J.H. Halbertsma als lexicograaf: studies over het Lexicon Frisicum (1872)

Dijkstra, A.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
J.H. Halbertsma as a lexicographer

Studies on the *Lexicon Frisicum* (1872)

The *Lexicon Frisicum* may be regarded as Joost Hiddes Halbertsma's *magnum opus*, in spite of the fact that it remained uncompleted. He worked on it until his death in 1869. It was posthumously published by his son Tjalling in 1872. Halbertsma wanted his dictionary to contain all present and past varieties of Frisian. For Old and Middle Frisian and also for North Frisian (spoken in Germany), he had to rely on lexicographic descriptions and text editions. It appears that he did not nearly include all the available material into his dictionary. Since there were no Modern Frisian dictionaries or word lists and hardly any written contemporary sources, he had to collect nineteenth century Frisian language material by himself. He took his field work quite seriously and he carefully selected his informants. Fairly soon in his linguistic and lexicographic career, he pointed out problems and pitfalls of field work that are still relevant today. In fact, he described Labov’s famous ‘observer’s paradox’ as early as 1862.

Halbertsma thought that everyday natural language should be the object of linguistics and lexicography, rather than the bookish, elitist language of the upper classes. So it was only natural for him to include a great deal of sexual language into his dictionary. Yet his lexicographic manuscripts show that he had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards sexual language. We see that he prefers Latin to Dutch when he describes taboo words and expressions. It would seem that there would have been far less sexual language in the *Lexicon Frisicum* had its metalanguage not been Latin.

Jacob Grimm and Matthias the Vries, lexicographers and contemporaries of Halbertsma, declared themselves respectively in favour of and against Latin in their dictionaries. Grimm wanted his dictionary to be accessible to both German and international users, while De Vries aimed at a Dutch target group. Like Grimm, Halbertsma chose for an international target group, and thus for Latin. Contemporaries as well as late nineteenth century linguists and others criticized Halbertsma's choice of Latin as the metalanguage of the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Latin in the nineteenth century had lost its position as the international language of scholarship and it made the *Lexicon Frisicum* inaccessible to the majority of Frisians. Another objection was that (classical)
Latin was unsuitable for the meaning description of modern Frisian words. Halbertsma was aware of the fact that Latin would cause problems. In the dictionary itself, however, he did not always try to avoid problems that his readers might encounter. His meaning descriptions are unsystematic. Halbertsma in the *Lexicon Frisicum* uses labels to inform his readers about the parts of speech of the lemmata, be it that he does not do this in a very systematic way. In the *Lexicon Frisicum* we find the parts of speech that Weiland gave in his 1805 Dutch grammar. Besides, the *Lexicon Frisicum* has labels for proper names and productive word endings.

With his dictionary Halbertsma wanted to further the etymological knowledge of the Germanic languages. We may say that his mission was successful, if only because he gave so many Germanic variants. He was not satisfied with the role that Frisian played in international linguistics, while, according to him, Frisian was essential to solve many etymological problems. He wanted to prove his point in various publications, and, especially, in his dictionary. He considered himself as someone who had seen the new etymological light that started to shine in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless his unsystematic and speculative way of etymologizing was criticized immediately after the publication of the *Lexicon Frisicum*.

Halbertsma in his dictionary did show that he was aware of the Germanic sound shift, even if he also presented sound shifts that could not bear the ‘new light’. His struggle to establish the etymology of Frisian *tsjoene* (‘work charms’), in the *Lexicon Frisicum* we find different etymologies of this verb on different pages, goes to show that he was not yet past the stadium of speculative etymology. On the other hand, he presented many correct etymologies.

Halbertsma’s approach resembles Grimm’s. In the *Lexicon Frisicum* he often seems to be after the internal relationship between meanings in Frisian, its dialects and historical varieties of Frisian and other Germanic and Indo-Germanic languages. The etymological component is in many articles rather limited. He does not compensate etymologically ‘meagre’ articles by giving extensive semantic information. Often, he merely gives Latin heteronym definitions, which regularly leave his readers out in the cold. His strong inclination to associate did not do much good to the internal system of the dictionary articles.

It does not seem to have been Halbertsma’s goal to present all lemmata in a natural context. Too often he fails to give example sentences or citations to illustrate and clarify the meanings of a lemma. Regularly, he gives citations without (full) acknowledgement of their sources. As a result, the *Lexicon Frisicum* in many cases does not meet the scholarly criterion of verification. Moreover, he so often misquotes his sources, that it is not safe to quote a source directly from the dictionary.
Halbertsma in his publications and in his manuscripts showed a constant interest in the relationship between English and Frisian. He wanted to demonstrate that Frisian was the origin of English. So, it comes as no surprise that English in all its phases has a prominent place in the *Lexicon Frisicum*. The relatively large number of English examples and citations immediately strikes the eye. In the heads of the articles, but also in the semantic part, Halbertsma gives words from other languages that are etymologically related to Frisian forms. Here too, we see a strong preference for Old, Middle and Modern English forms. Sometimes, he fails to point out the relationship between Frisian and English where he could easily have done so, or actually should have done so. He made insufficient use of the possibility to juxtapose Frisian and English with Dutch and German. He was particularly focussed on Frisian-English innovations that are still manifest in Modern Frisian. In spite of the focus in the *Lexicon Frisicum* on English, he did not totally convince the user of his dictionary of the correctness of his thesis that Frisians had a larger part in the invasion of England than generally assumed.

Nineteenth century dictionaries are considered as utterances of cultural nationalism. For a number of reasons, this qualification is not directly applicable to the *Lexicon Frisicum*. First of all, the (ordinary) Frisians do not belong to the target group of the dictionary, and, secondly, Halbertsma’s ideas about spelling do not comply with the prevailing urge to standardize languages. Nonetheless, when we look at its contents, the *Lexicon Frisicum* may very well be regarded as an exponent of cultural nationalism. For one thing, the *Lexicon Frisicum* pays ample attention to the rich history and culture of Friesland. Some example sentences clearly show Halbertsma’s romantic idealisation of the Frisians and their character.

Though Tjalling in his preface praises Halbertsma for his knowledge and commitment, criticism prevails. Tjalling considers the design of the dictionary far too ambitious. He thinks that the lack of a clear-cut plan is a major reason for the slow progression of the *Lexicon Frisicum*. Not only does he criticize his father’s choice of Latin as the dictionary’s metalanguage, he also points out that his father’s Latin was not without flaws. Tjalling puts his finger on more shortcomings in the *Lexicon Frisicum*, like its inconsequent spelling, its poor accessibility and Halbertsma’s inclination to stray from his subject and to give irrelevant data. All things considered, Tjalling’s final judgement of his father’s unfinished life’s work is negative.

On the basis of the studies presented in this book, I cannot but agree with Tjalling’s negative judgement. Yet it appears from Halbertsma’s indirect involvement in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal* that he clearly had sound ideas on the production of a large dictionary.