

# Pronouns of address in a job interview in Dutch and Frisian

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In the Dutch province of Friesland, the majority of inhabitants has Frisian as their first language alongside Dutch. The Frisian language is recognised as the second official language of the Netherlands and is strongly linked to Frisian identity and culture. Like Dutch, Frisian is a West Germanic language. One aspect that these languages have in common is that both make a distinction between formal (V; ‘u’ *you* in Dutch, and ‘jo’ *you* in Frisian) and informal (T; ‘je’ *you* or ‘jij’ *you* in Dutch, and ‘do’ *you* in Frisian) forms of address. However, works on Frisian grammar report that the way Frisian V and T, and Dutch V and T are used is not identical. Frisian V-forms are used more widely than Dutch V-forms (Tiersma 1999) and Frisian V is described as less formal than Dutch V (Popkema 2006). For example, Frisian speakers can use V with acquaintances living in the same village, whereas Dutch speakers would use T.

The differing rules for V and T in Frisian and Dutch mean that speakers of Frisian grow up with two languages which are culturally and regionally closely intertwined, but with different pragmatic “rules” of address. Previous studies have shown that speakers of a language with a V/T-distinction are sensitive to violations of the usage norms of V and T, and that these sensitivities differ between languages (den Hartog et al. 2024). In this study, we explore how the unique linguacultural context of Friesland affects Frisian speakers’ sensitivities to address practices. Given that Frisian people grow up with two languages with different norms for V/T-use, how do Frisian people respond to T and V in Dutch and Frisian? We performed an experiment to test Frisian speakers’ implicit and explicit preferences for V and T in Frisian and Dutch in a formal setting: a video-based job interview. 306 speakers of Frisian participated in the experiment, in one of four conditions. The interview was in Frisian or Dutch, and participants were addressed with V or T. Implicit preference for V or T was measured through ratings of the recruiters, the company, the job, and the expected salary. Participants were also explicitly

asked whether they would prefer to be addressed with V or T in a job interview.

First, our results show no main effect of T vs. V, but the recruiters, job, and company are rated more positively when the job interview is performed in Frisian. This finding reflects the positive attitude that Frisian speakers generally have towards their own language and culture. Second, we find that older speakers found the recruiters more agreeable when the recruiters used V (in Frisian and Dutch). The factor age as relevant to the choice between and effect of T vs. V has previously been found for Dutch (Van Zalk and Janssen 2004). Third, a majority of participants indicate an explicit preference for T in Frisian (86%) and Dutch (88%) in the context of a job interview. This is unexpected, since this does not reflect the more widespread use of V-forms in Frisian described in the literature. Overall, our results suggest that speakers' intuitions about V and T are highly similar in Frisian and Dutch, and more in line with Dutch than with previous descriptions of address practices Frisian. However, the explicit preference for having the job interview in Frisian hints at a conflict between explicit and implicit language behaviour within this group of speakers. We argue that the unique linguacultural situation in Friesland thus leads to particular pragmatic preferences which contrast with those found in other regions of the Netherlands.

## References

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## Gerbrich de Jong

Gerbrich de Jong studied Dutch and Frisian language and culture at the University of Groningen. She works as a teacher trainer of Frisian at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, Friesland.

Furthermore, she is an external PhD Candidate at Radboud University Nijmegen. She studies forms of address in the bilingual (Dutch and Frisian) province of Friesland, with special attention to indirect address, which is commonly used in Friesland.

### **Maria den Hartog**

Maria den Hartog is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Language Studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen. Her PhD project is about the effect of formal and informal pronouns of address (in Dutch: 'u' *you* and 'jij' *you*) on the person who is being addressed. She studies these effects in Dutch and in German using a wide range of methods: from questionnaires to cognitive and psycholinguistic measures in the lab such as EEG and eye tracking. She also has an interest in the historical background of the current address systems and investigates the diachronic aspects of address through corpus studies of Dutch and German 17<sup>th</sup> century newspapers.