

# User Contributions in the Online Dutch-Frisian Dictionary

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## 1. Introduction

The new Online Dutch-Frisian translation Dictionary (Online Nederlands-Fries Woordenboek, ONFW) will be a born digital dictionary (Van der Kuip & Sijens, 2014). The ONFW project started this year and will be completed in about 5-6 years. The new dictionary will replace the outdated Dutch-Frisian paper dictionary (Visser, 1985), which was published in 1985.

There are some 300,000 native speakers of Frisian, mainly living in the Dutch Province of Friesland. Dutch is the official language of the Netherlands, including the Province of Friesland. Frisian is the second official language of the Netherlands. It is a spoken language rather than a written language. Frisian is used in literature and furthermore to a limited extent in formal domains such as administration, education, commerce, and the media. From a commercial point of view it is not profitable to publish Frisian bilingual dictionaries for special target groups (language learners, native speakers, students) because the Frisian speaking region is simply too small. That is why the intended users of the ONFW are both non-Frisian speakers who want to learn the language and native speakers of Frisian. The latter group may seem an odd audience for a Dutch-Frisian dictionary, but there are definitely reasons to serve them as well with a comprehensive bilingual dictionary with Dutch as its source language and Frisian as its target language. Most of the native speakers of Frisian use Dutch as their frame of reference when they write their own language (if they write it at all). Many native speakers of Frisians opt for Dutch and not for Frisian as a written language, the main reason being that their writing competence in Frisian is insufficient.

## 2. Dictionary

The Dutch part of the ONFW is based on the macrostructure and the microstructure of the General Dutch Dictionary (Algemeen Nederlands Woordenboek, ANW), a scholarly dictionary of contemporary standard Dutch (Schoonheim & Tempelaars, 2014). The ANW is chosen as the source for the ONFW because it contains a comprehensive description of modern Dutch with a focus on meaning, (fixed) collocations and examples. This enables the ONFW to offer the user a practical modern up-to-date dictionary with equivalents in contemporary Frisian.

### 3. User Contributions needed

As Lew (2013, p. 25) states, 'there may be more room for collaboration between professional lexicographers and active users on bilingual (and multilingual) tools'. The ONFW may very well benefit from user contributions, for instance when it comes to so-called lexical gaps in Frisian. In the last 40 years, the possibility to use Frisian in formal domains has increased. Although terminology has been developed in the past decades, there are still gaps in the vocabulary, which are not filled in a spontaneous way by the Frisian language community. This also applies to the modernization of the vocabulary. Neologisms are often borrowings from Dutch. Sometimes they are literally borrowed and included in the language. For example, the Dutch word 'pindakaas' ('peanut butter', literally 'peanut cheese'), which is borrowed in Frisian as 'pindakaas', while a possible loan translation would be 'apenuútsjetsiis' (Hoekstra & Van der Kuip, 2015). The same applies to Dutch words like 'bijna-ramp' ('near-disaster'), 'stresskip' ('stressed chicken', a person who cannot cope with stress), 'publieksgericht' ('aimed at an audience'), the names for exotic animals like 'krenggier' ('Egyptian vulture') or 'galboorsnuitkever' (*Ceuthorrhynchus pleurostigma*, a kind of beetle). Next to the need to fill gaps in the vocabulary, there is the problem of how certain Dutch idioms should be translated into Frisian. Constructions like 'handige harry' (handyman), 'handje contantje betalen' ('pay cash on the nail') do not have ready to use equivalents. To give another example, the Frisian equivalent of Dutch numeral 'veel' ('much, many') is 'folle'. But 'folle' can only be used with negation: 'net folle' ('not much/many'). In unmarked usage 'veel' has to be translated into Frisian as 'gâns', 'in protte', 'in soad'. So the Frisian translation of Dutch 'veel mensen' ('many people') is not 'folle minsken', but 'in protte minsken', 'gâns minsken' or 'in soad minsken'. Consequently, Dutch compounds with 'veel', like 'veeleisend' ('demanding') or 'veelgoderij' ('polytheism') cannot be translated with an equivalent containing 'folle' (Hoekstra, 2011). In particular neologisms like 'veelpleger' ('recidivist') are notoriously difficult to translate into Frisian. To the lexicographer quite a number of common Dutch words, collocations and idioms are problematic because they do not have straightforward Frisian equivalents. This is where the users may be able to help.

### 4. Type of user involvement

When it comes to determining to what extent users may contribute in the ONFW project, the functional classification of user contributions to dictionary projects described by Abel & Meyer (2013) provides a good overview. The ONFW can be characterised in this context as a semi-collaborative dictionary, edited by a team of professional lexicographers.

Opportunities to involve the user in the project are social media like Facebook or Twitter. On the dictionary's Facebook page the public could be asked to suggest equivalents and on Twitter, a tweet could be posted with a question to provide the

editorial board with suggestions for translations of words, collocations, idioms and proverbs. Another possibility to call in assistance, is to send questionnaires by e-mail to a dedicated discussion group.

Although it was not intended for dictionaries, the Fryske Akademy has some experience with asking third party help. In 1980 its terminology department started a project to develop terminology for the domain of administration. By means of questionnaires suggestions were gathered, which were assessed by a selection committee and subsequently published in a list of administrative terminology (De Haan, 1987). Ten years ago, the terminology department of the Fryske Akademy had a regular feature in the Frisian dailies in which readers were asked to give Frisian suggestions for Dutch words or constructions which have no (known) Frisian equivalents. The questionnaires sometimes yielded useful suggestions.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Another way to involve the user in the project is opening a mailbox to allow the user to comment on and assess dictionary content. Most likely, not all user contributions will be useful or meet the intention of the editors. The editors should therefore establish criteria to evaluate the submissions. The editors should take care not to spend too much time on user contributions. Another important matter is the feedback to the user. It stands to reason that every user who submitted suggestions will have to receive some kind of feedback, if only to give him the idea that his suggestions are being taken seriously. Positive feedback will surely encourage him to submit new suggestions when asked to. It is expected that the editors of the ONFW will benefit from user contributions.

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