

Schwa deletion and Final Devoicing in West Frisian

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West Frisian (WF) is a West Germanic language spoken in the north of the Netherlands, mainly in the province of Fryslân. Like other Germanic languages, WF has final devoicing and schwa deletion in final *-ən*. These two rules interact opaquely: schwa elision does not lead to final devoicing. To account for this, we argue that final devoicing in Frisian is a word-level process, instead of a syllable-level process.

Final Devoicing

WF final devoicing applies to /b d g v z ʏ/, which become [p t k f s x] in word-final position (Visser 1997,1998; Tiersma 1999:26).

(1)	krab	/kra:b/	→	[kra:p]	‘crab’	dôf	/dɔ:v/	→	[dɔ:f]	‘deaf’
	read	/rɪəd/	→	[rɪət]	‘red’	gniis	/gni:z/	→	[gni:s]	‘grin.1SG’
						mich	/mɪʏ/	→	[mɪx]	‘fly’

Devoicing interacts with other rules. For instance, obstruent clusters must agree in voicing as in [ra:zdən] ‘rush.PAST.PLUR.’ or [li:ɣdən] ‘lied’. Notice that this example suggests that there are surface exceptions to final devoicing (see also Visser 1998). Alternatively, it could be possible that final devoicing does not occur at the syllable level. For instance, Tiersma (1999:26) observes that in words like *mooglijk* ‘possible’, the syllable-final fricative is voiced [mo:ɣlik], and also before the diminutive suffix, devoicing does not occur (given minimal pairs as [barxjə] ‘small pig’ and [barɣjə] ‘spill, act as a pig’). In this presentation, we show that there is another context in which final devoicing does not apply, namely if schwa in final *-ən* is deleted.

Schwa deletion

WF has homophonous suffixes *-ən* for the nominal plural, verbal plural, past participle, and gerund, and also has roots that end in *-ən*. In all of these contexts, schwa is usually deleted, resulting in a “syllabic” nasal (Cohen 1959:124, Riemersma 1979, Tiersma 1999:25-26, Visser 1997: Chapter 6).

- (2) *beiden* [bɛidŋ] ‘both’ *te litten* [ɦitŋ] ‘let.GER’
leden [leidŋ] ‘member.PLUR’ *praten hat* [pra:tŋ hɛt] ‘has spoken’

We will present phonetic evidence for the claims that the vowel is completely deleted and that the plosive is truly voiced. The resulting plosive is unreleased:

- (3) *iepen* [iəp̚m] ‘open’ *libben* [lɪb̚m] ‘life’
litten [lit̚ŋ] ‘let.PLUR’ *riden* [ri:d̚ŋ] ‘ride, drive.PLUR’.
boeken [bu:k̚ŋ] ‘book.PLUR’

Unreleased obstruents cross-linguistically arise in coda position and syllabic consonants usually do not have onsets (see other work in progress). This suggests that in words like *libben* [lɪb̚m] ‘life’ the [b] is in syllable-final position and does not undergo final devoicing, leading to surface opacity. We explore a number of ways to deal with this problem, including the use of rule ordering and limiting the domain of the rule to the syllable level.

References

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