

Social surveys of minority language communities

in: T. Wicherkiewicz, B. Synak (eds) (1997) *Language Minorities and Minority Languages in the Changing Europe*, p. 59-76. Gdansk: Uniwersitetu Gdanskiego

Durk Gorter
Fryske Akademy / University of Amsterdam

Introduction

To improve our understanding of the position of language minority communities in a Europe that is changing, we need detailed data on the characteristics of the populations concerned. Social surveys can give us representative and reliable data about a language group, about the language competence of its members, and about the use of languages in society. In recent years, several surveys were conducted in a number of minority language communities across Europe. In some cases, e.g., Ireland and Friesland, such studies have been replicated with regular time intervals over a period of 20 years or more.

My aim is to alert researchers in the field of minority languages to some of the problems, possibilities and limitations of conducting such social surveys. This is based upon experience with three large scale surveys (and several smaller ones) dealing with language proficiency, use and attitudes in the province of Friesland. The different stages of a survey project will be discussed and a brief description will be given of various problems that can be encountered when language is the object of the survey. This approach has proved its usability from the point of view of practical application of knowledge for language policy development, as well as for the scientific relevance of the results.

The work on Friesland will be placed in the wider perspective of the European Language Survey Research Network. This network was established in 1994 between four research institutions: the Linguistics Institute of Ireland in Dublin, the Research Centre Wales in Bangor, the Deputy Ministry for Language Policy of the Basque Country in Vitoria and the Fryske Akademy in Ljouwert. All four institutes have occupied themselves with large scale surveys of the minority languages vis-a-vis the dominant languages in their areas.

Among them they have considered many theoretical, methodological and technical aspects of comparative studies, based upon language survey methodology. The goal of the network has been to develop a module of core questionnaire items that can be used in future language surveys, also in other minority language communities. The four research teams in the network have already substantially benefitted from each others skills and experiences.

The participants in the network have constructed a common database, which not only contains the several hundred different questionnaire items included in the four studies, but also the full data about all respondents (N= 8.361). Although comparison of the survey results is complicated in many ways, such comparisons can be made on a few topics.

Statistical analysis of some results of these four surveys, results in empirical support for the persistence, or even the progress of the language groups concerned.

A survey project

To many persons a survey project may seem to be a straightforward exercise, which would not be all that difficult to carry out. In one sense this is true, as the basic ingredients can be easily listed and are probably quite well known. Surveys with standardized questionnaires have probably become the most popular social scientific research instrument over the last decades. Surveys are also used widely for market research and public opinion polling (often resulting in 'news' for the media). The following table does give an overview of different stages that can be distinguished.

Table 1: Stages in a survey project

- ▶ establish objectives
- ▶ formulate research questions
- ▶ define variables
- ▶ develop a questionnaire
- ▶ set up the sampling frame
- ▶ execute field work
- ▶ carry out data-analysis
- ▶ write and publish a report

Simple as such a list may seem, to each stage a multitude of aspects are related and several detailed methodological studies have been done on them. One can find a plethora of handbooks dealing with survey research in general, and several specialized books on, e.g., questionnaire design, on sampling methods or on statistical techniques of data-analysis. However, very little work has been done on the peculiarities of surveys when 'language' or 'bilingualism' is the object of the study (Lieberson 1980). Then the functioning of language as a social phenomenon is put central stage. The '*objective*' is to find out about the position and development of a minority language vis-a-vis a majority language in one particular language community. In our case it is the province of Friesland in the Netherlands, where Frisian, Dutch and a number of dialects are in use.

The '*research questions*' are concerned with the broader issue of 'who is speaking what language to whom, when and why?' (to repeat the phrase made famous by Fishman 1965). Such broad research questions have to be translated into numerous *variables*. These concept indicators will help to answer the research questions. Once the variables have been determined, they in their turn have to be 'translated' - operationalised - into a *questionnaire*. That brings us to the complicated skill of question formulation and the choice of format to be used. With survey studies in a bilingual community there are additional problems, such as what language will be used for the questionnaires: only one language (then which one?) or both languages (or even three as in the Basque Country: French, Spanish and Basque)?

As far as the *sampling frame* is concerned, most people would agree that the sample has to be 'representative'. But the researcher may forget to answer the question: 'representative of what?', (or, 'how well?'). Will the sample include only speakers of the minority language, e.g., because they are only a small proportion of the total population or are all inhabitants of the area interviewed? Generally people also know that the criterion of randomness is

important in a sample, but few are able to decide whether a two-stage cluster sample can better fulfill that criterion than a stratified sample. Sometimes the unit of analysis is not well determined. The unit of analysis can be the household, even when individual speakers are questioned. For minority language communities also the issue of borders arises: will the sample be drawn from the population of the administrative area or, of the linguistic area (where both areas in most cases do not fully overlap)? Another issue is the lower age limit of respondents (12, 16 or 18 years, or different?). How can non-response be influenced, will non-respondents be replaced and what other problems are experienced? How large is the sample going to be, is this mainly depending upon the available budget or other practical circumstances? What minimal size is acceptable? All these seemingly mundane questions, but very important for the end result, have to be answered by the research team before they can begin to do the fieldwork.

In terms of the *fieldwork* many other, but related issues do arise. A decision has to be made whether the interviews are carried out through the mail, by telephone or by means of face-to-face interviews. Here we are dealing with face-to-face interviews, in a standardized version. Moreover, there are the arrangements for interview-training, etc.: are those dealt with by the research team (or an individual researcher) or can a commercial survey agency be hired (and do they have experience with language related issues)?

Once questionnaires have been developed in more than one language, an important issue becomes the language to be used during the interview. This choice may be quite complicated when dealing with a minority language (with low prestige and/or not likely to be used in formal situations). Another issue concerns the proficiency of the interviewers to carry out interviews in two languages?

Many general techniques for *data-analysis* are well-known, such as frequency counts, cross tables, analysis of variance, correlations, factor analysis, and multiple regression. Many surveys are limited to some of the more basic techniques. It is however clear that the availability of high speed computer processing makes it easier to also use the more advanced techniques of, e.g., structural modeling. Many interesting relationships can be uncovered, but there is also the risk of a 'fishing expedition' in the data-set, when the analysis is not guided by a set of preestablished theoretical concept-indicators.

Finally, writing up the *report* may seem quite straightforward, but again one is faced with many questions, such as the language to choose, the target audience to write for, within how much time, etc.

Language surveys in Fryslân¹

Three times large scale surveys on language competence, language use and language attitudes were conducted in Friesland. The first was in 1967, executed and reported upon by Pietersen (1969). This survey was repeated (and extended substantially) in 1980, as reported by Gorter et al. (1984, 1988). Again in 1994 a very similar large scale survey was carried out and a preliminary publication appeared by Gorter and Jonkman (1995). Meanwhile a number of smaller similar surveys of one town or municipality were carried out (among others Duipmans 1980, Gorter 1985, Jonkman 1992) as well as surveys using a different technique, either telephone-interviews (NIPO 1987) or newspaper self-registered questionnaires (Leeuwarder Courant 1991). The basic objective of the three overall surveys

¹The official name of the province changes 1 January 1997 from Friesland to Fryslân, the latter being the Frisian form.

was to obtain insight into the social and geographical distribution of the language varieties spoken in the province: Frisian ('Frysk'), Dutch ('Nederlânsk') and several non-Frisian dialects ('streektaal'). Over a period of more than 25 years longitudinal data have become available, as the three surveys are partially replicated. This makes it possible to search for developments in the relative social position of the varieties.

The basic research question revolves around the already mentioned question 'Who speaks what to whom, when, why and how?' (Gorter et al 1984: 3). The study of Pietersen in 1967 was combined with questions on reading behavior and preferences. The 1980 study covered only language use and attitude related questions. Again in 1994 the survey was combined with a study of religious and social norms and values of the population (Jansma 1995).

The following table gives an idea of the concept-indicators (variables) that were used to draft a questionnaire.

Table 2: Concept-indicators (variables) (cf. ELSN 1996)

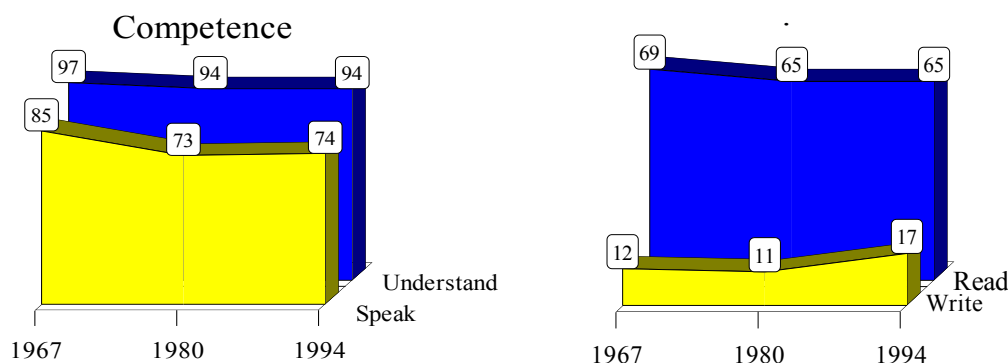
1. Lange Competence:	Speaking Understanding Reading Writing
2. Language Use:	Family Interpersonal Relations Neighborhood Work Public Environment Media
3. Language Attitudes:	Group Identity Language and Identity Reasons for learning language Education Policies Media Policies Language Policies in Public Sector
4. Socio-Demographic:	Demographic (age, marital status, etc.) Place of residence Education Community Socioeconomic status

These variables are 'translated' into a questionnaire with mainly closed, multiple-choice type questions. The list contains 80 numbered questions (with many sub-questions) on language related issues. On average the interviews took 1.5 hours to complete (including the second part on norms and values with 37 questions). All in all, some 2.000 persons were approached in the 31 municipalities of Friesland and 1.368 interview schedules were completed successfully². The fact that all data are self-reported is something to be kept in

²Another 601 interviews were carried out with the same respondents that had already participated in the 1980 study (when a total of 1125 persons were interviewed).

mind when interpreting the results, e.g., those on language competence or use. Storage of the data in the computer and ‘data-cleaning’ has taken place and after one year a straightforward report with the preliminary results could be published (Gorter and Jonkman 1995a). In this report the main results of 1994 are compared to those of 1967 and 1980. A major publication is still to follow, although the results have also been used for a few other publications (Gorter and Jonkman 1995b, Gorter 1996, Jonkman 1996).

A few of the main results of the survey on Friesland can be presented. To begin with percentages can be given for language competence.



Figures 1a and 1b: Competence in Frisian: understand, speak, read and write

Against the expectation of many persons, including the researchers, *the level of command of Frisian* has not changed substantially over more than two decades. Understanding Frisian is a capacity that more than 90 percent of the population has, so it may be considered ubiquitous. Three-quarters of the population says they can speak Frisian. In the period 1967-1980 it appeared that a decrease of some 12% in the speaking ability of Frisian had occurred, which was then explained by the relative high level of migration of non-Frisians to the province, especially during the 1970s. Today, it is less certain whether this was a ‘real’ decline or, perhaps the circumstance that the sampling frames of 1967 and 1980 differ substantially may be an other contributing factor.

Reading proficiency also shows stability, whereas for writing an increase of 6 percent points takes place between 1980 and 1994. Because the sampling frameworks of the latter two surveys are almost identical, this cannot (partially) explain the difference. However, a spelling change of Frisian became effective in 1980 and this may have induced a different answering pattern than in 1994.

These figures have been crosstabulated with the variable ‘language group’ (as measured by the first language learned as a child: Frisian, Dutch or one of the dialects).

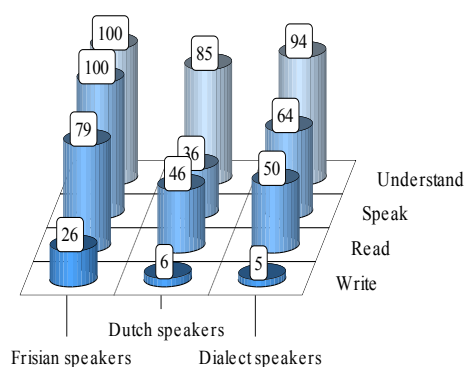


Figure 2: Language competence and language background

As could be expected, substantial differences among the three groups are found. Frisian speakers not only have higher levels of competence - by definition - in oral skills, but also in reading and writing. Dutch speakers compare well to dialect speakers when it comes to understanding, reading and writing Frisian, but far less have learned to speak Frisian.

A very central question concerns the language habitually spoken at home. The results for the variable 'home language' also give further insight into the relative size of the language groups.

Table 3: Home language 1967, 1980 and 1994

	1967	1980	1994
Frisian	71	56	55
Dutch	13	33	34
Dialects	16	11	10
total	100%	100%	99%
	(n=800)	(n=1125)	(n=1368)

This table throws more light on the observed decline in speaking ability between 1967 and 1980. It shows that Frisian loses 15 percent as a home language and Dutch gains 20 percent during that period. This development was interpreted in 1984 as a real decline. Today there is more certainty that at least part of the decline is probably caused by differences in the sampling frameworks, because the 1967 sample did not include some of the regions in the province that are historically considered to be non-Frisian speaking. The results for the years 1980 and 1994 may indicate that the language proportions have stabilized during that period. The outcome that Frisian is still spoken in more than 50 percent of all households seems to be of psychological importance. Frisian speakers are still a quantitative majority in their own province, even if Dutch is the dominant language in society, especially in the economic sector, in formal situations and as a written language. Based on these figures for competence and usage, and taking into account the increase of the absolute number of inhabitants of Friesland, one can even go as far and state that in absolute numbers never before in history there have been as many speakers of the Frisian language as there are today . . .

Still, these figures tell us little about the *actual use* which is made of the language outside the home, and of course, there are also results for that. The next figure contains a summary of twelve situations in public life for which the respondents have answered what language they ordinarily use. The situations can be distinguished according to the degree of

formality and the familiarity with the interlocutor. A cross-tabulation has been made with language background: thus those respondents that have learned Frisian as their first language (L1) are distinguished from those who indicated that they could speak Frisian but it was not their mother tongue (L2), those who cannot speak Frisian are left out.

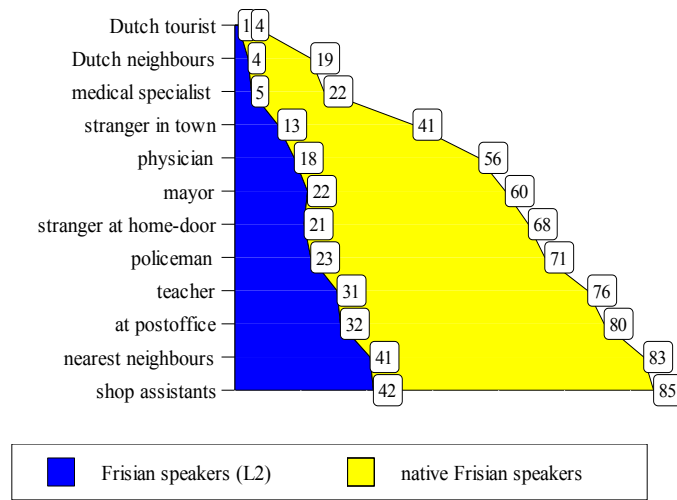


Figure 3: Language use of Frisian speakers, divided according to first and second language learned, in twelve different situations.

At the top of the graph there is very little difference between first language speakers and second language speakers of Frisian. In speaking to a ‘Dutch tourist’ it seems obvious that using Frisian is hard. However, already in the second situation - language with Dutch neighbours - some difference can be found. Second-language learners barely use Frisian with Dutch neighbours, where first language speakers do so in about one fifth of the cases (19 percent). A similar pattern occurs for a medical specialist. In descending this ‘mountain graph’ the gap between L1 and L2 speakers widens in terms of the percentage that does use Frisian in the selected situations. At the bottom we find that 85 percent of Frisian L1-speakers usually speaks Frisian in a shop where they do their daily shopping, whereas only 42 percent of L2-speakers do use Frisian.

Many other questions were posed on language use. Two similar questions concerned language choice. All respondents were asked to situate themselves in a shop in a larger town and answer the question of the language they would choose for the interaction with a shop-assistant. We first asked them 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?

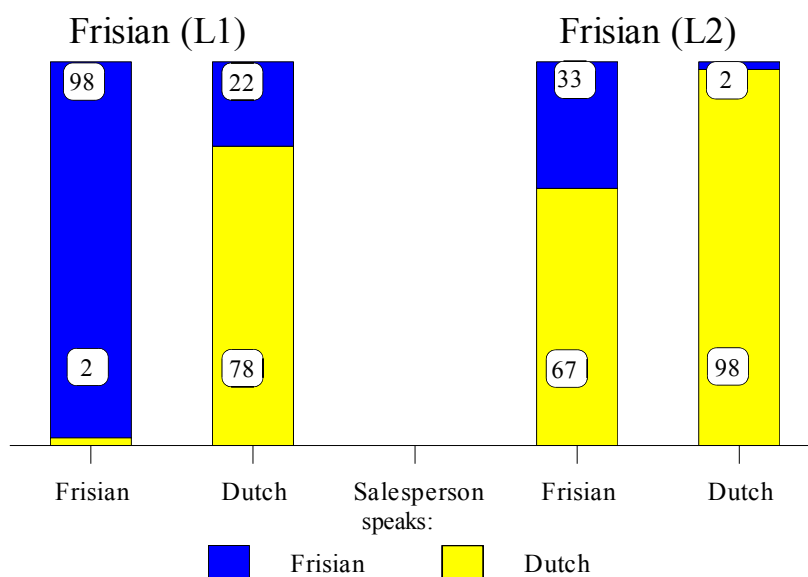


Figure 4: Language choice: Frisian speaking or Dutch speaking salespersons

In the lefthand 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 also use Frisian in return (98 percent). However, when the salesperson speaks Dutch to this same group, more than three quarters of the Frisian speakers converges to the shop-assistant and also uses Dutch. Only some 22 percent also speaks Frisian in case of a Dutch speaking shop-assistant.

When we turn to the right-hand part of the figure, we see a totally different outcome. These are the remaining respondents (including 42 percent who claimed to have speaking ability in Frisian, learned as a second language). We can observe here that only one third converges to a Frisian speaking salesperson by answering him in Frisian. In the case of a Dutch speaking salesperson, hardly anyone will answer in Frisian (even if for a large part it is their second language).

Of course, these results have informed us only about one particular situation of language choice. It is clear that the language of the interlocutor is an important factor. It also turns out to be quite important whether Frisian was learned as a first language or as a second language. On the basis of such results and taking into consideration the rule that between strangers Dutch will be the ‘unmarked’, safe choice, it does not come as a surprise that many persons make the observation that they hear so little Frisian spoken in the capital of Leeuwarden/Ljouwert (or some of the other larger towns).

Still, we may imagine that there are other factors involved in language choice. One such factor is language attitude. It would take us too far to go into this deeply, but I can give one example which gives some indication. In a series of short statements we asked the respondents to give their opinion on the following item: “Everyone who lives in Friesland has to be proficient in Frisian next to Dutch.” Respondents could strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or have no opinion.

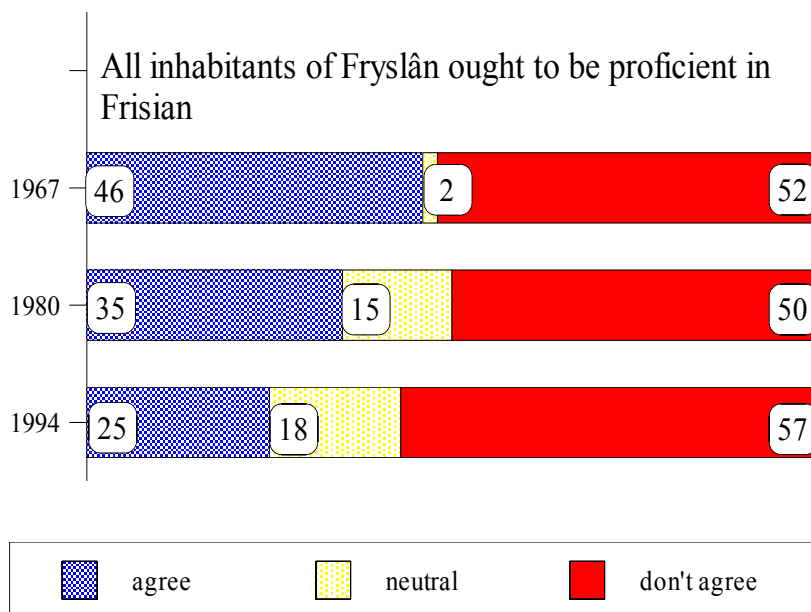


Figure 5: Everyone has to be proficient in Frisian

From the result for this statement one might be inclined to conclude that the attitude toward Frisian has changed substantially between 1967 and 1994. Where almost half the respondents would agree to an obligation to learn Frisian for all inhabitants in 1967, some 26 years later only one quarter endorses the same statement. However, I choose precisely this statement for presentation because it is one of the few that does show such differences (and one of a small number that was asked in all three surveys in exactly the same wording). The results for almost all other items do not show such large differences. Some statements elicit a more positive reaction, whereas others evoke a more negative reaction. Frisian - as a language as such - enjoys a lot of support, but usage in several official domains leads to divergent reactions. The attitude toward the Frisian language and the use of the language seems, again, to be influenced mainly by the language background of the respondents.

To close off this section and as prelude to the next, I present one final attitudinal item. This item was almost the same in the Irish and the Frisian surveys. The respondents are asked to reflect upon the most desirable future for the language in the community.

The answers given to the ‘same’ question in both surveys reflects different social realities for both language groups. The results make obvious that the social context in which both languages function is quite different. Probably the fact that in the Irish case the Gaeltacht was mentioned, lead some respondents to choose that option, in the Frisian case this was not possible. Still it is remarkable that so few persons there choose the ‘museum’ or preservation function for the language. One may perhaps prudently conclude from the table that the most debated issue in both cases will not be whether these languages should disappear, but the discussion will focus on the social status of the languages and the functions they can have in the respective communities.

Table 4: What future for Frisian, Irish? (Irish data from Ó Riagáin & Ó Glisáin 1994: 10)

	Frisian	Irish
a. Frisian/Irish should be discarded and forgotten	0	4
b. Frisian/Irish should be the principal language (like Dutch/English is now)	0	5
c. Friesland/Ireland should be bilingual with Dutch/English as principal language	44	33
d. Friesland/Ireland should be bilingual with Frisian/Irish as principal language	49	8
e. It should be preserved for its cultural value as in music and arts	7	38
f. Spoken Irish should be preserved in the Gaeltacht	-	8
g. don't care/ don't know	-	3
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	100%	100%

All in all the preliminary results of *the 1994 survey* in Friesland seem to point to a stable situation for Frisian language proficiency, use and language attitudes. However, the quality of the language, under heavy influence of the language contact with Dutch, has not been investigated. Frisian may well be under threat by linguistic deterioration of its forms. The example of the item on the future of the languages makes clear that further insight into the language situation in Friesland can be obtained by comparing with another situation. In the next section a project will be presented where the aim was such comparison.

European Language Survey Research Network

In 1994 four institutions came together to set up a network in which they wanted to discuss issues related to language surveys. All four were at the time engaged in survey research or had recently completed a study. Financial support was obtained from the European Commission (DG XXII). The participating institutions were 1) for Irish, the Linguistics Institute of Ireland (as coordinating agency), 2) for Basque, the Secretaría General de Política Lingüística, 3) for Welsh, the Research Centre Wales of the University of North Wales and 4) for Frisian, the Fryske Akademy. Publications about their surveys can be found in Aizpurua (1995), Ó Riagáin and Ó Glisáin (1984, 1994), Gorter et al (1984, 1988) and Gorter and Jonkman (1995a, 1995b).

Our aim was to address in a systematic way theoretical, methodological and technical problems related to carrying out a language survey in a bilingual area. During a number of workshops the participants have discussed their experiences about problems which all encountered in the conduct of language survey research. The participants thought that it was appropriate to make a detailed comparison of their questionnaires with the final goal to develop a core module of questions that could be included into future language surveys of minority language communities. The ideal would be that this basic list of questions could also be used in other European minority language regions. The final report was submitted to the Commission in June 1996, which concluded this stage of the work the network. The next stage is foreseen to go into a study of an important life stage (young adults) and to combine the quantitative social survey technique with a different, more qualitative approach (social network analysis).

Sampling considerations

All four research teams had to work under different operational circumstances. How the sample was drafted, what maximum size it could have, what lower age limit was used, etc. lead to differences between the surveys. This is very clear if we only take the example of the differences in sample size. The Irish sample was the smallest with 976 successful interviews, Wales conducted 1.000 interviewed (with replacements for refusals), in Fryslân 1.368 respondents were involved and the Basque survey was by far the largest with 5.017 interviews in three Basques speaking areas (in Spain and in France). Part of the work of the network was to combine these four separate samples into one large database of more than 8.000 respondents. On the basis of that database we have tried to do some elementary comparative work (see below). One major obstacle to direct comparative analysis was the fact that in Wales only Welsh speakers were interviewed, who had been selected on the basis of the census, where in the other three surveys also speakers of the dominant language were included as well as second language learners.

There are further practical considerations that influenced the way the three research teams could work, for instances the availability of other data, e.g., in the census. The questions in the census in the Basque Country, Wales and Ireland on language are not the same; in Friesland (and the rest of the Netherlands the last census is from 1971)

Questionnaire content

Formulation of research questions, based on concept indicators, is among the first steps of any survey project. In total, the four questionnaires in the network projects contain over one thousand discrete questionnaire items on a wide variety of topics.

One of the central theoretical considerations in the type of survey we are dealing with here, regards the variable of language competence. If one wants to measure proficiency in the minority language (and sometimes also the dominant language), what are the dimensions that have to be measured and how does one include one or more questions on competence in a self-report questionnaire? In particular what degrees of competence does one distinguish? As all four surveys had included one or more questions on competence, detailed comparison for this specific item could be made, the results are given in the table below.

Table 5: Competence questions: scales

	Basque	Frisian	Irish	Welsh
1	1 well	1 very easily	6 native speaker ability	1 very good
2		2 good		
3	2 quite well	3 fairly well	5 most conversations	2 quite good
4			4 parts of conversations	
5	3 a little	4 with difficulty	3 few simple sentences	3 some
6	4 only a few words		2 the odd word	
7	5 nothing	5 not at all	1 none	4 none

The issue of language competence is quite basic for all four surveys concerned. The four surveys differ among them in using 4, 5 or 6 different levels of language competence in the minority language. Also, they use different wordings to indicate to the respondents a level from which they can choose.

Bringing these differences into one table leads to the conclusion that there seems to be a fair degree of overlap of independently developed scales. Thus researchers seem to agree at least to some extent on what it means to ‘command’ a language. On the other hand direct comparison of the results would be quite difficult because of the different wording used to indicate the ‘same’ or almost the same level of proficiency. Of course, also some of the subtleties in the wording may have been lost in the translation to English.

One further issue should be mentioned. If one is interested in the social position of the minority language in the first place, does one ask for the competence in the dominant language as well? In the Irish and Frisian case this was not done, as it was deemed unnecessary or superfluous. However, in both the Basque and the Welsh case the question was also asked what the level of competence was in the dominant language (Spanish and English respectively).

As could be expected, the total number of (countable) questions among the surveys does differ to some extent. Here we should bear in mind that in some cases only parts of the questionnaire had to be answered by all respondents. E.g., it is of no great use and may be quite annoying to ask a respondent who cannot even understand the minority language about his or her ability to speak the language. Still an exercise was carried out to obtain an impression of the differences between the surveys as far as content of the questions goes. In the table the results of this analysis are given for questions concerning language use and for questions on language attitudes.

Table 6: Questionnaires: number of questions on language use and attitudes

survey	No Q's	Language use	%	Attitude	%
Basque country	246	62	25	36	14
Friesland	233	43	18	73	31
Ireland	267	34	13	123	46
Wales	317	134	42	23	7

From the table we can see that the Frisian questionnaire was the shortest and the one in Wales the longest, although the differences are not very large. The Welsh list contained by far the most questions on language use (42%) and relatively few on language attitudes. In contrast the Irish questionnaire was concerned with attitudes more than any of the others. This in part reflects a difference in theoretical approach and the importance attached to attitudes. Moreover, in Wales only speakers of Welsh were involved and a major aim of this first general survey was to trace language habits. In Ireland, where only a very small proportion of the total population uses the language extensively on a daily basis, language attitudes play a more important role. It fits in the pattern where the first major survey in Ireland was conducted in 1973 by the Committee on Irish Language *Attitudes* Research.

However, these differences in the number of questions do not inform us at all about the complexity of questions or how difficult they may be for respondents to answer. It is obvious that a battery-type series of questions that can straightforwardly be answered by saying 'yes' or 'no' (or 'don't know') is much easier to answer than a complicated sorting task where respondents have to select their most preferred answer from five different alternatives. Besides it can be remarked that the Welsh questionnaire also used to set an example for another 12 language use surveys in as many regions (each n=300) in the Europa Union conducted in the framework of the Euromosaic study (Euromosaic 1996).

Some results

From the foregoing it will be clear that there are substantial differences among the four surveys involved. Thus it is quite hard to make direct comparisons. Still taking these difficulties into consideration, we prudently can give two examples of comparable results. First of all, on the key-variable of home language and secondly, on an area of importance in language policy, primary education.

Only the respondents that are able to speak the minority language are included in these four graphs, (because in Wales only Welsh speakers were interviewed). From these graphs differences in social position of the languages in the communities concerned can be deduced. Thus, in Ireland only 1 percent reports to have Irish as the sole home language, whereas 47 percent of Irish speakers indicates to use both Irish and English in the home. Among the four cases, Frisian seems to hold the strongest position as home language, as 82 percent of all competent speakers also use Frisian as their normal home language.

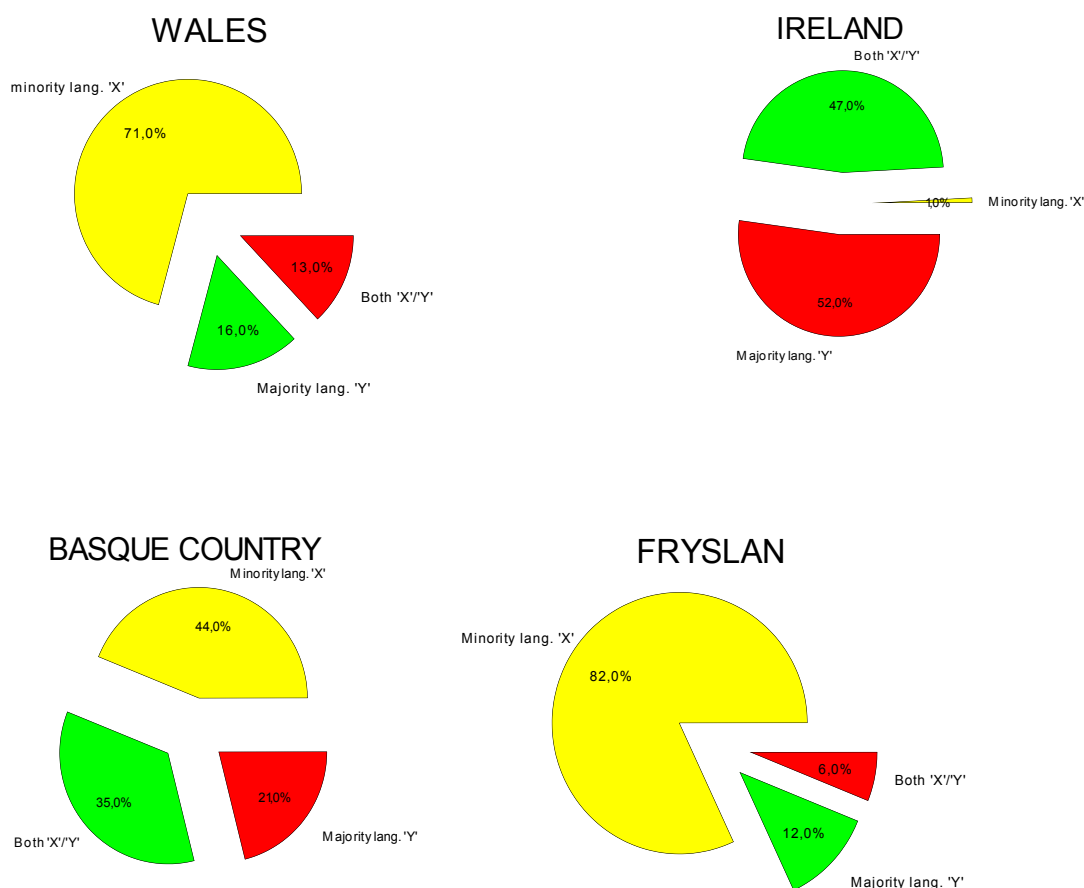


Figure 6 : Language normally used at home (language speakers)

Again it has to be reiterated, these results have to be interpreted very prudently. They are only comparable in a limited sense as the questions asked were not exactly the same in their wording (although better comparable than many others). The reason to present them here is exactly to point at such difficulties. Hopefully in the future, survey researchers will use some of the proposals from this project and include as many as possible questions from the core module in order to make international comparative research among linguistic minorities in Europe a true possibility.

An important area for language policy concerns education. Usually this is the first institution that is encouraged to use at least a minimum amount of time for the minority language.

The outcomes are a reflection of the position of the minority language in primary education. Again only competent speakers of the minority language are included. The first graph represents some of the priority given to education in language policy over a longer period. As is well-known, Ireland does have a long-standing tradition of teaching Irish to all students, thus it does not come as a surprise that near to 100 percent has obtained schooling either through Irish or in a bilingual school system. Wales - for Welsh speakers (!) - comes close to the Irish example as only 20 percent have not had any education

through Welsh. The tradition of education through the minority language seems quite strong in Wales. In the Basque Country only after the death of Franco a process of ‘normalization’ could begin. Teaching Basque today takes place on a wide scale, although the population on average did not obtain such schooling through Basque. Friesland also has a tradition with some schooling in Frisian which dates back before World War II, but only in 1980 the language became an obligatory subject in all primary schools.

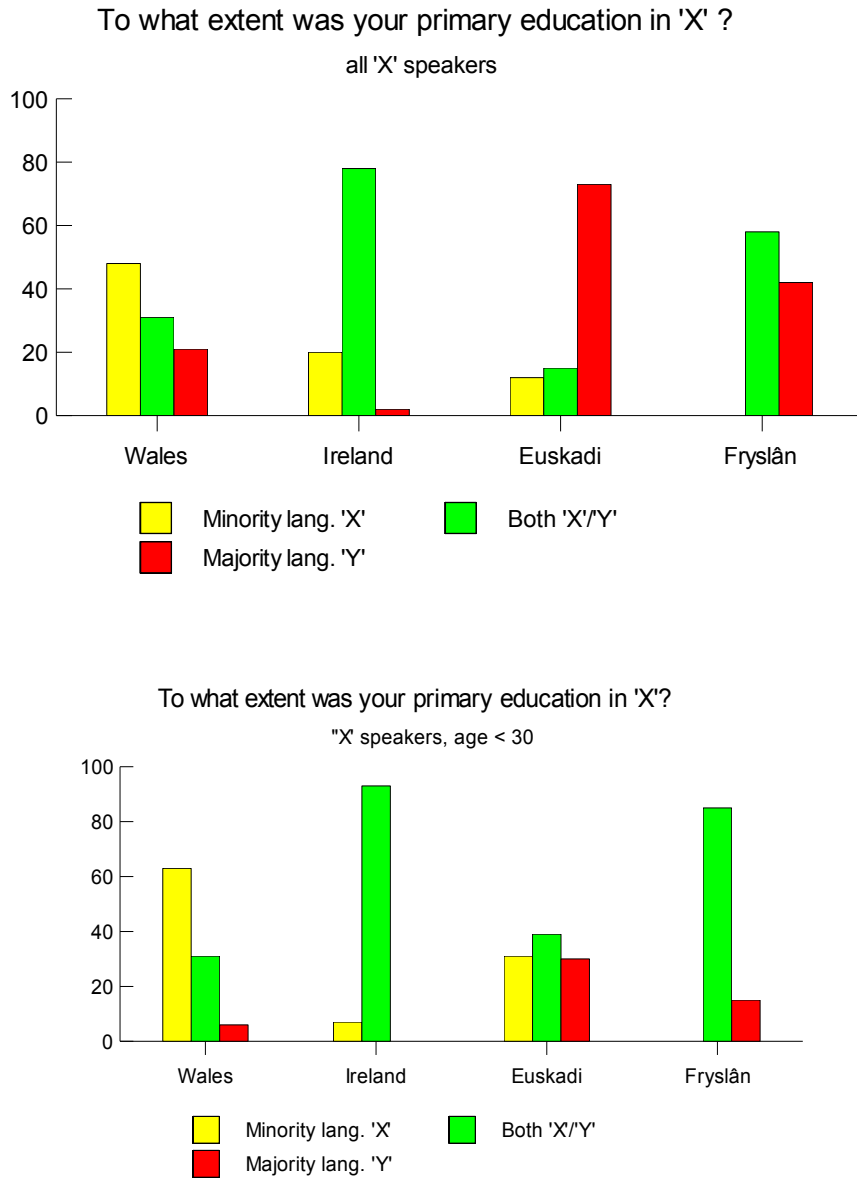


Figure 7: Extent of primary education in the minority language (all speakers, speaker below 30 years)

The second graph gives some insight into such recent historical developments, because a further specification for speakers below the age of 30 is given. The more recent developments in policy in the four areas are reflected. The Basque Country shows a sharp

decrease of persons that receive only education through the majority language (Spanish or French). Friesland also shows an increase in number of people that obtained at least some education in the minority language. However, these figures are quite superficial, they tell us little about the number of hours lessons were given in the minority language or aspects such as educational goals, levels obtained or 'quality' of education. Of course, most of such aspects could be surveyed as well, but probably not in the general type of language survey that we are dealing with here.

The end outcome of the European Language Survey Network is a proposal for a common module of questions that can be used in future surveys in several areas of Europe³

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I ask myself 'What lessons can be learnt from this exercise in comparative survey methodology among minority language communities?'. Language surveys can aim for the investigation of a policy problem, or simply try to provide a description of a language situation. Surveys can also have the express purpose of testing theory. Usually such clear-cut distinctions cannot be made. Many surveys of the descriptive type are undertaken within a theoretical framework, but practical limitations of time and staff, or the requirements a contracting party, leave theoretical statements implied rather than explicitly stated. Theoretical and empirical research would ideally continuously interact, as in any social survey.

The overall format of a social survey on language is determined to a large extent by the specific social and political context. Practical considerations lead to substantial differences between the surveys, which make it more difficult to compare across communities. The contexts of the languages studied in our network differ enormously in their sociolinguistic characteristics, even if they are all so-called 'unique' European minority languages. Comparing between four surveys from such different contexts turned out to be highly problematic, but not completely impossible. Although it is also quite difficult to compare over time, still repeated surveys over longer time intervals are of central importance to observe social change.

A language survey as a quantitative technique has its inherent limitations because data rely on self-report of respondents and because random sampling always implies a degree of statistical uncertainty due to chance. The technique cannot be used in all circumstances or for all problems. Often other techniques are more appropriate. In the final report of the network (ELSN 1996) we propose to combine these quantitative techniques with qualitative approaches such as ethnographies based upon participant observation, or open-ended, in-depth interviewing. A problem of the latter techniques is that they are time-consuming and expensive in operation and often used only in limited social or geographic contexts. Surveys can be used to provide a context for qualitative research techniques, where those are, in turn, being used to deepen and extend the scope of survey research.

The ideal would be to collect Europe wide comparable data on minority language communities, while at the same time meeting local requirements. It is not expected that such language surveys would be identical. Our reasoning is that a core module of questions

³The ELSN report is available from the ITE (Linguistics Institute) in Dublin.

can be developed for inclusion in future surveys, but it also allows ample space for adequate coverage of items specific to particular language communities. Both aims of a European-wide collection of comparable data about minority languages and sensitivity to meet local requirements, are compatible. In the ideal situation this whole endeavor would be combined with approaches where quantitative and qualitative techniques are triangulated.

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