

Trilingual primary schools in Friesland: the silver bullet in times of growing diversity?

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■ Introduction

Large-scale monitoring studies have identified an achievement gap between native speakers and those who do not speak the language of instruction at home (OECD, 2014). Although less investigated, a similar gap holds true for the Frisian minority (De Boer, 2012). Like many other European nations, Belgium and the Netherlands are currently struggling to combat economic crisis and the social changes it has caused, while new migrants keep arriving daily. Although the European geographic area has always been marked by large migratory movements (Gogolin, 2008; Hobsbawm, 1990), the globalization phenomena of the second half of the 20th century brought new dynamics. The term 'super-diversity' has recently been put forward in order to capture the complex nature of contemporary migration flows and the societal diversity triggered by them. Super-diversity is proposed as a 'summary' term to encapsulate a range of such changing variables surrounding migration patterns – and, significantly, their interlinkages – which amount to a recognition of complexities that supersede previous patterns and perceptions of migration-driven diversity' (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015, p. 542).

In times of such growing diversity and large inflow of migrants, issues of social justice and equity become more urgent in light of the growing inequalities within European countries. A central indicator for social justice lies in a country's ability to cater for equal success in education. Due to these new forms of migration, the diversity of languages spoken in the Dutch-speaking space has increased in the last decades, as it was added to already existing autochthonous forms of multilingualism (Extra & Gorter, 2008). While the official European discourse on societal and individual multilingualism is a highly favorable one – the aim being that all citizens are able to communicate in at least two languages other than their mother tongue (the three-language formula) – reality shows that those socialized in

more than one language, such as immigrant or regional minorities, are repeatedly achieving the lowest in school systems (OECD, 2014).

It thus becomes a central social justice issue to focus on the role of schools in closing this achievement gap. Yet, the growing linguistic diversity in the Netherlands (CBS, 2014) contrasts with the persistent monolingual orientation of its mainstream schools (Kroon & Spotti, 2011; Agirdag, 2010). Given that the common insistence on monolingual policies and on additional support measures (e.g. second language courses) focussing on the language of instruction only, have not yielded the expected results (Gogolin et al., 2011), a discussion on the role of immigrant and minority languages for teaching seems an imperative. In fact, recent research on strong bi- and trilingual models offered evidence for the potential of using multilingualism for raising academic achievement (Beetsma, 2002; Duarte, 2011; Duarte & Gogolin, 2013; Duarte & Pereira, 2011; Francis & Lesaux, 2006; Rolstad & Mahoney, 2005). So the question arises: how can such models respond to the growing linguistic diversity? What approaches are chosen? And how can they, at the same time, cater for already existing forms of multilingualism, such as autochthonous regional minorities?

The present chapter focuses on the trilingual schools in the Dutch province of Friesland where Frisian is a recognized autochthonous language. The region represents a prototypical European case study of a 'second-official language'. First the project will be presented and a particular focus will be placed on the chosen organizational and didactical approaches for the trilingual instruction. The scientific results of diverse evaluations of pupils' language skills and attitudes within the model will then be presented and discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the viability of the chosen models in light of growing language diversity in the province of Friesland by drawing on findings from other schools that have undergone similar changes.

The trilingual schools in Friesland

With the main aim of improving the quality of education, particularly regarding Frisian and English, the Frisian trilingual project – 'Trijetalige Skoalle' – started in 1997/98 with seven primary schools. One of the main aims for the project was to allow pupils to reach the official attainment targets (a general defined level of ability that a pupil is expected to achieve in every subject at each key stage in the national curriculum) for all languages at the end of primary school (Riemersma &

de Vries, 2011). Van Ruijven and Ytsma (2008) emphasize, however, that the main focus of the project was on Frisian and Dutch and that it was a conscious decision to start with English later on in the model.

In 2006, the project was officially completed. It then evolved into a Network of Trilingual Schools whose main aim was to allow more schools to gradually apply for certification. Since then, the number of schools in the network has steadily increased. Today, more than 70 primary schools (out of 445: about 15%) are officially in the Network of Trilingual Schools.

The role of Frisian in education

The three languages of the trilingual schools are Frisian, Dutch and English. Frisian is the regional minority language spoken as the mother tongue by 54% of the population living in the province of Friesland (Provincje Fryslân, 2007) and the official second language of the Netherlands. Dutch is the official first (state) language of the Netherlands. English is the schools' foreign language. Frisian, Dutch and English together with German form the group of the West-Germanic languages. Frisian and English are even closer related as they belong to the branch of Coastal Germanic languages and share certain phonological features that Dutch and German do not have (Lass, 1997). Table 1 shows an overview of the similarities that exist between Frisian, Dutch and English.

Frisian	Dutch	English
appel	appel	apple
roas	roos	rose
stof	stof	dust
kaai	sleutel	key
tsjil	wiel	wheel

Table 1 Similarities between Frisian, Dutch and English.

Since 1980, Frisian is an obligatory subject for primary schooling in Friesland (ages 4 to 12). English became legally compulsory in primary education in the Netherlands in 1986, being mostly taught in grades 7 and 8 only (at ages 10-12). However, the ways in which Frisian and English instruction is offered, differs

greatly from school to school. 90% of all primary schools in Friesland offer Frisian as a subject; while 40% offer it as a subject for one lesson (30 à 45 minutes) per week, 50% use the Frisian language as a medium of instruction during half a day, or a full day per week, alongside with the teaching of the language as a subject (de Vries, 2015).

But how is time allotted in the trilingual schools? What didactical choices do these models make? And what results have they yielded so far?

Organizational and didactical approaches

As mentioned above, the main aim of the trilingual school project was to create a program for trilingual education focused on the core objectives for the Frisian, Dutch and English languages in primary education. The three languages were thus not only taught as school subjects, but also used as languages of instruction in the classroom. According to the first project leader Ytsma (2000), the trilingual school project was based on three main didactical principles introduced by Cummins (1987):

1. additive bilingualism;
2. transfer of language skills;
3. interactive pedagogy.

The principle of additive bilingualism implies that learning an additional language must not happen at the expense of the first language. Transfer of language implies that skills from one language can be used through transfer of knowledge in the other language. The theoretical assumption behind this principle is that skills such as reading do not need to be learned separately in the three languages but rather involve abilities that students can take from one language to another. The last principle, interactive pedagogy, means that language learning takes place on the basis of meaningful language use. Therefore, one of the starting points of the project was the so-called immersion education. Immersion models are based on the assumption that languages are learned faster, more intensively and more sustainably, if they are not only learned as a subject, but also have communicative meaning (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Figures 1 and 2 show an example of how languages in the model co-exist alongside each other, marked by the their respective flags.



Figures 1 and 2 Vocabulary tree and example on the theme of "Spring" at the De Flambou primary school in Oosterbierum (photo by Joana Duarte).

Schools have translated these principles into practice in different ways. While one school alternates a Frisian and a Dutch week, others change language every day or use them during different parts of the day. Many visualisation forms for language separation have been introduced throughout the schools. Examples of this can be seen in the pictures below.



Figure 3 Language sign at the entrance of the Trije Doarpen Skoalle, in Reduzum, indicating with flags that in the morning Dutch will be the language and in the afternoon Frisian will be spoken (photo by Joana Duarte).



Figure 4 Days of the week in the three languages at the Otto Clantskoalle in Boksum (photo by Jacob van Essen/Het Hoge Noorden).

In terms of teaching time of the three languages, Frisian is the medium of instruction in grades 1 to 6 half of the time, and in the other half of the time Dutch is the medium of instruction. In grades 7 and 8, the division is 40% Frisian, 40% Dutch and 20% English as a medium of instruction. From grades 5 onwards English can be taught as a subject for one hour per week.

Independently of the chosen model, the principle remains that the languages should be consciously and consistently separated (van der Meij, 2008). Also, it is expected from both the teacher and the student to consistently use the language which is scheduled at the time. In practice, it was observed that both teachers and students fall back to their strongest languages at times (van der Meij, 2006). Also some Dutch speaking pupils seemed to need some time to be able to actively speak Frisian (Ytsma & Beetsma, 2001).

How did this approach affect students' performance? What results were attained?

Results

The results of the project were studied in terms of the pupils' language competence. In a longitudinal follow-up study, pupils from project schools and control schools were tested on Frisian, Dutch and English language proficiencies. Grades 1 to 6 were tested on Frisian and Dutch and grades 7 and 8 were also tested on English. The pupils in grade 1 and 2 (ages 4-6) took the CITO-test 'Bilingualism for Pre-school Children' (Verhoeven et al., 1995). The pupils in grades 3 and 4 (ages 6-8) were tested on vocabulary and technical reading. In grades 5 to 8 (ages 8-12) pupils were tested for Frisian and Dutch on technical reading, reading comprehension and spelling. Children in grades 7 and 8 were also tested for English vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening and self-assessment. The results were compared to those produced by control schools (van Ruijven & Ytsma, 2008).

The results were encouraging (van Ruijven & Ytsma, 2008). The results of the Frisian language tests showed significantly higher scores for the project schools for technical reading from grade 4 onwards and for spelling from grade 5 onwards. Furthermore, in grade 5 pupils from the project schools scored significantly better on reading comprehension. These results did not only apply to Frisian speaking pupils, but also to Dutch-speaking pupils at the project schools. Comparing the project schools and control schools on the Dutch language tests, no difference was found in terms of Dutch language proficiency, even though at the project schools, obviously, less time was spent on teaching in Dutch. Finally, the results of the English language tests showed no differences between the two types of schools. The only small, however not significant, difference was that pupils from the project schools scored slightly higher on the self-assessment questions: they indicated they spoke English more easily and more confidently compared to their peers from the control schools.

Van Ruijven and Ytsma (2008) conclude that pupils from the project schools gained in three ways: compared to pupils from control schools they have better Frisian language proficiency, similar Dutch language proficiency and although not better overall English language proficiency, they speak it more easily and confidently. Besides the large study by van Ruijven and Ytsma, several master theses were based on the trilingual schools. Two concentrated on speaking performance (van der Meij, 2008 and Martens, 2012) and one concentrated on language attitudes (Bangma, 2009). All three studies concentrated on grades 7 and 8 only. Van der Meij (2008) tested the oral proficiency in Frisian, Dutch and English using a picture story task and compared a trilingual school and a control school (within van Ruijven &

Ytsma's study). She found similar results for Frisian and Dutch oral proficiency for both schools and significant higher oral proficiency in English for pupils from the trilingual schools.

The study done by van Ruijven and Ytsma was continued in the Boppeslach research project (2007-2014) in which over 100 Frisian primary schools were evaluated on educational quality. The trilingual school model was evaluated as well but the results are still to be published. However, two master students (Martens, 2012 and Bangma, 2009) conducted their research within the Boppeslach project. Martens (2012) used a picture story task and compared Frisian L1 and Dutch L1 speakers of trilingual and control schools on English oral proficiency. She expected Frisian L1 speakers to do better on the task but found the opposite. The significant differences that were found (on the amount of words and the length of utterances in the English picture story tasks) were for the Dutch L1 pupils. The comparison with the control schools showed significant results for all aspects to do with the English tasks in favor of the trilingual schools. Bangma (2009) used a questionnaire to study the language attitudes – in general and towards Frisian – of Frisian primary schools pupils, comparing monolingual, bilingual and trilingual schools. She looked at cognitive, affective and conative components of language attitude. She found that pupils from bi- and trilingual schools had more positive language attitudes than pupils from monolingual schools, specifically on the affective and conative components. Moreover, Bangma found that Dutch L1 pupils were more positively influenced by the bi- or trilingual school system than Frisian L1 pupils.

Besides the several positive results the above studies showed, there are also obstacles that have been defined with respect to trilingual education in Friesland (Riemersma & de Vries, 2011; van der Meij, 2006):

- All trilingual primary schools are located in the province's countryside.
- There is a lack of Frisian teaching materials.
- Teachers lack sufficient English proficiency skills

Riemersma and de Vries (2011, p. 54) furthermore indicate that there is a transition gap between trilingual primary schools and secondary education "due to the lack of differentiation in goals with regard to English and Frisian".

The Dutch Education Inspectorate studied the position of Frisian at primary and secondary school in 2004/5. Relevant conclusions from their report (2006) are:

- Six percent of the primary schools in the province of Fryslân do not teach the Frisian language, although they are legally obliged to do so.
- School boards and schools have generally failed to develop a policy for Frisian as a school subject and as a language for teaching.
- Thirty-three percent of the teachers who provide lessons in Frisian are not formally qualified to teach this language. Most of the school authorities (83%) fail to obligate teachers to qualify for the certificate to teach Frisian.
- Frisian lessons mainly aim at a favorable attitude towards Frisian as well as understanding and speaking the language. Vocabulary, reading and writing in the Frisian language receive less attention.
- The didactic repertoire of teachers in Frisian is limited. They do not provide adequate educational arrangements for Frisian-speaking and non-Frisian speaking pupils. Furthermore, little use is made of computers.

Obviously, the situation at the trilingual schools is better than described above when it comes to Frisian and English since much more attention is given to them compared to regular Frisian schools. Most of the trilingual schools' teachers are qualified Frisian teachers and most of them have acquired the qualification 'Classroom English' (Riemersma & de Vries, 2011). This is a course aimed at primary school teachers to learn basic principles of foreign language learning and to improve their own English proficiency. Furthermore, with help of Taalsintrum Frysk, native English teaching assistants are appointed at most schools to provide the pupils with sufficient native input and encourage them to use the language themselves.

Outlook: Future directions for trilingual models in times of diversity

The chosen didactical approach of the Frisian trilingual schools is a traditional and successful way of dealing with regional linguistic diversity. It represents an attempt to react to the linguistic needs of bi- or multilingual pupils by coping with multilingualism within a conceptual framework of monolingualism (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013). Similar observations have been made in other bilingual models. In the case of the bilingual schools in the German Federal States of Hamburg and Saxony (Duarte, 2011; Gogolin, Neumann, & Roth, 2004; Roth, Neumann, & Gogolin, 2007) – with immigrant languages and a regional minority language (Sorbian) – the overall didactical arrangements indicated that these bilingual models are based on the concept of a quasi-natural relation between a state or a region and "its" language (Duarte & Pereira, 2011).

Another crucial observation that was done in the Hamburg and Saxony schools was that the diversity of languages and proficiencies of the pupils rapidly increased and surpassed the neat division into groups that was attempted by most teachers at the start of the programmes (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013). So, while some pupils were very competent in two of the languages offered by the programmes, others had varying degrees of skills in these or even other languages or dialects that were not included in the project. Comparable observations of growing diversity in bilingual models have been made in other contexts. Purkarthofer and Mossakowski (2011) report on the growing numbers of children with languages other than German or Slovene attending bilingual schools in Carinthia, Austria. In their ethnographic case studies, they found evidence of numerous adaptation strategies of schools in their attempt to adjust to learners: "different and heterogeneous linguistic predispositions" (2011, p. 554).

Why is this important to reflect upon in the Frisian context? Compared to the rest of the Netherlands the province of Friesland shows a lower total number of migrants, however these numbers have been rising (from 4,5% in 2000 to 9% in 2015; CBS, 2016). The largest concentration of migrants is found in Leeuwarden (17% of total population) but numbers are rapidly growing elsewhere in the province due to the arrival of large numbers of refugees. So, this typically rural and officially bilingual region is receiving large inflows of multilingual pupils in areas that so far have adopted a trilingual model to cater only for autochthonous forms of multilingualism. As in the case of the schools in Carinthia, Hamburg and Saxony, the Frisian trilingual schools will need to adjust their models to a growingly heterogeneous population. A summary of success features from the German case study will be provided below.

Some of the German schools developed didactic arrangements that were speaker-centred and reflected pupils' multilingual realities, thus intending to explore their multilingual repertoires and not reduce them to a bilingual dichotomy. This was achieved by supporting pupils to transfer from everyday informal to academic language use through using varieties or dialects as useful bridges, or in allowing and encouraging several forms of multilingualism in the classroom (Duarte, 2011). Consequently, pupils with other languages not included in the project could also actively use their own languages in class.

Cross-linguistic communicative practices of all sorts, used as productive resources rather than as a sign of linguistic deficits, have also been found to be a key feature in adjusting to growing diversity in dual language programmes (Purkarthofer &

Mossakowski, 2011). Instances of code-switching (switching between two or more languages in one conversation) were accepted in some schools as resources for learning and as a means of ensuring active participation in classroom discourse. Although such practices tended to rapidly disappear in general classroom discourse, they remained common practice in group or pair work. Similar to the Carinthian schools, language use in some of the Hamburg schools was regulated by respecting a balance between pupils' language choice and a proactive support for the use of the other languages. This sort of approach, which allows language learning across language boundaries (García et al., 2006), aims at fostering meta-linguistic knowledge through repeated language comparison.

This aspect is linked to another important issue of dual language models in their adaptation to growing linguistic diversity; the attempt to construct teachers as role models and competent speakers of many languages, thus avoiding a conception of teachers as monolingual speakers (Balboni, 1997). As Purkarthofer and Mossakowski (2011) state, their role is to reinforce the students' self-construction as proficient multilingual speakers and not to further sustain the myth of monolingualism. In some of the Hamburg schools, teachers were bi- or multilingual themselves and were encouraged to make use of their linguistic repertoires for instruction.

To summarise, traditional bilingual models, although mostly based on monolingual norms and occasionally reflecting traditional views of bilingual speakers as "two/three monolinguals", can in fact adapt to growing linguistic diversity. However, this means overcoming the usual monolingual habits found in these models such as strict separation of the different languages and moving towards methods already known from successful schools in dealing with diversity (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013).