

Frisian on social media

Citation for published version (APA):

Jongbloed-Faber, L. (2021). *Frisian on social media: the vitality of minority languages in a multilingual online world*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. LOT. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20210903j>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2021

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20210903j](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20210903j)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Impact paragraph

If it is not on the web, it does not exist. András Kornai, 2013

When I started my research, it was unknown how often Frisian was used on social media. While the role of social media in daily-life communication increased, it was also signalled that the up-come of the Internet could threaten the relevance of approximately 95% of the world's languages (Kornai 2013). Although a few studies had already observed the presence of other European minority languages on social media (see Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed 2013), it was unknown how much Frisian was used. As the sociolinguistic background of Frisian differed much from the contexts of the European minority languages described in those studies, investigating the use of Frisian on social media was an important research topic.

The outcomes of this dissertation are of interest to academics and policy makers in any multilingual society, and all of those who are interested in promoting linguistic diversity on social media. In this impact paragraph I will first summarize the most important results of the dissertation and then describe what the scientific and societal impact is of my PhD research.

Lysbeth's research is indispensable for Fryslân. Her research underlines the vitality and resilience of the Frisian language, including in social and digital media. Her work is not only academically relevant - Lysbeth is a scientist who strives to give her research social value. Her work bridges academic research and the everyday usage of the language. In that role she plays an important part in the Frisian language community, operating in the scientific field and also keeping our language policy up to date and vital.

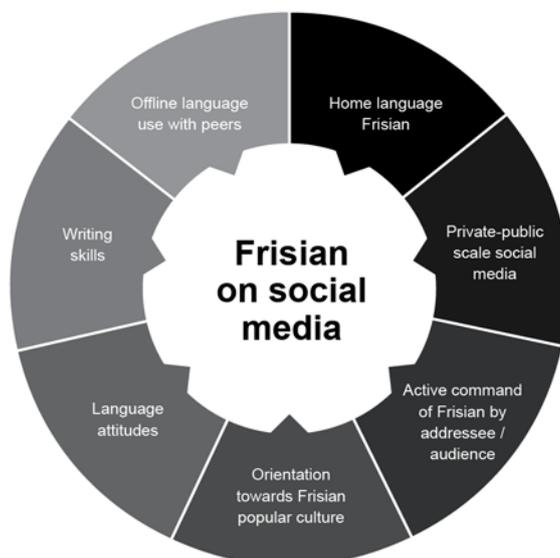
Harmen Akerboom
Manager Language and Knowledge, Province of Fryslân

Most important outcomes of the dissertation

The results of this dissertation show that Frisian is used on social media. The extent to which Frisian is used, is influenced by several factors. First of all, this dissertation shows that Frisian is used foremost by those who were raised exclusively in Frisian. Nine out of ten Frisian-speaking teenagers use Frisian

on social media and more than half of the Frisian-speaking teenagers use Frisian often or all the time. Secondly, important influential factors are offline language use with peers, writing skills, language attitudes, one's audience on social media and the type of social media. In Figure A, a visual representation of these processes is shown.

Figure A The factors influencing the use of Frisian on social media



In this impact paragraph, I will solely elaborate on writing skills and language attitudes, as those factors are more prone to be influenced by language policies and language promotion.

To elaborate on writing skills: the better one writes Frisian, the more one will use Frisian on social media. This dissertation however shows, as any other research about proficiency in Frisian, that writing skills lag far behind skills in understanding, speaking and reading Frisian, also by those who were raised in Frisian. Although Frisian has been an obligatory subject in the province of Fryslân in primary school since 1980 and in secondary education since 1993, 73% of the primary schools and 61% of secondary schools are not able to offer Frisian writing lessons of sufficient quality to their pupils (Varkevisser & Walsweer 2018: 36,166). This dissertation shows that if all speakers of Frisian would have good writing skills in Frisian, Frisian would be used more on social media as their writing skills would no longer limit their use of Frisian.

Language attitudes are also influential on the use of Frisian on social media: the more positive one's attitude, the more often one will use Frisian on social media. The results show that generally, Frisian-speakers are positive about Frisian while non-Frisian speakers are negative about Frisian. So if an individual has non-Frisian speaking peers, this directly and indirectly

influences one's language use. First, one will use less Frisian, but second, one is also more exposed to negative attitudes about Frisian as well. One then would need to be very confident to still use Frisian on social media.

The impact of writing skills and language attitudes on the use of Frisian on social media, platforms that have become so important in daily life communication, shows the urgency of the current *Taalplan Frysk* that is uptaken by the province of Fryslân to increase the quality of education in Frisian between 2018 and 2030. It is not just important to improve the Frisian skills of pupils, it is important to address language attitudes as well. This has been recognised by the Frisian government and curricula have been developed to address language attitudes next to basic skills. Moreover, digital language tools that enable users with insufficient writing skills to write in Frisian online should remain on the long term language planning agenda. This should enable a sustainable use of Frisian on social media by future generations.

The value of Lysbeth's research is that it shows that Frisian is a living language and has acquired a position in this modern domain. It proves that people would like to use Frisian in their informal contacts although their writing skills are often inadequate. The research is valuable input and gives direction to our language policy. Now that we know that people would like to use Frisian on social media, we can invest in tools to make it easier for people to use the language online.

Nienke Jet de Vries
Language policy officer, Province of Fryslân

Scientific and societal activities and results during my PhD

During my PhD, I participated in ten international conferences, seven national conferences and was co-organiser of two conferences as well. In addition, I was an invited speaker for fifteen events such as study days and conferences organised by cultural organisations throughout the Netherlands. Furthermore, I published four papers in scientific journals and three articles/chapters in magazines/books with a more general audience. My intrinsic motivation to deploy my knowledge and skills resulted in the involvement in several work groups related to the Frisian language, and a board position in the *Stichting Nederlandse Dialecten* (Foundation for Dutch dialects). Moreover, I cooperated with researchers outside my own institutes to initiate new research projects. See <https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/en/persons/lysbeth-jongbloed-faber> for an overview of my 100+ research output and activities.

My research has not stayed unnoticed by the media and it resulted in several interviews in local newspapers, radio and television programmes, and (professional) magazines. Moreover, the study “Local identity construction in dialect pop music: songs, narratives, and social media posts” (Chapter 5) served as inspiration for the documentary *Dat is ús taal* (Werkman 2019) which was broadcast at national television (https://www.npostart.nl/fryslan-dok/14-09-2019/POW_04066681). Finally, my research has made policy makers, influencers and language activists in Fryslân aware that it is more important that people use Frisian on social media than how they write it.

Lysbeth's research about language use on social media by teenagers is of great value to our organisation and activities. It gives us insight in the use of Frisian by this group, and gives us knowledge about what happens and in which situations and on which channels Frisian is used. This enables us to respond better to the needs of our target groups and develop strategies and campaigns to stimulate the use of Frisian by young people.

Mirjam Vellinga
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