

[0908] Maintenance and Promotion in North Frisian Language Instruction on Föhr, Germany

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Abstract

Minority language classes are often diverse, with students ranging from true beginners to native speakers. Language instruction must simultaneously maintain the skills of native speaker students and promote the language by teaching the language to beginner students. This study discusses how the language instruction program on Föhr, Germany tackles maintenance and promotion of North Frisian. This study combines a preliminary description of Frisian language instruction on Föhr with an experimental story-telling task. The results of the native speaker ratings of the story-telling task emphasize the importance of both home language input and Frisian instruction, but more detailed case studies also point to a complex network of factors which influence minority language acquisition.

1. Introduction

In the face of language shift, minority language communities have often used language instruction as a way of supporting their languages (Gorter 2008). The UNESCO Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages lists intergenerational transmission - imparting the language from one generation to the next - as an important factor in the context of endangered languages (Grenoble and Whaley 2006). This has led to an emphasis within minority language communities on language instruction in primary school. Grin (2002: 19) argues that it is “the single most important channel of government intervention in the sphere of language.” Language instruction— used here to refer to teaching *of* the language, rather than teaching *in* the language – (see Gorter 2008 for a discussion of teaching of the language compared to teaching in the language) has been implemented for many minority languages, including Cherokee, Irish, Welsh, West Frisian, Gallo, and North Frisian, among others (Peter and Hirata-Edds 2006; Nolan 2008; Walker 2007). While these programs have been successful to some extent, some criticize the emphasis on minority language instruction, arguing that teaching the language shifts the responsibility of language acquisition away

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from the family and entrusts the large task of language learning to a brief period of time in school (Gorter 2008). This paper investigates the North Frisian language program on Föhr, Germany, as one example of the benefits of and challenges to minority language instruction. It pairs descriptive documentation with an experimental story-telling task to merge the program description with the program outcomes.

Minority language instruction programs can be effective in many ways. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages requires minority language instruction “at all appropriate levels,” with the goal of supporting native language skills. The Charter asserts minority language instruction is “a crucial factor in the maintenance and preservation of regional or minority languages” (Explanatory Report 1992, point 63). The Euromosaic study (Nelde et al. 1996) argues that minority language instruction can also promote the language by adding new speakers with no prior experience with the language. For the purposes of this paper I limit my discussion to two aspects: language promotion and language maintenance. *Language maintenance* aims to support native speaker skills and prevent language shift. On the other hand, *language promotion* seeks to actively revitalize the language by increasing use among populations that do not currently speak the language (see Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton and Hale 2001 for an overview). While language promotion can also refer to efforts such as creating textbooks, modernizing language through planned vocabulary introduction, among other programs, I limit the discussion of language promotion to increasing the number of speakers through classroom language acquisition. Classroom language acquisition refers to learning a language through classroom language instruction rather than via inter-generational transmission at home. Ideally, a minority language instruction program can both maintain and promote a language. The current paper examines North Frisian instruction as an example of how a language program can achieve these dual goals and speaks to the benefits and limits of minority language instruction.

While previous studies have examined language instruction in mainland North Frisian dialects (Grützmacher 2012; Steensen 2003), no studies to date have described the use of Fering in detail. I begin by addressing this gap with a brief description of the current status of North Frisian instruction on Föhr. Subsequently, I present the results of a story-telling task that tests students’ Frisian proficiency. In bringing together descriptive documentation and experimental results, I emphasize the need for both program

description and program evaluation. I answer the following research questions:

RQ 1 (Descriptive) - What is the current status of Fering language instruction?

RQ 2 (Evaluative) - Does Fering instruction both maintain and promote Frisian skills?

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 contextualizes the current project through a history of North Frisian instruction. Section 3 turns to the current project, which is divided into two sections: Section 3.1 describes the nature of Frisian instruction on Föhr, including the levels where it is taught and the types of learning activities used in the classroom. Section 3.2 evaluates Fering instruction by presenting the results of an experimental story-telling task. Section 4 discusses both sets of results. Section 5 concludes the paper and discusses the future of Fering instruction, as well as the challenges and the limitations of minority language instruction (Gorter 2008; Nolan 2008; Steensen 2003).

2. Background

2.1 Fering

Fering is one of ten dialects of the severely endangered North Frisian language (Århammar 2007; Walker 2001), which is a West Germanic language spoken in Northern Germany. Figure 1 shows where Frisian has historically been spoken, and highlights the island of Föhr, where Fering is spoken. Frisian is currently more widely spoken on Föhr than in other areas in North Friesland, where Frisian has been largely lost. In East Friesland Frisian has been long since been lost, East Frisian is only spoken in a very limited area in the Saterland, which is outside of East Friesland (see Munske et al. 2001 for an overview). Although it is difficult to determine the number of native speakers, current estimates are that there are between 1,500 and 3,500 native speakers on Föhr (Bohn 2004; Roeloffs 2012), including 29% of high school students (Roeloffs 2012). There is also strong community support for Frisian language instruction here. In grades one through four at rural elementary schools, Frisian is taught to all students, on a de facto basis. However, it is voluntary by law. In high school, students may continue studying Frisian from grade 11-13 to satisfy their foreign language requirement, and they can study Frisian as an emphasis subject for their high school exit exam (Roeloffs 2012; Walker 2001).



Figure 1. Map of West and North Frisian (<http://www.ferring-stiftung.net/>)¹

2.2 History of North Frisian Instruction

Although it is not well documented, Steensen (2002) hypothesizes that North Frisian was the language of instruction in many North Frisian schools until the beginning of the Prussian period. As many students came to school with no knowledge of German, North Frisian was often used in schools to aid communication. The Frisian language itself became a subject, rather than the medium of instruction, for the first time on the island of Sylt in 1909. The program was cancelled at the school in Westerland shortly thereafter, as Frisian language instruction ran counter to the Prussian nationalistic policy. All Frisian instruction ended with the beginning of the First World War. During the Weimar Republic, enthusiasm grew for Frisian instruction, and in 1928 Frisian was taught in 46 schools for one hour a week (Grützmacher 2012). There was, however, concern among parents that Frisian instruction might prove detrimental to their children learning the

1. Helgoland is spelled Heligoland in English.

German language, as most of them came from Frisian speaking homes. Indeed, these concerns led to the termination of Frisian instruction in the eastern part of Föhr. To address these concerns, the teacher and poet Nis Albrecht Johannsen organized workshops and information evenings to assuage parents' concerns. All Frisian language instruction ceased again during the Third Reich.

In the period after WWII, there were plans to start a school with Frisian as the language of instruction in western Föhr, but the plan was halted with 98% of parents rejecting the plan. The parents did not see Fering as an endangered language and therefore believed there was no need to support it (Grützmacher 2012). Despite conferences and workshops for Frisian teachers in this post-war period, lack of parent support, falling numbers of native speakers, and lack of support from teachers and schools meant that nearly no schools were teaching Frisian. During this period Frisian was still taught on Föhr, but it was limited to one hour in grades three and four and at the high school level. Due to the school restructuring, the smaller village schools were closed and centralized. Today, there are two rural elementary schools on Föhr, Rural-West, located in Süderende, and Rural-East, located in Midlum, as well as one elementary school in the town of Wyk.

In the 1970s, Frisian instruction was reinvigorated by the renaissance of regional and minority languages in Europe. In 1976, Frisian instruction was officially re-permitted through the *Schulamt*, or educational authority. During this period there was renewed enthusiasm for Frisian instruction. Students were primarily German native speakers by this time, and therefore parents did not worry about their German language skills. Frisian was instead seen as a non-threatening part of their children's identity. Grandparents began speaking Frisian with their grandchildren, as a way to revitalize the language. Student enrollment increased from 1982-2002. Recently, the number of students has decreased, which is to partly due to the overall reduction in the number of students. As of the 2009-2010 school year, there were 900 students enrolled in Frisian instruction across 18 schools in North Friesland. Generally, schools offer Frisian for two hours a week in grades three and four (Grützmacher 2012).

3. Current Status of Fering Instruction

3.1 Program Description

On the island of Föhr, Fering is offered to students at both of the rural elementary schools for two hours a week in grades one through four.

Following the school decree in Schleswig-Holstein of 2008, renewed in 2013, participation in Frisian instruction is voluntary but takes place within the normal school day. Schools are required to inform parents in North Friesland that students have the opportunity to take Frisian classes, and a minimum of 12 participating students is needed for Frisian to be guaranteed. Schools may, however, offer Frisian instruction with fewer students in areas with a large Frisian presence. All students at both rural elementary schools on Föhr participate in Frisian instruction. In Wyk on Föhr, there is not the minimum number of students for Frisian to be offered. All students also begin with English instruction in the third grade.

At the secondary school level, all students at the Gymnasium continue with English instruction and may choose between Frisian, French, and Latin as their second required language. At this time Frisian classes are only available for students at the Gymnasium, and not at the Regionalschule. In this paper when I refer to secondary school or high school, this includes only the Gymnasium. Frisian classes are offered in grades 11 through 13, and there are plans to begin instruction in grade seven. This would align the Frisian language program with the other language programs on Föhr, where students begin taking Latin and French in grade seven, and reduce the gap between elementary school and high school Frisian instruction.

3.1.1 Who Learns Frisian?

At the elementary school level, universal participation in Frisian instruction leads to a mix of native and non-native speakers in the classrooms in western Föhr. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for minority language instruction. Even among native speakers there are varying degrees of exposure to the language, as some students speak exclusively Frisian at home, and others come from homes where Frisian, German, and sometimes Low German are spoken. Although participation in Frisian classes is voluntary, all parents allow their children to participate at the rural elementary schools. The two rural elementary schools differ in the proportion of native speakers. According to teacher estimates, about two-thirds of students at the school in western Föhr speak Frisian along with German as their native languages, and about one third of students at the rural school in eastern Föhr speak Frisian along with German as their native languages. Although some students at the school in eastern Föhr additionally speak Low German, this language is not offered as a course.

High school classrooms are similarly diverse. While all students are required to take English, they choose between French, Latin, and Frisian for

their second required language. Students begin with either Latin or French before Frisian is offered, beginning in grade 11. According to the Frisian teacher, high school students choose Frisian as one of their required languages for several reasons. Native speaker students may be interested in local culture and minority language issues or in developing reading and writing skills in their native language. Some native speaker students choose Frisian because they believe it will be easier than learning an additional language. Some non-native speakers choose Frisian due to their connection with other native speakers. Non-native speaker students who have friends, especially boyfriends or girlfriends who speak Frisian are highly motivated and have ample opportunity to speak Frisian outside of the classroom. Some students choose Frisian after previously struggling with French or Latin, the other two foreign languages offered at the local high school. Finally, students from the neighboring island of Amrum may learn Frisian because they do not have the opportunity to learn French or Latin on Amrum and find it difficult to catch up when beginning the high school on Föhr.

Thus, typical of minority language classes generally, the Frisian classes at both the elementary and high school levels on Föhr are linguistically diverse, with native speakers learning alongside non-native speakers. Teachers must consider the needs of highly proficient speakers and true beginners. This diversity emphasizes the opportunity for both language maintenance and language promotion.

3.1.2 What Happens in a Frisian Classroom?

At the elementary school level Frisian is used as the language of instruction during Frisian language classes, and activities focus on the needs of students representing a range of Frisian skills. As Frisian classes are voluntary, teachers try to keep activities enjoyable. In order to address the needs of students from different backgrounds, activities focus on teaching students vocabulary and writing, as even native speaker students are not literate in Frisian. For example, an activity for elementary school focused on prepositional phrases and vocabulary associated with Easter. In this activity, students find the Easter eggs in a drawing and then write the location of the eggs in Frisian. Students are given a worksheet with the vocabulary in German and are asked to complete the chart with the Frisian terms. Non-native students learn vocabulary from their native speaker peers, while the native speaker students practice writing Fering. As such, activities are age appropriate and enjoyable for students while meeting the needs of students from Frisian-speaking and non-Frisian-speaking families.

Turning to the secondary school level, Frisian classes in grade 11 center on teaching the language, using a Frisian language textbook along with other sources (Arfsten and Tadsen 2009). Students with no previous Frisian instruction may enter at this level, and for native speakers there is an additional emphasis on reading and writing. Grades 12 and 13 are taught in one section and are content based. Students explore cultural topics, such as local history, culture, environment, and issues facing minority languages more broadly through the medium of the Frisian language. Frisian is the language of instruction at this level and native speaker students respond in Frisian, while non-native speakers may respond in German.

High school Frisian classes encourage engagement outside of the classroom as well. Students support elementary school Frisian instruction via projects such as translating children's books such as, *Guess How Much I Love You* or making Frisian language board games to give to the elementary schools. Students also create Frisian language materials for the Fering speaking community, for example, a translation of eight short stories by Ernest Hemingway, which was published in 2008 and is available for purchase at the *Ferring Stiftung*, a local foundation for Frisian studies. Additionally, high school students attend social events, including baking traditional Frisian Christmas ornaments. Thus, while students at the high school level begin with learning the language itself in grade 11, they switch to learning content through Frisian - teaching *in* the language - in grades 12 and 13 (see Gorter 2008). Focusing on the issues facing the Frisian community encourages students to look beyond the classroom and to promote Frisian language revitalization in the larger community. Creating materials for the elementary school classes and other community members both makes the experience more concrete for the students and promotes Frisian language use beyond the classroom.

3.1.3 Discussion and Summary

The descriptive documentation of the Frisian language program on Föhr highlights some of the opportunities and difficulties facing minority language programs generally. Within a minority language community, students differ in their language skills, and universal participation in elementary school Frisian classes at rural schools results in a heterogeneous group of students. High school classes are similarly diverse, with some students who have no prior Frisian experience alongside native speakers. While previous studies on teaching in North Frisian have focused on mainland dialects (Grützmacher 2012; Steensen 2003; Walker 2001), this description of the status of one dialect, Fering, spoken on Föhr, demonstrates an example of

how a program uses a heterogeneous classroom to maintain and promote a minority language.

3.2 Documenting Language Vitality on Föhr

Having briefly described the Frisian instruction program on Föhr, I turn now to the evaluative portion of the current project. Merging descriptive documentation and experimental data provides a more detailed picture of the current status of North Frisian. Section 3.1 documented the diversity in the Frisian classroom, as well as the attempts to both maintain Frisian for native speakers and promote the language through classroom language acquisition.

This section investigates Frisian proficiency among students at the rural elementary schools on Föhr through a story-telling task. While using a cross-sectional design, the comparison between younger grades and older grades speaks to improvement over apparent time. That is, if the students in the older grades perform better on the story-telling task than the students from younger grades, this will be taken as evidence of improvement over the course of elementary school. Improvement or stable language skills for students from Frisian speaking homes constitute positive evidence of language maintenance, while higher ratings for older non-native speaker students than younger students represents support for language promotion.

3.2.1 Participants

During the 2012-2013 school year, elementary school students, high school students, and adult community members on Föhr completed a series of language experiments testing their Frisian language proficiency. I present the results of the story-telling task completed by elementary school students. A letter of invitation and consent form were given to all parents of all students at both rural elementary schools on Föhr. All students with signed consent forms were asked to participate. Forty-five elementary school students (29 girls and 16 boys) in grades one through four (ages 6-10) completed the task.

Following Gathercole and Thomas (2009), participants were separated into three groups based on the percentage of Fering spoken by the parents to the child. The three groups are: “high-input” participants whose parents spoke Fering more than 75% of the time with the participant, “middle-input” participants whose parents spoke Fering between 25% and 75% of the time, and “minimal-input” participants whose parents spoke less than

25% Frisian with the participant. The quantity of Frisian input was determined via a sub-set of the Utrecht Bilingualism Exposure Calculator (UBiLEC) (Unsworth 2011). The primary researcher administered the UBiLEC to parents when possible, or students themselves when the parents were not available. The questionnaire investigates the child's speech partners, the language each speech partner uses with the child, and the ratio of language use. Table 1 presents the number of participants by grade and home language. Of the 45 participants who completed the story-telling task, 20 fell into the high-input category, 12 are considered middle-input, and 13 were minimal-input.

Table 1. Elementary school participants by grade and home language

Group	High-input	Middle-input	Minimal-input
Younger (grades 1,2)	7	6	2
Older (grades 3, 4)	13	6	11

3.2.2 Method

All participants were tested in a quiet room at the school by a native speaker research assistant, who speaks both Frisian and German, and the primary researcher. Participants were shown a series of pictures (see Figure 2) and given directions in German to tell a story in Frisian. They were told that the story is called "The living book". Participants first looked at the pictures, and, so as not to conflate vocabulary and overall Frisian fluency, participants were permitted to ask for specific words. Participants told the story twice; the first time was practice and the second time was recorded using an external microphone connected to a laptop computer with Audacity 2.01 software.

3.2.3 Analysis

Stories were coded for overall language skills by a native speaker on a scale from 0-4, seen in Figure 3. As the goal of this task was to determine the participants' general language skills, a broad measure was used. Following Peter and Hirata-Edds (2006), native speaker raters who were blind to the language background or grade of the participants, were instructed to give a "holistic rating", reflecting how well the participant spoke Fering. Raters were instructed that while they should reflect on the speakers' overall Fering

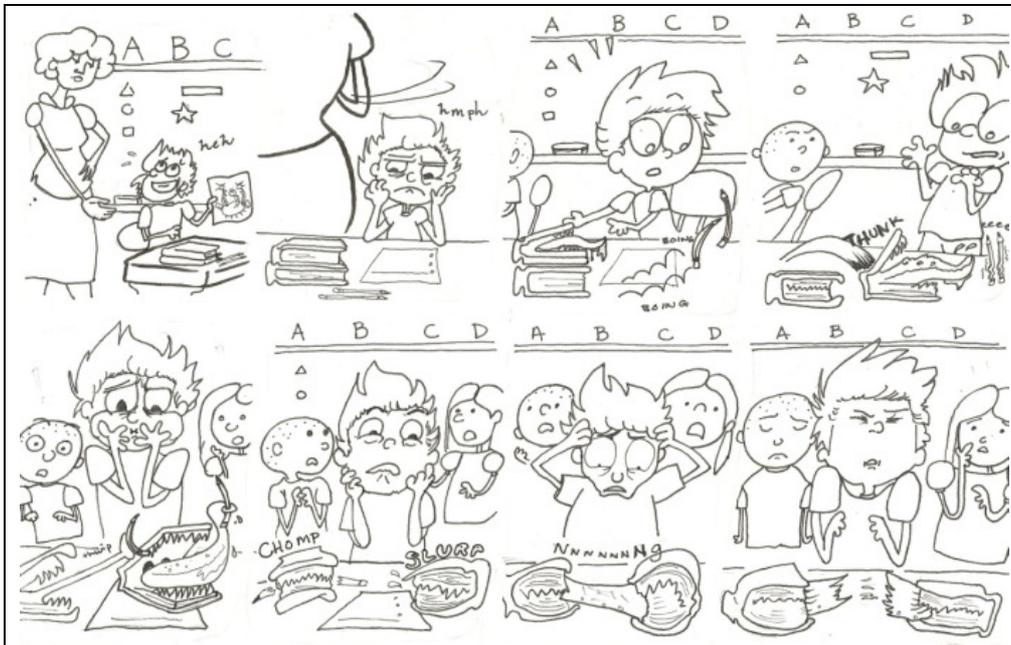


Figure 2. Pictures for Story-telling Task

skills, they may refer to the overall fluency, sentence and story complexity, and vocabulary size when scoring the recordings. Raters gave short one to two sentence justifications in addition to their score, which are not presented here. The rating scale is presented in Figure 3. 58% ($N = 26$) of the recordings were re-coded by a second native speaker, with an inter-rater reliability score of 96% (Cronbach's $\alpha = .963$). As the inter-rater reliability was high, the analyses presented here are the results of Rater One's scores.

3.2.4 Results

Overall, the results show that students on Föhr are relatively fluent in Fering and confirm that there is a wide range of skills in the Frisian classroom. I first compare the results of the elementary school students' story-telling tasks for each home language group, then for each home language group I compare younger elementary school students to older elementary school students, to investigate development over apparent time. Finally, two case studies of minimal input students are presented to highlight the wide-range of outcomes in this group.

0: The child was not able to complete the task in Frisian; Speaks exclusively German.
1: The story is limited in scope and may only be only several sentences long, child may only be able to use simple sentences or relies heavily on German vocabulary or structures
2: The story is more developed than a level 1 score, but the child speaks less fluently than a level 3 story. The story is halting and hesitates frequently.
3: The child speaks freely in Frisian, but hesitates sometimes or uses repetitive or limited vocabulary
4: The child speaks freely and confidently in Frisian, showing a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures. Child may use some German vocabulary, but is not overly reliant on German borrowings.

Figure 3. Scale for native speaker ratings of story-telling task

Home Language

First looking at the results of the story-telling task split by home language, we see a cline of performance, with high-input students rated the highest, followed by the middle-input students, and finally the minimal-input students. The average native speaker ratings for each group are presented in Table 2. The high-input students were rated on average as 3.5, meaning that students in this group speak freely and confidently in Frisian, demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, but may hesitate or be slightly repetitive at times. As the participants did not complete the story-telling task in German in addition to Frisian, it is not possible to determine whether these hesitations reflect their Frisian fluency specifically or represent a general pattern of child language use. On average, the middle-input students are rated by native speakers as 2.5. This suggests that the stories were more hesitant or halting than the high-input students, but

participants still completed the task in Frisian. In contrast, the minimal-input students were rated on average as 1.5, which means their stories were limited to several sentences, drew heavily on German vocabulary, and participants hesitated or spoke in a halting manner.

Table 2. Native speaker ratings of story-telling task by Home Language group

Home Language Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
High-input $N = 20$	3.50	0.95	0-4
Middle-input $N = 12$	2.50	1.38	0-4
Minimal-input $N = 13$	1.54	1.56	0-4

Age Group

As a proxy for improvement over elementary school, I now compare two groups of elementary school students: younger students in grades one and two, and older students in grades three and four. These results must be interpreted with caution, given the small sample sizes, particularly in the younger minimal-input group, where only two parents allowed their students to participate in the study.

Table 3. Native speaker ratings of story-telling task by Home Language and Grade Group

Home Language Group	Younger (Grades 1, 2)	Older (Grades 3, 4)
High-input	3.14 ($N = 7$)	3.69 ($N = 13$)
Middle-input	1.67 ($N = 6$)	3.33 ($N = 6$)
Minimal-input	0.50 ($N = 2$)	1.73 ($N = 11$)

Table 3 presents the results of the story-telling task with participants separated by both home language and age group. These results suggest that high-input participants begin elementary school speaking Frisian fluently and maintain their high scores over the course of elementary school. In contrast, the middle-input students show large gains during elementary school and the low average score for the younger group may be due to a few low scores in this group. Finally, while the minimal-input students still lag behind the students who speak Frisian at home in both the high-input and

middle-input groups; the older group shows higher ratings than the students in the younger group. The results of the minimal-input group are limited by the very small number of participants in the younger group. Taken together, the results suggest that while there are overall differences between home language groups, students in the older group are rated as more fluent than those in the younger group in Frisian, regardless of their home language(s).

Case Studies

A closer investigation of two fourth grade students with the same home language background and Frisian school instruction examines other factors influencing Frisian language outcomes. The first student, Lena, produced a level four story, meaning that she was rated the same as native speaker students. Lena is in the fourth grade and neither of her parents speaks Frisian. She attends the rural elementary school in western Föhr, where about two-thirds of students speak Frisian at home, and lives in a small village in the western part of the island. She reports playing with friends out of school for about 20 hours a week, where she speaks exclusively Frisian. While other speakers would usually speak German with her because they know she does not speak Frisian at home, she insists that they speak Frisian with her and responds in only Frisian.

The second student, Imke, produced a level zero story, as she was not able to complete the task in Frisian and spoke exclusively German. Imke is also a fourth grade student and neither of her parents speaks Frisian. She lives in a village in central Föhr and attends the rural elementary school in eastern Föhr, where about a third of students speak Frisian at home. Like Lena, she reports playing with friends for about 20 hours a week, but she estimates that she speaks Frisian rarely, about 10% of the time, while playing with friends.

The two students have the same home language background and Frisian instruction. However three additional factors differentiate them. They live in different areas of the island, attend different elementary schools, and while they spend the same amount of time playing with friends, they use different languages with their friends. While the larger applicability of these case studies must remain tentative given the limited scope, the results suggest a network of factors influences minority language acquisition. In addition to home language and language instruction, the community language domi-

nance, the language of time spent outside of the classroom, and the individual student's motivation for learning, impact language outcomes.

3.2.4 Discussion

The description of the Frisian language program highlighted the diversity in Frisian classes and suggested that both language maintenance and language promotion were possible. In this section I summarize each home language groups' story-telling task ratings, and discuss how the results of each home language group address maintenance and promotion of Frisian.

The results of the high-input and middle-input groups speak to the issue of language maintenance. If the Frisian language program is successful in maintaining the language, I would expect the older high-input and middle-input students to perform better on the story-telling task than the younger elementary school students.

High-input

Perhaps not surprisingly, the students in the high-input group enter elementary school speaking Frisian fluently, as seen by the strong ratings for the younger high-input elementary school students. The strong ratings for the older high-input elementary school students can be taken as evidence of successful language maintenance among these speakers.

Research on heritage language speakers shows that native speakers are susceptible to language shift and loss at pivot points where the language dominance shifts, for example, when they enter elementary school. On Föhr many children begin attending Kindergarten for several days a week at age three, where German is widely spoken. However, the transition from Kindergarten to elementary school brings an additional shift away from Frisian use and towards German use, and therefore represents a pivotal moment in their language use. There are other language use pivot points throughout one's lifetime including but not limited to, beginning secondary school, marriage, and beginning a career. The older high-input group's strong Frisian skills suggest students successfully maintain Frisian, despite a shift toward German language use in school.

One limitation of the story-telling task was that it may not have fully challenged the native speaker's abilities. Therefore it is difficult to determine whether the students are showing normal age related language development or have stalled at this level. Future research should test these students' abilities on a wider range of features. Moreover, it was not possible to determine whether the participants are equally fluent in both of

their two native languages, as German fluency was not tested. Future studies would also benefit from testing both of the speakers' languages, in order to establish a baseline of general fluency.

Middle-input

The middle-input group of students, in contrast, shows a different pattern of results. As an intermediate point on the continuum of quantity of Frisian input, the results of the middle-input students speak to both the issue of language maintenance and promotion. Recall that these students are native-speakers, and have learned Frisian from birth. However, they receive less Frisian input than their high-input peers. While students in the younger middle-input group struggled with the task, as seen by their low ratings, the older middle-input students approximate the older high-input students. Thus, it appears that with increased exposure to the language, middle-input students are able to improve their Frisian skills. As such, the results of the middle-input group suggest both successful language maintenance, in that the older group is not rated lower than the younger group, and language promotion, in that the older group outperformed the younger group.

I suggest the timing difference between high-input students and middle-input students is driven by the differences in the amount of Frisian input. While a number of factors influence minority language outcomes, including but not limited to language of interaction with each parent, sibling, neighbors, acquaintances, the level of minority language use in the larger community and in childcare, and social variables such as language attitudes (see Grenoble and Whaley 2006 for an overview; Morris and Jones 2007 for a Welsh example), I emphasize the importance of the amount of Frisian input. The middle-input students typically received Frisian input from one parent at home, but this does not translate into overall balanced exposure to each language. Even children who hear Frisian roughly half of the time from their parents are exposed to a significant amount of German in school, through television and radio media, books, newspapers and games. When considering the overall ratio of language exposure, therefore, the middle-input students may require additional time, and consequently more input, than their high-input peers to develop Frisian proficiency. These results are in line with findings for Welsh students showing that in minority language contexts students need additional language input – either at home or in school –in order to counter-balance the majority language dominance outside the home (Gathercole and Thomas 2009).

Minimal-input

Finally, the minimal-input students address the second goal of minority language instruction: language promotion. Students who enter elementary school with little or no previous Frisian language exposure present an opportunity to increase the total number of speakers through classroom language acquisition. The extremely small sample size for minimal-input students in the younger group makes the trajectory of development difficult to track. Parents of these young students may have been reluctant to allow their students to participate given their limited Frisian skills. Looking at the older minimal-input students, there are substantial individual differences. Some students produce a level 4 story, meaning that they are rated as highly fluent as many high-input students. Conversely, four older minimal-input students speak exclusively German, and do not produce any Frisian.

Given that the minimal-input students have the same access to Frisian at home and school, differences between students cannot be attributed to either of these factors. While home language and school language both contribute to predicting language outcomes, they cannot fully account for which students will acquire the language. This result follows other studies which highlight that language acquisition depends on many factors (De Houwer 2007; Gathercole and Thomas 2009; Hickey 1999; Morris and Jones 2007). The case studies of the minimal-input students demonstrate that while there is a range of outcomes, and that some students can perform similarly to native speakers on this task, it is not possible to directly tie the results of this task to Frisian instruction. High scores for some of the older minimal-input students do, however, suggest that Frisian instruction can indeed produce new speakers. Moreover, a set of factors, including not only the home language and school language, but also the language spoken with friends outside school, the linguistic composition of the school community, and the individual student's motivation influence which students will successfully acquire the minority language. Future studies should aim to control these factors in order to determine the relative importance of Frisian language programs in language promotion.

The interpretation of the differences between younger elementary school students and older elementary school students in all age groups is limited by the project's cross-sectional design. The two groups of students may differ in more aspects than just age, and thus while comparison is intended to be a proxy for improvement over the course of elementary school, it may instead reflect individual differences between the groups of students. Especially given the larger inter-speaker variation in this sample, future studies should

utilize a longitudinal design. This would allow for tracking development throughout elementary school while comparing the same students at different time points. Despite this limitation, the current project provides preliminary evidence that Frisian language programs on Föhr can be successful in both supporting students with a Frisian language background, and increasing the number of Frisian speakers through classroom acquisition.

To summarize: Overall, the results of the story-telling task demonstrate the importance of the home language in minority language acquisition, and suggest that Frisian instruction is able to successfully meet the needs of a diverse classroom. Both younger and older high-input students show strong Frisian skills which points to successful language maintenance. The younger middle-input students struggled with the story-telling task, while the older students excelled. Thus, it appears that the middle-input students present an important opportunity to foster continued development, as they require additional Frisian input to approximate their high-input peers. While there was a wide-range of outcomes among the minimal-input students, some students are highly successful, which suggests that Frisian programs may also be successful in promoting the language. Taken together, while the cross-sectional design and small sample sizes prevent making strong claims about the effectiveness of the Frisian language program, the experimental results provide preliminary evidence of both successful language maintenance and language promotion.

4. General Discussion

This project ties language documentation and descriptive research to experimental outcomes in order to provide a fuller picture of one minority language situation. Section 3.1 described the current status of Frisian language instruction on Föhr, with special attention to the linguistic background of students, the goals of Frisian instruction, and the methods used in Frisian classrooms. Like other minority languages, Frisian classes are linguistically diverse with students ranging from Frisian dominant native speakers to true beginners who have no prior experience with Frisian. Students of different backgrounds present an opportunity and a challenge for minority language instruction. Teachers must address both maintaining native speaker skills while also promoting the language through classroom language acquisition.

The experimental task supports the linguistic diversity posited in the descriptive section. The results suggest that Frisian language instruction may successfully maintain Frisian while also promoting the language. The amount of Frisian the parents speak with the child significantly impacts Frisian proficiency, with students with more Frisian input at home rated by native speakers as having stronger overall Frisian skills. The high-input students perform the best on the story-telling task, followed by students from middle-input homes, and finally students with minimal Frisian input at home.

Within each home language group, the younger elementary school students and older elementary school students were compared. The younger and older high-input students were rated equally highly on the story-telling task, suggesting that the older students have maintained Frisian. The younger middle-input students struggle with the task, while the older middle-input students approximate their peers in the older high-input group. The middle-input group suggests both successful maintenance and promotion of Frisian through Frisian instruction. There were only two young minimal-input students, which makes the age group comparison less revealing than for the other two home language groups. The key finding for the older minimal-input group was the diversity of outcomes. While some students were not able to complete the task in Frisian at all, several others were rated at the same level as high-input students. The success of these minimal-input students suggests both that Frisian language instruction can successfully promote the language, but also that additional factors, such as the student's level of motivation, and network of friends influences their language outcomes. While the effect of age group was less pronounced, for all home language groups the older students were rated higher than younger students, suggesting a role for Frisian instruction as well. Finally, the case study results highlight the complexity of minority language acquisition, and suggest that time outside of the classroom is as important as instructional time. In the next two sections I explore the indirect benefits of Frisian instruction and the future of Frisian language instruction.

4.1 Indirect Benefits of Frisian Language Instruction

Although two hours a week of Frisian instruction is unlikely to result in successful acquisition for classroom language learners, the impact of Frisian instruction extends beyond the classroom. First, Frisian instruction gives students an opportunity to know whether other students speak Frisian at home. Students report in the UBILEC that they speak Frisian with friends

who speak Frisian and German with those who do not. However, students do not always know which of their peers speak Frisian. When students meet each other in a German dominant school environment, it is possible that two native Frisian speaking students may not know that the other speaks Frisian, leading them to speak German with each other. Students note that it can be difficult to switch languages, even when parents point out that the other child speaks Frisian. Through Frisian instruction, students can learn who speaks Frisian, and increase the number of speech partners. Second, formal Frisian instruction increases the language's prestige and encourages native speakers and non-native speakers alike to use the language outside of the classroom. Increases in language attitudes correlate with language maintenance for Catalan in Valencia and Appalachian English in the United States (Ferrer 2010; Nolan 2011; Priestly McKinnie and Hunter 2009). The case study results highlight the importance of Frisian language use outside of the classroom, and therefore, while the time in the classroom is limited, the Frisian instruction can have broad impacts.

4.2 Future of Frisian Instruction

In the immediate future, there is no concern that either of the rural elementary schools on Föhr will fall below the minimum 12 students required for Frisian courses to be offered. The decree, allowing for Frisian instruction in schools in North Friesland, has been extended until 2018. Demographic shifts in Germany mean that there are fewer students overall enrolled in each school, and there have been discussions about combining the two rural elementary schools. This would mean that the students from western Föhr will encounter many more non-Frisian speaking students and could lead to less Frisian time outside the classroom, which is one of several factors predicting language outcomes. At the secondary level, the plans to extend Frisian instruction will begin to close the gap between 4th grade and 11th grade and provide non-native speaking students from Wyk the opportunity to begin learning Frisian earlier. Overall, the outlook for Frisian and Fering instruction looks bright; however, we have to remember that currently the choice is in the parents' hands.

5. Conclusion

This study provides an initial analysis of one minority language program, Fering. A descriptive account of North Frisian instruction on Föhr combined with an experimental evaluation of elementary school students' proficiency

were used to test the program's ability to both maintain and promote Frisian language. Taken together, the results emphasize both home language and Frisian instruction, but also point to a complex network of factors influencing minority language acquisition. Importantly, the story-telling task results show that parents play a vital role not only in language transmission at home, but also in allowing their students to attend Frisian classes, as these results highlight the benefits of Frisian instruction. As Gorter (2008) and Nolan (2008) highlight, two hours a week in the classroom cannot guarantee language transmission. However, universal participation in Frisian instruction provides an opportunity for instruction to simultaneously address language maintenance and promotion. Frisian instruction can also play a key role in helping students to value their native language, showing students that other students speak Frisian, facilitating Frisian use outside of the classroom.

This research joins Gorter (2008) in emphasizing the importance of teaching through the language rather than teaching the language. The secondary school courses on Föhr have already begun this by teaching local themes and minority language issues through Frisian. In the future, we should turn our gaze beyond Frisian language instruction, and consider whether other courses can be taught through Frisian, such as Art, Religion, or Sports, or if plans for a Frisian language or bilingual school on Föhr can be revitalized. While parents on Föhr rejected plans for a Frisian school in 1979 because they did not think that Frisian needed support, it may now be the time to revisit this idea. While Frisian instruction on Föhr appears to be successfully helping to maintain and promote Frisian, especially in western Föhr, I follow Fishman, 1991: 109 in calling for "eternal vigilance".

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