



A small language,
..... a large dictionary



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Frisian, the language spoken in the Dutch province of Friesland, is of West Germanic origin. Its earliest stage, Old Frisian, belongs with Old English and Old Saxon, to the North Sea Germanic group.

Traditionally, three stages are recognized - Old, Middle and Modern Frisian. These three stages do not coincide, however, with the periodization of the other West Germanic dialects. Old Frisian is the language found in a number of manuscripts and charters from the 11th to 16th centuries, originating from an area ranging from the German river Weser in the East to the IJsselmeer in the West. Though the oldest manuscripts are relatively late, they often contain texts that are much older. Linguistically, these early texts reflect features that justify calling this stage Old Frisian. Middle Frisian is the term used for the language of the poet Gysbert Japicx (1603-1666), and that of the literature of the 17th and the 18th centuries. Though there are no specific linguistic reasons for considering Middle Frisian (1550-1800) a separate stage in the process of linguistic evolution, it has, for practical reasons, been generally accepted as such. Frisian is the second official language in the Netherlands and it forms the main object of investigation of the Linguistics Research Group of the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy). The Fryske Akademy is the scientific research and educational centre for Friesland and its people, its language, its history and its culture.

Lexicographers of the Fryske Akademy have been working since 1938 on a comprehensive scholarly dictionary of Modern Frisian, i.e. the *Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal / Woordenboek der Friese taal* (WFT).



This is a unique undertaking for a lesser used language like Frisian. When the entire project is finished, 120,000 words will have been defined, comprising 25 volumes of 400 pages each. This is considerably more than was aimed at when the project started, namely a dictionary about the size of the Van Dale monolingual Dutch desk dictionary, which at the time consisted of one volume.

Preamble

Like most dictionaries, the WFT stands on the shoulders of earlier ones. In fact, the history of the WFT begins with the Mennonite minister and language lover, Joast Hiddes Halbertsma (1789-1869). He was the first to make extensive collections of (Modern) Frisian language material and also the first to describe such material in a dictionary format. In 1872, his son Tsjalling posthumously published the *Lexicon Frisicum*, which contained material his father had finished in manuscript, the part *A to Feer*. The metalanguage of the Lexicon was Latin, consequently the dictionary was not accessible to the majority of Frisians. This was a pity, because in those days many people took great interest in the study of Frisian. In 1879 the Provincial Executive of Friesland decided there should be a comprehensive dictionary of Modern Frisian, taking as its point of departure the *Lexicon Frisicum* and the dictionary material Halbertsma had left to the Province of Friesland. This new dictionary, the *Friesch woordenboek*, was compiled by Waling Dykstra (1821-1914), with the assistance of others. The dictionary appeared in three volumes (1900, 1903, and 1911). Fairly soon there were critical comments on the *Friesch woordenboek* and there was an increasingly strong demand for a more complete dictionary. Eventually,



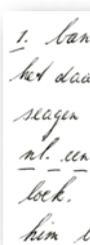
this was one of the reasons for the founding of the Fryske Akademy in 1938. The main project the Fryske Akademy embarked on was the scholarly *Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal / Woordenboek der Friese taal*.

The material from Halbertsma's manuscripts and his dictionary has been incorporated into the WFT, as has been that of the entire *Friesch woordenboek*. Thus, be it in a roundabout way, and over a hundred years later, Halbertsma's material still became available for everybody.

The beginning

Towards the end of 1938 Fryske Akademy chairman Sipma launched a plan to establish a large alphabetic card index system, which was to supply the words for the new dictionary. This card index system would have to contain a collection, as complete as possible, of words and phrases in contemporary and earlier Frisian, including the dialects. In practice, material was gathered from 1800 onwards. In any case the material from existing dictionaries, studies, collections etc. had to be included. Furthermore, attention would have to be paid to (technical) jargon, dialect words, proverbs, sayings and set expressions. The Fryske Akademy was understaffed at that time, so it could only realize this ambitious plan with the help of volunteers. Those volunteers occupied themselves mainly with making excerpts from books and other texts, taking note, as they read, of words and expressions that seemed interesting enough for inclusion in the prospective dictionary.

The volunteers did a great job. In 1954 there were already 300,000 cards in the card-index system. Yet this appeared to be too small a basis for a scholarly dictionary, partly because the people making excerpts had gathered many special and rare words and expressions, but hardly any 'common' ones, like the articles (*de* and *it*



1. Van
het daa
sagen
n't. un
boek.
him





[the] and *in* [a(n)]) and the prepositions (e.g. *yn* [in] and *op* [on/at]). The decision was made to establish a second card-index system, which was to contain integral (parts of) texts. With the help of volunteers this second card-index system was established during the years 1956 to 1958. It was called ‘trochsneedapparaat’ [cross-section system], and it contained all the words of a selection of 4875 pages of text from the period of 1800 to 1950. The new collection yielded for instance 60,000 occurrences of the word *de* [the] and 16,000 of *yn* [in]. All in all, material from over 1,200 books, articles, newspapers etc. has been incorporated in both card-index systems. The ‘cross-section’ card-index system was a very modern tool for its time.

The writing begins

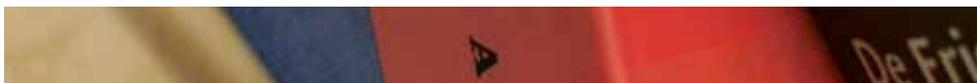
Towards the end of 1958, the contours of the dictionary became a little clearer. The idea was to compile a dictionary of Frisian from 1800 onwards, about the size of the Van Dale dictionary mentioned before. In 1960 it was, at last, possible to start the

compilation process. Partly because the Fryske Akademy was understaffed, the editing process of the dictionary quickly lost momentum, but in the seventies, the situation improved considerably. In 1977 there was a staff of six lexicographers. Yet it would take a long time for the first volume to be published. One of the reasons for the delay was that the first card-index

system had been substantially expanded over the years. Consequently, many of the earlier dictionary texts had to be adapted. Another hurdle to be dealt with before the first volume could be published was the spelling reform that was announced in

*d om hals van een dier, inv. een hend, em
naar te leiden. // Fr. W. [1900]. - De jonges
skreuten mei de boer, dy't Bruins,
hend, by de halstân krige en op 'e wâl
M. BAERSMA, Fris. 13 [1917] Ninny pakte
by syn halstân leet en de baan wraan de hep*

Stress mark		Part of speech
Lemma	'keatse , zw. v. [kɪ.ət̪sə] 1819 →, Pret. <i>keatste</i> , <i>keatst</i> . Sch., OT. [ka:tsə], Hi. [kə:tsə]. Etym. → N. <i>kaatsen</i> .	
General translation	Kaatsen.	
First meaning	1. het kaatsspel spelen. ^s Keatse. <i>Fr.W.</i> [1903]. — <i>Dog as ik en arbeid flijtig. / Kaetzen, koekhakje ijnne t field. / Lit de boesse zonder jield.</i> P.G. DEKETH, <i>tjead</i> (2) [1819]. It soe dochs skoof en skande wêze as de spulregels fan it âlde Dongeradielster keatsen forlern giene. J. HARTMANS, <i>nijtsjerk</i> 99 [a. 1969]. — In subst. gebr. Keatsen wier nin wirk foar sokke ljou: ien biljard moast er komme. E. HALB., <i>lapekoer III</i> 46 [1834]. — <i>Dokkumer, Poppenwierster keatsen, de bal tegen de muur slaan en dan terugslaan.</i> <i>Opg.:</i> M.K. SCHOLTEN [1955]. — Zegsw. Jæ kætze malcoor dy bal ta, 'zij werken alle met hetzelfde oogmerk, en wel om wederzijds voordeel'. P.C. SCHELTEMA, <i>spreekw. III</i> 118 [a. 1835]. (<i>Ook</i>): Hja keatse elkoar de ballen ta, 'zij kaatsen elkander de ballen toe, schijnbaar in tweestrijd werken ze elkaar in de hand'. W. DYKSTRA, <i>volksl. II</i> 288 [1896].	
Dialect pronunciations		
Collocations	2. weerkaatsen. ^o In, Brutus! it iz doebbel kleien wird. / Dat jou nin spegel hadde, dij jou prijs, / Nou ijn it tjuester, koe keatse ijn jou eag, / Sodat jo jou schâd siean koene. R. POSTHUMUS, <i>keanman</i> 123 [1829]. It wetter yn de brede grêft en de ruten fan haed- en bygebouwen keatsten en wjerkeatsten de strielen fen it to sliep geande sintsje. T.E. HALB., <i>laech I</i> 9 [1912].	
Proverbs	3. gooien. ^o Mar dat fielden noch wisten de frouliu net. didse keatse de boel út de wei. T.G. v.d. MEULEN, <i>fen</i> 68 [1860]. — Prov. Dy keatze wol moat de ballen wachtse, wie kaatst moet de bal verwachten, wie schertst moet scherts kunnen verdragen. J.C.P. SALVERDA, <i>sprekwirde</i> 67 [a. 1836]. — Deriv.: <i>be-</i> , <i>fer-</i> , <i>wjerkeatse</i> . — Comp.: <i>broek-</i> , <i>dak-</i> , <i>dyk-</i> , <i>kriich-</i> , <i>merke-</i> , <i>muorre-</i> , <i>om-</i> , <i>plein-</i> , <i>potsje-</i> , <i>prûis-</i> , <i>rekreaasje-</i> , <i>seleksje-</i> , <i>skoalle-</i> , <i>tebek-</i> , <i>ut-</i> , <i>wedstryd-</i> , <i>weromkeatse</i> .	
Derivations		
Compounds		



Pronunciation

Earliest citation

'keatse, zw. v. [kI.ətsə] 1819 →, Pret. *keatste*, *keatst*. Sch., OT. [ka:tsə], Hi. [kə:tsə]. Etym. → N. *kaatsen*.

Kaatsen.

1. het kaatsspel spelen. ^s || *Keatse*. Fr.W. [1903]. — Dog as ik en arbeid *fljigt*. / *Kaetzen*, koekhakje ijnne t field. / Lit de boesse zonder jield. P.G. DEKETH, *tjead* (2) [1819]. It soe dochs skooft en skande wêze as de spulregels fan it âlde Dongeradielster kaatsen forlern giene. J. HARTMANS, *nijtsjerk* 99 [a. 1969].

— In subst. gebr. || *Keatsen* wier nin wirk foar sokke ljou: ien biljard moast er komme. E. HALB., *lapekoer III* 46 [1834].

— *Dokkumer*, *Poppenwierster kaatsen*, de bal tegen de muur slaan en dan terugslaan. || *Opg.*: M.K. SCHOLTEN [1955].

— Zegsw. || Jæ keatze malcoor dy bal ta, 'zij werken alle met hetzelfde oogmerk, en wel om wederzijds voordeel'. P.C. SCHELTEMA, *spreekw. III* 118 [a. 1835]. (*Ook*): Hja keatse elkoar de ballen ta, 'zij kaatsen elkander de ballen toe, schijnbaar in tweestrijd werken ze elkaar in de hand'. W. DYKSTRA, *volksl. II* 288 [1896].

2. weerkaatsen. ^o || In, Brutus! it iz doebbel kleien wird, / Dat jou nin spegel habbe, dij jou prijs, / Nou ijn it tjuester, koe keatse ijn jou eag, / Sodat jo jou schâd sian koene. R. POSTHUMUS. *keanman* 123 [1829]. It wetter yn de brede grêft en de ruten fan haed- en bygebouwen keatsten en wjerkeatsten de strielen fen it to sliep geande sintsje. T.E. HALB., *laech I* 9 [1912].

3. gooien. ^o || Mar dat fielden noch wisten de frouliu net, didse keatse de boel út de wei. T.G. v.d. MEULEN, *fen* 68 [1860].

— Prov. || Dy keatzje wol moat de ballen wachtsje, *wie kaatst moet de bal verwachten, wie schertst moet scherts kunnen verdragen*. J.C.P. SALVERDA, *sprekwirde* 67 [a. 1836].

— **Deriv.:** *be-*, *fer-*, *wjerkeatse*.

— **Comp.:** *broek-*, *dak-*, *dyk-*, *kriich-*, *merke-*, *muorre-*, *om-*, *plein-*, *potsje-*, *priis-*, *rekreaasje-*, *seleksje-*, *skoalle-*, *tebek-*, *út-*, *wedstryd-*, *weromkeatse*.

Inflectional forms

Etymological reference

Usage (sport)

Verbal source

Saying

Citations with their sources

Usage (rare)



1976 and which came into effect in 1980. For the editorial staff this meant that many words that had already been described had to be respelled.

Metalinguage

Around 1960, Sipma raised the question of the dictionary's metalanguage, i.e. the language in which, among others, the semantic and grammatical characteristics of the Frisian words are given. He thought the metalanguage should be Frisian and this stirred up a lot of commotion. The members of the dictionary committee were unable to agree on the matter. Some members opted, for scholarly and ideological reasons, for Frisian. The lexicographers in the committee were in favour of Dutch as the metalanguage. They argued it would allow them to describe the Frisian words in a more simple and compact way. Moreover, with Dutch as the metalanguage, the dictionary would be more accessible to non-Frisian speakers. The board of governors of the Fryske Akademy put the decision into the hands of managing director Brouwer, who chose Dutch as the dictionary's metalanguage, for practical and financial reasons. In 1982 the matter of the metalanguage was raised again. This caused a lot of commotion in- and outside Fryske Akademy circles. The larger part of the dictionary staff were, for practical reasons, opposed to changing over to Frisian as the official language of the WFT. The majority of the general board of the Fryske Akademy, however, supported the advocates of Frisian and in January 1983 it was decided to change the metalanguage of the WFT. But the Minister of Education and Science overruled the board's decision. The board of governors had to reconcile itself to the situation.

When the matter of the metalanguage had been settled, there was nothing left to prevent the publication of the WFT. Towards the end of 1984, the editor-in-chief Klaas van der Veen presented the first volume of the WFT to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.





Scholarly

The WFT in its final form may be described as: a scholarly, alphabetically arranged, historical dictionary, with definitions in Dutch, covering the period 1800-1975. The description of the words is based on the material contained in both card-index systems. All the meanings of a word, one might say, are demonstrated by the accompanying citations from which the meaning has to become clear. By means of these citations the user may verify the work of the lexicographer. This possibility of verification allows us to call the WFT a scholarly dictionary. The choice of Dutch as the dictionary's metalanguage turned the WFT into something of a hybrid. On the one hand it is an explaining dictionary, because explanatory definitions are used. On the other hand it is a translation dictionary, because often a merely translated equivalent is given, especially where compounds are concerned. The later volumes of the WFT, for that matter, show an increasing tendency to give explanatory definitions instead of short translations.

Language museum

Apart from being a perpetual monument to the Frisian language and a model for (future) Frisian lexicographers, the WFT is a treasure trove for anyone intrigued by words and phrases. One might look at the WFT as a language museum. By means of the language and its words, this museum provides the reader with a picture of Frisian society. This is an ever changing picture, because every era has its own words. We all have this natural urge to be able to give a name to everything happening around us and to everything we see. Whenever the things around us are changing, our language does so too. For new things new words come into being, and words for things that have gone out of fashion disappear. Through this changing vocabulary, the WFT allows us to keep track of minor and major changes in society.

Every citation is accompanied by its year of appearance, which allows us to roughly determine when certain changes occurred.



One of the things that keep changing constantly is the fashion in clothes. The WFT records it. We may read that around 1900 people wore durable and strong underwear made of the white-spotted blue fabric *divel-* or *izersterk* [devil- or iron-strong]. The dates of the citations of the word *himdrok* show that in the 19th century men wore that garment between their undershirt and their outer clothes.



The WFT also indicates that environmental legislation has not always been as strict as it is now. Today, the farmers are at their wits' end about what to do with their cow and pig manure. From the WFT we learn this was not really a problem for their predecessors, who simply dumped it in the *jarrefeart* of *-sleat* [slurry ditch].

Interesting too is the indirect picture the WFT paints of the social taboo on blasphemy. To get around this taboo and yet be able to vent one's feelings in a terse way, people invented a whole series of disguised oaths. The WFT faithfully reports them. The yield from volume 10 is *jakkes*, *jammele*, *jandoarje*, *jandoasje(my)*, *jandomme*, *jasses(krastes)*, *jemeny(joasje)*, *jemis(kremis)*, *jeukes(kreukes)* and *jokes*, all having the name of Jesus (Christ) as a common basis.

Lovers of popular superstition will find an abundance of examples in the WFT. In volume 10 we read that black cats will bring sorrow and grief and white cats good luck. But be careful with cat's hair, because it will give you consumption. Dreaming of molars falling out of your mouth means that one of your next of kin will die.





A screw from a coffin, or a ring made of such a screw, is good for gout and a living frog is an excellent cure for *blikgatsmerte*, or pain caused by a skinned backside.

Digital era

Up to circa 1985, every lexicographer wrote his or her dictionary text with a pen. From then on, the editorial staff used specially designed dictionary writing software. Each handwritten text has since been entered into the computer. Thus a digital version of the ultimate paper dictionary was created. In 2010 the data of this digital version were converted into state-of-the-art standards. The WFT was integrated into the dictionary component of the *Geïntegreerde Taalbank Nederlands* (Integrated Language Database of Dutch) of the Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie in Leiden (<http://gtb.inl.nl/>). The WFT is now freely available to a large audience, allowing interested parties to search in the most complete Frisian dictionary, and to explore the Frisian language in relation to Dutch by means of an advanced retrieval application. The digital WFT will no doubt prove to be a modern lexicographical resource of significant value.

Conclusion

With the completion of the WFT, something has been accomplished of which a small community like Friesland may be proud. In the meantime, lexicographers of the Fryske Akademy have also published a number of other dictionaries, including a monolingual Frisian dictionary (2008) and a bilingual Frisian-English dictionary (2000). Both have been partly based on WFT-material and both are available as digital dictionaries.

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