

# Introduction to Joost Halbertsma's Frisian-Latin *Lexicon Frisicum* in Translation

By Anne Dykstra

Jacob Grimm and Matthias de Vries, lexicographers and contemporaries of Halbertsma, have spoken in favour of and against the use of Latin in their dictionaries, respectively. In both cases the choice of their target group played a role. Grimm wanted to give foreigners access to his dictionary, too, while De Vries focused on a Dutch-speaking target group. Grimm could choose for Latin because he attached less importance to the logical and consistent representation of the meaning of the lemmata (Reichmann 1991:316-318). To De Vries (1882:lxiv) such a logical and consistent representation was important, that's why he did not opt for Latin. Halbertsma's position is very close to Grimm's. Both contemporaries and late nineteenth-century users have criticised Halbertsma's choice of Latin as the meta-language of the *Lexicon Frisicum*. The objections to Latin are of different kinds:

- 1) Latin is an anachronism in the nineteenth century as an international scientific language
- 2) Because of Latin the *Lexicon Frisicum* is inaccessible to the 'ordinary' Frisian user.
- 3) (Classical) Latin is not suitable to explain the meaning of Frisian words

The first objection may have some truth in it, but Halbertsma as a man between two centuries, still saw Latin as the only language to reach international scholars. Since did not aim his dictionary at the ordinary user, for him the second objection was not relevant. The third objection is lexicographically relevant. Halbertsma was aware that Latin could cause problems when explaining Frisian words. Nevertheless, in the dictionary itself he often only gives an ambiguous Latin equivalent of a Frisian lemma.

It is the second objection that gave rise to the current publication. Eekhoff, in Halbertsma's obituary (1869), somewhat bitterly complained that Halbertsma should have considered the ordinary Frisian, who of course did not master Latin, and therefore could not enjoy such an important work about his own language.

With the translation of Halbertsma's Latin, and sometimes Greek, I hope to have served the 'ordinary Frisian', as well as all those who are interested in the *Lexicon Frisicum* and the Frisian described in it. Because the *Lexicon Frisicum* is also a description of nineteenth-century Frisian society in all its facets, the translation will hopefully also be of interest to anyone interested in Friesland in the nineteenth century. Thanks to Halbertsma's historical focus, those who love medieval Friesland, will also be able to indulge themselves. Below you will find a brief discussion of some aspects of the *Lexicon Frisicum* (based on Dykstra (2011), (2019) and Dykstra forthcoming).

## Romanticism, Linguistics and Lexicography

At the start of Halbertsma's linguistic career - his first publication is from 1822 - Romanticism in Europe was already a fairly influential social and political movement. In Romantic linguistics there was a lot of interest in etymology and historical-comparative research. Linguists focused on vernacular languages and dialects, and the daily spoken language was considered superior to the written language of books. A people and its

language were considered to be a unity and the language of a country, its national character and culture were no longer seen in isolation from each other. A good example of this is one of the two mottoes of the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal* (WNT), which is attributed to Halbertsma: 'De taal is de ziel van de natie, zij is de natie zelve' (The language is the soul of the nation, it is the nation itself). Due to the strong nationalistic tendencies of Romanticism, scholars became increasingly interested in the language, history and folklore of their own country. This also goes for Halbertsma, though maybe a bit different. In his work he tells the story of the Frisians and their ancient, valuable language and culture. At the same time, he was very concerned with the Netherlands as a free civil state (De Jong 2018:162-164), and he used ancient Frisian customs and habits to comment on the national and political situation of his time (De Jong 2018:500).

Almost ten years before the plans for the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal* (1864-1998) become topical, Halbertsma wrote in a manuscript about the necessity of a Dutch dictionary (Tresoar Hs 1236<sup>i</sup>, see Kalma 1969:62). He related a Dutch dictionary to the level of civilisation of a nation, and by mentioning the term 'nation' he also emphasized the national aspect of the dictionary he envisages.

### **Structure of the *Lexicon Frisicum***

In his dictionary Halbertsma wanted to give Old and Modern Frisian and also East Frisian and North Frisian as spoken in the North of Germany<sup>ii</sup>. The *Lexicon Frisicum* contains about 6400 lemmata in 1004 columns. A limited random sample shows that between 1100 and 1300 lemmata are not contemporary Frisian. The vast majority of these are Old Frisian or North Frisian. A little fewer than 200 lemmata are personal names. The dictionary articles may have a modern Frisian lemma, with the Old Frisian form in the microstructure, or an Old Frisian lemma, with the modern Frisian form in the microstructure. It is not clear on what basis Halbertsma made these choices.

In the *Lexicon Frisicum*, a distinction is made between lemmata in capitals and lemmata in lowercase letters. The lemmata in capitals are arranged alphabetically. They are followed by lemmata in lowercase letters, which (are supposed to) have a morpho-semantic or etymological relationship with the preceding lemma in capitals. Because many words from the *Lexicon Frisicum* are practically untraceable because of his father's way of working, Tjalling added indices at the back of the dictionary.

### **Sources and Material**

Collecting contemporary Frisian language material has cost Halbertsma a lot of time and effort. There was no lexicographical description of the modern Frisian language, and there was hardly any written material, as in the nineteenth century Frisian was mainly a spoken language. Bearing in mind that he left Friesland as early as 1822, he collected a respectable amount of nineteenth-century language material. Halbertsma has taken his fieldwork very seriously and he has carefully selected his informants.

For Old and Middle Frisian, he had to rely on lexicographical descriptions and on text editions. Halbertsma has not included all available material from his lexicographical sources in the *Lexicon Frisicum* (Buitenrust Hetteema 1888: III, Buma 1969:104). The original goal of including indices to all Old Frisian laws has not been achieved. We must wonder whether Halbertsma really wanted to do that. He must have soon realised the impossibility of his mission. He has benefited thankfully, and rightly so, from the work of others. It is noteworthy, however, that he did not include everything that was presented

to him in a convenient alphabetical order in the consulted Old, North and East Frisian dictionaries.

## Meaning Descriptions

Halbertsma does not follow a rigid pattern when describing meanings in the *Lexicon Frisicum*. He often seems to be concerned with the intrinsic connection between the meanings in Frisian, the dialects and historical varieties of Frisian and other Germanic and Indo-Germanic languages. But he is far from being consistent in this. In many articles the etymological component is very limited. In etymologically 'meagre' articles, Halbertsma often suffices with giving Latin heteronymous definitions, thus leaving his users in the cold.

His critics have a point with their comments on the meta-language and its consequences for the definitions, even though they may not have realised enough that the *Lexicon Frisicum* is more an etymological, linguistic-historical dictionary than an explanatory one.

## Examples

Halbertsma apparently did not want to present the different lemmata in the microstructure in a more or less natural context wherever possible. On more than one occasion he has not even used quotations that were presented to him on a silver platter, for example in Von Richthofen's 1840 Old Frisian dictionary. For many modern Frisian lemmata he did not give a poem where he could easily have done so. At the same time, many articles have examples and quotations in a language other than that of the lemma. Strictly speaking, these are not lexicographic examples. This also applies to all the example sentences in which Halbertsma wanders away from the lemma in question. Although he has clear ideas about the function of examples and quotes with regard to other dictionaries, it remains unclear what he wanted to do with them in his own dictionary. In any case, he often gives too few examples and quotations to make the meaning nuances of the lemmata clear.

The present-day assessor of the meaning section of the *Lexicon Frisicum* must be aware that there was no such thing as 'meta-lexicography' at the time. Lexicographers from the first half of the 19th century were at 'a pre-scientific' stage of definition practice, as explained by Nerlich (1992:18).

## Etymology

Halbertsma had a passion for etymology, and he was not the only one to have that passion in those days. The nineteenth century was a period in which etymology could flourish in Europe. Etymology was popular in Friesland, too (Jensma 1998: 200-201).

In his description of the purpose of a much-needed Dutch dictionary, Halbertsma stresses that the Dutch lemmata should be put in a larger Germanic context. This is precisely what he does in the *Lexicon Frisicum*, where he gives related forms from different stages of other Germanic languages. However, the etymological component is often limited to simply listing forms from other languages and language stages, leaving it to the user to figure out the relationship between words.

Halbertsma saw himself as someone who had seen the new etymological light. In 1847, Halbertsma wrote that he tried to work in accordance with the current linguistic

ideas, so that he would not shame Grimm. Nevertheless, the *Lexicon Frisicum* was soon after its publication criticised for its unsystematic and speculative way of etymologizing. Feitsma (1997:143) comes to Halbertsma's rescue by emphasizing that etymology in the first half of the nineteenth century, before the rise and establishment of the 'ausnahmlose Lautgesetze' (sound laws without exceptions), often had a speculative character. In his dictionary Halbertsma has shown that he was aware of the Germanic sound shift, yet it must be said that the *Lexicon Frisicum* also presents sound shifts that prove the opposite.

In a letter of 1843, Halbertsma wrote that in his linguistic studies he had initially applied Valckenaer's linguistic principles<sup>iii</sup>. He uses the concept of analogy in his linguistic work. This is particularly important in etymology: If anywhere, he says, it is appropriate in etymology to trace analogies, to grasp remote relationships with one glance, and to connect extremes between which ordinary minds see no connection (Halbertsma 1848:562). According to Feitsma (1996:130), his fondness for analogy probably stems from the study of the writings on this subject by the so-called Schola Hemsterhusiana<sup>iv</sup>.

## **Frisian and English**

Halbertsma's publications and manuscripts show a continuing interest in the relationship between English and Frisian. And he is not alone in that. He thinks that Frisian is the origin of English, and he is not alone in that either. According to Tjalling, his father in his dictionary wanted to prove that it were not only Angles and Saxons who had invaded Britain by sea, but also a large proportion of Frisians. With a certain amount of, we would now say, cultural nationalistic pride, he even refers to the English as settlers from Friesland. The relationship between English and Frisian is therefore an important theme in his dictionary. English in its various stages of development plays a major role in the *Lexicon Frisicum*.

The large number of English examples and example sentences in the *Lexicon Frisicum* immediately strikes the eye. There are many more of them than examples in any other language. They are by no means always relevant to the demonstration of the relationship between Frisian and English. Some Frisian examples have been translated into English, and not into Latin, without any apparent reason. This could indicate that Halbertsma, consciously or unconsciously, wrote for an English-speaking target group. In the head of the articles, but also in the semantic section, Halbertsma gives words from other languages that are etymologically related to a particular Frisian form. Here too we see a clear preference for Old, Middle and Modern English forms. Halbertsma has paid particular attention to Frisian-English innovations that can relatively easily be recognised in modern Frisian and English. Often, he does so only in passing, but in a few places, he indicates how a particular innovation came about.

## **Cultural Nationalism**

Leerssen (1999) considers nineteenth-century dictionaries unequivocally as expressions of cultural nationalism. There are a number of reasons not to adopt this view for the *Lexicon Frisicum*. First of all, the Latin meta-language excludes the (ordinary) Frisian users. Then there are Halbertsma's tolerant view of spelling his aversion to language purism, both of which do not match the strong nineteenth-century tendency to standardise language. Nevertheless, the *Lexicon Frisicum* can be seen as an

expression of cultural nationalism in many respects, even if cultural nationalism might not have been Halbertsma's central aim. Yet, the *Lexicon Frisicum* devotes ample attention to Friesland's rich history and culture. A few example sentences also show that Halbertsma has written his dictionary as a Frisian and from a Frisian perspective. In other examples, he praises the Frisians and their character. So, if we regard Halbertsma's *Lexicon Frisicum* as an expression of cultural nationalism as we understand it now, it's not by the mere fact that it is a dictionary, but because it is dominated by elements that would qualify as cultural-nationalistic.

De Jong (2009) places Halbertsma in a broader, politico-social and scholarly Dutch and European context. According to her, Halbertsma is mainly concerned with the Dutch unity and uses Frisian as a means to strengthen that unity. From this point of view, she says that Halbertsma exploited the similarities between English and Frisian, so to speak, by attributing Frisian to English in order to associate the Dutch, rather than the Frisians, with the English and their 'public spirit' (De Jong 2009:346). If De Jong is right, and I tend to think that she is, one might argue that the *Lexicon Frisicum* is as much an expression of *Dutch* cultural nationalism as it is of *Frisian* cultural nationalism.

### **Encyclopaedic information**

Halbertsma (1851:4-6) shows that he was not only aware of the non-linguistic, sociocultural and cultural-historical aspects of (in this case the Dutch) language, but that he also attached great importance to it. Around 1854, Bosworth sent Halbertsma a number of lemmata that he had transferred from a glossary to words from Northhamptonshire. Halbertsma was very enthusiastic about it. The glossary suited him exactly because it clarified the meaning of words and expressions on the basis of local customs (De Jong 2018:410). Such embedding in a context of customs and circumstances was worth a lot to him. He wanted to do the same in his *Lexicon*. Indeed, the *Lexicon Frisicum* often looks much more like an encyclopaedia than a dictionary, especially in articles that deal with what we now would call folklore.

### **Folklore**

Due to the strong nationalist tendencies of Romanticism, scholars were increasingly focused on the language, history and the folklore of their own country. Leerssen (1999:81) considers the activities of the brothers Grimm trend-setting for everything in romantic Europe that is concerned with the national past. In fact, he says, there is almost no European cultural nationalism to be found that does not begin with folkloristic fieldwork and publications of folk songs, ballads or fairy tales and narratives. Such inventories had their origins in the new cultural sciences, and they exercised great influence on the emerging national awareness of the country in question, and they inspired poets and activists. It was all about national traditions and traditions form a link between past and present. Old ballads, oral literature, traditional festivals and customs, fairy tales and narratives were important sources in which the true spirit of a people could be rediscovered, untouched by alienating cosmopolitan levelling of the 'high' culture (Leerssen 1999:80-81).

Halbertsma had actually 'been encouraged by Grimm to write about Frisian manners, customs and folktales' (Breuker 2017c). Jacob Grimm himself sent him a copy

of his *Deutsche Mythologie*, edition 1844<sup>1</sup> (Van der Molen 1969:257). Though folklore certainly had his interest, it this does not show in official publications on the subject. The myths and legends that he discovered during his fieldwork have largely been incorporated into his literary work, but we also find folklore material in the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Halbertsma in his manuscripts never used the words *volkskunde* or *folklore*, simply because they only came into existence during his life (Van der Molen 1969:260). He mostly used, as did his contemporaries, the word ‘mythology’.

Since Halbertsma had such a broad view of contemporary and former society, and because he put language at the centre of everything, it seems only natural that he also conveyed his interests in his dictionary. And that’s what he generously did. S.v. *berthe-leppel* (birth spoon)<sup>2</sup>, for example, he dwells on the customs and traditions around birth and s.v. *bigraffenis* (funeral) he spends more than two columns to inform the reader about a variety of subjects that are related to burial in Friesland. We find information about exorcism under *düewel-banner* (exorcist). S.v. *brilloft* (wedding) and BREID (bride) we find ample details concerning marriage customs.

## Sexual language

In 1852, Jacob Grimm wrote to Matthias De Vries in 1852 (Soeteman 1982:38). De Vries was editor-in-chief of the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, and Grimm wrote him to ask some questions about taboo words. Grimm’s basic attitude toward sexual language is that ‘Der lexicographer und grammatiker müssen alle wörter gleich wichtig und heilig sein, folglich auch, die an sich unschuldigen obscoenen.’ There appeared to be a difference of opinion between Grimm and De Vries. The latter wanted to use the Dutch dictionary to improve and to purify the Dutch language, by excluding, among other things, indecent and uncivilized language. In 1858, Halbertsma complained to Grimm about Matthias de Vries’ plans. He wrote to Grimm to say how pleased he was to see that Grimm did include obscene words in his dictionary, because obscene words usually are among the oldest in a language (Sijmons 1885:28-29).

Halbertsma’s dictionary and the manuscripts upon which it is based contain, as might be expected, many words and expressions in the field of sexuality. Yet Halbertsma does not always seem to be entirely comfortable when he notes down sexual words in his own manuscripts. The metalanguage in the manuscripts is Dutch, but Halbertsma often switches to Latin when it comes to words that denote sexual activity or refer to sexual organs.

In a number of entries, words and expressions are referred to as being obscene, euphemistic, or trivial. But the dictionary is not very strict with its labels. S.v. BITHJINJE (modern spelling *betsjinje*), ‘serve,’ the phrase *inire fæminam*, ‘enter a woman,’ is labelled figurative or metaphorical, whereas *concubitus*, ‘sleeping with someone,’ is a euphemism s.v. the corresponding noun *bithjinning*, ‘servitude’ (modern spelling

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<sup>1</sup> Halbertsma corresponded with Grimm. In a letter from 11 June 1836 he wrote to Grimm about his observation that everywhere where farmers in the Dutch Province of Overijssel believe in ‘wite wiven’ (spirits of wise, or witty women, AD), old Germanic sepulchral mounds were found (Van der Molen 1969:261). Halbertsma wrote Grimm in a letter from 26 July 1855 about *bijgelovigheden* ‘superstitions’. Grimm in the 1844 edition of the *Deutsche Mythologie* on p. 620 referred to Halbertsma’s book on Buddhism (Halbertsma 1843).

<sup>2</sup> The *Lexicon Frisicum* makes a distinction between lemmata in capital letters and lemmata in lower-case letters. The lemmata in upper-case letters are ordered alphabetically. The lemmata in small letters following a lemma in upper-case, have a morpho-semantic or etymological relationship with the preceding upper-case lemma. This means that they very often are not in their alphabetical place.

betsjinning). As a Romanticist and Frisian chauvinist, Halbertsma considered the Frisians a very noble and decent people who would never use downright offensive language, but would always prefer euphemisms. To Halbertsma, much of the sexual language he cites in the *Lexicon Frisicum* is probably acceptable euphemism, though the dictionary itself does not provide much information as to the degree of offensiveness of words and expressions referring to sexual matters.

## Conclusion

Although Tjalling in his foreword praises his father for his skills and dedication, criticism prevails. The Latin meta-language, he thinks, cost his father a lot of extra time. Tjalling points to other shortcomings of the *Lexicon Frisicum*, such as the overall lack of consistency, poor accessibility and Halbertsma's tendency to wander from his subject and to mention irrelevant data. De Jong (2018:472) points out that Halbertsma's weakness was indeed his inability to create a structure, his collection of languages was actually a collection of stories, and each system interfered with the coherence he saw in it. And that coherence was what he was concerned with (De Jong 2018:472). De Jong describes Halbertsma's way of working thus: he investigated all kinds of things, and he did so thoroughly, but not according to an unwavering scientific principle. He recorded the results of his investigations, but not in a neutral informing way. He never suppressed his inclination to wander, to entertain himself and his audience, to make digs at people, and to leave an impression. The result is a remarkable oeuvre that is not 'finished' and that evokes contradictory reactions (De Jong 2018:504-505). The *Lexicon Frisicum* would seem to fit exactly into the rest of Halbertsma's interesting oeuvre.

This is a work in progress. Up to now some 60% of the *Lexicon Frisicum* has been translated into Frisian. The translation process will hopefully go on, so that we will be able to publish updated versions of the translated *Lexicon Frisicum* from time to time.

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<sup>i</sup> Halbertsma has left a large part of his library to the Province of Friesland. His library is now part of collection of Tresoar, Friesland's scientific library in Leeuwarden, including his manuscripts. I refer to the manuscripts with the designation 'Tresoar', followed by the application number from Tresoar's catalogue (<http://www.tresoar.nl>).

<sup>ii</sup> The usual, though not undisputed, periodization of Frisian is as follows: <1550 Old Frisian, 1550-1800 Middle Frisian, 1800 to the present-day modern Frisian. The term 'Middle Frisian' was not used in Halbertsma's time.

<sup>iii</sup> Valckenaer belonged to the *Schola Hemsterhusiana*.

<sup>iv</sup> See Hassler (2007) for the history of analogy as a concept and as a term.