

2 MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EUROPE: THE CASE OF FRISIAN AND THE WORK OF THE MERCATOR EUROPEAN RESEARCH CENTRE

Tjeerd de Graaf and Cor van der Meer

Introduction

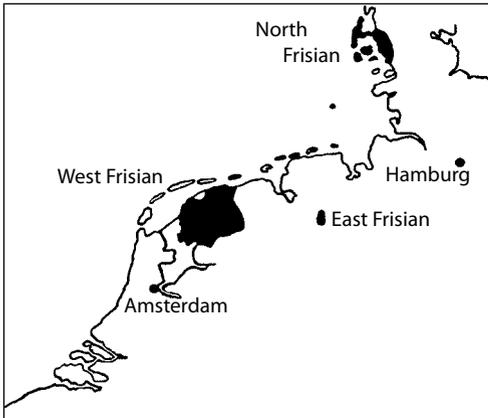
The work of the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy) and the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning is devoted to the study of minority languages in Europe. The primary involvement of the Fryske Akademy lies in the domain of history, literature and culture, as they are related to the West-Frisian language. The users of its nearest relatives, the East- and North-Frisian languages in Germany, are less numerous and these languages are included in the list of the most endangered languages of Europe. This report presents the present-day position of the Frisian language as one of the minority and regional languages of Europe. After sections on the characteristics of the language, its speakers, language use, multilingualism and language policy, we consider the organisations which are involved in the documentation and safeguarding of the language, in particular the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. A survey of the available resources on Frisian and on the work of the Mercator Centre will be presented, which can be useful for the study and safeguarding of minority language situations elsewhere in the world, such as in Siberia.

General remarks on the Frisian Language

Frisian is spoken in the north-western part of Europe, and has its most important branch in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands. When the distinction with the smaller branches in Germany (North-Frisian and East-Frisian) has to be made, it is also called West-Frisian (not to be confused with the geographic name West-Friesland for the Northern part of the province Noord-Holland). The three languages West-Frisian, East-Frisian and North-Frisian are not mutually comprehensible. In the following we shall limit ourselves to the most important member of the language group, West-Frisian in the Netherlands, which henceforth will be referred to as 'Frisian'.

The Frisian language belongs to the Germanic family of languages. In this family the coastal West-Germanic subgroup is represented by English and Frisian, whereas the continental subgroup consists of (High- and Low-)German and Dutch. Historically (in the time before the Anglo-Saxons went to the British Isles), Old-Frisian and

Old-English were very similar. As late as the 8th century, the Germanic languages Old Saxon, Old Franconian, Old Frisian, etc. were still close to each other. During the whole of the Middle Ages, Friesland was monolingual and largely autonomous under the leadership of frequently changing tribal chiefs. Old Frisian was not only the spoken language but also the official language of government and judicial power. Old Frisian laws and legal documents have survived from the 13th century.



[1] Areas in Europe where Frisian is spoken

Modern Frisian still shares certain features with English, but the influence of Dutch and the similarity with this language has become very strong. This is due to the fact that after the sixteenth century, Dutch was used as the official language of the Netherlands in the local government, the judiciary, in schools and churches. Frisian virtually ceased to be used in written form until a revival occurred at the end of the 19th century. Since then Frisian has gradually regained access to more areas of life and developed into

Modern Frisian. In recent decades it has acquired a modest place (alongside Dutch) in government, the judiciary and education.

Language characteristics

The modern Frisian language has an official standard writing system. There was a revision of the spelling in the second half of the 20th century, but at the moment no additional changes are underway. The prescriptive norm for the Frisian language is described in *Frisian Reference Grammar* by Pieter Meijes Tiersma (1985, 1999). This norm of standard Frisian is officially promoted in schools and administration, but the overall dominance of the Dutch language makes the promotion difficult. For details about the grammar of modern Frisian we refer to this book, which is the only grammar of Frisian currently available in English and which describes the correspondences and contrasts with English. Together with the Frisian-English dictionary, which the Frisian Academy published in 2000, the book provides a useful source of information for those interested in the Frisian language.

Although there are many contrasts with English, Frisian is genetically the closest related language to English. The tremendous influence of French on English and of Dutch on Frisian, along with natural changes over time, has obscured this, but even

today certain features common to Frisian and English (as opposed to Dutch and German) document this relationship.

The use of Frisian and multilingualism

Frisian is spoken in the province of Friesland and in a few border villages in the neighbouring province of Groningen. The provincial government and several municipalities have started a language policy that gives Frisian equal rights to Dutch. In the last decades the name of the province (Fryslân) and many local place names have officially been converted to Frisian. In this review we shall use Friesland, which is the current English name for the province.

Frisian and Dutch are both spoken in the province of Friesland, where Dutch as the official national language has the highest prestige. Frisian presently has official status in the Netherlands as the second language of the state. Its spelling has been standardised and Frisian is used in several domains of Frisian society, thereby breaking through the dominance of Dutch. Apart from domains such as the judiciary, public administration, radio and television, the Frisian language can also be used within the province for education.

Nevertheless, it can be stated that the Frisian language is mainly spoken in the homes of Frisian people, in the countryside and in informal situations. In more formal surroundings, such as shops in town and government offices, many people shift to Dutch, even if Frisian is their first language. In larger groups of people, the presence of one Dutch speaking-person may suffice to trigger language shift of the whole group from Frisian to Dutch. Because of the fact that most Frisians (in particular the older ones) got their school education only in Dutch, many of them are not able to use the Frisian language in writing and prefer reading in Dutch. This is the main reason that the newspapers contain very little written Frisian.

The provincial government of Friesland and a number of municipalities make frequent use of both written and spoken Frisian. The regional broadcasting company Omrop Fryslân does radio and television broadcasts where standard Frisian is well-represented and accepted by speakers of the dialects. In the interviews on radio and television, one can hear the dialects spoken in bilingual conversations, and Dutch also plays an important role. There are Frisian church services (the bible was translated into Frisian only in 1943), and every year Frisian language books are published and theatre plays performed.

The province of Friesland has about 600,000 inhabitants and about half of these can be considered first-language speakers of Frisian. A sociolinguistic study in 1994 revealed that 94 % of the population of Friesland can understand the language, 74 % can speak it, 65 % are able to read Frisian (however, most of them read Dutch more easily) and 17 % write Frisian. Frisian is spoken in 55 % of the homes. Speakers of Frisian form a (great) majority in most rural areas, and a (small) minority in the towns

and cities, on the Frisian Isles and in the Stellingwerven (two Low-Saxon municipalities in the south-eastern part of the province). Practically all Frisian speakers are bilingual in Dutch. Most mother-tongue speakers of Dutch in Friesland can understand Frisian, but are not able or not willing to speak it.

In the past, language use in Friesland could be characterised as a stable diglossic situation (Frisian for the country and informal domains, Dutch for the town and formal domains). In the last century, Dutch has also invaded the old Frisian domains (rural community matters and the family), primarily as a result of migration and mixed marriages. In this way, language use changed into a sort of informal (and receptive) polylingualism. General attitudes to Frisian have become more positive, and it has become acceptable to use it in more and more domains (radio, newspapers, etc.).

As stated before, Dutch is still dominant in economic, political and religious spheres. Therefore Frisian is strongly influenced by it, particularly at the lexical level. More and more people say, for example, *sleutel* ['key'] rather than *kaai*, and *boven* ['above'] instead of *boppe*. On the other hand, the influences of Frisian on Standard Dutch are meagre – some of the only words to have found entry into Dutch are those from typical Frisian sport terminology such as *skûtsjesilen* (competitive sailing with traditional sailing boats).

The third language in Friesland is English, which has growing importance in all parts of the Netherlands. As the European Union countries are becoming more united, English is increasingly being used as a means of general communication, in particular in international firms, commercial contacts, science, pop culture, higher education, etc. In many advanced courses in Dutch universities and similar educational institutions, English is used as the medium for teaching, in particular with a growing group of students from abroad. This also holds for Friesland.

Language policy

Until recently, a national language policy for Frisian was not formally expressed by law, but finally in 2011, such a law was prepared by the government. Official Dutch policy started with the Van Ommen Committee (1970), which produced a report that recognised the responsibility of the national government with regard to Frisian. An important principle of the report was recognition of Friesland as a bilingual province. The use of the Frisian language in specified domains is clearly restricted to the province of Friesland. The committee stated that the central government should focus on safeguarding the identity of the Frisian language and culture, in collaboration with provincial and municipal authorities. According to the report, this means that the national government has the function of resolving specific problems caused by bilingualism in the Frisian culture. An immediate result of the report was that a small

sum of money in the national budget was directed to organisations with key roles in maintaining the Frisian language and culture.

In general, Frisian speakers can use their own language in contacts with public authorities, as the provincial administration and a number of other bodies have made this a matter of policy. Documents issued by public authorities are generally only in Dutch; Frisian or bilingual ones are very exceptional. In courts of justice, all parties, including the defendant and witnesses, are allowed to speak Frisian. If need be, the court can employ the services of an interpreter. Courts of justice in Friesland accept civil actions brought in Frisian, but this can cause problems in case of an appeal to a higher court. Documents published in Frisian only are not legally binding. Public signs can be in Frisian, in Dutch, or bilingual, depending on the choice of the municipality concerned.



[2] Bilingual Frisian-Dutch signposts of placenames

Current language policy regarding the Frisian language is based on the Frisian Language and Culture Covenant, an agreement between the provincial and the central government. This was drawn up in 1989, renewed in 1993, and redrafted in 2001 on the basis of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (BFTK-Bestjoersôfspraak Fryske Taal en Kultuer 2001–2010, Staatscourant 125, 3 July 2001). This Council of Europe document was signed in 1992 and ratified by the Dutch government in 1996. With respect to Frisian, it contains 48 concrete measures

(part III), and other regional languages in the Netherlands obtained merely symbolic recognition from the national government (part II). In the covenant of the BFTK, it is declared that it is desirable to make it possible for citizens, local authorities, organisations and institutions to express themselves in Frisian. The covenant also states that both provincial and central governments are responsible for preserving and reinforcing the Frisian language and culture. Lastly, it states that resources must be provided to create suitable conditions for this purpose.

This means that:

- the national government determines general education, culture and media policies in Friesland, although, as far as Frisian is concerned, it has to respect the European Charter;
- the province of Friesland determines policy regarding the Frisian language and ensures the execution of this policy;

- the national government provides the province with the means to execute its policy as regards Frisian;
- provincial policy concerning Frisian and national policy concerning general education, culture and media have to reinforce each other where possible.

On several occasions, Friesland and its government have insisted on the necessity of a comprehensive language law, and at present (March 2011) such a law has been presented to the national government.

Frisian in education

The role of Frisian in primary education dates back to 1907, when the local government offered a grant to support Frisian lessons after regular school hours. Frisian was then taught as an extra-curricular subject. Legislative provisions for Frisian only began in 1937 with amendments to the Education Act of 1920. Although Frisian was not specifically mentioned, the changes to the act made it possible to teach Frisian as a regional language in higher grades during Dutch lessons.

However, nothing was arranged for the use of Frisian as a medium of instruction. In 1950, nine primary schools began to experiment with bilingual education and in 1955, bilingual schools obtained legal basis. Frisian became an optional subject throughout primary school, and the use of Frisian as a medium of instruction was allowed in the lower grades. By 1959, the number of bilingual schools had risen to 47. Starting in 1959, the Dutch state financed the Paedagogysk Advysburo of the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy), which merged into the organisation CEDIN for the northern provinces.

The Paedagogysk Advysburo (Pedagogical Advisory Bureau) is an institution that has offered educational advice and guidance to bilingual schools. Around 1970, these had risen to 84 schools, which was 25 per cent of all primary schools in the province. In 1974, the Primary Education Act was modified. Frisian became an approved teaching medium in all grades and an obligatory school subject throughout primary education as of 1980. Preparations for the implementation of this new policy included the following extensive activities: the training of 3,000 teachers; special parents' evenings at all schools; the development of new learning material; the re-working of television and radio for schools and, finally, the introduction of Frisian as a subject at teacher training colleges.

In 1985, the Primary Education Act was replaced by a completely new Act for Primary Education in the Netherlands. In 1998, the Education Act was changed again. Except for some textual changes, the legal arrangements for Frisian in primary education remained the same.

Since 1980, Frisian has been taught in all primary schools, both public and private. In many of these schools, Frisian is also used to varying degrees as a teaching medium,

alongside Dutch. There is no provision for primary education entirely through Frisian, although some preschool groups are conducted exclusively in Frisian. At secondary level it is also possible to use Frisian as a teaching medium for some subjects, but this is infrequently done. There is no secondary schooling entirely in Frisian, but in some schools Frisian can be used as language of instruction, and Frisian can be taken as an exam subject. In the early 1980s, the subject was offered by 25 % of all secondary schools on an optional basis, and about 5 % of all students availed themselves of this opportunity. Since 1993, Frisian has been an obligatory subject in the first three years of secondary education. The two teacher-training centres in Friesland are required to offer Frisian to their students. They have a policy which stipulates that all students must attend Frisian classes. This qualifies them to teach Frisian in primary schools. Secondary school teachers of Frisian are trained at the part-time higher vocational education college in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden and at the University of Groningen, after having studied the language as a main subject at either of the universities in Groningen or Amsterdam. At the University of Leiden, Frisian is a subsidiary subject. There is an extensive network of adult language courses in Frisian.

The current Primary Education Act (Wet op het Primair Onderwijs – WPO, 1998) lists a number of subjects that all primary schools have to teach without prescribing the number of hours or how schools should teach those subjects. In 1993, the Minister of Education defined attainment targets (*kerndoelen*) for these subjects. These targets were modified to some extent in 1998. In the Netherlands it is the minister of education in The Hague who determines these attainment targets. The minister may be corrected by the national parliament, but not by the Frisian parliament. According to recent studies, only 30 % of the primary schools in Friesland meet these targets for Frisian. On March 14, 2005, the Frisian executive for education signed a covenant on the implementation of language policy with the Dutch state, and subsequently discussed the covenant in the regional parliament. The covenant mentions lower attainment targets for Frisian than for Dutch. Various political parties were angry because this was completely contradictory to their decision that Frisian targets should be equal to those for Dutch.

Together with other regions with lesser-used languages within the European Union, special projects have been initiated in the field of trilingual education. In seven schools in Friesland, three languages are used as a medium of instruction: Frisian, Dutch and English. The Frisian Academy is involved in the coordination of these projects and the evaluation of their results.

Afûk and EduFrysk

The Algemeine Fryske Ûnderrjocht Kommisje (Afûk, a foundation to promote the knowledge and use of the Frisian language) is a cultural institution in Leeuwarden



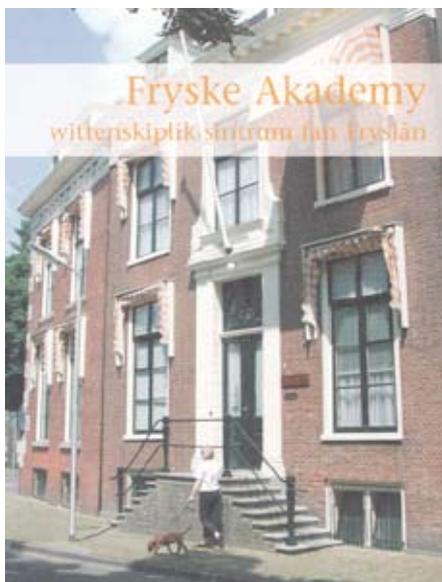
[3] Trilingual school in Friesland

particular for children who grow up and go to school in a bilingual Frisian-Dutch situation, or even in trilingual schools, where Frisian, Dutch and English are used. Very successful programmes are provided by the so-called Tomke-books for small children, and the online learning facility *EduFrysk*. Tomke is a Frisian speaking cartoon figure for young children (aged 0–6 years) with the objective of promoting multilingualism. To celebrate its 10th anniversary, there were musical theatre performances in the province of Friesland.

Anyone with questions about Frisian grammar and the use of the language can receive aid from the Language Desk. The Desk answers questions about spelling, phrasing or terminology, and can give advice concerning the composition of Frisian texts. The Language Desk is specialised in translating texts containing technical terms into Frisian (e.g. notarial acts, official and technical documents). Information can be obtained about place names in Friesland, foreign geographic names, computer terminology, terminology in special areas, such as for inland shipping, creation of new words, etc.

with special tasks in the field of education (see www.afuk.nl). Firstly, it has a bookshop in the centre of town where books related to the Frisian language and culture are sold. It also is an editing house producing numerous books and other publications, in particular educational material and the Frisian monthly journal *De Moanne* (www.demoanne.nl).

The Afûk organises courses on Friesland and its language and culture, which for instance take place on the island of Terschelling. It also houses a special translation service, *stipepunt Frysk*, where texts are translated from and into Frisian. Special educational methods are developed for language classes and in



[4] Building of the Fryske Academy

The Afûk is (mainly) funded by the regional government. It has several commercial counterparts, for instance, the language agencies Taalbuuro Popkema, specialised in translation and linguistic research (www.taalbuuropopkema.nl) and DAT Tekstbureau, specialized in literary translation, editing and the production of Frisian audio-books (www.dattekstbureau.nl).

EduFrysk (www.edufrysk.com/) presents an innovative multimedia online learning facility, which allows people to learn the Frisian language in their own time and at their own speed. It contains a multitude of texts, poetry, musical performances, videos, dictations and several kinds of exercises. The programme keeps a record of the student's progress, and by placing the mouse over a word one can discover the meaning of Frisian words, consult a dictionary and listen to the pronunciation. EduFrysk is one of the most complete language learning facilities on the internet, which is financially supported by the Frisian provincial government and has modules on several levels of ability. Target groups are students, teachers and interested learners, who not only live in Friesland, but in principle anywhere in the world with access to the internet. The language of instruction is Dutch but an English version is in preparation. For this one can for instance think of 'root seekers' in America, where many descendants of Frisian emigrants live.

New features in the programme are the possibility for users to create their own profile, work in virtual communities and with expert groups, use podcasts and language games. The programme is permanently extended with new issues and it also has large educational potential for application for other minority languages in the world. In this way, the internet can play a very important role in the education and safeguarding of minority languages in the world and stimulate the revitalisation of endangered languages.

The Fryske Akademy and other authoritative sources on the language

The main authoritative source on the Frisian language is the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy) with its Departments of Linguistics, History and Social Sciences.

The Department of Linguistics is focussed on linguistic research into all phases of Frisian: Modern Frisian (with its dialectal variants), Middle Frisian and Old Frisian. There are special projects on the phonology and grammar of Frisian and on the research into Frisian dialects, such as Town-Frisian and non-Frisian dialects connected with Frisian. Several language corpora have been developed by the Frisian Academy, such as the New Frisian language corpus, which is a digital collection of Frisian books, scientific magazines and newspaper articles, which can be used to investigate various aspects of Frisian culture, including language and literature. The corpus contains more than 25 million words. The texts in the New Frisian language corpus provide a tool for keeping scientific research on Frisian culture up to date, since language and

culture change over time. The New Frisian language corpus is of vital importance to several ongoing projects. The New Frisian language corpus is accessible via the internet to everybody who wants to make use of it. Potential users include:

- (Foreign) researchers who conduct research into minority languages like Frisian.
- Translators and writers who want to know in which contexts a given word is used; they can find several instances of sentences in which the relevant word occurs.
- Somebody who remembers a line from a song or a poem can try to find the bibliographical reference in the corpus.
- Frisian emigrants can refresh their knowledge of Frisian language and culture.

The *Dictionary of the Frisian Language/Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal/Woordenboek der Friese taal* (WFT) is the product of the WFT-project which collects the vocabulary of Modern Frisian (Frisian since 1800), described in the period 1800 to 1975. The dictionary is bilingual, the definitions and so on are in Dutch. A volume of 400 pages comes out every year, the first volume came out in 1984. The editorial phase has been finished in 2010, the final editing and publication phase at the end of 2011. Other results of the lexicographic work of the Fryske Akademy are a Frisian-English and a Frisian-Frisian dictionary and dictionaries with special terminologies, such as one for legal matters.

The Department of Social Science of the Fryske Akademy studies the distinguishing features of Frisian society. The central theme of ‘multilingualism’ is the point of departure for projects about Frisian-Dutch language relationships. Some of the projects are:

Multilingualism and minority languages:

- A regular survey of language use in Friesland;
- The Frisian language abroad: language use of emigrants.

Educational research:

Interest in good education is growing, thanks to increasing and changing demands from our society. Research enables schools and government institutions to gain insight into the current state of affairs, and it also supports and evaluates education policy-making. The following topics are considered:

- Evaluation of the provincial education policy 2007 to 2014 (Boppeslach project);
- Language acquisition and development in young children;
- Trilingual schools.

Social cultural developments:

- Life and worldview of the Frisians;
- Policy research;
- Regional economic research;
- Rural change: farm building conversion.

Some of these activities take place in the framework of the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning.

Publications, media and conferences

There is a relatively large literary production in Frisian. About 100 Frisian books of various kinds are published each year. Friesland has one professional Frisian-language theatre which is very popular. Most towns and villages also have a Frisian amateur drama group. There are a number of museums, libraries and cultural centres. In addition, approximately 20 CDs consisting of popular Frisian music are released every year.

A total of about 30 hours annually of Frisian television is broadcast on Sundays all over the Netherlands. In the rest of the week the provincial television of Omrop Fryslân broadcasts an hour and a half per day in Friesland. There is one provincial radio service, which broadcasts more than 80 hours per week in Frisian. There are also 20 minutes a week for both school radio and school television. There are no daily or weekly newspapers at all in Frisian. Frisian is used in some newspaper articles, however. Just a few (literary) periodicals (like the monthly *De Moanne*) are published in Frisian, but they have limited circulation.

Every three years the Frisian Academy organises the Frisian Philologist Congress, which provides a platform for scholarly discussion concerning Frisian studies in the broadest sense. In 2012, this congress took place in June. In July 2010, the Fryske Akademy hosted the congress of the European Association for Lexicography (Euralex). One of the special features of this successful conference was its focus on the lexicography of lesser-used non-state languages.

Conferences are also regularly organised by the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, which is located within the Social Science Department of the Fryske Akademy. The work of this centre will be described separately in the following section.

The Mercator European Research Centre

The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (Mercator or Mercator Centre in short) addresses the growing interest in multilingualism and the increasing need of language communities to exchange experiences and to cooperate in a European context. This centre is the successor of Mercator Education, which was founded in 1987 by an initiative of the European Commission. Since 2007, Mercator is funded by the provincial government of Friesland and the municipality of Leeuwarden. Thanks to this funding, the centre was able to increase

its activities and focus on research. Besides, its working area was extended from the member states of the European Union to the member states of the Council of Europe and beyond. In that same period the centre's name was changed to Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. It is based in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, is part of the Fryske Akademy, and gathers and mobilises expertise in the field of language learning at school, at home and through cultural participation in favor of linguistic diversity in Europe.

The centre aims to be a platform in Europe and an independent and recognised organisation for researchers, policymakers and professionals in the field of education and language learning, and it endeavours to favor linguistic diversity within Europe. The starting point lies in the field of regional and minority languages. Yet, immigrant languages and smaller state languages of Europe are also a topic of study.

Successful ongoing activities of the Mercator European Research Centre are: research, the series of Regional Dossiers, the Network of Schools and the organisation of international conferences and expert seminars.

The Mercator European Research Centre develops its research programme in line with its experience and on the basis of the data collections available.

Scientific research is being conducted at the following three levels of aggregation:

- the way in which language and multilingualism take place within individuals in a cognitive-psychological sense (intra-individual and individual; psycho-linguistics);
- the way in which language and multilingualism between individuals are realised, acquired (transfer, teaching, training, and testing) and experienced in mutual contact with the language itself and by the individuals who use the language (inter-individual and socio-linguistics). This implies the linguistic study of language contact, language mergers, creolisation, code switching, language surveys, new teaching methods and the issue of inter-cultural and bilingual didactics;
- the way in which language and multilingualism are practised in a society in terms of policy, institutes, legal structures and strategy (governance and organisation), language strategy and planning.

Recent research activities focussed on:

- Language learning and acquisition; various aspects of bilingual and trilingual education, such as interaction in multilingual classrooms, language proficiency in different languages, teachers' qualifications for the multilingual classroom, and the development of standards.
- Stimulating and improving multilingualism; the study of role models, language attitude, language vitality, immersion programmes, the position of (new) media, relations between Regional and Minority Languages (RML) and immigrant languages.
- Added value of multilingualism; international comparison of the social status of languages, socio-economical value of languages.

The recent published inventory of *Trilingual Primary Education in Europe* (Bangma, Van der Meer and Riemersma 2011) presents a number of case studies (e.g. Friesland, the Basque Country and Finland) as well as a number of small scale initiatives in trilingual education. The results of trilingual primary schooling in Friesland are encouraging: pupils have mastered Dutch equally well as other pupils, but Frisian better, and they speak English more easily (see Ytsma 2007). The model of trilingual schooling will be expanded to other schools and extended to a trilingual stream in secondary education. Research on trilingual education will focus on the actual results in terms of language command, but also on the longitudinal approach, the use of both Frisian and English as media of instruction, and on the implications for teacher training.

Whenever possible, research will be carried out in a comparative European perspective. On behalf of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE) of the Council of Europe, Mercator carried out the study *The Development of Minimum Standards on Language Education in Regional and Minority Languages* (De Jager and Van der Meer 2007). With reference to the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, the present situation of ten languages in eight countries has been evaluated. The outcomes show a great variety in terms of time investment, teaching materials, teacher qualifications and the curriculum. This report will be used for the setting of minimum standards by the Council of Europe. Research results are disseminated through publications (on the website, on paper) and through conferences in collaboration with European partners.

The series of Regional Dossiers meets the growing need for basic information on education in minority language settings. The dossiers present an up-to-date description of the position of a minority language at all levels in the educational system of a state. The Regional Dossiers are written by experts according to a fixed structure. Each dossier is updated once every five to eight years. In this way the dossiers can also be used for comparative research. So far, some 40 languages of EU member states have been covered. In the years to come, the series will be extended with the coverage of other languages: smaller EU state languages, minority languages of Council of Europe member states outside the EU and beyond. The whole series of regional dossiers is available online at the website of the Mercator European Research Centre.

The Network of Schools consists of around 100 schools in 20 European regions where a regional or minority language is taught. The goal of the Network of Schools is to create a platform for bilingual and multilingual schools in minority regions in Europe in order to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences. The Network of Schools is intended for schools at the pre-primary, primary and secondary level. These schools actively teach and use the minority or regional language, aside from the state language, in the curriculum, and they often teach English as a third language.

Recently Mercator started to create a European Network of Teacher Training Institutes. These institutes are training future teachers for bilingual and multilingual

education. This Network will not only create a platform for the exchange of information and experiences, but will also function as the instrument to further development of common projects in terms of language transmission, adequate levels of language command, didactics and testing.

The Mercator European Research Centre organises conferences and expert seminars on a regular basis. Important themes for the conferences are: measurement and good practice, educational models, language vitality, development of minimum standards, teacher training, and the application of the Common European Framework of Reference. The main target groups for the Mercator European Research Centre are professionals, researchers, and policymakers from all member states of the Council of Europe and beyond. In June 2012, the Mercator Centre hosted the 13th International Conference on Language and Social Psychology (ICLASP).

During the first years of its existence, Mercator Education has cooperated with two partners in a network structure: Mercator Media hosted at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth and Mercator Legislation hosted at the Ciemen Foundation in Barcelona. The Mercator European Research Centre has expanded its network in close cooperation with a number of partner organisations working in the same field: the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences in Budapest, Hungary, and the Mälardalen University in Eskilstuna, Sweden. The network created in this way is introduced in the following section.

The Mercator European Network of Language Diversity Centres

This network connects multilingual communities across Europe, promoting knowledge sharing and facilitating structured exchange of best practice and cutting edge initiatives through its programme of activities. Focus lies on multilingual regions dealing with regional or minority languages, but also immigrant languages and smaller state languages, with emphasis on language needs arising from migration and globalisation.

This network builds on the achievements of the former Mercator Network, which was founded in 1987. The specific topics chosen are: the use of media and information technology, legal provisions with respect to minority language learning, and developments in language teaching and learning. The Mercator Network aims to contribute to improving language vitality by analysing language visibility as well as cultural, economic and social opportunities for language use. The envisaged function of the Network is to be a platform for the exchange of research results, information, experience and good practice in the field of language learning and linguistic diversity. Communication among policy-makers, language planning professionals and those involved in language transfer and teaching will take place in face-to-face meetings at annual conferences and workshops as well as through publications and in online

activities. In addition, the Mercator Network aims to be a reference point for these target groups as well as for academics and students by providing accurate and reliable information, which can inform policy development at all levels of government and administration.

The Mercator Network is a member of the European Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism. The platform was created as an initiative of the European Commission in 2009. Almost 30 different networks working in the field of multilingualism are members of this platform. Out of this platform a project called 'Poliglotti4.eu' was initiated. 'Poliglotti4.eu' is a project promoting multilingualism in Europe. Its website reports on best practice in language policy and language learning, and provides policymakers, teachers, learners and civil society organisations with a powerful toolkit for benchmarking and enhancing their activities in non-formal and informal education and learning sectors. The project is funded through the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme.

As successful policies need public support, it is also important to inform the public at large of the benefits of linguistic diversity and multilingualism. The Mercator Network's activities can contribute to embracing positive attitudes towards multilingualism within minority and majority language communities. This includes disseminating information on the language-related policies of the European Commission. But above all, it means raising public awareness of language-related issues among speakers and non-speakers of minority and smaller state languages. The focal point is the role of language as an influential factor within social cohesion, economic prosperity and the specificity of regional identity. The Mercator Network's approach is inclusive of immigrant minorities and deaf communities as well as regional and smaller state languages, and mutual understanding and cooperation are key elements in all aspects of the work. Though the emphasis is on academic research, the wider work of institutions responsible for language learning and language use, and the implementation of new teaching and policy models play an important part in the Mercator Network's activities.

Concluding remarks

In Europe there is a growing awareness of the value of linguistic diversity and the need to learn languages. The objective of the Council of Europe and the European Union is that all Europeans learn to speak at least two other languages in addition to their mother tongue. This not only refers to some of the major languages of Europe, such as English, French, German, or Spanish, but also to smaller state languages, immigrant languages, and regional and minority languages. All these languages together create the linguistic diversity of Europe. This characteristic diversity, however, needs to be protected and promoted at all levels. For example, the Province of Friesland, the

Dutch government, and the European commissioner for multilingualism all emphasise the relevance and importance of multilingualism. The Council of Europe stimulates language teaching and learning by means of conferences, projects and comparative studies, whereas the European Union has its own Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013) that explicitly wants to promote language learning and supports linguistic diversity. This creates a clear need for up-to-date information and research.

The Mercator European Research Centre tries to meet this need by participating in developing a multitude of activities ranging from carrying out research projects and making inventories of existing research to conducting comparative studies and providing language dossiers, search engines and articles on regional and minority languages, immigrant and smaller state languages, as well as sign languages. At present the activities of the Mercator Centre take place on a European scale, but there is a growing interest from other parts of the world (Canada, China, Siberia) from where information is requested about possibilities to handle the problems of multilingualism and the safeguarding of minority languages. For this purpose, the Frisian case and the work of the Mercator Centre may present an illustration and a source of inspiration.

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Further information can be found on the following websites about Frisian and other minority languages. Part of this report is based on texts from these websites:

<http://www.fryske-akademy.nl>

Website of the Frisian Academy

<http://www.languages-on-the-web.com/links/link-frisian.htm>

General information about Frisian and its relation to other languages

<http://www.languageandlaw.org/FRISIAN/FRISIAN.HTM>

Web site by the Frisian-American author Pieter Tiersma

<http://www.afuk.nl>

Cultural institution for education in Frisian

<http://www.berneboek.nl>

On the first interactive book for children

<http://www.mercator-research.eu>

Homepage of the Mercator Research Centre. The site contains the series of regional dossiers, the network of schools, a database with organisations and bibliography and many rated links to minority languages

<http://www.mercator-network.eu/>

The Mercator European Network of Language Diversity Centres and portal for the partners of the network

<http://www.networkofschools.org>

Website of the Network of Schools, a network of around 100 schools in Europe dealing with regional or minority languages in the curriculum. This network is maintained by the Mercator Research Centre

<http://www.eurydice.org>

Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The site provides information on all European education systems and education policies.

<http://www.ethnologue.com>

Encyclopedic reference work cataloguing the world's known living languages

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/langmin.html>

At the website of the European Union an explanation is given of its support for regional or minority languages.

<http://www.conventions.coe.int/>

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and Framework
Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) European Treaty
Series/Série des traités européens ETS 148 and 157, Strasbourg.

<http://www.ogmios.org>

Foundation for Endangered Languages