

Listening Comprehension

"Butter, bread and green cheese..."

In the following conversation you are going to hear some new words. Read and listen to them.

Make sure you know what they mean

grant : atorgar / otorgar

threat : ameaça / amenaza

huge : enorme

overwhelming : aclaparador / apabullante

detrimental: perjudicial

Ready?

Now read the questions on the following page. Read them carefully before listening to the interview.

"Butter, bread and green cheese...is good English and good Friesen". This saying refers to the similarities between English and Frisian, a language spoken on the Northern coast of Holland which is closer to English than any other language, including German and Dutch. In the following conversation, Troy Gallagher interviews Matthias Paulsen, a professor of Frisian language and literature at the University of Nijmegen in Holland who has just written a book about Frisian.

[Now listen to the interview]

Troy: Professor Paulsen, thank you for accepting to talk to us about the Frisian language and its situation in modern-day Holland.

Professor Paulsen: Thank you, Troy, for inviting me. It is a pleasure to be able to talk to your audience about Frisian.

Troy: Even though Frisian is, as you say in your book, the closest language to English, most English speakers have never heard of this language. Why do you think that is?

Professor Paulsen: Well, to begin with, Frisian is a minority language, spoken primarily in Holland but also in small parts of Germany and Denmark. It has just over 400.000 speakers, the majority of which are also speakers of other languages, mostly Dutch but also German and Danish. So it isn't surprising that it should not be very well known to anybody outside these areas.

Troy: And what is the current status of the language in Holland? Is it an official language?

Professor Paulsen: For many years Frisian was considered a language of peasants, spoken at home by fishermen and farmers and so it had no official recognition. Fortunately, it was granted

official language status in the province of Friesland, in Holland, in 1956 and nowadays it is one of the two official languages in the country, together with Dutch. In Germany it is protected as a minority language also. An interesting detail is the fact that the official name of the province is now 'Fryslân', the Frisian name, instead of the earlier Dutch 'Friesland'.

Troy: And how did this recognition change the situation of the language?

Professor Paulsen: Well, in many ways Frisian is still, we could say, a 'country' language, spoken by people in rather remote, rural areas, especially on the Frisian Islands. But since it achieved official recognition, there have been some important improvements. For example, it is now possible for children to attend school in Frisian and there are also some University courses that are taught in Frisian.

Troy: Is Frisian used at all levels of community life? I mean, can you for example use Frisian in court or in public institutions?

Professor Paulsen: Yes, this is a right that is guaranteed by the fact that it is considered an official language. However, it is still rather unusual for most people to use Frisian outside the family environment and therefore many switch to Dutch when they have to speak to people they don't know or in the administration.

Troy: And what about the media? Do you have Frisian TV or radio service?

Professor Paulsen: We do not yet have Frisian TV but we have had a Frisian radio station for a while in Fryslân. Also, even though we do not have any newspapers that publish entirely in Frisian, many do carry occasional columns in the language.

Troy: In your book you mention that, even though the number of speakers of Frisian is larger than the number of speakers of, for example, Icelandic, there are some serious threats to the survival of the language in the near future. Why is that?

Professor Paulsen: You see, this is a complicated situation but the possibilities for a language to survive into the future do not depend only on the number of speakers. There are other factors that can be more decisive in this respect. For example, nearly all Frisian speakers are bilingual in other, more powerful languages such as Dutch or German. These languages can have a huge influence on young Frisian speakers through their overwhelming presence on the media, like TV, the Internet, etc. That is why many people feel that speaking Frisian does not represent any advantage in today's world and therefore stop speaking the language or stop teaching it to their children. Some people even think that speaking Frisian can distract them from learning Dutch properly!!

Troy: But that is not true, is it?

Professor Paulsen: Certainly not! There is no scientific evidence at all to suggest that knowing or learning more than one language can be detrimental for another. In fact, quite the opposite seems to be the case. The more languages you learn, the easier it is to learn new ones and there is hardly ever any interference between them.

Troy: So what do you think needs to be done to make sure that Frisian remains a living language for many centuries?

Professor Paulsen: The most important thing is that Frisian speakers take their language seriously and that they speak it in as many different situations as possible. But above all, it is essential that the language be taught to children so that there can be new generations of native speakers and that the transmission of the language is not interrupted or broken. It is very easy to lose a language but extremely difficult to bring it back.

Troy: Well, Professor Paulsen, thank you very much for your very interesting words. It has been a pleasure talking to you and I hope that your expectations for the survival of the Frisian language turn out to be true. But before we finish, I have one more question for you, do you really eat green cheese in Fryslân?

Professor Paulsen: Ha ha!! No, we don't! The expression says 'green cheese' because of the similarity between the words in English and Frisian, but as far as I know, there is no green cheese in Fryslân. We do love cheese though, even blue cheese, but not green!

Choose the most appropriate answer according to the text. Only one answer is correct.

[0.25 points each correct answer Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.08 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

Clau de Respostes

1. How many Frisian speakers are there?

- Less than 400.000.
- **Just over 400.000.**
- There are 400.000 in Denmark.
- There are just over 400.000 monolingual speakers of Frisian.

2. In 1956...

- Frisian was declared an official language in Germany.
- the name of the language was changed to 'Fryslân'.
- Frisian was officially recognized as a 'country' language.
- **Frisian was given official status in Holland.**

3. What is the situation of Frisian in schools?

- it can only be taught in schools in remote rural areas.
- it is only taught at University.
- **it is taught in schools.**
- children can attend Frisian schools only on the islands.

4. In their relationship with the administration...

- Frisian speakers use Frisian exclusively.
- Frisian is never used.
- **people hardly every use Frisian.**

people use Frisian when they are accompanied by their family.

5. What is the presence of Frisian in the media?

- There is no Frisian TV or radio, but there are some Frisian newspapers.
- **There is no Frisian TV, but there is Frisian radio.**
- There are some newspapers that publish exclusively in Frisian.
- There are no media in Frisian.

6. According to Professor Paulsen, one of the threats to the survival of Frisian is...

- the fact that it has more speakers than Icelandic.
- **the fact that most Frisian speakers are bilingual.**
- the fact that most Frisian speakers watch TV and use the Internet.
- the fact that speaking Frisian distracts them from learning Dutch.

7. What is the most important thing that needs to be done to ensure the survival of Frisian?

- Frisian speakers must use their language in serious situations.
- The language needs to be taught by children.
- Frisian speakers need to lose the language and then bring it back.
- **The language must be taught to the new generations.**

8. Green cheese is...

- very popular in Fryslân and in England.
- **only part of a saying about the resemblance between Frisian and English.**
- only eaten in Fryslân but not in England.
- loved more than blue cheese in Fryslân