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[this is the original English version]

The Frisian language in the Netherlands

Durk Gorter

1. Introduction

The province of *Fryslân* (Dutch/English: *Friesland*) is one of the twelve provinces of the Royal Kingdom of the Netherlands. Geographically the province is located in the north-west, on the southern borders of the North Sea. It has a surface of 6.200 km², of which 2.850 km² is water. Four of the five Dutch Waddensea islands are part of the province: *Flylân/Vlieland*, *Skylge/Terschelling*, *Amelân/Ameland* and *Skiermûntseach/Schiermonnikoog*. Apart from the islands, the province can be divided roughly into three regions. Overall the landscape is characteristically flat and the largest part of the province is below sea level, protected from the sea by solid dikes. About one third of the surface consists of water. In the north-western region, *de Klaaihoeke (the Clay corner)*, along the coast, many villages are built on or around *terps*: the *terps* are ancient artificial mounds of earth and clay which offered protection against the rising seawater before the dikes were built (i.e. before the year 1000 AD). The central lakes region, *it Lege Midden (the Low Center)*, contains 13 larger and 17 smaller lakes connected by canals and waterways. The area extends from the north-east through to the south-west and is a popular tourist area (sailing, surfing and swimming). The south-eastern region is known for its forests as indicated by the name *de Wâlden (the woods)*.

The total population of the province is 643,000 (2005), which is equal to approx. 190 inhabitants per km² (cf. the Netherlands: 16 million inhabitants; 460 per km²). The capital is the city of *Leeuwarden* (Fr. *Ljouwert*), which has some 90,000 inhabitants. Leeuwarden is one of the eleven “cities” in Friesland which obtained city rights during the Middle Ages. Some of these “cities” are quite small and would be

considered small villages by today's standards. The “eleven cities tour” (Fr. *Alvestêdetocht*) has a length of some 200 kilometers. The tour has become known world-wide, especially because it takes place on skates during a severe winter (the last three times in 1985, 1986 and 1997). It is also possible to do the tour many other ways, e.g. by motorboat, canoe, bike, or on foot.

Friesland has 31 municipalities. A dense pattern of over 300 villages (many with a population of less than 1,500) with only a few larger towns is typical for Friesland. The second largest town is *Drachten* with some 41,000 inhabitants; the tiniest villages may have less than 25 inhabitants.

The administrative borders of the province coincide well with the geographic area in which the Frisian language (Fr. *Frysk*) is spoken today. Only in a small part of the neighboring province of Groningen (Fr. *Grinslân*), where the language border crosses the administrative border, do we also find a few thousand speakers of Frisian.

In 1830 the population of Friesland (205,000) comprised almost 8% of the total population of the Netherlands; by 1920 the proportion had declined to 5.6%. By 1950 the absolute number of inhabitants had more than doubled (468,000), but it had further decreased relatively (only 4.6%). Today it is less than 4% of the total population of the Netherlands. The relative decrease is mainly due to a continued departure surplus from Friesland, caused especially by its weak economy. Friesland is traditionally an agricultural area with relatively little industry. Today the (financial) service sector is quite important.

According to age, the youngest group (below 19 years) and the oldest group (over 65 years) are overrepresented in Friesland compared to the average in the Netherlands. Many young people leave the province to study at a university (mainly Groningen) or to obtain a job in the “city-belt” (*Randstad*) of Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam. In terms of educational level and income the population of Friesland is below average.

Migration is thus an important factor (Van Langevelde 1999). During the 1950s there was massive emigration from Friesland. From 1960 till today the number of people leaving the province every year has remained fairly constant, averaging $\pm 25,000$. However, the number of newcomers has fluctuated from just over 20,000 in 1960, rising to a high 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. Population growth has come from a surplus of births and after 1995 from an influx of asylum seekers and other immigrants. Only since 2003 this trend has reversed again.

There is also internal migration to and from the countryside, where living in the towns and larger villages 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 language related differences less distinct.

2. The sociolinguistic situation

A census has not been held in the Netherlands since 1970 and the former censuses have never contained a question on language. Thus there are no detailed data available on the numbers of Frisian-language speakers (nor on Dutch or other languages). From representative sample surveys among the population of 12 years and older, which were carried out in 1967, 1980 and 1994 (Pietersen 1969, Gorter et al. 1984, Gorter & Jonkman 1995), we can deduce that $\pm 74\%$ of the population is able to speak Frisian. This figure implies an absolute number of roughly 400,000 speakers of Frisian. From the same surveys we know that a substantial part of them, $\pm 19\%$, must be second-language learners because 55% reports they acquired Frisian as their first language as a child. Currently, just over half the population usually speaks Frisian at home. Again from these surveys it is known that approximately 94% of the population can understand Frisian, 65% can read it and only 17% can write the language. What we observe over the time span of more than 25 years is a slow decline in speaking proficiency and an increase in writing abilities. Yet, overall, the percentages have been relatively stable, as shown in figure 1.

====> insert figure 1 here <=====

Figure 1: *Competence: ability to understand, speak, read and write Frisian (1967-1994)*

From more recent studies among primary and secondary school children we know the percentage of first language learners is falling gradually and is just above 40% (Foekema 2004, Van Ruijven 2004, Van der Bij & Valk 2005).

Language transmission among the dialect speakers has decreased sharply over the last two generations (Gorter & Jonkman 1995). The number of immigrants from other countries has increased and so has the number of mother tongue speakers of foreign languages. It has been estimated that approximately 25,000 foreign born migrants settled in Friesland in ten years time (Van der Vaart 2001:15), a number which constitutes 3 per cent of the total population (much lower than the central regions of the Netherlands). A large part of the immigrants settled in the four largest towns of Friesland. For the capital of Leeuwarden/Ljouwert (population 90,000) it was established that some 50 different mother tongues were spoken by primary school children (Van der Avoird et al. 2000). The five most common foreign mother tongues were English, Arabic, Kurdish, Hindi and Berber. These five together accounted for 50 per cent of all speakers of foreign languages.

English, as an additional language, has become more important over the last few decades due to increased globalization. The sociolinguistic position of English today is more that of a second language than of a foreign language. In Friesland, similarly to the rest of the Netherlands and some other European countries, English has become part of the linguistic repertoire of average citizens. A recent survey showed that 87 per cent of the population claims they can have a conversation in English (Eurobarometer 2005: 5). Globalizing developments make that all inhabitants of Friesland are exposed to English in their daily lives. Television is a powerful force for the socialization of family members and the TV set is “speaking English” a great deal of the time, because American or British programs retain the original sound track and are subtitled in Dutch. In the linguistic landscape, the signs in the streets, one sees English on billboards, in the names of shops, bars, restaurants, etc. In this way everyone is confronted with English on a regular basis (Cenoz and Gorter 2006). Overall, one can say that multilingualism has increased (Gorter 2001).

As a rule, all inhabitants of Friesland are able to speak, read and write Dutch. There is, however, a substantial part of the Frisian speakers which claims to have greater fluency in Frisian than in Dutch (about 60%).

In terms of language geography there has been a contrast between the towns and the countryside for at least four centuries. Principally during the first part of the 16th century a separate linguistic system came into being in at least eight towns: the so-called "town-Frisian" (Fr. *Stedfrysk*). This was caused by a change in government (new rulers with immigrant civil servants) and increased trade contacts with the towns

in the province of Holland (Amsterdam etc.) (Jonkman 1993). Basically town-Frisian is a Dutch dialect although it has been strongly influenced by Frisian, especially in its lexicon and pronunciation.

The emergence of town-Frisian gave rise to a lasting historical contrast between the towns and the countryside. Before World War II we can estimate that over 90% of the households in the countryside spoke Frisian and less than 20% of the households in towns where town-Frisian was spoken. Migration, both internal and external, has changed this pattern, but even today the distribution of the Frisian language reflects a contrast between towns and countryside. Frisian still has its strongest base in the countryside. In the villages the figure for Frisian as the home language is around 70% and in the larger towns (over 10,000 inhabitants) it is about 40% or less.

Some other dialect varieties can be found in Friesland. On three of the four Waddensea islands separate dialects are spoken, viz. *Amelânsk* on Ameland, *Westersk*, *Midslânsk* and *Aastersk* on Terschelling, and *Skiermûntseagersk* on Schiermonnikoog. All five can be thought of as being heavily influenced by both Dutch and Frisian, or as a sort of mixed language. For all varieties the number of speakers has been declining rapidly over the years and few of them are left. The municipality of *It Bilt/Het Bildt* in the north-western part of the province consists mainly of land reclaimed from the “Middle sea” at the beginning of the 16th century. Thereafter the area was settled by farmers from the province of South Holland. Up until today a separate dialect (*Biltsk*) is used by at most a few thousand speakers. At the north-eastern border a dialect known as *Kollumersk* is spoken which does, however, only have a limited geographical spread. In two south-eastern municipalities, *East-* and *West-Stellingwerf*, a Saxon dialect (*Stellingwerfsk*) is spoken by about one third of the inhabitants as their home language (± 20.000 persons). In recent years efforts to revive the dialects have gained some popularity, but overall they seem to decline as home languages. Together the dialect areas mentioned are sometimes referred to as “non-Frisian speaking areas”, which is only in part a correct label, mainly based upon historical considerations.

The position of the Frisian language itself has been characterized as being between a vernacular and a standard language (Feitsma 1981). The Frisian speech community is basically homogeneous and all the dialect varieties are mutually comprehensible. One major dialect is the speech variety found in the south-western part known as

Súdhoeksk. It differs from other varieties mainly due to the lack of the phonological feature “breaking”, thus giving the pronunciation its own particular character. Another major dialect variety is spoken in the *Wâlden* district and is called accordingly *Wâldfrysk*. A feature peculiar to this dialect is the pronunciation of “me”, “he” and “we”. Finally, the third major variety is *Klaaifrysk*, spoken in the western part, *de Klaaihoeke*. The standard variety of Frisian is an amalgam of *Wâldfrysk* and mainly *Klaaifrysk* (Tiersma 1985).

When we look at the distribution of language use of Frisian over different social domains or situations, we see an uneven pattern. In the domains of the family, work and the village community Frisian commands a relatively strong position because a majority of the population habitually uses Frisian. 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 is fairly limited. Survey research has thrown some light on the patterns of differential language use.

Figure 2 contains a summary of twelve situations in public life for which the respondents have indicated which 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 the language background: thus those respondents that learned Frisian as their first language (L1) are distinguished from those who said that they could speak Frisian but that it was not their mother tongue (L2). Those who cannot speak Frisian are left out.

===== insert figure 2 here =====

Figure 2: Use of Frisian: as first language (L1) and as second language (L2)

At the top of the graph there is only a small difference between first-language speakers and second-language speakers of Frisian. In speaking to a “Dutch tourist” it seems obvious that using Frisian is “not done”. However, in the second situation - language with Dutch neighbors - a certain difference already appears. Second-language learners barely use Frisian with Dutch-speaking neighbors whereas first-language speakers do so in about one fifth of the cases (19%). A similar pattern occurs for a medical specialist; usually such people have a Dutch language background and the situation is defined as formal and non-familiar.

In descending this graph the gap between L1 and L2 speakers widens in terms of the percentage that uses Frisian in the selected situations. At the bottom 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.

In the survey many other questions were put on language use (Gorter & Jonkman, 1995). Two similar questions were concerned with language choice. All respondents were asked to imagine themselves in a shop in a larger town and answer the question as to which language they would choose in interaction with a shop assistant. They were first asked “What do you speak when you are spoken to in Frisian by the salesperson?”, and secondly, its complement: “When the salesperson speaks Dutch to you”?

===== insert figure 3 here =====

Figure 3: Language choice in interaction with a Frisian-speaking or Dutch-speaking salesperson

On the left-hand side of the graph we can see that when a salesperson addresses the respondent in Frisian, almost all Frisian speakers (with Frisian as their first language) will reply in Frisian (98%). However, when the salesperson speaks Dutch to this same group, more than three quarters of the Frisian speakers accommodate to the shop assistant and also use Dutch. Only some 22% speak Frisian in the case of a Dutch-speaking shop assistant. On the right-hand side of the graph, we see a totally different picture. These are the remaining respondents (including 42% who claimed to have speaking ability in Frisian, having learned it as a second language). We can observe here that only one third accommodates to a Frisian-speaking salesperson by answering in Frisian. In the case of a Dutch-speaking salesperson, hardly anyone will answer in Frisian (even if for many it is their second language).

These results have, of course, informed us about one particular example of language choice. It is, however, obvious that the language of the interlocutor is an important factor. Language choice is in many cases “person bound”.

It also turns out to be important whether Frisian was learned as a first or second language (Ytsma 1995). On the basis of such results and taking into consideration the rule that between strangers Dutch will be the “unmarked”, safe choice, it will come as

no surprise that many non-Frisians make the observation that they hear little Frisian spoken in the capital of Leeuwarden (or some of the other larger towns).

On the basis of systematic participant observation, a set of four rules for interactional language behavior has been formulated which can be considered a sort of linguistic etiquette (Gorter 1993, 167-181). The first rule is: [a] “Dutch is the common language for everyone”. This rule does not take bilingualism into account. Because everyone can speak Dutch, everyone could - theoretically - act in accordance with this rule.

There is a second, contrasting rule: [b] “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 pertaining to the right to speak one’s own language is only applied cautiously. Thus, additionally, a third rule can be formulated: [c] “Frisians must speak Dutch to Dutch speakers and Frisian only to Frisian speakers”. This rule seems quite simple and straightforward but, as could be shown, is not without problems when applied. For instance, the language learners are a complicating factor. For a conversation with three or more participants still another rule is put forward: [d] “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.

These four rules do not predict the language choice precisely in all cases. Interaction generally is a process of negotiation where everything is not arranged beforehand. The rules are part of the normative ideas about appropriate language use: which language is marked in certain cases and which is not? Frisian is usually the noticeable, the marked language and Dutch is the expected, the unmarked language. This indicates 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 demands extra effort. A person who continues to speak Frisian to a non-Frisian person runs the risk of being labeled a “Frisian activist” or, in other situations, as “someone who can't even speak Dutch properly”.

There are still other factors involved in language choice. One such factor is language attitude. There is a wide variety of attitudes towards the Frisian language. Frisian speakers seem to be basically positively predisposed toward their own language. They express a certain emotional attachment and there is widespread agreement on the “beauty” and the “value” of Frisian. At the same time speakers can wholeheartedly

oppose certain specific measures to promote the use of Frisian, e.g. in education or public administration.

Language attitudes (emotions and opinions) about Frisian can be placed in four simple categories. In the first category we find persons with negative emotions and negative opinions concerning Frisian: e.g. they are against any use of Frisian for official purposes. They will often deny being “anti-Frisian”, but consider Frisian a language to be used only by Frisian speakers among themselves. There are two categories in between. In one category we find persons who hold the opinion that Frisian is useless for economic purposes (or any “serious” use), although at the same time they feel positively towards the maintenance of the “beautiful” Frisian language. Probably this is the largest group. There is another category similar to the former, but the reverse in terms of opinions and emotions. They will approach Frisian positively as some technical policy problem that has to be solved in a rational way, but they feel little emotional attachment towards the language. There are not many who are outspokenly negative in their emotions, rather neutral. Finally, there is a category with both positive emotions and positive opinions. This last category comprises a relatively small number of pro-Frisian persons.

With such contrasting language attitudes, language conflicts are part and parcel of daily life in Friesland, but usually only on a small scale at the level of individual interaction. There is no large-scale social conflict over the use of the language. An exception was the introduction of Frisian place names in 1989 when organized resistance by small entrepreneurs made it difficult to effectuate the measure; even fifteen years later the measure has still not been fully implemented.

Outside the province of Friesland people are often hardly aware of the developments concerning Frisian. There the prestige of the language is relatively low, even though it may be held in high regard inside the province itself. Although the Frisian speakers are a quantitative majority in Friesland, the Dutch speakers constitute the social group whose (language) interests and desires are more likely to be realized, and thus they exert more power. Local government is one of the places where Frisian has made some inroads. The stable-diglossia relationship with Dutch as the exclusive language in formal domains and Frisian as the “lower” language, no longer exists. In the current situation it is less clear when and where which language can be used or has to be used. Frisian is allowed, and its use must be possible, but other mechanisms are now constraining its use.

Whether the well-known concept of *diglossia* is still useful to describe the relationship between Frisian and Dutch is a matter of some debate among scholars of the Frisian linguistic situation (Gorter 1993, 24-27). It is clear that the older strict “division of functions” between the two languages has given way to new patterns. Dutch has entered into and cannot be kept out of the intimate spheres of the home, friends, family and neighborhood, whereas at the same time Frisian is seeking to “conquer” some of the “higher” domains of education, media and public administration. Especially self-aware speakers of Frisian may find themselves in a situation of “competing bilingualism”.

As a written language Frisian has remained quite marginal, thus there is at least still a diglossic distribution between spoken and written language functions.

Individual and social bilingualism are the rule in Friesland as three quarters of the population can speak (at least some) Frisian and Dutch. Many claim to have an active command of English and some of other languages such as German or French as well. Increased contacts with speakers of other languages (immigration of foreign workers, refugees, international exchanges, tourism and the media) make the use of such languages more than just a potential, theoretical issue. Inhabitants of Friesland very much live in an increasingly multilingual environment where contact, albeit often passive, with many languages is frequent. In the streets of Leeuwarden, as well as in many other towns and villages, dozens of different languages can be (over)heard.

3. Language policy

The Frisian language has been officially recognized as the second language of the Netherlands (Rapport 1970). That formal recognition has, however, only entailed moderate promotion of the language by the state. In a slow process of legal codification certain provisions for the use of Frisian in dealings with the government have been made. The period of 1989 to 1997 may be characterized as exceptional because Frisian and Dutch appeared more or less regularly on the political agenda; this is related to the process of European integration (Hemminga 2000: 196).

Developments at the level of the European Union caused a change in perception. The fear existed that the Dutch language in Europe might be forced in a minority position similar to Frisian in the Netherlands. Schmidt (1997: 30) observed that “the Frisian language underwent an important increase in prestige”. He was referring to

developments in Friesland with reference to the legal framework during the 1990s. Within the language policy framework four different but interconnected parts can be distinguished.

The first part is a so-called Covenant or formal agreement between the State and the Province. The Province of *Fryslân* started developing its language policy in the 1970's. Because provinces are not a powerful level of government in the Netherlands, it was courageous of the Province to try to establish a formal policy. In 1985 it published an important report with the meaningful title: "From a Favor to a Right". This indicates clearly the point of view of the Province, but it also implies the point of view of the State. The State's attitude was that Frisian is not a right but purely a favor. Some provisions should be made for Frisian such as a few hours in primary schools or a small subsidy for Frisian theatre. Thus there were conflicting approaches between the State and the Province in the 1980's. This resulted in long negotiations and finally, in 1989, for the first time a formal agreement, a Covenant, was reached between the Province and the State Government. The agreement included provisions for the media, education, culture and scientific research, but also for public administration and the use of Frisian in court. The covenant has been renewed in 1993 and again in 2001, the third time it was extended in coverage and was intended to last for a period of ten years. The most recent formal agreement covers an even broader range of fields than its predecessors. The reason is that it follows the structure of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (see below) and thus covers seven different policy areas. The policy intentions of the 'Covenant' can be viewed as a consequence of ratification of the European Charter.

However, when the first agreement between the State and the Province was put to the legal test in 1989 on the issue of publishing documents in Frisian, it was rejected by the highest court of the Netherlands. The first Covenant was declared not to be legally binding for ordinary citizens. Thus the language policy needed a stronger legal base. So work started on making a Frisian language law, which again was a long process. This concerns the second part of the policy framework. Just before the special law was completed, as it was about to go to parliament, the Dutch government decided it needed some similar legal arrangement for the Dutch language as well. This was because the Dutch constitution does not have an article on the Dutch language, and because there is nothing in law about the official language of the Netherlands. Therefore in the new general Act on Administrative Law, which is dealing with the

structure of public administration in the Netherlands, an article on the Dutch language was introduced. As an exception, an article on Frisian was added which contains the core from the original special law on Frisian. The general act came into force in July 1995 so since then it is officially possible, and can no longer be rejected in court, to use Frisian in legal affairs including documents and speaking.

The third part of the policy framework concerns the courts. There were similar problems with Frisian in court. Frisian was allowed in court by a law passed in 1956 due to a riot in Friesland in 1951 over the use of Frisian in one particular court case. As a reaction, the Dutch government passed an Act which stated that one could, if one insisted, use Frisian, at least when the presiding judge allowed the use of the language. So in a few cases the Frisian language was actually used. This law has changed as a new law came into effect in 1997. This revised law on Frisian in court also includes many legal provisions for Frisian in written documents. One can use Frisian in documents as long as one does not “unduly obstruct” the process of the law. Today one does, in principle, have the full right to speak and write the Frisian language in court proceedings.

Finally, there is a European legal policy product, the Council of Europe’s *European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages*. In the case of the Netherlands the Charter is perceived as quite important. The Dutch State was among the first to sign and also to ratify the Charter which came into force on March 1st 1998. This did not lead immediately improve the position of Frisian. One positive effect is in the sense of a *symbolic* act as the Dutch member State is committing itself to such measures as are already provided for in the covenant and in other laws. For Frisian, the positive aspect of the European Charter being signed is that it will be more difficult to reverse existing measures. However, the reports by the Committee of Experts (2001, 2004) and the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers (2001, 2004) both times showed that the Dutch state was not fulfilling all its obligations towards Frisian. In particular the paragraph for education got a lot of attention of the Committee of Experts and came most pronounced to the foreground in the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers, which must have been disappointing for the central state government, because they were convinced they were “doing their best for Frisian”. Part of that was tried to counter-act by the third Covenant between the State and the Province of 2001. That Covenant, as well as the periodical reports for the Charter

describe in detail what the central state and the provincial government have done and even more what they intend to do in order to improve the position of Frisian.

There is substantial political agreement that the government has a task in protecting and promoting the Frisian language. However, the policy plans have a largely non-committal character. The fact that Dutch is so much taken for granted seems to wield far greater power than the formal implementation of policy intentions.

In terms of language policy, next to the government sector, also the domains of education and the mass-media are of great importance. These sectors will be briefly dealt with below.

Even if Frisian has only a very modest place in the education system, this domain is considered one of the spearheads of language policy (Zondag 1993, Extra & Gorter 2001). In education, efforts were undertaken as early as 1907 to teach Frisian (then outside regular school hours). Only 30 years later, in 1937, Frisian obtained a modest place inside the curriculum as a “living regional language”. From the early 1950s onwards a process began of introducing Frisian into more schools. In 1980 the language became an obligatory part of the curriculum in all primary schools (with a few exceptions in dialect areas where less Frisian is spoken). Since 1993 Frisian has also been granted a modest place in the first three grades of secondary school.

Teaching materials have been developed, but are only available in modest quantities. Teacher training for Frisian is the responsibility of the corresponding departments in two large colleges for higher vocational training in Leeuwarden (Ytsma & Van der Schaaf 2001, Inspectie 2006). There is no university in Friesland; at university level Frisian can be studied in Amsterdam, Groningen and Leiden. In research Frisian is restricted those universities and to the *Fryske Akademy*. Since its foundation in 1938 the *Akademy* has occupied a central place in research on the Frisian language, history and society. Important projects concern lexicography (dictionary of the Frisian language), history and social sciences. The latter mainly concerns the sociology of language and international comparative research on other European minority languages (Mercator-Education). At the *Akademy* there is a staff of some seventy and almost two thirds carry out scholarly work. Since its inception the *Akademy* has published over 1.000 books in many different languages, about 1/3 in Frisian, 1/3 in Dutch and 1/3 in other languages such as English and German.

In the mass-media Frisian has also only a minimal presence. The two major daily newspapers have a small number of Frisian texts every day (< 3%), and one special Frisian page every week. Local papers generally follow this pattern; here and there some have a little more Frisian. There are few literary journals and a general monthly magazine, all of those have a presence on the internet next to two special web journals and several literary blogs. There one journal special for education: *De Pompeblêden*. There are two special youth magazines aiming at the age group under 18.

The number of hours broadcast by the regional radio station has increased quite considerably over the last few years, to some 60 hours a week. Frisian television remained very modest for a long time at less than one hour a week, including school TV programs. Since 10 years there is one and a half hour of original programs every day (plus the re-running of programs). These are well received and have a relatively high viewing rate. Frisian has a modest place in more recent “new media” developments, such as CD-ROMs and the Internet. An increasing important source of information is the Frisian version of Wikipedia with well over 2.000 articles in Frisian.

Taking all factors into consideration, we may conclude that Frisian has a moderately strong position in society (cf. Fishman 1991, Gorter 2001). When some years ago Fishman (1991: 180-181) compared the situation of the Frisian language to that of Basque in the Basque Country in Spain, he pointed out that the basic problem in Friesland is to activate the passive good will for Frisian. He observed that the Frisian scene is rather lethargic compared to that for the Basques. In similar vein Cummins (1989: 17) commented on the apathy surrounding bilingual education in Friesland. The last years not much seems to have changed.

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www.mercator-education.eu (information on Frisian and other European
minority languages in education)

www.omropfryslan.nl (Frisian broadcasting organization, website all in Frisian)

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