model’ for later Middle Frisian writers such as, for example, Jan Althuysen (1715–1763). Other writers, like Johannes Hilarides (1649–1725) and Eelke Meinerts (1732–1812), took a more linguistic interest in Japicx’ work. Their writings contributed to linguistic study of Frisian and paved the way for the codification of Frisian at the end of the nineteenth century. Meinerts, for example, contributed directly to the codification of the Frisian language, by propagating a purist attitude towards Dutch loans and advocating the use of common Frisian forms instead of dialectally marked vocabulary (Breuker 2001a: 713). Fourth, in the Romantic age, Japicx’ work, served as an inspiring example to those who wanted to revive the Frisian tradition of writing. It was used as evidence by those who claimed that Frisian really was an independent language (not simply a dialect), in which literary work could be written. Despite the stimulus provided by Japicx, the output of the Middle Frisian period remained limited. The fact that only about one million words of Middle Frisian survive cannot be ascribed to a coincidence of history, but provides an indication of the scantiness of the Middle Frisian output. The language was slumbering, and it was not to be reawakened until the nineteenth century.

It was noted by Breuker (2001a: 716) that the study of Middle Frisian has been neglected. There are no dictionaries, grammar or orthographical surveys available. However, the Frisian Academy ([www.fa.knaw.nl](http://www.fa.knaw.nl)) will publish all available Middle Frisian texts on the Internet in 2004. The Middle Frisian Language Corpus will include bibliographical and linguistic annotations. The Corpus will provide an important tool for the construction of a Middle Frisian dictionary and a Middle Frisian grammar, which are planned for the subsequent years.

## 2. Norm selection of Modern Frisian

### Historical background<sup>3</sup>

We can distinguish two major sources for the Romantic revival of Frisian, its study and standardization. The first source is academic. At the end of the eighteenth century, Frisia had a university at Franeker.<sup>4</sup> The Franeker professor of Greek, Everwinus Wassenbergh (1742–1826) initiated new interest in the study of the work of Japicx. Wassenbergh studied classical influences on the work of Japicx, but was also interested in other aspects of Frisia’s literary and linguistic heritage such as proverbs (there is a collection of Middle Frisian proverbs by Burmania, 1641) and proper names. Some of his students, such as, for example, Ecco Epkema (1759–

1832) carried on Wassenbergh's work. Another academic who deserves to be mentioned in this context is Joost Halbertsma (1789–1869). Halbertsma not only studied the Frisian language, but also produced literary work together with his brother Eeltsje Halbertsma (1797–1858). This relates to the second source of the revival of interest in Frisian which was literary. The Halbertsma brothers published a magazine called *The Lapekoer of Gabe Skroar* ('Tailor Gabe's Ragbag', later reprinted as *Rimen en Teltsjes* 'Rhymes and Tales') which was very popular. It contained poems, songs, short stories as well as cabaret pieces. All texts were written in easily accessible Frisian (characterized, for example, by closeness to spoken language), often with a comical undertone. The contributions by Joost Halbertsma were sometimes more learned than those of his brother Eeltsje, without becoming too academic. Another writer who should be mentioned is Waling Dykstra (1821–1914), who was a widely read and a very productive writer. Frisian was once again a language that was written and that was read.

### Selection of orthography

When the Halbertsmas began to write in Frisian, they encountered the same problem as Japicx did two hundred years earlier: in the absence of a continuous literary tradition, there was no codified language norm available. They solved the problem by taking what they saw as the vernacular of their own time as a starting point. Their orthography is a reasonably adequate attempt to represent the pronunciation of the vernacular. Other Frisian writers chose a different approach. Harmen Sytstra (1817–1862) returned to the norms of Old Frisian for orthography and grammar. The spelling he used was, however, difficult to learn. Other writers used Japicx's orthography. Ultimately the Halbertsma orthography, which was based on the spoken vernacular, would win out. However, this did not happen until the end of the nineteenth century.

### 3. Norm codification of Modern Frisian

An important theme in the early history of the codification of the language was the attempt throughout the nineteenth century to arrive at a unified spelling (cf. Folkertsma 1973; also for detailed information about orthography in the nineteenth century). The period of variant spellings came to an end in the late 1870s. In 1879, the *Selscip foar Frysce Taal in Skriftekennise* ('Society for Frisian Language and Literature') adopted the orthography mainly developed by the librarian Gerben Colmjon (1828–1884; Breuker 2001a: 715). In the following years, this spelling was

generally adopted. Colmjon's spelling system was similar to the system proposed by Halbertsma. The 1879 spelling, however, retained some archaic features of the type which abounded in Sytstra's highly archaising spelling system. The adopted spelling system was a compromise between historical and modern spelling principles (Feitsma 1999a: 168). A second hallmark in the history of codification was the dictionary of Frisian produced by Waling Dykstra (1900, 1903, 1911). Joost Halbertsma had attempted to compile a dictionary but he got no further than the letter F (*Feer* 'feather'). Dykstra's dictionary was the first 'complete' Frisian dictionary and was widely used. It contained many linguistically sophisticated observations with regard to lexical differences between Frisian and Dutch.

Some grammars of Frisian also appeared in the nineteenth century, but they did not have much impact on those writing Frisian. Epkema (1824) wrote a descriptive grammar based on the model of the Dutch grammars of his time. Sytstra (1854) published a prescriptive grammar constructing an ideal Frisian language out of the various dialects and historical stages of the language. A well-written practical grammar written by S. K. Feitsma appeared in 1902. This grammar was widely used for educational purposes. Sipma (1913) published the first English-language grammar of Frisian. By that time, the basis for the elementary codification of the Frisian language as far as grammar was concerned had been laid (see Feitsma 1999b for further information on grammars of Frisian written in that period). The early Frisian grammars are linguistically relatively unrefined. They are, however, a direct reflection of the growing interest in the Frisian language and its codification in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### Selection of dialect

Frisia contains three large dialect groups: Clay Frisian in the Northwest, Wood Frisian in the Southeast, and Southwestern Frisian. With respect to morphology and syntax, there are no known differences between the Clay dialect and the other Frisian dialects. As far as lexis is concerned, there are minor differences concerning some vocabulary items, like the word for *swing*, which is *touter* in Clay Frisian, *soeie* in Woods Frisian. In such cases, both variants are allowed, both being different from Dutch (*schommel*).

From the very beginning of the nineteenth century, written Frisian was oriented mainly towards the dialects of Clay Frisian since most of the writers active in the Frisian movement came from this area. Both the Halbertsmas and Waling Dykstra used Clay Frisian. Historically, the Clay area is also the richest part of the province, hence the most powerful and prestigious area; feelings of national identity and pride were also particularly strong in this part of Frisia. As in many other



standard language histories, the dialect associated with the most prestigious and economically as well as culturally influential area came to be selected as the basis of the new standard norm.

The question remained, however, to what extent dialect variation should be allowed in the emerging standard orthography. West Frisian dialect differences concern mainly vowel variation and some vocabulary items. For example, the diphthongs written as <oa> and <uo> in standard Frisian are pronounced in the Clay and the Woods area as /wa/ and /wo/. In the Southwestern dialects, however, they are pronounced without the /w/ and the vowels have a different quality: Clay Frisian /wa/ corresponds to a short central half closed vowel, Clay Frisian /wo/ corresponds to short central half open vowel (Hof 1933). Furthermore, <oa> may be pronounced as /ja/ in the southern Woods area. On the whole, the question as to whether such variation in the phonological domain should be reflected in the spelling has been answered negatively

#### Cultural and linguistic revival of Frisian

The process of codification and elaboration of a language often co-occurs with an increased vitality of the speech community. Hence in the first half of the twentieth century when codification and elaboration of the Frisian language began, one also sees an increasing vitality of Frisian culture. The Frisian movement in particular which propagated the rights of the Frisian language and culture, gained strength in the first half of the twentieth century. Political aspirations, on the other hand, have always been weakly developed in Frisia. It was generally assumed that more rights for the Frisian language and culture could be obtained from the Dutch government in The Hague without drawing any political conclusions. Thus the Frisian movement must be understood as having been first and foremost a cultural event. Magazines in Frisian sprang up, likewise societies for singing in Frisian, acting in Frisian, and so forth (there were regular contacts with Frisian speakers in Germany as well, see Steensen 2001). It should not be forgotten that a century earlier all political, cultural and religious activities were conducted in Dutch, while Frisian was only used in face-to-face interactions in house and village. When Waling Dykstra and Tjibbe Geerts van der Meulen first toured the country with a Frisian Cabaret program — a specifically Netherlandic type of performance combining songs, slapstick and social criticism — they moved many people to tears who were immensely touched by the dramatic effect of theatre in their own native language. Although the rise of Frisian was a modest phenomenon which did not affect the status and prestige of the Dutch language in Frisia, its relatively successful development in the cultural field testifies to the changed perception of Frisian since 1800 (cf. Scholten 1974 on the first Frisian performances; Jensma 1998 on Frisian book production).

#### 4. Norm elaboration

##### Development of institutions dealing with standardization

In the nineteenth century, the codification of the Frisian language had mainly been the interest of initiatives of individual persons, or, at most, particular societies like the *Selscip*. In the twentieth century, the standardization of the Frisian language became a matter of concern of the public authorities; thus recognizing the language-political ideals to which the nineteenth-century pro-Frisian language activists had devoted much of their time and energy. The efforts of two institutions were particularly important for the development and elaboration of the Frisian standard language. The first that should be mentioned is the *Fryske Akademy* ('Frisian Academy'), an academic institute for the study of matters pertaining to the province of Fryslân ('Frisia'), founded in 1938. The Frisian Academy receives one third of its funding from the province of Frisia, and two thirds of its funding from the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen* ('Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences'). It provides employment for about 70 people. It has three departments: the department of linguistics, the department of history and the department of social sciences.

The Academy advises the government of the province of Frisia on matters pertaining to Frisian linguistic policy and also provides answers to questions of linguistic terminology. Companies producing texts on graveyard stones, for example, may contact the Frisian academy in order to have a Dutch text translated into Frisian. Typically, neither the customers themselves, nor the company, are able to do so for lack of substantial schooling in Frisian. Similarly, the Academy may be contacted by advertising agencies who want to have a commercial in Frisian. The Academy also translates official documents into Frisian, because few politicians and administrators within the provincial Frisian government are proficient in the written standard. The *Omrop Fryslân* ('Frisian Broadcasting Company') regularly contacts the Frisian Academy on questions of terminology. All these requests support norm elaboration. The Academy also advised the province on the 1980 spelling reform of Frisian, and it developed, with support from the province, a Frisian spell checker for Microsoft Word.

The *Omrop* mainly broadcasts in Frisian. Since many journalists are native speakers of Dutch and do not speak Frisian, they take courses to learn or improve their Frisian before they start working for the *Omrop*. The *Omrop Fryslân* broadcasts one hour of Frisian television per day, which is repeated at different times during the evening; Frisian radio broadcasts continuously throughout the day and evening. The programs of the Frisian Broadcasting Company mainly focus on the Frisian province, and thus fill the gap between Frisian speakers and the omnipres-

ent Dutch television with its focus on the western part of the country (where the big cities of The Netherlands are).

The other institute that is relevant to elaboration is the *Algemene Fryske Underrjocht Kommisje* ('General Frisian Education Committee'), founded in 1927. The General Frisian Education Committee ([www.afuk.nl](http://www.afuk.nl)) deals with all aspects of Frisian education. It is an institute that actively promotes the use of the Frisian language. The Education Committee produces books that can be used in class for teaching Frisian to children. Frisian primary schools have one compulsory hour of Frisian language teaching per week, which is mostly used for learning Frisian songs or telling stories. In secondary schools, Frisian is virtually non-existent: it is an optional subject and conformity to the Dutch norm is so strong as to make Frisian classes impossible (for attitude studies with respect to Dutch and Frisian see Gorter et al. 1985 as well as Gorter and Jonkman 1995). A small number of primary schools in the countryside are experimenting with providing a larger and more substantial part of the classes in Frisian. However, attempts to enforce obligatory classes in Frisian in secondary education caused protest from parents and schools. Bilingual education thus remains an unattainable ideal. The Education Committee also buys a page (once every week) in the two Dutch language newspapers that are widely read in Frisia: the *Friesch Dagblad* and the *Leeuwarder Courant*. These local newspapers occasionally have an article in Frisian, and they sometimes render the quotes of the interviewees or spokesmen in Frisian. The Education Committee fills the page they buy in the newspapers with popular articles written in Frisian as well as with games such as, for example, crosswords.

Norm elaboration: orthography, vocabulary, grammar

The Frisian Academy advised on the two spelling reforms that took place in the twentieth century (1945 and 1980). In both cases, there was pressure from people working in Frisian education, who wanted to eliminate unnecessary differences between the Dutch and Frisian orthographies. Thus, regarding the orthographic principles of Frisian the educational principle was stronger than the principle of distancing. The original orthographic proposals were watered down. In 1945, a minor spelling reform, based on advice of the Frisian Academy, was accepted. However, other parties — among whom were members of the provincial politicians who had to approve of the reform — had other priorities and the resulting reform was a compromise, leading, accordingly, to an inconsistent standard orthography (cf. Feitsma 1999a: 170). Mention should also be made of the spelling system proposed by the linguist and writer Trinus Riemersma. He developed a highly consistent, mainly phonological spelling system (cf. Riemersma 1977 for details), and some books were printed in this spelling.

The first dictionary of importance, as mentioned earlier, was Waling Dykstra's (1900, 1903, 1911) dictionary. However, as the recognition of Frisian as a 'real' language grew, and as more linguists wanted to know more about this least conspicuous of the Germanic languages, the need arose for a scientific dictionary of the Frisian. Most large Standard languages such as, for example, Dutch possess shelf-filling dictionaries such as the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* ('Dictionary of the Dutch Language'). In the 1930s, it was decided that a similar dictionary would be published for the Frisian language. However, since the publication of such a dictionary usually takes many years, it was felt necessary to establish an institute that would take responsibility for the project. The planned publication of a Frisian dictionary (*Wurdboek fam de Fryske Taal*, 'Dictionary of the Frisian Language') was one of the main reasons for the foundation of the Frisian Academy (Dykstra 1999: 206). Between 1940 and 1960 a large collection of quotations was built up. By that time, departments of Frisian, run mostly part-time, had been established at the University of Utrecht, at the Free University of Amsterdam, at the University of Groningen and the University of Leiden (because of budget cuts the departments of Frisian at the University of Utrecht and the Free University of Amsterdam were later closed). Academics from the departments of Frisian, together with colleagues from Dutch departments, were members of the advisory board of the dictionary project. The writing of the dictionary articles began in the 1960s. The first part of the dictionary (from *A* to *Behekst*) was published in 1984. Since then, one volume has appeared nearly every year. The dictionary has now reached volume eighteen (last entry *siedsprút*, 'germ'). The dictionary's meta-language is Dutch. The Frisian Academy attempted to plan to use Frisian as a meta-language, but the Minister of Education and Sciences (whose agreement was required, partially because of funding) forbade this(!).

The Frisian Academy also produced two concise dictionaries, one for Frisian-Dutch (1984) and one for Dutch-Frisian (1985). Both dictionaries went through several editions. The Academy also produces books about technical vocabulary and thus actively engages in norm elaboration. Glossaries, have appeared, for example, on plant names in Frisian (Franke and van der Ploeg 1984) or on the mechanical parts of cars (de Haan 1984). A dictionary of legal terminology came out recently (Duijff 2001). Frisian may be used in court: a defendant or witness has the right to use Frisian and many legal documents may be drawn up in Frisian. Little use is made of this possibility, however; the custom to revert to Dutch in the formal domains is extremely strong.

The attention of the Frisian Academy has been heavily focused on lexicography at the expense of grammar. Although many articles and some dissertations dealing with aspects of grammatical research have been published no substantial grammar has appeared. There are a few shorter grammars (cf. Tiersma 1985, Hoekema 1996),

and, in the early part of the twentieth century, traditional grammars based on the Latin model were published (see Feitsma 1999b on older grammars of Frisian). In addition, the Education Committee has produced textbook material both for the teaching of Frisian as a foreign language to speakers of Dutch and for the teaching of written Frisian (vocabulary, spelling, grammar) to mother tongue speakers of Frisian. An overview of the output of Frisian philology between 1880 and 1940 can be found in Miedema (1961); a general historiographical outline of Frisian linguistics can be found in Dykstra and Bremmer (1999).

In the process of language elaboration, the question comes up to what extent variation should be allowed in a standard norm. In many cases, although the orthography is standardized, the pronunciation is not. However, the Education Committee actively endorses the Clay Frisian dialect as the standard pronunciation. The Committee believes that there should be one standard for pedagogical and practical reasons, and it is claimed that especially children and civil servants benefit from having a clearly defined, unambiguous standard or linguistic norm (Hiemstra 1983: 33–35). The oral exams of the Education Committee actually subtract points for dialect pronunciation. This, however, has been criticized as an overly strict approach, and it has been suggested that variation can also be viewed as a form of cultural richness (cf. Breuker 1993, 2001a). In addition, it has been argued that instead of focusing on preserving obsolete expressions from the traditional farming life or correcting Frisian dialect pronunciation, the attention of the Education Committee should be focused on the influence of Dutch on modern Frisian vocabulary and grammar.

### 5. Closeness of written Frisian to spoken Frisian

It is generally thought, and this holds true for the present, that written Frisian stands in a closer relationship to spoken Frisian than the written Dutch standard to spoken Dutch in Frisia (hence Frisian was considered to be “more authentic” in the romantic world view of the nineteenth century). There are two main reasons for the closeness of written Frisian to spoken Frisian. First, Dutch has a long history as a strong standard language and the divide between spoken and written language has widened considerably with time. Second, the use of standard written Dutch in formal domains like judicial courts, government institutions and writing in general has led to the gradual elaboration of the language away from everyday linguistic practices in face-to-face interaction. However, according to some critics, the Frisian standard supported by the Frisian Education committee also has a somewhat artificial and formal ring to it, and it has thus received the nickname *boekjefrysk* (‘book Frisian’). Social support for the use of this standard in formal

domains is low, and in most places Dutch is used. Frisian, on the other hand, is used in more private or informal interpersonal interactions. Shop owners, for example, typically address customers in Dutch and then talk to the shop employee in non-standard Frisian. The main characteristic of this spoken Frisian is the great amount of Dutch influence, in all areas of grammar and vocabulary. This type of “interference” or “language contact” Frisian has not yet been the subject of systematic study.

## 6. Norm acceptance

Norm adoption has been investigated extensively in Gorter et al. (1985) as well as Gorter and Jonkman (1995), although their interpretation has been criticized in De Haan (1996) and Breuker (2001b: 122ff). Gorter and Jonkman investigated linguistic proficiency in Frisian on the basis of self-rating. As a result the label “Frisian” covers a wide range of varieties of the language, including dialectal Frisian and Frisian with Dutch interferences. The informants’ claims about themselves were not verified. Their research indicates the following:

- 94 % of their informants claimed to be able to understand Frisian,
- 74 % claimed to be able to speak Frisian,
- 64 % claimed to be able to read Frisian, and
- 17 % claimed to be able to write Frisian.

As Breuker (2001b: 122) has pointed out, these results must be interpreted against the general dominance of Dutch: almost all informants are able to understand, speak, read and write Dutch fluently, and of those who have proficiency in Frisian, many actually speak, hear, read and write Dutch most of the time. Breuker points out that two Frisian speech communities can be distinguished (although in reality they are better described as extreme points on a spectrum). On the one hand, there are a few thousand speakers of Standard Frisian who try to speak it wherever they can, and who aim to speak it as correctly as possible, i.e. with as little interference from Dutch as possible, in accordance with the rules of the standardized variety. On the other hand, there is a large group of speakers (between 200,000 and 300,000 people) who switch between Frisian and Dutch, depending on the social context and interlocutor. Most of them speak Frisian at home (either exclusively or in combination with Dutch) and with other speakers of Frisian. They speak Dutch in formal situations as well as with monolingual speakers of Dutch. It is customary for them to switch from Frisian to Dutch, if their conversation partner talks Dutch, even if the latter understands Frisian. This group of speakers of Frisian may occasionally read a Frisian book, but mostly, they read Dutch. They may watch an hour of Frisian television every evening, but they are sure to watch two hours of

Dutch television. They don't care about their Frisian because they have hardly been schooled in it, and there is no social pressure or direct need to speak Frisian; even in small villages where Frisian is much more common, Dutch is an accepted option.

## 7. Recent developments

As a result of recent language activism by the *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* ('Frisian National Party', carrying 5 percent of the votes on average, less in the cities, more in the countryside) and pro-Frisian politicians from all other parties, Frisian has received some status within political circles. Thus, Frisian is spoken by some politicians on the municipal and the provincial level. Furthermore, the province of Frisia is officially bilingual: individuals can request municipal documents to be translated into Frisian and provincial documents are bilingual (Frisian next to Dutch) if the subject concerns the Frisian language or culture. However, Frisian official documents are rarely requested since most people read Dutch better than Frisian. In the field of education, no significant progress has been made.

Apart from slight advances of Frisian at the bureaucratic level, the popular image of Frisian has also been elevated by the use of Frisian in pop music (the groups *De Kast* and *Twarres* have recorded some successful Frisian songs). A comparison of the language survey of Gorter et al. (1985) with that of Gorter and Jonkman (1995) suggests that the use of Frisian was relatively stable in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the very structures and linguistic autonomy of Frisian are increasingly being eroded through on-going influence from Dutch (De Haan 1996), on the one hand, and through the persistent lack of Frisian in education and media, on the other hand. The marginal presence of Frisian in the public domain can be interpreted as a reflection of Frisian's lack of overt social prestige. Nevertheless, the Frisian language and culture are today recognized by many politicians as an asset, not a liability — much as with old windmills, which were demolished in the past, but which are now protected as national monuments.

To sum up, the official Frisian standard is accepted as a spoken norm by a minority of speakers (as a reading norm the standard is generally accepted), and it plays a small role at the institutional level. The standard norm is, furthermore, taught in some primary schools but this does not have much impact, since there is no follow-up at the level of secondary schools. On the positive side, once we start comparing Frisian to Dutch dialects rather than to the Dutch standard language, there is reason for optimism. After all, Frisian is more widely written and read than any dialect of Dutch within The Netherlands. Furthermore, Frisian is allowed in some formal domains, it has become a standard ingredient of the image which the provincial and other authorities like to uphold. This is more than holds true of any

dialect of Dutch. In addition, if we compare the present state of affairs of Frisian with that of 1800, there has been substantial progress. Thus Frisian is, socially speaking, really in between being a dialect and a standard language, and it will probably continue to be so.

## Notes

\* Thanks are due to Willem Visser for reading the manuscript critically. In this article I shall restrict myself to West-Frisian, the Frisian language which is spoken in the province of *Friesland* in The Netherlands and which has approximately 400,000 speakers. The Frisian language family further consists of two other languages, East- and North- Frisian (respectively 2000 and 10,000 speakers), which are also recognized as separate and official minority languages in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. On the historical origin of North Frisian, see Århammar (2001); on East-Frisian, see Versloot (2001).

1. The Old Frisian period ended later than the corresponding periods in other Germanic languages. On this issue see Bremmer (2001).
2. This section is based on Feitsma's (2001) excellent overview of the language and literature of the Middle Frisian period. For information on the study of lexicography and grammar in this period, see Boersma (1999a,b).
3. This and the following sections owe much to the research reported by Breuker in various publications (especially 1993, 2001a).
4. The university of Franeker was closed down as a result of Napoleonic centralization efforts; it was not re-opened by the Dutch authorities after the Napoleonic wars.

## References

- Algra, N. 1991. *Zeventien Keuren en Vierentwintig Landrechten*. Doorn: Graal.
- Århammar, N. 2001. "Die Herkunft der Nordfriesen und des Nordfriesischen". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 531–537. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Boersma, P. 1999a. "De leksikografy fan it Midfrysk". In *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*, A. Dykstra and R. Bremmer Jr (eds), 111–125. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Boersma, P. 1999b. "De taalkunde fan it Midfrysk". In *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*, A. Dykstra and R. Bremmer Jr (eds), 126–144. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Bree, C. van 2001. "'Stadtfrïesisch' und andere nichtfrïesische Dialekte der Provinz Fryslân". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 129–138. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Bremmer, R. 2001. "The Geographical Division and Periodization of Old Frisian". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 602–606. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.



- Breuker, P. 1993. *Noarmaspekten fan it hjoeddeiske Frysk*. Dissertation, University of Groningen.
- Breuker, P. 2001a. "The development of Standard West Frisian". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 711–721. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Breuker, P. 2001b. "West Frisian in Language Contact". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 121–129. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Coetsem, F. van 1988. *Loan phonology and the two transfer types in language contact*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Duijff, P. 2001 *Juridisch Woordenboek Nederlands-Fries/Juridysk Wurdboek Nederlânsk-Frysk*. Groningen: Martinus Nijhoff and Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Dykstra, A. and Bremmer Jr, R. (eds) 1999. *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Dykstra, A. 1999. "De leksikografy fan it Nijfrysk". In *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*, A. Dykstra and R. Bremmer Jr (eds), 191–212. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Dykstra, W. 1900, 1903, 1911. *Friesch Woordenboek*. Three volumes. Leeuwarden: Meijer en Schaafsma.
- Epkema, E. 1824. *Woordenboek op de gedichten en verdere geschriften van Gijsbert Japicx*. Leeuwarden.
- Feitsma, S. 1902. *De vlugge Fries. Handleiding om zonder onderwijzer in korten tijd Friesch te leeren lezen, schrijven en spreken*. Kampen: Zalsman.
- Feitsma, A. 1999a. "Skiednis fan de stavering". In *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*, A. Dykstra and R. Bremmer Jr (eds), 154–174. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Feitsma, A. 1999b. "Grammatika fan it Nijfrysk". In *In skiednis fan 'e Fryske taalkunde*, A. Dykstra and R. Bremmer Jr (eds), 175–190. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Feitsma, A. 2001. "Mittelfriesische Sprache und Literatur". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 704–711. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Feitsma, T. 1958. "Om in nije stavering. It lûdsysteem fan de fokalen." *Us Wurk* 07: 34–39.
- Feitsma, T. 1958. "Om in nije stavering. It lûdsysteem fan de konsonanten." *Us Wurk* 07: 86–90.
- Fokkema 1937. *Het Stadsfries. Een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis en de grammatica van het dialect van Leeuwarden*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Folkertsma, B. 1973. *De stavering fan it Westerlauwerske Frysk yn de njoggentjinde ieu. Estrik* 46. Grins.
- Franke, D. and van der Ploeg, D. 1984. *List fan offisjele Fryske Plantenammen*. Fryske Akademy, Ljouwert
- Gorter, D., Jelsma, G., van der Plank, P. and K. de Vos (eds) 1985. *Taal yn Fryslân*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Gorter, D and Jonkman, R. (eds) 1995. *Taal yn Fryslân op 'e nij besjoen*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Haan, G. de. 1996. "Over de (in)stabiliteit van het Fries." *Nederlandse Taalkunde* 01: 306–319.
- Haan, R. de. 1984. *Terminology fan de saakfakken*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Halbertsma, J. 1827. *Hulde aan Gysbert Japicx II*. Ljouwert.
- Hiemstra, S. 1983. "Noarm en ynterferinsje". *De Pompeblêden* 54 (8): 147–152.

- Hoekema, T. 1996. *Beknopte Friese Vormleer*. Leeuwarden: AFÜK.
- Hoekstra, E. 1993. "Over de implicaties van enkele morfo syntactische eigenaardigheden in West-Friese dialecten". *Taal en Tongval* 45: 135–154.
- Hof, J. 1933. *Friesche Dialectgeographie*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Jensma, G. 1998. *Het Rode tasje van Salverda : Burgerlijk bewustzijn en Friese identiteit in de negentiende eeuw*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Johnston, T. 2001. "The Old Frisian Law Manuscripts and Law Texts" In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 571–587. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Johnston, T. 2001. "The Middle Low German Translations of Old Frisian Legal Texts". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 587–594. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Jonkman, R. 1993. *In taalsjologysk ûndersyk nei it Stedsk yn ferhâlding ta it Nederlânsk en it Frysk yn Ljouwert*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Miedema, H. T. J. 1961. *Paedwizers fan de Fryske filology. Th. Siebs (1862–1941), F. Buitenrust Hettema (1862–1922) en de Fryske filology tusken 1880 en 1940*. Ljouwert: Fryske Academy.
- H. Munske (ed.) 2001. *Handbook of Frisian Studies*. In collaboration with N. Århammar, V. Faltings, J. Hoekstra, O. Vries, A. Walker and O. Wilts. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Riemersma, T. 1977. *Fôl en fredeloas. Noivud*. Ljouwert: Koperative Utjowerij.
- Scholten, K. C. 1974. "Winterjoune-nocht". In *Tsjibbe Gearts van der Meulen. Wâldman en Wrâldboarger*, F. Dam, K. Dykstra, J. Knol and Y. Poortinga (eds), 135–144. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Steensen, T. 2001. "Zur Entstehung und Entwicklung interfriesischer Beziehungen". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 698–703. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Tiersma, P. 1985. *Frisian Reference Grammar*. Dordrecht: Foris. [reprint 1999, corrected and improved]
- Versloot, A. 2001. "Grundzüge ostfriesischer Sprachgeschichte". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 734–740. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Vries, O. 1993. *Naar ploeg en koestal vluchtte Uw taal; De verdringing van het Fries als schrijftaal door het Nederlands (tot 1580)*. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.
- Vries, O. 2000. "De stêden oan it roer. It tiidrek fan stêdske supremasy yn Fryslân (1482–1486)". *It Beaken* 62: 73–99
- Vries, O. 2001a. "Die altfriesischen Urkunden". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 594–601. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Vries, O. 2001b. "Die Verdrängung des Altfriesischen als Schreibsprache". In *Handbook of Frisian Studies*, H. Munske et al. (eds), 606–613. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- WFT, *Wurdboek fan de Fryske Taal / Woordenboek der Friese Taal* 1984. Ljouwert: Fryske Akademy.