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THE OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY OF WEST FRISIAN: PROMOTION AND PERCEPTION OF A MINORITY LANGUAGE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Summary. The study presented here is the first contemporary investigation of the subjective compared to the objective ethnolinguistic vitality of West Frisian. West Frisian is a minority language spoken in the province of Fryslân, in the north of the Netherlands. The objective ethnolinguistic vitality of the language was established on the basis of policy documents and statistical data. To investigate the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of the language, rich qualitative data were gathered by means of a questionnaire, which – due to low literacy rates – was administered to West Frisian speakers (N=15) in person. The primarily open-ended items in the questionnaire targeted different aspects of the three main socio-structural factors that constitute the ethnolinguistic vitality of a language: that is, status, demography, and institutional support. Content analysis was performed on the questionnaire data, using rounds of deductive and inductive coding and analysis. The results suggest that West Frisian has a certain amount of vitality, which constitutes a good basis for language planning to ensure its continued maintenance. Moreover, the findings indicate that overall, the subjective vitality tallies with the objective vitality in terms of status, demography, and institutional support. However, two aspects raised concern among the participants: firstly, as part of the status of West Frisian, there was concern about the language's presence in the linguistic landscape (where subjective vitality matched objective vitality, but participants explicitly expressed the desire for a more persistent and pervasive presence of the language in public spaces); and secondly, as part of the institutional support for West Frisian, there was concern about the role of the language in the education system (where subjective vitality did not match objective vitality). The article discusses what implications the findings of this exploratory study – should they hold true – would have for language planning in the province of Fryslân.

Keywords: ethnolinguistic vitality; language contact; language maintenance; language planning; minority languages; West Frisian.

Introduction

Around the world, minority languages in inter-group situations face endangerment as many communities shift from their heritage languages to the socially, politically, and economically more powerful tongues of their dominant neighbours (e.g. Austin & Sallabank, 2013). No small number of languages are consequently undergoing shift, with many of them even facing extinction. It is widely acknowledged that “[l]aissez-faire policies mean that the languages of power and prestige will eventually take over in all situations of contact. Benign neglect [...] [is] always de facto support for the language of the group that is already dominant” (Wright, 2004, p. 187). In many settings, regional, national, and supranational policies have thus been put in place to protect minority languages, and to enhance their chances of maintenance and survival.

At the European level, concerns about the protection of minority languages can be traced back to at least the 1950s – and in the 1990s, these concerns led to the adoption of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (henceforth: the ECRML), whose aim is “to ensure [...] the use of regional or minority languages in education and the media and to permit their use in judicial and administrative settings, economic and social life and cultural activities” (Council of Europe, 1992, p. 2). All countries that have ratified the ECRML have committed themselves to protecting their minority and/or regional languages, and each country had to agree to a number of paragraphs (at least 35) from the ECRML to implement.

One of these countries is the Netherlands. Recognised in the ECRML is the Frisian language, and more specifically the West Frisian variety, which is spoken predominantly in the province of Fryslân in the north of the country.¹ With an estimated number of around 420,000 speakers (Province of Fryslân, 2015), Frisian has officially been classified by UNESCO (2010) as being vulnerable, and the government of the Netherlands has ratified 48 paragraphs from the ECRML to ensure its maintenance. It is mostly

¹ Other surviving varieties are North and East Frisian, both spoken in Germany. However, this article will focus solely on West Frisian, and henceforth, the term ‘Frisian’ will be used to refer to this variety.

through the Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture (2018) that the government implements the ECRML paragraphs it has ratified, and this agreement also describes the division of relevant responsibilities between national and provincial government (which will be discussed in more detail below).

As noted above, language planning is essential for the protection of minority languages in multilingual societies, such as the Netherlands. However, to be effective, the relevant planning measures and their consequences need to be perceived by the minority language speakers themselves. A well-established way of assessing this is by considering the objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language. A theory of ethnolinguistic vitality was developed by Giles et al. (1977) as a way of assessing the likelihood of language maintenance in inter-group contexts. Over the years, much research has been carried out on ethnolinguistic vitality in multilingual communities around the world. Moreover, there have been a few investigations of the objective ethnolinguistic vitality of Frisian, or specific aspects thereof (e.g. Gorter, 2006; Hilton & Gooskens, 2013). However, there seems to be only one previous study that has fully examined the language's subjective ethnolinguistic vitality – that is, whether and to what extent Frisians are actually aware of the language planning measures and provisions that are in place (i.e. Ytsma et al., 1994). The data for that study were collected in the early 1990s, and much has happened since then: from the Netherlands' ratification of the ECRML, to the implementation of the aforementioned Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture, and numerous further measures aimed at maintaining Frisian in Fryslân. In this article, we therefore present the first contemporary investigation of not only the objective but also the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of Frisian, with the aim of examining existing provisions for the language's promotion as well as establishing whether and to what extent these provisions are perceived by Frisian speakers.

The data discussed here were collected as part of the Erasmus+ project *LangUp*, an international collaborative project whose overall aim is to promote minority languages in different contexts. The countries participating

in the project are Argentina, Greece, the Netherlands, Peru, and Portugal. More details can be found on the project website.² The focus here will only be on the data obtained in the Netherlands, and specifically in the province of Fryslân.

To provide the necessary theoretical background, we begin by outlining the key concepts that are part of ethnolinguistic vitality theory before explaining the methodology of this study. We then provide an analysis of the objective as well as the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of Frisian among Frisian speakers in Fryslân. The subsequent discussion of the findings focuses on the extent to which these two overlap, and the potential implications that our findings can be seen to have for effective language planning to ensure the maintenance of Frisian.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

Structural Factors that Influence Ethnolinguistic Vitality

As noted above, the term *ethnolinguistic vitality* (henceforth: EV) was coined by Giles et al. (1977) as part of their theory on language and inter-group relations. They defined EV as “that which makes a group behave as a distinct and active collective entity in intergroup situations”, and they argued that a minority group’s EV constitutes a good indicator of how likely that group is to survive as a distinctive entity within a particular language contact situation (Giles et al., 1977, p. 308). Their theory focuses on three sets of socio-structural variables “which may combine to at least permit an ethnolinguistic community to survive as a viable group” (Giles et al., 1977, p. 308): namely status, demography, and institutional support.

Status factors are those that “pertain to a configuration of prestige variables of the linguistic group in the inter-group context” (Giles et al., 1977, p. 309). This includes the status of the language itself as well as that of the linguistic community in which it is spoken. The former is largely determined by the extent to which the language is legally and officially

² www.lang-up.eu

recognised; the latter on the socio-economic and socio-historical context (Smith et al., 2018).

In addition to the traditional aspects of status introduced by Giles and colleagues, subsequent EV research has also investigated linguistic landscapes under the rubric of status. The term *linguistic landscape* refers to the visibility of a given language in public and/or commercial spaces – that is, “[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). While some researchers also include the language that one hears in the streets as part of the linguistic landscape, language in its written form in public spaces constitutes the main focus of linguistic landscape studies (Gorter, 2006). As Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 29) note, the linguistic landscape is “the most observable and immediate index of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory”, and it can serve two key functions. Firstly, it informs individuals of the linguistic characteristics and territorial limits of the region they are in; and secondly, it serves an important symbolic function since “the absence or presence of one’s own language on public signs has an effect on how one feels as a member of a language group within a bilingual or multilingual setting” (Landry & Bourhis 1997, p. 24–25). This is linked to the perceived status of the language, which will be discussed in more detail below. Notably, the higher the status of a language and the corresponding linguistic group is considered to be, and the higher the language’s visibility is in the linguistic landscape, the more EV the language is assumed to have.

Demographic factors are those “related to the sheer numbers of group members and their distribution throughout the territory” (Giles et al., 1977, p. 309). They comprise the size of the ethnolinguistic group (both absolute and comparative in relation to the relevant out-group) and their distribution patterns. Demographic factors also include birth rates as well as numbers relating to migration. Groups with favourable demographic trends are likely to possess more EV than those whose demographic trends are unfavourable.

Institutional support refers to “the extent to which a language group

receives representation in the various institutions of a nation, region or community" (Giles et al., 1977, p. 309). This includes, for example, government, education, culture and media, and provisions in economic and social life. The more institutional support a language and its speakers receive, the higher the language's EV. Importantly, the more EV a language is seen to have, the more likely it is to be maintained (Giles et al., 1977).

The EV research paradigm has provoked some controversy in the literature; it has been criticised, revisited, and developed further (see e.g. Smith et al., 2018, for an overview). Yet, the socio-structural factors that are understood to define vitality have remained the same: namely status, demography, and institutional support.

Objective Versus Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality

While these factors are conceivably objective, EV researchers quickly came to recognise that it is also crucial to investigate how groups cognitively and affectively perceive the status, demography, and institutional support of their language. Bourhis et al. (1981) thus introduced the concept of *subjective EV*, and it is now acknowledged that this is "as important as, if not more important than, the group's objective vitality. Fundamentally, individuals act based on what they perceive" (Smith et al., 2018, p. 3). For instance, the more a minority language group perceives their language to be present in the linguistic landscape, the more group members tend to use it in a broader range of sociolinguistic situations (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). While objective and subjective EV tend to be similar (e.g. Harwood et al., 1994), they are not always the same – and in some contexts, there are notable differences (e.g. Bourhis et al., 2019).

Together, objective and subjective EV therefore constitute the core of the EV paradigm, and it is generally recognised that a comparison of the two provides an excellent starting point from which the link between sociological, sociolinguistic, and social psychological aspects of language and inter-group relations can be researched (Bourhis et al., 2019). The EV paradigm in its current form enables a nuanced understanding of language communities in inter-group settings, providing valuable insights into the variables and

mechanisms involved in the maintenance or shift of minority languages.

In this article, we thus examine both the objective and the subjective EV of Frisian in the Dutch province of Fryslân, considering the key socio-structural factors of status, demography, and institutional support.

Methodology

Objective Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Sources. In order to obtain information about the objective EV of Frisian, we examined policy documents and reports, data from the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics and the Frisian Social Planning Bureau, as well as previous academic investigations of Frisian in Fryslân.

Analysis. A content analysis of these sources was conducted to collect the most pertinent facts concerning the objective EV of Frisian in the province, distinguishing between the aforementioned three types of socio-structural factors that constitute the EV of a language: namely status, demography, and institutional support.

Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Method and procedure. To find out about the subjective EV of Frisian, data obtained by means of a questionnaire were used. The questionnaire was devised as part of the aforementioned Erasmus+ project *LangUp* (see above).

Given the exploratory nature of this study due to the fact that there is no recent and comparable research into the subjective EV of Frisian, the decision was made to employ a questionnaire with primarily open-ended items. Such questionnaires are considered particularly appropriate for exploratory investigations because they have the advantage of allowing respondents to freely express themselves while avoiding the potential bias resulting from suggested answer options – and they yield “rich, thick, qualitative accounts” (Beckett & Clegg, 2007, p. 309) as well as “adding more depth and colour to the data than answers to closed-response items” (Brown,

2009, p. 205). In recent years, several key researchers working in the EV paradigm had commented on the “dire need” for qualitative investigations of EV in inter-group contexts (Smith et al., 2018, p. 128; see also e.g. Bourhis et al., 2019).

The questionnaire was administered face-to-face, in Frisian, by Author 1. Face-to-face administration of questionnaires with open-ended items is time-consuming, which means that participant numbers tend to be small and results cannot be generalised. Moreover, there is the risk of social desirability biases and the researcher’s characteristics affecting participants’ responses (Baker, 1992). Nevertheless, given the exploratory nature of the study – and especially in light of the fact that literacy rates in Frisian tend to be rather low even among many L1 speakers (e.g. Klinkenberg et al., 2018) – face-to-face administration of a questionnaire with open-ended items was deemed most appropriate. The possibility of clarifying participants’ misunderstandings was considered a further advantage of this procedure.

Participants were recruited through the mailing lists and social media accounts of the Fryske Akademy and the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. Additionally, snowball sampling was used: people were asked to also share the call for participation with their own contacts. All participants gave informed consent before taking part in the research.

The questionnaire was administered in different locations, depending on the participants’ preferences: at their home, at their office or at the Fryske Akademy. As all participants were able to understand and speak Frisian, Author 1 read the questions out to them and then wrote down their answers.

Participants. The participant sample consisted of 15 Frisians whose ages ranged from 22 to 62, with a mean age of 44. The sample included 9 female and 6 male participants. To ensure their anonymity, participants were assigned codes consisting of the letter F or M to indicate their gender, followed by a number to indicate their age. As there were two 46-year-old female participants, one of them was given the code F46A and the other F46B; and since there were two 62-year-old male participants, they were assigned the labels M62A and M62B.

All participants were either fully raised with the Frisian language or

had at least one parent who was an L1 Frisian speaker. They were all able to understand and speak Frisian well; however, their reading and writing skills in the language varied greatly. All participants lived in Fryslân and self-identified as Frisian.

Materials and analysis. To investigate the perceived status of Frisian, including its presence in the linguistic landscape, the questionnaire included open-ended items pertaining to the role of the language in relation to official communication, employment opportunities, career enhancement, and public spaces. The only closed item in the questionnaire was used to find out about the perceived demography of Frisian: the participants were asked to estimate in which category the number of Frisian speakers falls, with the answer options being 1–100; 100–1.000; 1.000–10.000; 10.000–100.000; 100.000–1.000.000; and >1.000.000.³ To examine the perceived institutional support for Frisian, the questionnaire included open-ended items concerning the support the language receives in general as well as specifically with regard to public life, culture and media, and education. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked if they had any further comments.

Qualitative content analysis (see e.g. Jackson & Trochim, 2002) was performed to analyse the questionnaire data. First, deductive coding and categorisation took place using pre-established codes based on the three socio-structural factors from EV theory – that is, status, demography, and institutional support. Subsequently, the data were inductively analysed for themes and recurring patterns within each factor type. Our analysis thus reflects the theory, concepts, and constructs that motivated this investigation.

³ The questionnaire had been standardised so it could be employed by the *LangUp* partners in all countries involved in the project, to allow for a comparative investigation of their regional and minority languages. Apart from the language name(s), the questionnaire was the same in all contexts. This is the reason why, in the demography item, the categories could not be more specific to the Frisian context.

The Objective Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Frisian

Status

As noted above, the status of a language is chiefly determined by its legal recognition and by the status of the speech community in which it is spoken.

With regard to the speech community, there is a lack of empirical studies comparing Frisian speakers with Dutch speakers. This is due to the fact that Frisian history has always been “closely integrated with Dutch history” (Ytsma et al., 1994, p. 66) and therefore “most Frisian speakers identify themselves as Dutch speakers as well as Frisian, which causes problems for such an investigation” (Hilton & Gooskens, 2013, p. 142).

More can be said about the legal status of Frisian: along with Dutch, it is an official language of the Netherlands. It began to receive increasing recognition in the 1950s, and specifically after a period of unrest which culminated in the so-called *Kneppelfreed* [baton Friday] in 1951. On this day, the police force used their batons to violently banish Frisians from the court house in the provincial capital of Ljouwert (Dutch: Leeuwarden), where they had come to attend the trial of a Frisian writer accused of insulting a judge – after the latter had insisted on the use of Dutch instead of Frisian in his court room. The event led to great anger among Frisian speakers, and to appease them, the government of the Netherlands eventually passed an amendment to the law that allowed the use of Frisian in primary schools (the Decree on Education in the Frisian Language, 1955), followed by another that allowed it in courts of law (the Act on the Use of Frisian Language in the Justice System, 1956). The national government confirmed its responsibility to protect the Frisian language in a report by the Commission on Frisian language politics in 1970, based on which the cabinet concluded that national policy should ensure the maintenance of the Frisian language and culture. In 1981, a Commission of the Frisian language was instated to advise the government on the place of Frisian in administrative law. Their conclusions were published in a report that eventually led to the first Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture, which went into force in 1993 – followed shortly afterwards by an amendment to the General

Administrative Law Act in 1995, granting Frisian the position as an official administrative language of the Netherlands.

As mentioned in Section 2, much modern EV research also considers linguistic landscapes to be indicative of language status. Based on the Act on the Use of the Frisian Language (2013), each municipality in Fryslân has their own rules and regulations regarding this. For example, in some municipalities the Frisian names are at the top of town and street signs, in others it is the Dutch names; some have only Frisian signs; and sometimes the municipality's name is Dutch while the towns within that municipality have Frisian names on their signs. There is also great variability with regard to the use of Frisian on other kinds of public signage, for example on and in shops, with much more Frisian signage being used in rural areas than in urban spaces (Edelman, 2014; Trincheri, 2015). This may be linked with the more general linguistic reality that Frisian is more commonly used in the countryside, and Dutch in the cities (Gorter & Jonkman, 1995; see also Jongbloed-Faber et al., 2017). This is exemplified by research in the provincial capital of Ljouwert: only 3 per cent of shop signs were found to be unilingually Frisian, and a mere 2 per cent a combination of Frisian and Dutch (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). However, even in smaller towns and villages, Dutch is used more often than Frisian in public signage, and most bilingual signs are in fact Dutch-English rather than Dutch-Frisian (Trincheri, 2015).

Demography

As explained in Section 2, demographic factors pertain to the size of the speech community.

In 2019, the Netherlands had over 17 million inhabitants, of which more than 647.000 were living in Fryslân (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2019). The provincial government estimates the overall number of Frisian speakers to be around 420.000 (Province of Fryslân, 2015). Further research paints a more nuanced picture: 77 per cent of the province's population have Frisian as their home language; 89 per cent are able to understand it, 70 per cent can speak it, 59 per cent can read it, and 19 per cent

can write it (Klinkenberg et al., 2018).⁴

Although the number of children growing up in Frisian-speaking families has been declining, in recent years this decline has lessened and the status quo has for some time been between 45 per cent and 55 per cent (e.g. Klinkenberg et al., 2018). Yet, while the overall population of Fryslân might be relatively stable, its composition is not: the number of seniors is increasing and the number of children is decreasing (Frisian Social Planning Bureau, 2019). Thus, while the percentage of children growing up in Frisian-speaking households may be constant, the numbers are in fact declining.

Institutional support

As noted above, institutional support refers to the representation of the language in the institutions of a community. Here, we focus on institutional support in general as well as specifically with regard to public life, media and culture, and education.

By ratifying the ECRML, the government of the Netherlands agreed to key measures to protect and promote, for example, education in Frisian as well as the language's use in culture and media, and in various aspects of public life. Additional steps towards Frisian language maintenance in these realms were developed through the Act on the Use of the Frisian Language (2013). Furthermore, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995), ratified by the Netherlands in 2005, binds the Dutch government to the protection of national minorities like Frisian. Yet, as explained in Section 1, based on the Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture (2018), the implementation of any protective measures is not only the responsibility of the national government but also to a large extent delegated to the provincial government of Fryslân.

⁴ Migration has led to the formation of Frisian-speaking communities outside of Fryslân, for example in the neighbouring province of Grynslân (Dutch: Groningen) – but these are small in size and number (e.g. Bootsma, 2016). There has also been migration of Frisian speakers to North America, leading to Frisian-speaking communities in Canada and the United States (e.g. Bousquette & Ehresmann, 2010). However, for reasons of space, this article focuses solely on the province of Fryslân.

The provincial government promotes Frisian in public life through the provision of various grants, subsidies, and schemes. For instance, the province is committed to the production, promotion, and distribution of Frisian books and magazines. As per the Administrative Agreement on Frisian Language and Culture, the provincial government offers subsidies for these purposes, including a scheme to promote Frisian language books, Frisian book publishing, and a scheme for writers of Frisian prose and drama (Province of Fryslân, 2020). Moreover, the province subsidises several Frisian institutions, such as the provincial library and archive *Frysk Histoarysk en Letterkundich Sintrum* [Frisian History and Literature Centre; usually referred to as 'Tresoar'], the scientific research institute *Fryske Akademy* [Frisian Academy], and the language promotion institute *Algemiene Fryske ûnderrjocht Kommisje* [General Commission for Frisian Education; typically abbreviated to 'Afûk'].

Frisian media is regulated by the Media Law (2008) and the Administrative Agreement on Frisian in the Media (2016). The regional broadcaster Omrop Fryslân provides Frisian radio and television programmes. Moreover, there are news outlets such as the newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant*, which has some Frisian content, the literary magazine *De Moanne*, which is bilingual Dutch-Frisian, and various Frisian language village newspapers and newsletters. Notably, visible use of Frisian on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has also been attested (e.g. Jongbloed-Faber et al., 2017), and Facebook even allows users to set up Frisian as the language in which their general page information is displayed. Most of the institutional support for Frisian culture is arranged through ministerial decrees with resolutions for Frisian theatre and shows (for an overview, see the Frisian Language Regulation in the Netherlands, 2012).

Frisian education is regulated by national educational policies: it is a mandatory subject of study until the second year of higher education, but the quantity and quality of instruction differ greatly between schools – and it is even possible for schools to apply for exemptions from Frisian education (Varkevisser & Walsweer, 2018). There are, however, a number of trilingual primary schools where Frisian is not only studied as a subject but also used as a language of instruction alongside Dutch and English. To address issues

and inequalities concerning Frisian in the education sector, the provincial government recently initiated the project *Taalplan Frysk* [Language Plan Frisian],⁵ which provides monetary incentives aimed at encouraging schools to increase the share of Frisian in education. By 2030, all schools in the Frisian language area are expected to comply with the plan's attainment targets.

In terms of higher education, Frisian as a subject of study is available as part of the BA Minorities and Multilingualism (which, in fact, has a Frisian track) and the MA Multilingualism (which, however, currently only has one module on Frisian) – both at the University of Grins (Dutch: Groningen), but partly taught at their Campus Fryslân in Ljouwert.⁶ With regard to adult education, the aforementioned Afûk offers the whole spectrum of Frisian courses, including speaking, understanding, reading, and writing skills as well as content relating to Frisian history and culture. Educators can receive their Frisian teacher qualification either through a Frisian elective in the national teacher training scheme or through the teacher training scheme at NHL-Stenden, the University of Applied Sciences in Ljouwert.

The Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Frisian

Status

The questionnaire data reveal that all participants were aware of the status that Frisian holds as an official language of the Netherlands. However, participants commented on how, in reality, knowledge of Frisian has little to no economic value (M22); they perceived it as beneficial only in institutions whose working language is Frisian (M29, M62B, F47, F49, F56, F58) or in public services and educational positions (M27, M31, F38, F42, F46A, F46B, F48) – but they felt that even in the education sector, there are not as many opportunities in Frisian as there used to be (M62A).

⁵ taalplan.frl

⁶ It is also possible to study for a minor in Frisian at the University of Amsterdam – however, as noted above, the focus here is solely on the province of Fryslân.

Moreover, while the participants all knew that Frisian may be used in courts of law and in correspondence with governmental institutions, they were also all aware that such institutions are not obligated to respond in Frisian. M22 explained that “kommunisearje mei in gemeente yn it Frysk hinget ôf fan de gemeente: sommige gemeentes binne mear op it Frysk rjochte as oaren” [being able to converse in Frisian with a municipality really depends on the municipality: some are more Frisian-orientated than others], and F56 elaborated that “it hinget ek mar ôf fan wa’t je treffe” [it depends on who you come across]. These participants’ statements indicate that whether or not one receives an answer in Frisian may depend on the language abilities and/or attitudes of the person handling one’s request. This reflects that while national regulations permit the use of Frisian, municipalities (and even individuals) differ in their practices. Yet, without exception, all participants stated that they would appreciate a response in Frisian.

Regarding the presence of Frisian in the linguistic landscape, all participants except one (F38) said they were aware of campaigns to promote the language in public spaces, such as *Praat mar Frysk* [Let’s speak Frisian]⁷ by Afûk, and they knew about efforts to organise visible language-related activities by institutes like the Fryske Akademy and Tresoar. However, despite such efforts, participants did not feel that Frisian is particularly present in the linguistic landscape of the province: for instance, M22 described it as “hast net sichtber op strjitte” [barely visible in the streets]. Moreover, it was noted that there are regional differences with regard to the linguistic landscape, with Frisian being even less visible in urban areas than in rural regions (M22, M62A, F38). The participants showed a desire for an increase of Frisian in the linguistic landscape, as evidenced by comments such as that by M62A, who said “Ik soe wol graach mear Frysk sjen op strjitte, sa as twatalige strjitnammeboerden en yn winkels” [I would like to see more Frisian in the streets, like bilingual street and shop signs]. Along the same lines, F46A elaborated that “it soe aardich wêze as bedriuwen of restaurants oanjaan soene dat hjin dêr Fryske prate kinne” [it would be nice if companies or restaurants would indicate that one can speak Frisian there].

⁷ www.praatmarfrysk.nl

Demography

Regarding the demography of Frisian, all but one participant (F38) were able to correctly place the number of speakers in the 100.000–1.000.000 category. Notably, the only participant who placed Frisian in the category with fewer speakers than it actually has (i.e. 10.000–100.000) was also the one who did not consider the language to be promoted in the public spaces she uses (F38; see above). While no correlation can be claimed based on data from a single participant, this does lend tentative support to the aforementioned notion that the perceived presence of a language in the linguistic landscape is linked with the subjective demographic vitality of that language.

Institutional support

As explained above, we investigated the institutional support of Frisian with regard to public life, media and culture, and education.

In terms of institutional support in public life, it is notable that all participants were able to name the province as a provider of language promotion incentives, while none mentioned the national government. For instance, M22 commented that “de provinsje is de lûker fan de kar wat taalpromoasje oangiet” [the province is the main driving force behind language promotion]. Other respondents made specific reference to the province’s role in the promotion of Frisian when Ljouwert was a European Capital of Culture in 2018 (F46B, F47) or they commented on grant schemes for literary writers and magazines (F56). There was agreement that the province “docht in soad” [does a lot] (M27, M62A) – primarily by subsidising organisations to promote Frisian (F42), sponsoring cultural events and media (M27, F58), and facilitating Frisian education (F38, F49). While the participants could not name any specific grant schemes, M22 noted that “it kin sûnder twifel, subsydzje foar it promoatsjen fan Frysk” [without a doubt, there are grants for Frisian language promotion].

In terms of institutional support in the areas of culture and media, the entire participant sample felt that all types of media could be consumed

in Frisian as there are Frisian radio and television programmes as well as various Frisian language village newspapers and newsletters. All participants knew about Omrop Fryslân, the Frisian broadcaster, as an institution that promotes culture in the Frisian language. There was also an awareness of the newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant*, which has some Frisian content (M62B, F56, F58), and the Dutch-Frisian bilingual literary magazine *De Moanne* (F38, F42, F56, F58, M22). Moreover, all participants mentioned the availability of Frisian settings on social media.

With regard to institutional support in the education sector, participants commented on primary and secondary schooling as well as teacher training and Frisian courses outside the traditional education system. All participants knew that Frisian is mandatory in the education sector to a certain extent. However, there was little awareness that Frisian in education is mandatory as a result of national policy (only mentioned by F38 and F58), and even less awareness of the exemptions schools can acquire for Frisian education (only mentioned by F42). None of the participants were sure about the exact rules and regulations in the education sector, and only one (M22) seemed to be aware of the aforementioned *Taalplan Frysk*.

In primary education, respondents estimated Frisian to be taught for one hour (M22, F38, F46A, F58) or two hours (M27, M31) per week, or even one day per week (M62B). There was little awareness of the trilingual primary schools (M22, F42, F56). The participants did seem to perceive the quality and quantity of Frisian language teaching as depending on the school (M29, M62A, F46A, F47, F48, F49, F56) as well as on the teacher (F42). M62A even went so far as to say that “de dosinten behearskje it Frysk skriuwen faak net goed genôch, om’t sy sels ek nea goed Frysk ûnderwiis krigen doe’t sy op skoalle sieten. Der falt in gat tusken Fryske les jaan wolle en it finen fan de geskikte ûnderwizers” [Frisian teachers aren’t skilled enough in Frisian writing, because they never received proper Frisian education when they were in schools. There is a gap between wanting to learn Frisian and finding the right teacher to do it].

The participants showed even less awareness of the regulations concerning Frisian provisions in secondary schools than they did concerning the provisions at primary level. The majority wrongly assumed that Frisian is

not mandatory at all in secondary education (M27, M29, M31, M62B, F46A, F46B, F47, F48, F49) or made other incorrect assumptions (F38, M31). Only a small share of the participant sample correctly stated that Frisian as a subject of study is mandatory for the first two years of secondary school (M22, M62A, F42, F56).

Frisian in higher education was only mentioned by two respondents, indicating a lack of awareness regarding Frisian education past primary and secondary level. Of the two participants who did mention it, one correctly stated that Frisian is available as part of the BA and MA degree programmes at the University of Grins, which are partly taught at their Campus Fryslân in Ljouwert (F58). The other was aware of previous possibilities for studying Frisian at higher education institutions that now no longer exist, but he was not aware of the aforementioned degree programmes and thus wrongly assumed that Frisian at university level had disappeared completely (M62A).

While all participants knew that it is possible to obtain a Frisian qualification in general teacher training, only some were aware that Frisian teacher training is available at NHL-Stenden in Ljouwert (M22, M27, M62A, F42, F56). The entire participant sample, however, had knowledge of the Frisian courses offered by Afûk. Moreover, all correctly assumed this is the only institution in the province at which such courses are offered.

Notably, F58 stated that “*underwiis is hiel wichtich foar it lêzen en skriuwen, sûnder dat sil it útstjerre*” [education is very important for reading and writing to prevent extinction]. This well-reflected comment highlights an awareness of the link between language education and language maintenance.

Discussion

Given the non-representative nature of the participant sample as a result of the sampling method and sample size, we cannot make any claims regarding the generalisation of this study’s findings to the Frisian population at large. Further research with greater, random samples is necessary to confirm our findings, including more extensive research of a qualitative as well as a quantitative nature (see also e.g. Smith et al., 2018; Bourhis et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the findings of this first contemporary study of the objective as well as the subjective EV of Frisian in Fryslân provide meaningful insights concerning the language's actual and perceived status, demography, and institutional support.

With regard to its status, the findings reveal that participants were well aware of the role that Frisian holds as an official language of the Netherlands as well as of the fact that it may be used in correspondence with governmental institutions. However, the participants expressed unhappiness about the fact that Frisian responses from governmental institutions are not necessarily the norm and depend on the institution or even the particular person one is corresponding with. Moreover, the findings show that the role and amount of Frisian in the linguistic landscape is not clearly regulated, with different rules – and therefore different practices – in different municipalities throughout the province. This objective fact was clearly reflected in the subjective perceptions of Frisian in the linguistic landscape, with participants even commenting on systematic rural versus urban differences. The findings clearly indicate a desire for a more consistent and widespread presence of the language in public spaces.

In terms of demography, it is notable that almost all participants were able to place Frisian into the correct category of speaker numbers. This suggests that, overall, the participants' perceived demographic vitality of the language accurately reflected its objective demographic vitality. Yet, further research with narrower categories more specific to the Frisian context (rather than the broad categories used for the comparative purposes of the Erasmus+ project *LangUp*, as part of which these data were collected) is necessary to verify this.

Regarding the institutional support of Frisian in Fryslân, the participants' subjective perceptions of the provisions in public life reflected an accurate awareness of what is objectively in place (e.g. concerning language promotion incentives and grant schemes provided by the provincial government). The same applies to the participants' perceptions of the institutional support Frisian receives in terms of media and culture: their responses indicated an awareness of the various existing provisions (e.g. Frisian radio, television, and the availability of social media in

Frisian). However, the same certainly cannot be said for participants' perceptions of the existing institutional support in the education sector: there was very little awareness – in addition to many mistaken assumptions – concerning the existing regulations and provisions with regard to this. Notably, participants knew even less about the regulations and provisions in secondary and higher education than about those at the primary level.

As acknowledged above, further research is necessary to ascertain whether our findings hold true and can be generalised to the Frisian population at large. Yet if this were indeed the case, these findings would have important implications for language planning that aims to ensure the maintenance of Frisian in Fryslân.

Both the objective and the subjective EV of Frisian indicate a necessity for further planning measures regarding the status of the language – and specifically the linguistic landscape. This stipulation is based on our finding that participants were aware of the current provisions and regulations in this regard, but did not perceive these to be sufficient. Should this finding generalise, it would seem sensible to implement planning measures that promote a more persistent and pervasive presence of Frisian in public spaces.⁸

Moreover, a comparison of the objective and subjective EV of Frisian indicates a necessity for planning measures regarding the institutional support that the language receives – with a specific focus on the education sector. This stipulation is based on the fact that while there are several provisions and regulations that are objectively in place to promote the Frisian language in education; our findings reveal that participants were largely ignorant of these. Should this hold true, it would make sense to implement measures to raise Frisians' awareness of the existing provisions and regulations. After all, the subjective EV of a minority language matters as much as, if not more than, its objective EV – for as Smith et al. (2018, p. 122, emphasis added) note: "the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group

⁸ As noted above, with regard to the status of Frisian, our findings also revealed the participants' wish to receive responses in Frisian in official correspondence. However, as it is unclear whether responses in Dutch are primarily motivated by lacking ability in Frisian, negative attitudes towards the language, or both, further research would be necessary before any informed recommendations could be made regarding this.

perceives itself to have, the more likely that it will thrive as a collective entity in an inter-group context”.

Conclusion

Comparing the objective and the subjective EV of Frisian in Fryslân has allowed us to gain nuanced insights into whether and to what extent our participants were aware of the existing provisions to promote the language as well as how satisfactory they perceived them to be. We discovered that, while it is classified as vulnerable by UNESCO (2010), Frisian seems to have at least a certain amount of EV, which constitutes a good basis for language planning to ensure its continued maintenance.

We were able to pinpoint at least one area (namely the linguistic landscape) where both the objective as well as the subjective EV of the language could be raised by means of specific planning measures. Moreover, we discovered at least one area (namely the education sector) where the subjective EV of Frisian does not match its objective EV, and further planning measures could be implemented to raise awareness.

In addition to the potential implications that our findings might have specifically in terms of language planning to ensure the maintenance of Frisian in Fryslân, they also have a broader significance in that they support the notion that the objective and the subjective EV of minority languages do not necessarily overlap at all times and in all points. Our findings therefore highlight the importance of considering both of these aspects in EV research that aims to ascertain the likelihood of minority language maintenance.

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OBJEKTYVUS IR SUBJEKTYVUS VAKARŲ FRYZŲ ETNOLINGVISTINIS GYVYBINGUMAS: MAŽUMŲ KALBOS SKATINIMAS IR SUVOKIMAS OLANDIJOJE

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje pristatomas tyrimas yra pirmasis šiuolaikinis tyrimas, kuriame analizuojamas subjektyvus ir objektyvus vakarų fryzų kalbos etnolingvistinis gyvybingumas. Vakarų fryzų kalba yra mažumų kalba, kuria kalbama Fryzijos provincijoje, Olandijoje. Objektyvus etnolingvistinis kalbos gyvybingumas buvo įtvirtintas remiantis politiniais dokumentais ir pagrįstas statistiniais duomenimis. Norint iširti subjektyvų etnolingvistinį kalbos gyvybingumą, buvo surinkti gausūs kokybiniai duomenys naudojant klausimyną, kuris dėl žemo raštingumo lygio buvo asmeniškai administruojamas vakarų fryzų kalbėtojams (n = 15). Klausimyno pirminiai atvirieji klausimai buvo susiję su įvairiais trijų pagrindinių socialinių ir struktūrinių veiksnių, sudarančių etnolingvistinį kalbos gyvybingumą, aspektais: tai – statusas, demografija ir institucinė parama. Buvo atlikta klausimyno atsakymų turinio analizė, pasitelkiant dedukcinį ir indukcinį kodavimą bei analizę. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad vakarų fryzų kalba gana gyvybinga, ir tai pagrįstai leidžia imtis kalbos planavimo siekiant užtikrinti nuolatinį šios kalbos išlaikymą. Be to, tyrimo išvados rodo, kad apskritai subjektyvus gyvybingumas sutampa su objektyviu gyvybingumu kalbos statuso, demografijos ir institucinės paramos aspektais. Tačiau tyrimo dalyviai išreiškė susirūpinimą dėl dviejų minėtų aspektų: pirma, vakarų fryzų kalbos statuso klausimu – respondentams kelia nerimą kalbos vieta kalbiniame kraštovaizdyje (kuriame subjektyvus gyvybingumas atitinka objektyvų gyvybingumą, bet respondentai aiškiai išreiškė norą, kad viešosiose erdvėse kalba būtų vartojama nuolat ir visur); antra, vakarų fryzų institucinės paramos klausimu – buvo susirūpinta kalbos vaidmeniu švietimo sistemoje (kurioje subjektyvus gyvybingumas neatitiko objektyvaus gyvybingumo). Straipsnyje aptariama, kokią įtaką šio mokslinio tyrimo išvados – jei jos pasitvirtintų – turėtų kalbos planavimui Fryzijos provincijoje.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: etnolingvistinis gyvybingumas; kalbų kontaktas; kalbos išlaikymas; kalbos planavimas; mažumų kalbos; vakarų fryzų kalba.