

Gay Frysk: Expressing LGBT identity in a minority language

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LGBT youth use linguistic practices to construct their sexual and gender identities (Munson & Babel, 2007). In this poster, we discuss whether young LGBT speakers of Frisian do this as well.

There are reasons to assume that sexual and gender identity expression is not prevalent in Frisian. Frisian functions predominantly as a home language. The dominant language of socialisation in schools is Dutch, especially in urban areas, and it is likely that identity expression occurs mostly in that language — and perhaps in English (cf. Vriesendorp & Rutten, 2017). Secondly, Frisian is associated with rurality and with conservative values and ideals of gender roles that may not square with an LGBT identity.

In this poster, we present pilot results from a project researching the language of Frisian LGBT youth. The results are based on sociolinguistic interviews with Frisian speaking youth aged 16–22 of various genders and sexualities.

We focus on two variables:

(s) — Fronted /s/ has been shown cross-linguistically to vary by gender and to be used by gay men to mark identity (Mack & Munson, 2012; Pharaoh et al., 2014; Bekker & Levon, 2017; Munson et al., 2017). Because of this strong cross-linguistic pattern, this feature may also be used by Frisian LGBT youth to express their identity.

(sk) — The pronunciation of final *-sk* clusters in Frisian is undergoing change from /sk/ to /s/. As change is typically led by women and gay men, this is a salient feature available for identity expression. However, as (sk) also varies by literacy level (Hilton et al., 2012), and given the frequent association of gay men with proper, precise speech (Eckert, 2008), LGBT youth may also lag rather than lead in this particular change.

We hope that this work inspires more research into language variation and LGBT identity in minority or peripheral language communities.

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