
Dictionaries and their influence on language purification in minority languages.

The case of Frisian

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In literature, scepticism on the effect of language propaganda is dominant. Researchers observe that it is almost impossible to stop lexical interferences from becoming current in standard languages such as Dutch (or Southern Dutch in Belgium) through language purification literature or through language-related articles and transmissions in the media or (last but not least) through concise dictionaries.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, whether the dictionaries' influence in a minority language such as Frisian is limited as well. Most speakers of Frisian are, as far as writing is concerned, illiterate in their own language. They are not accustomed to written Frisian word forms and unsure when it comes to how their language should be written correctly. A Frisian speaker will be more inclined to consult a dictionary when writing something in his own language, than a speaker of a majority language or a national language would do. On the basis of that assumption, you would expect that including purisms and avoiding or marking interferences in dictionaries, would significantly affect the written language at least.

In this survey, I looked at four loan-words, including the loan-translations and purisms (if any) that go with them. I compared the occurrences (and non-occurrences) of these words as dictionary entries to their respective frequencies of occurrences in two major databases.

On the one hand, we see that, throughout the years, the purisms included in the dictionaries perform considerably better than the equivalent loan-words and loan-translations. The purisms not in the dictionaries perform considerably worse. On the other hand, we notice a trend among writers of Frisian to use interference words in the last few decennia. So, at first glance, dictionaries seem to have influenced language purification. However, one cannot tell for how long that will be the case. It will depend on speakers' attitudes towards their language. After all, it is very difficult to control a language as has been proven in the case of Dutch, and the same might hold for Frisian.

1. Introduction

Anyone who writes a minority language dictionary is constantly confronted with the dilemma of whether they should follow the speakers of that language completely (that is to say: whether they should compose a descriptive dictionary of an 'interference language' that is being heavily influenced by a dominant language) or, whether they should alert these speakers on their improper language use by marking or avoiding lexical interferences and propagating, or even introducing, purisms. For example, when working on the final editing of the *Frysk Hânwurdboek* (the Frisian concise dictionary, FW 2008) my colleague Pieter Duijff and I, consciously preferred the purist word *nútsjesmoar* (meaning 'peanut butter'), which many a speaker of Frisian, regards as a constructed word. We did not include the synonymous Dutch loan-word *pindakaas*, which most speakers tend to use.

One can ask oneself how useful this approach is. In the literature scepticism on the effect of such language propaganda is dominant. Researchers observe that it is almost impossible to stop lexical interferences from being included in standard languages such as Dutch (or Southern Dutch in Belgium) through language purification literature or through language-related articles and transmissions in the media or (last but not least) through dictionaries. Theissen (1975), who made a major investigation on Germanisms in written Dutch, concludes that some Germanisms are much more frequent than might be expected given the disapproving attitude of the dictionaries (Theissen 1975: 632). Geeraerts and Grondelaers (1997), who investigated Southern-Dutch in the domains of sport and fashion, observed that language propaganda and purification have had only a limited influence over the years. They claim that top-down care of the language has effect only when spontaneous language development follows the same path as the development propagated (Geeraerts & Grondelaers

1997: 111-112). Van der Sijs (1999) also considers the effect of purism to be limited and thinks that it is not purism that keeps a language alive, but rather a positive attitude of the speakers towards their languages (or, as she puts it, ‘language pride’) (Van der Sijs 1999: 35). In earlier centuries the effect of purist dictionaries also seems to have been limited. As for sixteenth century Dutch, which was not then yet standardised, Van der Sijs (2004) observes that, although such dictionaries were being published, the number of borrowed words tripled compared to the century before (Van der Sijs 2004: 394-395).

The question we have to ask ourselves is, whether the dictionaries’ influence in a minority language such as Frisian is as limited as in a majority language like Dutch. The situation for Frisian can be described, in short, as follows: Most speakers of Frisian can read their language, but only a few can write it (Gorter & Jonkman 1995)¹, because they were not, or were barely educated in their own language. They are, as far as writing is concerned, illiterate in their own language. Moreover, they are not accustomed to written Frisian word forms, because, both in daily and public life, they are rarely confronted with their own language in written form. Speakers of Frisian are unsure when it comes to how their language should be written correctly. There is still is no clear-cut standard. The dictionaries for practical use, which appeared from 1900 onwards, unfortunately mark several dialect forms (per entry) as standardised forms. Moreover, spoken Frisian is full of Dutch interferences. It is reasonable to assume that a Frisian speaker will be more inclined to consult a dictionary when writing something in his own language, than a speaker of a majority language or a national language would do. On the basis of that assumption, you would expect that including purisms and avoiding or marking interferences in dictionaries, would significantly affect at least the written language.

2. Pilot survey

In this survey I looked at four loan-words, including the loan-translations (calques) and purisms (if any) that go with them. Three of these are from the administrative domain. These were not chosen randomly, as written language expanded particularly in this domain during the twentieth century.

Dutch	Frisian loan-word	Frisian loan-translation	Frisian purism	Translation
<i>bewust</i>	<i>bewust</i>	(-)	<i>bewitten</i>	conscious(ly)
<i>penningmeester</i>	<i>penningmeester</i>	<i>penningmaster</i> , <i>pinningmaster</i> ²	<i>skathâlder</i> , <i>ponghâlder</i>	treasurer
<i>vergadering</i>	<i>fergadering</i>	<i>fergearring(e)</i>	<i>gearkomste</i>	meeting
<i>agenda</i>	<i>agenda</i> , <i>aginda</i> ³	(-)	<i>wurklist</i>	agenda

I compared the occurrences (and non-occurrences) of these words as entries in the twentieth century concise dictionaries to their respective frequencies of occurrences in two major databases:⁴ the Frisian Academy’s *Language Databases* (TDB) and the digital archive of the

¹ According to Gorter & Jonkman (1995: 68) 74% of the inhabitants of Friesland can speak Frisian, 64% can read Frisian, and only 17% can write Frisian. These figures are based on a 1994 survey.

² Frisian has two dialect forms *-in-* and *-en-*. In dictionaries *-in-* is the preferred form.

³ Frisian has two dialect forms *-in-* and *-en-*. In dictionaries *-in-* is the preferred form.

⁴ Including inflected forms, derivations and compoundings (if any). The figures should, however, not to be regarded as being absolute. In checking the context a fair degree of noise came to the light, caused, in most

provincial newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant* (DALC). I did not include the concise dictionaries which were published in 2007 and 2008, as their possible influence on the written language use could not yet be measured.

The *Language Databases* (still under construction) contain a fair quantity of language material from the twentieth century, (as yet) a marginal quantity from the nineteenth century and virtually everything from the scarce material published in the previous centuries. From the quantities of material per period, one can more or less conclude that over the years, the use of written Frisian, has become more and more fashionable.

The digital archive of the *Leeuwarder Courant* covers the period from 1752 to the present day. This mainly Dutch newspaper, also includes some contributions in Frisian and, importantly, Frisian speakers are quoted in Frisian when interviewed. Here too we see an increase in written Frisian over the years.

2.1. *Bewitten*

As a substitute for the Dutch loan-word *bewust* (meaning ‘conscious(-ly)’) the purism *bewitten* was suggested in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵ Not one concise dictionary included the word. It is only present in the *Wurdboek fan de Fryske Taal* (WFT). The WFT is the scholarly comprehensive dictionary covering Frisian from 1800 to 1975 and was based on two large filing systems containing approximately two million files in total. The oldest attestation of the purism *bewitten* in the WFT is from 1933; the Dutch loan-word *bewust* is first attested in 1906.

Dictionary entry	1900- '11	1918	1934	1944	1952/ '56	1980	1984/ '85
<i>bewust</i>	-	+	-	-	+	+	+
<i>bewitten</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Concentrating on the number of hits in the *Language Databases*, it is clear that in written Frisian, there is a strong preference for the word included in the dictionaries. In this case, the Dutch loan-word.

Hits in TDB	18th c.	19th c.	20th c.
<i>bewust</i>	0	0	627
<i>bewitten</i>	0	0	11 ⁶

A comparison with the digital newspaper archive is not easily made. *Bewitten* does not occur at all. *Bewust* does occur, no fewer than 67.000 times. However, it is important to note that in the vast majority of cases, it occurs in texts written in Dutch.

cases, by scanning errors. The reader should also be aware of the fact that the *Language Databases* are still under construction and that the digital newspaper archive is expanding every day. I also decided not to include the infrequent citation from Dutch-Frisian mixed dialects.

⁵ Kalma (1940: 84): ‘Fen alle Fryske nijfoarmingjen for ôfstegere Hollannismen hat gjin inkele safolle losmakke as dy for Hollânsk ‘bewust’. Folkertsma brûkte hjir jierren lang de stam *wêst* foar: *ûnderwêsten*, *bûtenwêsten*, ensfh. (..) Fen myn kant hie ik it mei *biwitten* bisocht.’ (‘None of all these Frisian neologisms substituting rejected Hollandisms caused so much discussion as the one substituting Dutch ‘*bewust*’ (‘conscious(-ly)’). For many years, Folkertsma used the root *wêst* in: *ûnderwêsten* (‘subconsciousness’), *bûtenwêsten* (‘unconscious’) etcetera. For my part, I have tried to introduce *bewitten*.)

⁶ Four times in 1934, four times in 1969 and three times in 1983 (each year by the same author).

2.2. *Skathâlder/ponghâlder*

Purisms substituting the Dutch loan-word *penningmeester* ('treasurer') have been in use since the nineteenth century: *skathâlder* and *ponghâlder*. The WFT's first attestation of *skathâlder* is from 1900; *ponghâlder* is from 1854. The loan-translations *pinningmaster* (and the female counterpart *pinningmasterske*) also occur in the nineteenth century, although infrequently. The WFT dates them back to 1894 and 1849, respectively. The concise dictionaries only include the purisms, with a slight preference for *skathâlder*.

Dictionary entry	1900-'11	1918	1934	1944	1952/'56	1980	1984/'85
<i>penningmeester</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>pinningmaster</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>skathâlder</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<i>ponghâlder</i>	+	+	-	+	+	-	+

Concentrating on the number of hits in the *Language Databases*, we observe a clear preference for both dictionary purisms in written Frisian. The loan-word *penningmeester* was found in material from 1989 and 1990 which is not representative of written Frisian. As it concerns quotations from people interviewed in newspaper articles and reports of radio transmissions, making it effectively spoken language.

Hits in TDB	18th c.	19th c.	20th c.
<i>penningmeester</i>	0	0	5
<i>pinningmaster</i>	0	2	0
<i>skathâlder</i>	0	0	145
<i>ponghâlder</i>	0	0	78

The same picture arises from the digital newspaper archive.

Hits in DALC	18th c.	19th c.	1900 1909	1910 1919	1920 1929	1930 1939	1940 1949
<i>penningmeester</i>	(no research done: 30240 hits, mainly in Dutch texts)						
<i>penningmaster</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
<i>pinningmaster</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<i>skathâlder</i>	0	16	7	37	28	78	52
<i>ponghâlder</i>	0	0	1	2	0	7	14

Hits in DALC	1950 1959	1960 1969	1970 1979	1980 1989	1990 1999	2000 2009
<i>penningmeester</i>	(no research done: 30240 hits, mainly in Dutch texts)					
<i>penningmaster</i>	0	0	1	1	3	1
<i>pinningmaster</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>skathâlder</i>	85	81	62	41	38	8
<i>ponghâlder</i>	28	25	27	21	59	26

2.3. *Gearkomste*

The Dutch loan-word *fergadering* ('meeting', lit. 'gathering') is the most ancient one in written Frisian. It was first attested in 1796. In the nineteenth century, the loan-translation *fergearing(e)* and the purism *gearkomste* were introduced as competitors. *Gearkomste* is a literal translation of the Dutch hyperonym *samenkomst* or *bijeenkomst* (lit. 'coming together'). The WFT dates these back to 1854 and 1824, respectively. The concise dictionaries include only the loan-translation and the purism.

Dictionary entry	1900- '11	1918	1934	1944	1952/ '56	1980	1984/ '85
<i>fergadering</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>fergearring(e)</i>	+	+	-	+	+	-	+
<i>gearkomste</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Concentrating on the number of hits in the *Language Databases*, we observe a clear preference for the purism *gearkomste* in the written language. The loan-translation *fergearring(e)* has a very poor score.

The loan-word *fergadering* occurs in material from 1980 onwards. That material is not representative of the written language. Again it concerns spoken language in interviews and radio transmissions.

Hits in TDB	18th c.	19th c.	20th c.
<i>fergadering</i>	6	1	44
<i>fergearring(e)</i>	0	14	37
<i>gearkomste</i>	0	15	2025

A similar, although more differentiated, picture arises from the digital newspaper archive. Over the years, the use of the loan-translation *fergearring(e)* clearly loses ground to the purism *gearkomste*. The figures of the loan-word *fergadering* from 1960 onwards are striking. Admittedly, the material is not in all cases representative of the written language (for example, when it concerns spoken language in interviews), nevertheless this period shows a fair number of articles written entirely in Frisian, in which the loan-word is used.

Hits in DALC	18th c.	19th c.	1900 1909	1910 1919	1920 1929	1930 1939	1940 1949
<i>fergadering</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>fergearring(e)</i>	0	0	12	39	13	8	7
<i>gearkomste</i>	0	277	196	306	343	627	516

Hits in DALC	1950 1959	1960 1969	1970 1979	1980 1989	1990 1999	2000 2009
<i>fergadering</i>	0	15	75	58	97	85
<i>fergearring(e)</i>	6	2	2	0	0	0
<i>gearkomste</i>	722	700	941	966	972	660

2.4. *Wurklist*

The loan-word *agenda/aginda* (in the case of the meaning ‘list of items to be considered on a meeting’) probably entered Frisian through Dutch. Consequently, the dictionaries prescribe the purism *wurklist*, but after 1980, the loan-word *aginda* is also permitted. The dictionaries have a preference for the form *aginda*, regarded as the most ‘Frisian-sounding’. The oldest attestation of the purism in the WFT is from 1911. That of the loanword is from 1952 and 1966.

Dictionary entry	1900- '11	1918	1934	1944	1952/ '56	1980	1984/ '85
<i>agenda</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>aginda</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
<i>wurklist</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Concentrating on the number of hits in the *Language Databases*, we observe that written Frisian has a preference for the purism.

Hits in TDB	18th c.	19th c.	20th c.
<i>agenda</i>	0	0	14
<i>aginda</i>	0	0	20
<i>wurklist</i>	0	0	116

Considering the date of the sources, a more differentiated picture arises. Admittedly, the quantity of data material is small, but may, nevertheless, indicate a trend. The purism was being used increasingly until 1990. After that date, the loan-word seems to gain ground. It is telling that the 1984 and 1985 dictionaries included the loan-word. Possibly the editors were more tolerant towards internationalisms than they were towards Dutch interferences.

Hits in TDB	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
	1909	1919	1929	1939	1949	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999
<i>agenda</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	6	2	2
<i>aginda</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	2	3	9
<i>wurklist</i>	0	0	0	0	3	4	2	26	42	37

It is not easy to make a comparison with the digital newspaper archive. *Agenda* is found no fewer than approximately 44000 times (versus *aginda* approximately 4700 times), but in the vast majority of the cases, this word *agenda* occurs in Dutch texts (and in all possible meanings. The word can also mean '(pocket) diary).

3. Conclusions

The following picture arises from the four cases investigated: Throughout the years, the purisms included in the concise dictionaries perform considerably better than the equivalent loan-words and loan-translations. The purisms not in the dictionaries perform considerably worse. It should be noted, however, that the frequency of a word in actual language use may well determine whether it is included in a concise dictionary. It is a 'chicken-and egg' problem. What came first: the word in daily use or the word in the dictionary? Concise dictionaries usually follow actual language use, and by recording this, they confirm and direct language use. Frisian concise dictionaries are less orthodox in that respect. In the case of *bewust* (versus its purist counterpart *bewitten*) their starting point is the interference language Frisians were, and are, accustomed to speaking, but in the cases of the purisms *ponghâlder/skathâlder*, *gearkomste*, *wurklist* they do not. And it is these very purisms that stayed in written language.

We see a less clear picture with the loan-translations. One of them seems to have been lost from written language since 1980 (*fergearringe*). Conversely, another one seems to be gaining ground, though only slightly (*pinningmaster*). A possible explanation for the disappearance of *fergearringe* is the fact that it is reputed to be literary (FW 2008: 433) and has an uncommon and unnatural ring to it.

The increased use of the loan-translation *pinningmaster* in the last few decennia seems to be connected to a trend among writers of Frisian to use interference words. This is probably due to the more liberal standard of language use in the Netherlands in general. This may have affected the Frisian standard of language, which used to be rather liberal anyway (see Pieter Duijff's contribution in these Proceedings). People reject an overly purist standard of language, because it creates too broad a gap between artificially experienced written language

and naturally experienced spoken language. Frisian literary author Eppie Dam defended the use of lexical interferences in 1991 in an evocative way. He argued he would rather have a few cavities in his teeth, than a set of dentures (Dam 1991: 6).

In short, at first glance concise dictionaries in a minority language such as Frisian seem to have influenced language purification. However, it is not possible to tell for how long this will be the case. It will depend on speakers' attitudes towards their language. In the end, one cannot control a language as has been proven in the case of Dutch, and the same might hold for Frisian.

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