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**Lysbeth Jongbloed-Faber**, *Frisian on social media. The vitality of minority languages in a multilingual online world* (dissertation University of Maastricht). Amsterdam (2021), LOT 596, 212 pp. ISBN 978-94-6093-380-6. DOI: <https://dx.medra.org/10.48273/LOT0596>.

One of the main objectives of this dissertation is finding an answer to the question how language vitality of minority languages and their respective use on social media are intertwined. While work on (West) Frisian in this field is scarce, the topic per se is not new to sociolinguistics. Crystal (2001), for example, outlined a state of an English dominated internet sphere, already some twenty years ago, in which other national languages are still underrepresented – not to speak of small or minority languages. Kornai (2013), on the other hand, after the Web 2.0 has been established, conceptualized a framework for measuring vitality of languages based on their appearance in online content, both created by editorial staff as well as user generated content. This follows the basic assumption that online use of a language reflects that the community is actively adopting their language use to new domains – which in fact might be referring to both technical domains as to the domain of written language.

However, this work by Jongbloed-Faber offers a pleasant new angle at researching language use on social media as it does not try to find an explanatory model that is generally applicable to every (minority) language. It rather focuses on a Frisian case study of social media language use and possible conclusions that might be drawn from that, acknowledging that certain factors might play different roles in each language community's experience. Strictly speaking, this case study consists of five individual empirical case studies (four of which already have been published as articles). They offer both a quantitative insight on language use (chapters 2 and 6) and qualitative analyses of actual postings collected on Twitter Us Wurf 71 (2022), s. 89-93; <https://doi.org/10.21827/uw.71.89-93>

and motifs of their authors for language choice (chapters 3-5). As part of this dissertation, they provide a comprehensive and valuable insight in the work on the use of European regional and minority languages on social media.

Chapter 2 sets the point of departure for this work by first establishing to which extent Frisian is used on social media by Frisian speaking teenagers, focussing on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. In this chapter, the motivation seems strongest to be able to find an answer to links between language choice on social media and the sustainability of language use in the community of speakers. In fact, that is how the choice of participants for this research is justified, assuming considerable effects between language choice and language attitudes in the teenage years and later life (pp. 20-21). Based on a questionnaire, the study can make out several factors that favour speakers' use of Frisian on social media or discourage its use respectively. Growing up with Frisian as mother tongue and therefore with the use and status of Frisian among their individual peer group (also in offline contexts) seems to especially encourage speakers in using the language on social media. Furthermore, writing skills (or the lack thereof) appear to be a major factor of discouragement. This internalised pressure to meet normative orthographic expectations has been documented in similar settings (see for example Reershemius 2017; Heyen 2020), but this study also hints that the acceptance of both non-standard orthographic writing and lexical borrowings enables more speakers to rather use Frisian. It would be interesting to include this in further qualitative analysis since this study very strongly links loss of language competence to writing skills which does not necessarily has to be the case. In all, the study attests that Frisian is used in computer mediated communication and thus also has been established in the written domain which leads to the conclusion of an increased vitality of the language.

According to this basis, chapter 3 shifts from research based on metadata and self-reporting to an analysis of actual postings, offering a case study of Frisian and Limburgish as regional languages in contact with Dutch. Here, the study does not focus solely on the share of users and postings the languages are used in but aims to point out situational and discursive factors that can be interpreted as encouraging speakers in using their respective regional language in favour of the interregional or national language Dutch. As already observed before (chapter 2), the use of regional languages would decrease the bigger the potential audience of a posting gets. With that in mind, it might appear as a surprise that in this chapter Twitter postings are analysed which are usually considered as a rather public posting format without a specific addressee. However, as it is pointed out here, 'usually tweets are initially meant as a public announcement but often turn into private conversation' (p. 50). In fact, that is what the study can show for both Frisian and Limburgish. Again, it stresses the conclusions made from questionnaire data in chapter 2, that the outlook of being able to use the regional language in a certain peer group encourages the language choice. Furthermore, through using the regional language an identity connected to the language can be expressed (i. e. some sort

of local identity or ‘local culture’ in this case, but might also be applicable to heritage identities, see for example Androutsopoulos 2006). The case study also shows that although social media networks might be considered and perceived as global in terms of the potentially addressed audience, there are possibilities to enable some sort of micro-communities or breathing spaces for small languages (cf. Belmar and Glass 2019; Cunliffe 2019, 467; Belmar and Heyen 2021).

The analysis in chapter 4 follows a similar objective in comparing occasions for the use of three minority languages (Welsh, Frisian and Gaelic) on Twitter. Tweets that are taken into consideration here are those tagged by a hashtag denoting the respective language (*#cymraeg*, *#frysk*, *#gaelge*) over a set period. As pointed out in the study, one ‘cannot expect that everyday users of a given language tag their online content as such.’ In contrast to chapter 3, the focus lies more on the topics associated with tagging a language than on discursive decisions speakers make for their language choices. While the study can make out quite different representations of topics for each language in the data, the hashtags are often used to tag content about those languages and not necessarily content in the language, although a fair share of c. 50% of tweets using the tags is written in the respective language. It also shows which topics and hashtags are frequently associated with the minority language, which in turn fits in well with the strong perspective on the construction of linguistic identities in this work.

The hashtags *#Fryslân*, *#Fries* and *#friesland* are considered as top five hashtags used alongside *#frysk* in chapter 4. This strong connection between language use and local identity is further investigated in chapter 5. Focussing on the language use of the Frisian band *De Hûnekop* in both Twitter postings and the lead singer’s performance onstage or in interviews, this case study not only demonstrates constructions of a language identity but also outlines economic benefits from it. In a thorough analysis, the author shows how the band uses rural (and archaic) stereotypes associated with people from the *Fryske Wâlden* as well as salient dialectal features of the regional variety *Wâldfrysk* to establish an identity. Interestingly, this identity is not only linked to language and regional origins or affiliations, but it serves to legitimise behaviour that can be tolerated as acceptable through the stereotypical regional narrative alone (p. 103). This marks one of the most interesting and striking points in the construction of linguistic identities that are presented in this work. The author points out that while the singer being born outside of the province does not see himself as ‘a real Frisian’ (p. 93), he and the band rely strongly on using Wood-Frisian and presenting themselves in their work as such. This is explained as part of their financial success, acknowledging their work would not be perceived outside a Frisian niche. In contrast, social media postings targeted at gaining financial success are often held in Dutch ‘in order to avoid misunderstandings and in order to get as high a sales revenue as possible’ (p. 102). In the context given, the outcome of this case study surely cannot be transferred to everyday communication of Frisian speakers on social media. However, stressing the fluidity of identities as being ‘flexible, negotiable, relational

and constructed' the author thus illustrates how the use of the small language can function as part of a locally construed identity that can be seen as part of an enactment or performance.

In chapter 6, a follow-up research (conducted 2019-2020) on language choice of Frisian speaking teenagers is offered that checks again on outcomes from the study presented in chapter 2 (conducted 2013-2014). The use of Frisian in WhatsApp messages sees basically no differences between the two studies, what might assure the language community an ongoing vital use of the language on social media. But the more interesting outcomes in this study are based on a more differentiated view on motifs and obstructions when it comes to language choice. The author describes that the choice of language is determined less by the question of who understands Frisian and more by the question whether the addressees speak Frisian themselves. This acknowledges that communication on social media should rather be considered as a set of heterogeneous situational contexts instead of communication via a medium that reaches many (see also Androutsopoulos 2007). It is reflected in the observations made in chapter 3 and addressed in this chapter, in which the author argues that exchange via WhatsApp and Snapchat could be considered as a resemblance of face-to-face communication. It is also backed by language choice on Instagram where profiles according to the author are rather to be construed as an identity that is aimed at reaching a broader audience.

Combining these five case studies, the author draws a multi-layered picture of the use of Frisian alongside other regional or minority languages on social media, concluding that the absence of a small language in social media postings with a broader audience does not necessarily has to be interpreted as a sign of declining language use if speakers are actively trying to adopt their offline speaking patterns to social media. However, the author also points out that this adoption should not be understood as the regular case, as there are also many speakers using Dutch in online exchange although using Frisian offline. But to what extent both languages are used and how choices are influenced on a narrower level, is open to future research (which we are happily looking forward to).

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