



The effects of bilingualism, ideology and literacy on morphosyntactic variation in the Northern Netherlands

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The Northern Netherlands is home to two regional languages, Frisian and Low Saxon, which both are structurally similar to the majority language, Dutch, but which differ in many sociolinguistic aspects. Frisian enjoys a degree of institutional support, has a widely accepted (but not as widely used) standard written form, and is conceived of by an overwhelming majority of speakers as a language separate from Dutch. Low Saxon, on the other hand, has much less institutional support, is not meaningfully in use as a written language, and is considered by most speakers as a dialect of Dutch.

In this talk, I present ongoing research into variation in the two bilingual constellations in the area (Frisian–Dutch and Low Saxon–Dutch), focusing on two linguistic variables and a number of sociolinguistic predictors.

Verb clusters.

The first variable is the internal order of verb clusters at the end of a subordinate clause. Dutch allows both the finite-verb-first “red” order (e.g., *dat Sam het boek heeft gelezen*) and the finite-verb-last “green” order (e.g., *dat Sam het boek gelezen heeft*), with a number of linguistic constraints and an overall preference for the red order. Frisian and Low Saxon both normatively only allow the green order, but the red order also occurs.

Infinitive endings.

The second variable concerns allomorphy of infinitive endings [ə] and [ən]/[ɪ]. In Dutch, the spelling is always *-en*, but pronunciation varies between [ə] and [ən] based on social factors. In Low Saxon, the variant [ɪ] is almost invariably used. In standard Frisian, the allomorph is decided based on language-internal rules that do not allow variation: a bare infinitive gets the ending [ə], but for example after *te*, [ən] is the correct ending. This is reflected in the spelling. Especially speakers with Dutch as the dominant language may deviate from this pattern.

I discuss the production of these variables in the speech of Frisian–Dutch (N=60) and Low Saxon–Dutch (N=35) bilingual speakers, taking into account the speakers’ linguistic background, their language attitudes and ideologies, and (for Frisian) literacy in the regional language.