

The evolution of language demands in Friesland: A comparative approach

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The Czech historian Miroslav Hroch provides a useful categorisation of the stages in the development of language demands of national movements among speakers of non-dominant languages in Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries. I make use of his model, which distinguishes five, partly overlapping stages, to roughly establish the evolution of the national movement in the Dutch part of Friesland, which, since its emergence during the first half of the 19th century, was almost exclusively dominated by the language issue (in an earlier period, strikingly enough, language was never listed among the demands made by Frisian patriots).

Measuring the evolution of the language demands made by the protagonists of what was called the Frisian Movement by means of Hroch's model, we find that during the 19th century in the case of the Frisian Movement language demands slowly passed through the model's first two stages, as well as a small part of the third one. This performance can be described as modest in comparison to the linguistic programme developed by national movements among the speakers of most other non-dominant languages in Europe. During the first decades of the 20th century the third stage in the evolution of Frisian language demands was completed, though, and some headway was being made in the fourth stage as well. This fourth stage, which entails entering the field of politics, has not been completed up till now. The fifth, highly political stage, has been covered for a small part only.