

BESPREEK

[0766]

A. Dykstra, *Frysk-Ingelsk Wurdboek / Frisian-English Dictionary, with a corresponding English-Frisian word list*. Ljouwert/Leeuwarden (2000), Afûk / Fryske Akademy, 1153 pp, ISBN 90-6273-579-7, HFL 59.50.

Introduction¹

Anne Dykstra's *Frysk-Ingelsk Wurdboek / Frisian-English Dictionary (FED)* is the first Frisian-English dictionary really deserving the name 'dictionary', for Raymond John Fisher's *Frisian-English Dictionary* (1986) is rather too short to be a real help as a dictionary. The FED consists of a *Preface*, a *User's Guide and Concise Grammar of Frisian*,² the A-Z part of the dictionary (pp. 1-830), an *English-Frisian Word List* (pp. 832-1149) and a *Selection of Frisian proverbs and sayings* (pp. 1150-1153). The dictionary is intended as an active Frisian-English dictionary (i.e. for speakers of Frisian to actively use English a foreign language) in view of the fact that the A-Z part uses Frisian as its metalanguage ('The language used to present and comment on a subject field', Hartmann & James 1998).³ However, the front matter (the preface and the concise grammar – cum – guide) are entirely in English, which indicates that the book is simultaneously also intended for native speakers of English wishing to understand Frisian or even to translate from this language into English. Obviously, the purpose of the English-Frisian wordlist is to make the FED bidirectional and bifunctional (i.e. active as well as passive), so that English can also be turned into Frisian. Bifunctionality has for obvious reasons always been highly problematic and will no doubt cause similar problems in this case.

From all this it is clear that Dykstra tries to do literally what the title of the dictionary promises: for Frisians it is ***Frysk-Ingelsk*** and for English speakers it is ***Frisian-English*** (and also ***English-Frisian***). This, as said above, has never been a good idea, but – as always – cost considerations play an important role in dictionary making: it would clearly have been far too expensive to produce both a

1. Also see Jan Posthumus' review in *De Woordenaar* (Posthumus, 2000). I will refrain from remarking on a number of issues raised there, such as the ratio between available text space per page and amount of text, the fact that the English user should have been told about the alphabetisation practise of Frisian dictionaries (particularly relevant for <i> and <y>) and some problems with phonetic transcription.
2. In this review I have not dealt with this part of FED.
3. With apparently occasional lapses as under **y_nsp.**, which runs 'short for ynspeksje', where *short for* suddenly uses English as a metalanguage.

Frysk-Ingelsk Wurdboek and a *Frisian-English Dictionary* (and indeed also an *English-Frisian* one). Below I will test whether the book ‘works’ as a Frisian-English dictionary and I will also check whether, from the native English speakers’ point of view, the book offers them enough words to enable them to produce something in Frisian from their culture. In spite of the fact that ostensibly the A-Z part, due to its metalanguage, is meant as a Frysk-Ingelsk dictionary, this seems to me a highly unlikely use in actual practice: Frisians will undoubtedly prefer the bigger Dutch-English (i.e. really *Nederlands-Engels*) dictionaries available to them.⁴ But first of all I will follow the time-honoured practice in dictionary criticism of ‘incidental sniping’.

Incidental sniping

Osselton (1989: 229) has remarked that ‘incidental sniping (often takes) the place of real exploration of the intentions with which the works being criticized had been set up’. I will of course try to avoid the unfairness which has often been the result of such sniping, but I do believe that collecting a number of observations made while sampling the FED in a somewhat systematic way will show an emerging pattern which does very probably say something interesting about the real character of the book. So, what I will try to do in this section is run through a number of incidental notes made while opening and scanning the book at 30-page intervals and then see if any more than incidental conclusions can be drawn. I will use the entry words as pegs to hang my remarks on.

- THE TREATMENT OF FOREIGN WORDS. **ammesuer** (*E. embouchure*). One may wonder why this musical term has been included in a dictionary which is after all rather restricted in offering not more than a little over 37.000 words, a relatively small number for any dictionary (note that English (monolingual) learner’s (!) dictionaries like the OALD and LDOCE offer over 60.000 entries). In addition, the Frisian form is an uneducated phonetic adaptation of the French loanword, and I can hardly believe that anyone familiar with and using such a concept would today not use the ‘proper’ word *embouchure* (with only a limited amount of phonetic adaptation). Quite understandably, Frisian entries as ‘equivalents’ for words like *adagio*, *allegro*, *coda*, *ritenuto*, *rallentando* are not to be found and they of course should not, and no more should **ammesuer**, which in my view no educated Frisian would use in this

4. Though I am not going to prove this here, not only are dictionaries like *Wolters’* and (esp. the big) *Van Dale* ‘bigger’ in offering more entries, they are also better in offering more systematic grammatical and contextual information. It has to be said, though, that FED – which is in many respects much more like *Wolters’* than *Van Dale* – has not been slack in offering as much in the way of contextual information as was possible given the constraints of space.

form.⁵ Its only *raison d'être* here seems to be its 'Frisian' form. This prompted me to look up **perfester**, the adapted form of **professor** (in my view the latter is today the only acceptable form in standard Frisian if one does not want to sound rather ridiculous), where we are cross-referred to **professor**. Astonishingly, even the 'Frisian' form for **emeritus**, i.e. **mjirkjes**, is listed, without a cross-reference to **emearitus**. The probably long obsolete adaptation **mjirkjes** is in my experience today only used facetiously to poke fun at extreme attempts at Frisianising the language. Let us hope no non-native user of Frisian will ever try to use words like **mjirkjes**, which will only produce blank looks.

- TRANSLATION EQUIVALENT OR DEFINITION/PARAPHRASE: **alvestêdetocht** is defined, not translated of course, as <long distance skating race/tour in Friesland that passes through all eleven Frisian cities>, where the '<...>' obviously indicate this is not a translation but a definition in the target language. This layout difference between translation proper and definition of culture-specific items is not always maintained consistently. Thus, **greidhoeke** (lit. ca. 'meadow/pasture region') is *cattle farming area in the western part of Friesland*, without <...>, leaving the impression that this is a translation proper. The same applies to **ynslûpsel**, where English *abuse/habit/etc. that has developed/has crept in* is a somewhat clumsy paraphrase rather than a translation (though this time the entry word is hardly a cultural term). See also **ynspraakjûn**.
- INCOMPLETE CONTEXT FOR THE ENTRY WORD: **bekweadigje**: *be guilty of*, a translation that will do, though the word *perpetrate* might also have been a good idea; however, in Frisian the word is always accompanied by the reflexive pronoun, here **jîn**, which is lacking here, as is the preposition **oan**. Information perhaps not really necessary for Frisian speakers, but rather important to English speakers. It turns out that there are more cases where it is not clearly indicated, or only *after* the #,⁶ that the verb concerned is reflexive (cf. **fersinne**, **skamje**).
- IMPRECISE OR MISLEADING ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS. See **bekomme**, where **it iten is my goed bekommen** is rendered as *the food has done me good, the food hit the spot*. Especially the second of these translation is not very accurate, it would seem (OALD⁶ explains this expression as 'it does exactly what it should do'). In my view *the food has agreed with me* is much to be preferred. **blok**: the idiomatic expression **foar it blok sitte** (lit. something like 'be stuck before a pulley') is given as *have no options left*, which is clearly much less

5. **Embouchure** itself is lacking as an entry word.

6. The '#' indicates where the word-in-context part begins. Its use is similar to the diamond in the Van Dale dictionaries, though the latter are much more rigidly systematic. FED's 'system' is an alphabetical listing based on the intuitively most salient contextual words.

idiomatic.⁷ However, it has to be admitted that the translation of idioms is often problematic in any dictionary. **dieder** is given as *perpetrator*: this is rather too concise, as (with different shades of meaning) *offender*, *(wrong)doer*, ... *culprit* (VD) are in many contexts the required renderings. **keutel**, *droppings*; <minsken ek:> *turd*: here the remark in '<...>' may suggest rather incorrectly that *droppings* can also be used for humans. It is at any rate unfortunate to start the lemma with the plural (and collective) word *droppings*, where the Frisian word represents a singular countable thing. Under this heading might also come the translation of **tosk** (*tooth*), where the *cog* (of *cogwheel*)⁸ has been overlooked. The word **ûnder/onder** does not give sufficient attention to the differences in English between *under*, *below* and *underneath*: though this would hardly be a problem for English speakers, there would be a serious one for Frisian speakers. A rather weak translation (paraphrase rather) is also the one for **útslute**: **Berops binne foar dizze wedstryd útsletten** *professionals are not allowed to take part in this contest*, where *suspended for* would have been much more precise and to the point.

- SUPERFLUOUS MATERIAL AFTER '#'. **bliuwe**, *remain*, ... *stay* etc.: it seems to me that a number of items following the '#', where the idiom and translations in context part begins, are rather superfluous. Thus **Fatsoenlik bliuwe** is in fact rendered rather inaccurately as *remain decent* (where *polite* seems preferable), when it was already quite clear that *remain* can be used here. The same superfluity is found in **kalm bliuwe**, translated as *stay/remain calm*. This information serves no translation purpose and the space it takes up might have been used more efficiently. Under **hjit**, *hot*, we find **De kofje is hjit** as *the coffee is hot*, another entirely superfluous rendering of a non-idiomatic item.

7. And also less precise. My suggestion would be 'be stuck, be (caught) in a cleft stick, be in a tight spot'.

8. The Frisian word for 'cogwheel' is mentioned as *kamrêd*. One of the editors of *Us Wurk* kindly pointed out to me that there may be some doubt whether *tosk* is genuine Frisian for 'cog'. The puristic Frisian word should be *takke(l)*, a word I have, as far as I can remember, heard only once in my entire life (*takk(el)* is not in FED). Anyway, *tosk* for 'cog' is recognised as such by the Frisian-Dutch and Dutch-Frisian desk dictionaries. This use is of course a metaphorical extension of the literal sense and it is often hard to say for any two closely related languages whether such extended uses are borrowings or home-grown developments. From a more general point of view it should be emphasised that in the case of any two closely related languages in contact it is often extremely difficult to draw the line between what is original and what has developed due to outside influences. In the case of Frisian versus the dominant language Dutch it may safely be asserted that Frisian has in almost all new developments given up its independence and taken Dutch as its model. The same applies to Afrikaans, which despite its seemingly puristic outward appearance (due to its loan translations) resembles Frisian in that it too has taken another language, English in this case, as its model for new developments.

Similar remarks can be made about **hjitte**, *be called*. Under **krêft/kracht**, **gjin krêft mear yn 'e earms hawwe** is superfluous as well. See also **neame**, *call, name*; **pynlik**, *painful*. Under this heading we might also place the material offered after the days of the week, where in many cases the same problem is dealt with again and again, while they are all of a kind.⁹ In this context a case as found under **skealik** (*harmful* etc.) should perhaps also be mentioned. Here we find the collocation (?) **skealike wapens** *damaging weapons*. I absolutely fail to see the usefulness of – or need for – this combination in a dictionary.

- WRONG PLACEMENT: under **mei** (*with*) there are a number of translations in context that belong elsewhere. Thus, the translation problem of **prate mei**, *talk to* is really a problem to do with the English equivalent of **prate** and its proper prepositions and not with **mei** in isolation; the same applies to **(net) sitte mei** (*(not) care about*) in the same entry, which is additionally also dealt with in its proper place under **sitte** (**prate mei** is for that matter also dealt with under **prate**), though with a somewhat different translation.¹⁰

There are therefore, on the basis of this sample, some reasons for assuming that the FED may have some weaknesses in the field of in particular selecting the most useful items for the wordlist and choosing the most closely corresponding equivalents. There is some evidence that renderings are more than occasionally vague or fuzzy and slightly beside the point or out of focus, or paraphrases rather than translation equivalents. The selection of the equivalents in context and more idiomatic items after '#' betrays a certain degree of uncertainty with respect to what is essential and what is not, or belongs somewhere else. In this respect, it has to be said, the FED to some extent resembles many other comparable dictionaries (cf. Van der Meer 1995).

The proof of the pudding

a) Into English

During the ceremony at which the FED was presented to the American ambassador,¹¹ Mrs C.P. Schneider, one of the speakers was Henry J. Baron, translator of Frisian books into English. Mr Baron expressed the hope that this new dictionary would make life for him and other translators easier, for now they had a dictionary to fall back on. In this section I will try to test to what extent the

9. Simple cross-references from the six other days of the week might have sufficed

10. Admittedly, it is often rather difficult to choose where to place certain material. Should for example **dea** in **deade taal** (*dead language*) be dealt with under **dea** or **taal**? FED does both.

11. July 11 2000 in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden.

FED enables translators into English, with English as their primary language,¹² to do their job more confidently. To this end I have chosen the first few lines from the well-known Frisian short novel *De Fûke* (first ed. 1966; respelled ed. used here 1995; translated by Henry Baron in 1995). I will assume that our imaginary user of the FED has a relatively good command of Frisian and wants to know the exact meanings of Frisian words and expressions by means of finding the equivalents in English, in which he is more fluent. Hence, this user first wants to understand and then to translate.¹³

The passage goes like this:

Guon minsken leit it op 'e lea, mar hy hie noait foargefoelens hân, dat it kaam him ek dizze kear oer 't mad. Hy hearde de losse planken yn 'e brêge ratteljen en doe't er him omdraaide, kaam it ljocht de reed del. Fuort letter wie it út, mar de motor rûn noch.

Hy hie krekt de boat op 'e wâl lutsen en it spit yn 'e grûn trape. Dat lêste hoegde net, want allinne op 'e midden fan 'e mar stie in koelte. Oan 'e kant lei it wetter sa blak as in spegel, bistjurre ûnder de dize en it skimertsjuster dy't mar min fuort woenen. Hy stie op 'e kant en hie beprakkeseard, dat er earst wol teesette koe en dan de iel út 'e beun helje. It wie koel en der hie net ien deade iel oan 'e dôbers sitten, dat it koe wol lije.

De motor dy't de reed delkaam, brocht him der ôf. Hy stapte it hiem oer nei it loadske en die de doar iepen. Wylst seach er achterhûs lâns nei de reed, dêr't it noch tsjusterder wie. Folle tsjusterder as op 'e mar dy't begûn te ljochtsjen.

For reasons of space I will pass over the words where no difficulties were found, and focus on the more complicated cases, especially expressions and word combinations.

leit it op 'e lea
hy hie noait foargefoelens hân

(cf. **lea**) *have a premonition*+¹⁴
he had never had any premonitions (+, here the translator will have to use his active knowledge of English to find a variant expression),

(*dat it*)
kaam him ... oer 't mad

so+ (under **dat conj.**)
(cf. **mad**) *he was surprised ?; he was taken aback* -; (no correct transl. found,

12. A situation that will occur much more often and naturally than translating into English as a foreign language, even though the metalanguage of FED is Frisian. Cf. the following note.

13. So, I will not try to imitate the rather unlikely situation in which a native speaker of Frisian tries to translate into English with the FED.

14. Here '+' means OK, '-' means incorrect, and '?' doubtful.

*him omdraaide**reed**Fuort letter* (a collocation)*wie it* (i.e. *it ljocht*) *út**motor**rûn noch**krekt**wâl**lutsen**trape* (< *traapje*)*hoegde net**koelte**sa blak as in spegel*

though the translator is probably offered enough to decide on a proper rendering in this context)¹⁵

turned (a)round +¹⁶**dirt road** +¹⁷

(composable as) **immediately, straight-away later** ? (the combination is of course odd in English, but a good translator will know what to do with it, e.g. **but it was ... in a minute**)

?(no real suggestion under *út*; the correct transl. may be guessed from **out**, however: lights can be **out**, so here: **it was turned off**)

engine+ (with some possible confusion from **motorcycle** in this context)

(after #) **run** may be chosen on the basis of the example with **auto car** (but in this context **was not** is perhaps better (i.e. **was not turned off**, as in Baron's transl.; FED cannot be blamed here)

just (may be guessed, though FED's entry is far from clear here)

shore+

pulled+ (there is a helpful reference from *lutsen* (p.p.) to *lûke*)

no real suggestion for this use; Baron's **stomped** is nice

the best translation in this context (i.e. **it was not necessary**) is not given as such, but is guessable by an intelligent translator

breeze +¹⁸**still, calm** +

15. Baron's rendering he was caught off guard is excellent.

16. Here, too, no attention is given to the reflexive construction with *omdraaie*.

17. Which is in my view to be preferred to Baron's *drive*, defined in RHD as 'a road for vehicles, esp. a scenic one, as in or along a park, or a short one, as an approach to a house'.

18. The first edition had the Dutch loanword *bries* here, which consequently is not in the FED.

bestjurre (<bestjurje)

no proper suggestion;¹⁹ as usual in bilingual dictionaries, the less conventional metaphors cause problems and have to be creatively solved;

dize

mist, haze; in this context *mist* is to be preferred

min fuort woenen

this rather idiomatic combination has to be guessed at²⁰

beprakkeseard

not in, so the meaning has to be put together from *be-* and *prakkeseardje*. In my view the entry for *be-* is not really helpful in this particular case, even though the prefix *be-* strikes me as relatively productive in the present sense not in; productively composed from *tee* and *sette*. Under *tee* the combination *tee sette* gives *make tea+*

beun

(under *bun*) *corf, creel, well, bin*; judging from W3 and RHD as well as from the definition in WFT, *well* is the only real equivalent here; this scatter-gun technique²¹ in the case of a really hard word seems to betray the same occasional tendency towards vagueness as observed elsewhere

ljochtsjen

light (up)?, grow light+; the former would not be quite idiomatic in English, but the latter would do; anyway, an English speaker would know what to do with it here

My conclusion is that on the whole the FED does its job comparatively well when the words to be translated are from a context where Frisian has traditionally been used as the natural means of communication, which is the world and the culture of

19. Baron has the nice solution frozen.

20. In Baron's translation the elegant solution by means of a translation 'transformation' lingering (fog and twilight) has been chosen, where perhaps mist instead of fog would have been more literal.

21. Cf. Cowie (1999, 24) quoting from Palmer (1935): (a technique whereby) 'one fires off a number of near or approximate synonyms [read here: 'translation equivalents' GvdM] in the hope that one or other will hit the mark and be understood'.

the Frisian countryside. Here the comparatively small number of FED's entries does not seem to really matter greatly.

b) Into Frisian

Let us now look at the service offered by the English-Frisian Word List,²² an index allowing Frisian equivalents to be found for English words.²³ As already said above, this use of the FED is not very likely, but since the book does offer it, it will be interesting to find out to what extent it is effective. To this end I have chosen a text from *The Guardian* (November 28, 2000) about the ordeal English train passengers often have to endure these days. The passage is too long to be quoted in full, and I will therefore select a number of words reflecting modern (non-agrarian city) life, without too much jargon. I hope that approaching the FED from this angle will reveal to what extent the FED reflects the world of the average native English speaker.²⁴

train trip: not in as such, but **train journey** is in: *spoarreis, treinreis*.

ordeal: only *godsoardiel*, not the metaphorical sense required here (Fris. *besiking*).

(special) report: *berjocht, ferslach*, which might both be used here.

transport: *ferfier*, OK.²⁵

agency (in *Staff and agencies*): no usable equivalent given; VD has: *bureau*, which comes close.

passenger: *passazjier*, which is in a way OK, though *reizger* would be better in this context.

(experienced the chaos on Britain's railways) first-hand: not in.

(forced to spend the night) stranded (on a train): not in.

power failure: *stroomsteuring*, OK.

(left them) marooned (on board the ...): not in.

bleary-eyed (passengers): not in.

(nine hours after) setting off: *ôfreizgje*, OK

fork lift (driver): not in as such, but *fork-lift truck* is, so OK.

compensation: *skeaffergoeding*, OK.

public address system: *lûdsynstallaasje*, OK

luxury coach: not as such, but *coach* is (as *bus*), which is OK, and under *luxury* we find *lúkse* (n.), so in a way a certain solution may be found.

double-decker bus: unsurprisingly, this rather British cultural term is not in.

cab: *taksy*, OK.

22. The number of English 'entries' can be estimated to be ca. 40,000.

23. The A-Z part will of course have to be consulted to check the correctness of choices.

24. The paper is a British paper. Though I expect, in the light of immigration history, that most users of the FED will be Americans, the language used in this report is sufficiently neutral between the two main varieties of English.

25. As expected, 'UK' (United Kingdom) is not listed.

(taxi) fare: *kost* (though here it should be *kosten*), *taryf*, which will do.

(no amount of compensation will) make up for (what happened): *goedmeitsje*, OK.

highlights (the problems): not in.

speed restrictions: not in; only the separate words are in; puristic Frisian tends to avoid the Dutchism *snelheidsbeperking/-beheining*.

imposed (after the Hatfield) train crash: *impose* is in as *oplizze*, which is OK; *train crash*, surprisingly is in as *treinbotsing*, though equally surprisingly *car crash* is not in;

spokesman: *wurdfierder*, OK.

out of order: *stikken*, OK.

(By the time) the fault (was fixed): *defekt*, *euvel*, OK.

(compensation for) being delayed: *útstelle*, not correct.

overreaction: not in.

issue: no usable equivalent offered, here the equivalent is *probleem*, *kwestje*.

Conclusion: it is gratifying to see that in spite of FED's comparatively restricted word-list it manages not too badly in its treatment of the vocabulary associated with modern (urban) life. For the vast majority of the words in this report a Frisian equivalent can be found. Strikingly, it is rather the more colourful terms like *marooned*, *stranded* and *bleary-eyed* that are not 'in', whereas more concrete terms like *public address system* have frequently received proper attention (though, regrettably, the common meaning of *issue* 'probleem, kwestje' is sadly lacking). Still, in spite of all this, it has to be said that one may well wonder how a native speaker of English will – after consulting the index - navigate his way through FED's A-Z part, which has been compiled from the point of view of the native speaker of Frisian, who needs no help for Frisian, whereas obviously an English speaker needs a lot of assistance (for grammar, word combinations etc.). There can be no doubt whatsoever that the attempt to make the FED bidirectional (i.e. Frysk-Engelsk and English-Frisian) will only be successful for users who are already very familiar with Frisian (and are able to understand the Frisian metalanguage), such as second or third-generation immigrants who learned Frisian from their (grand)parents. For them, the FED will often serve as a kind of mind-jogger. Those speakers of English wishing to learn Frisian from scratch will find FED extremely tricky to handle.

Thus, given the restricted word-list and taking into consideration the fact that this was largely a one-man job, the FED has been established to be a relatively acceptable dictionary. It is, however, a pity that the compiler has not been in a position to make up his mind about the targeted *user*. Nevertheless, I understand the considerations of trying to make the dictionary usable for as many groups as possible, but the result is a hybrid, which in the end serves all groups less well than would have been possible, had a clear choice been made for either the Frysk-Engelsk user group, the Frisian-English group or the English-Frisian group. My

impression is that the book's users will mostly – and certainly most fruitfully – be the Frisian-English group. The Frysk-Ingelsk usergroup will be much better served by the existing (bigger) Dutch-English active dictionaries, though in the case of highly typical Frisian words the FED will of course come in handy, whereas the English-Frisian group will have great difficulty in using the FED to good effect. There is, finally, a possible fourth group, i.e. translators into Frisian from English as a foreign language (e.g. translators of English literary works). For this group the FED will no doubt, with all its restrictions, be a welcome addition to their English-Dutch aids.

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