

The Fryske Akademy and the University of Groningen are offering

Two PhD Positions in Linguistics

starting October 2026

The two PhD candidates will develop and carry out their own research projects within the overarching theme of language variation. Specifically, one project will focus on morpho-syntactic structures across West, East and North Frisian, while the other will focus on dialectology with the aim of creating new maps of linguistic variation in the language area Fryslân in the Netherlands.

The positions are jointly embedded at the University of Groningen and the research institute Fryske Akademy, providing a unique opportunity to undertake research supported by the complementary expertise and infrastructure of both institutions. During the appointment, candidates will work towards completing a doctoral dissertation and will devote 0.1 FTE to teaching activities. The supervisory team will consist of Fenna Bergsma (Fryske Akademy), Anne Merkuur (Fryske Akademy and University of Groningen) and Arjen Versloot (University of Groningen). The positions are appointed for four years, starting in October 2026 (or later by agreement). The successful candidates will be employed at the Fryske Akademy, with positions based in Leeuwarden (Fryske Akademy) and Groningen (Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen).

Eligibility

- Candidates hold an MA degree, preferably in the field of linguistics, computational sciences, social sciences or spatial sciences (for project 2).
- Candidates demonstrate a clear affinity with one or more Frisian languages.
- Candidates are able to operate in environments where Dutch and German serve as important source languages for academic information, and (for Project 1) for the execution of the project.
- For project 2: candidates have experience working with geographical information systems or are willing to acquire such skills through dedicated training during the first year.

Terms and conditions

- An employment contract for 4 years, with an initial one-year contract subject to evaluation.
- Employment and salary at the Fryske Akademy are in accordance with Dutch law and the CLA (in Dutch: CAO) UNL.
- A salary based on scale P, ranging from €3,059 (first year) to €3,881 (final year) gross per month.
- Additional benefits include a holiday allowance, a year-end bonus, travel expense reimbursement and a solid pension scheme.
- The PhD candidate will be based partly in Leeuwarden and partly in Groningen (approx. 40–60%), to be agreed in consultation.

More information?

For further information about these positions, please contact Prof Arjen Versloot (a.p.versloot@rug.nl).

Interested?

Candidates are invited to submit their application before 12:00 on August 24, 2026. Please send your application to wurkje@fryske-akademy.nl, with the subject line 'PhDs FA-RUG 2026'.

The application consists of:

- A CV.
- A motivation letter.
- One academic writing sample (e.g. MA thesis, BA thesis, publication, or other relevant paper).
- One letter of recommendation, to be sent directly to wurkje@fryske-akademy.nl.
- Copies of degree certificates and academic transcripts.
- An indication of which of the two PhD projects the candidate wishes to apply for, along with a research statement (500–1000 words) outlining their vision of the topic and proposed approach.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview in person (preferred) or online on Thursday, 3 September 2026.

*These positions are made possible thanks to the generous support of
Frysk Akademy Fûns.*

Recruitment agencies are kindly requested not to contact us regarding this vacancy.

RESILIENCE AND CHANGE IN FRISIAN ACROSS TIME, SPACE, AND SOCIETY

Background

Frisian languages, West Frisian (Netherlands), East Frisian (Germany), and North Frisian (Germany), share a common ancestor in Old Frisian. They have developed in multilingual environments, each in contact with different languages: Dutch, Low German, High German, and Danish.

Objectives

The two PhD projects in this overarching programme aim to identify how Frisian has changed over time: which features were most susceptible to contact-induced change, which features developed internally, and which Frisian-specific features, shared by the ancestor(s) of all Frisian varieties, have been preserved.

Relevance

The outcomes will contribute to various fields of linguistics. First, they will provide a more detailed description of Frisian varieties across time, space, and society. Second, the different contact settings and changing societal configurations will shed light on the mechanisms that drive language change and resilience.

This will not only deepen our theoretical understanding of language as a human expression of thought but may also help identify aspects of language instruction that require specific attention in multilingual contexts.

Approach

The two projects are complementary in their approaches, while sharing insights and linguistic topics that will serve as case studies in both. Language variation can be described along three dimensions: time, geographical space, and societal diversity, including factors such as social class, level of education, and exposure to and involvement in multilingual settings.

The first project will predominantly focus on the latter two dimensions, where 'space' is primarily understood in terms of three discrete units: West, East, and North Frisian. The historical dimension, relating to the origin of features in Old Frisian or to (early) forms of language contact, will serve as a one-dimensional background.

The second project will focus on the first two dimensions, taking the largest and best-attested Frisian variety, West Frisian, as its primary area of investigation, and

examining the interaction between geographical and diachronic dispersion of linguistic features.

Project Synergy

The added value of combining the two projects lies in their partial overlap in case studies and the mutual enrichment they offer. Each project can inform and strengthen the other. To this end, the projects will coordinate their selection of linguistic features and ensure that a relevant number of these are shared.

Project descriptions

The project descriptions below are intended as starting points rather than fixed plans and may be adjusted based on the interests and expertise of the successful candidate.

Project 1: Morpho-Syntactic Resilience in the Frisian Languages

Objectives

This project treats the Frisian languages as a connected language family and focuses on grammatical features and structures that were either inherited from the common ancestor or developed in parallel.

Approach

The project adopts a twofold approach: alongside linguistic description and interpretation, the presence and distribution of these features in current speaker populations will be studied from a sociolinguistic perspective. This includes both language-internal constraints and social contextual factors, such as the speaker's position within the speech community, attitudes towards Frisian, and a potential sense of identity expressed through language.

Empirical Focus

This PhD builds on a current pilot study in the Fryske Akademy on the two infinitives in Frisian (-e vs. -en) and moves beyond that to other features that make Frisian unique. It asks how these distinctive structures survive or develop(ed) in contact with neighbouring languages Dutch, Low and High German or Danish. The goal is to see which features remain stable, which are shifting, and what this tells us about language itself but also language identity.

The candidate can choose the project's main focus, for example:

- Weak/strong variants of the definite article
- Lacking past participle *ge-*

- The use of the suffix *-ens* to derive abstract nouns from adjectives
- Noun incorporation
- Two weak verb-class distinctions
- Pronoun systems with sets of stressed and unstressed allomorphs
- Final (de)voicing
- Directional particles

Methodology

The research preferably combines formal morpho-syntactic analysis with sociolinguistic insights and employs shared tools such as questionnaires, elicitation tasks, and corpus data. Fieldwork will be conducted in all three Frisian regions, supported by local experts. By comparing these varieties and linking structural patterns to social factors, the project will provide a clearer picture of contemporary Frisian morphosyntax and its interaction with identity and language contact.

Contribution

The project will contribute to a comparative account of Frisian grammar, as well as to the development of reusable research instruments and methods for future studies. It will also strengthen an emerging international network of Frisian researchers and lay the groundwork for long-term collaboration across regions and disciplines.

Project 2: A 21st-Century Dialect Atlas of Frisian

Background

Mapping regional variation in the West Frisian-speaking area has a long-standing tradition. In the 20th century, three large-scale dialect atlas projects were carried out: Hof (1933), Boelens & Van der Woude (1955), and the Goeman-Taeldeman-van Reenen project, the latter accessible through the FAND/MAND environment of the Meertens Instituut. Additionally, the Fryske Akademy holds data from dialect surveys conducted in the later decades of the 20th century, for which maps have been created but not further published. Several projects on language variation have been carried out in the 21st century, the results of which can be shared and visualized at a regional level.

Historical Data

The documentation of regional variation in West Frisian has even deeper roots. The Aardrijkskundig Genootschap collected data from multiple locations in Friesland in 1879 and 1895, covering both Frisian and non-Frisian varieties, and Theodor Siebs gathered Frisian data during his 1886 fieldwork. Moreover, it has been established that earlier authors of Frisian texts, including the scribes of late-medieval charters, did not rely on standardized spelling conventions but largely “wrote as they spoke,” using the spelling conventions of (Middle) Dutch of their time. These partly geolocated data can be extended

further back, with primarily chronologically interpretable material reaching to around 1200. As a result, certain aspects of Frisian can be traced over more than eight centuries in a nearly continuous stream of data. While many languages have earlier attestations, they often lack such diachronic continuity or show clear signs of standardization, which obscures patterns of actual language use.

Relevance

Regional variation in Frisian is thus exceptionally well documented historically. This is rare for a minority language community and offers a unique opportunity to examine the role and extent of regional variation alongside other factors contributing to language change and potential language loss. This project will investigate which linguistic features are disappearing and which are spreading, as well as the degree of geographical expression of homogeneous alternation versus dialectal contrast within the speech community, including possible shifts in spatial patterns over time. Where relevant, the influence of social background factors on the use of regional variants will also be considered. Likewise, understanding how features from the majority language Dutch spread across the speech community is essential for analyzing patterns of language change in Frisian.

Approach

The project will address these theoretical considerations by visualizing the spatial diffusion of linguistic forms across the region from a historical perspective, using existing data. Where feasible, additional data may be collected specifically for the project through methodologies based on citizen science.

Methodology & Contribution

Methods from dialectometry will be applied to analyze patterns of variation, and the resulting dialect maps will be developed as interactive tools. These will be made permanently accessible via the Fryske Akademy website as a new 21st-Century Dialect Atlas of Frisian.