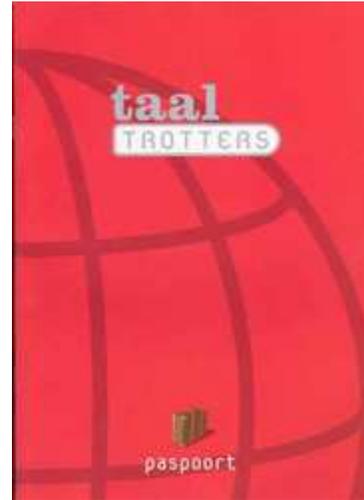


## TAALTROTTERS: *an educational program on multilingualism and linguistic diversity*

The Taaltrotters project was initiated by the Studio Taalwetenschap in Amsterdam (Studio Linguistics; [www.studiotaalwetenschap.nl](http://www.studiotaalwetenschap.nl)), in the framework of the European Year of Languages (2001). Taaltrotters was designed for pupils from ten to fifteen years, but can also be interesting for older pupils, teachers or interested adults. The program started with Dutch as language of instruction. In the framework of the project, an interactive movie of 50 minutes was made, and a booklet of 40 pages with information and assignments, called the "Taaltrotters passport", was published. This information was put on a cd-rom as well. After a while a Frisian version of the booklet, *It Fryske Taaltrotters Paspoart* was published. The Frisian booklet is the result of an intense co-operation between students of the Frisian colleges of higher education, the Fryske Akademy and the Stichting Studio Taalwetenschap.



### Aims of the project

For the project, clear aims were formulated. Taaltrotters aims to enlarge the linguistic awareness of children and to gain insight in the similarities and dissimilarities in structure between languages. To know about more and lesser-known languages, including modern western languages, as well as the languages of immigrants, minority languages and dialects. Moreover, the project can lead to insights favouring a better understanding of second language learning problems. The designers of the Taaltrotters program want children and youngsters to enjoy playing with and learning about language, to create feelings of pride towards their language. In the view of the makers of Taaltrotters, the multilingual western societies simply require educational programs based on cross-linguistic presentations.

### Content

Taaltrotters deals with the core properties of grammar: phonology, morphology, syntax and more grammar-peripheral topics like child language and sociolinguistics.

The story: four pupils are sent out of the classroom for disturbing the dictation given by the teacher; they must come back in an hour's time with something new about language: something which is new to the teacher. The pupils indeed come up with something the teacher does not have: a number of languages other than Standard Dutch. A Surinamese girl speaks Sranantongo and Dutch with a typical Surinamese accent; a Flemish girl speaks Dutch as spoken in Flanders, and French; a boy from Rotterdam knows all about street-language and sign language (his brother is deaf); and a Turkish boy speaks Turkish, Dutch and Frisian. In addition, there is a boy from Morocco speaking Berber and Dutch with the accent of the city of Tilburg; and finally, there is the deaf brother who uses Dutch sign language.

The vowel systems differ among languages; some languages, like Dutch, have many vowels, other, like Arabic, have just a few. Almost every language makes use of the vowels /a/, /u/ and /i/. How to explain this distribution? In order to understand this vocalic diversity, pupils can navigate in the Taaltrotters program a cursor through the shapes of a mouth.

The Berber-speaking boy tells a joke in Dutch-Berber, i.e., in sentences with Dutch words but shaped according to the syntax of Berber. In less than no time the pupil recognizes some of the basic syntactic principles of language, concerning word order and head-dependent relations. Taaltrotters in West Frisian

The Topics were determined by the Dutch booklet for the sake of good linking, but also by the position of Frisian as a minority language in the Netherlands along Dutch as the majority

language. Therefore the subjects Phonology, Syntax / Word Order, Language Music and Language Diversity in the Netherlands were maintained. However, within these subjects, the focus was on differences between Frisian and Dutch. Of course those differences are not unique; we also see them in other languages, and so we could point out to other language phenomena as well. In other words: focusing on the properties of a specific other language gives new opportunities in comparing languages and language properties. Some examples:

- Phonological rules: Dutch does not have nasalization and syllabification, but Frisian does. Dutch (at least in the western and southern part) drops the – n of verbal and plural endings in - en but Frisian, just like for example Slavic languages, has syllabification where nasals and liquidae are also syllabified.
- Morphology: Frisian has two classes of verbs: the infinitive ends on – e or – je . The verbs of the – e- group do resemble the Dutch verbs, which end on - en , but the conjugation of the – je - class is quite different. Also: not every language has the same amount of conjugation endings (South African: 1, English: 2, French: 6). This gives you another aspect for comparing languages: does a certain language use a lot or just a few conjugation affixes? Children are invited to compare languages regarding this aspect and to place them on an axis running from a few to a lot of endings.
- Vowel inventory. A characteristic feature of Frisian is its large vowel inventory. The system contains nine short vowels, nine long vowels, a lot of diphthongs and some triphthongs: all together some thirty-five. So Frisian does not match the schedule of vowel inventory of the Dutch booklet. In this way, pupils have to discover that the vowel inventory of various languages can differ in size.

Exhibitions

The Taaltrotters-movie has been exhibited in museums and public libraries since March 2002 in the cities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Tilburg, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Brussels, Purmerend, Ljouwert and Sittard in the Netherlands and will possibly be shown on Curacao (Dutch Antilles) after the summer of 2005 as well. Presently the possibilities of bringing out cd-rom versions in other languages like English, German and Papiamentu are examined.

The Taaltrotters project received an award from the Dutch National Research School for Linguistics (LOT), the “Populariseringsprijs 2003”, and very recently the European Language-Label 2004.

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