

FEL XII – The 12th annual conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages

A report by *Christopher Moseley, Treasurer, Foundation for Endangered Languages*

This year, 2008, the Foundation for Endangered Languages was back on European soil for its 12th annual conference, after a long succession of conferences on continents more far-flung from its British base. This was possible thanks to the collaboration of our hosts the Fryske Akademy in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, and the Mercator European Research Centre, also based there. The common element in these three organising bodies was the presence of Tjeerd de Graaf, a long-standing member of the FEL committee. The task of editing the Proceedings volume was also a collaborative effort between the three bodies: it fell to Tjeerd, to Nicholas Ostler of FEL, and Reinier Salverda of Fryske Akademy.

This year's conference theme was 'Endangered Languages and Language Learning' and as always it drew on the skills of a very widely-spread team of contributors. It is always gratifying and amazing to see from how far afield the submissions of papers for our conferences come. The task of winnowing the contributions to fit into a fairly tight three-day programme was as hard as ever this year, as the standard of the papers was very high.

Our Keynote Speakers dealt first with a Frisian theme – the case of institutional support for North Frisian in Germany, by Alastair Walker, and secondly with an international comparison of language teaching policies, with Prof. Maya Khemlani David (organiser of the FEL conference in Malaysia in 2007) contrasting the situations in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Lastly the keynote speakers looked at European minority languages generally (Durk Gorter) and a further set of examples reviewed in terms of "language documentation and pedagogy" by David Nathan and Meili Fang. During the opening session Cecilia Odé presented an interactive e-learning module with teaching materials on Endangered Languages.

Interspersed between these keynote speakers was a crammed programme of papers dealing with the learning and teaching of minority languages in countries as diverse as the USA, Cyprus, Siberian Russia, China, Tajikistan, Scotland, Morocco, the Basque country, the Channel Islands, Italy and Canada, among others. But what was most striking on the programme was the amount of attention devoted to languages spoken in diaspora communities, whether it be Yiddish, Kurdish, Malayalam or Rotuman. As an FEL member I found this contrast between home-country education of minorities and language maintenance in expatriate communities especially stimulating.

Despite the tight schedule of papers, there was time for the participants to get to know Friesland as well. We had two enjoyable excursions, which neatly broke up the indoor proceedings, firstly to Snits/Sneek, a Frisian maritime town with a fine seafaring museum, which culminated in a very pleasant evening boat cruise; and, for those staying on after the conference, a visit to the Frisian Museum in Ljouwert followed by a trip to the town of Workum, which housed the rather quirky Jopie Huisman museum and where a delicious lunch was laid on for us.

All in all a very well planned and executed conference, and on behalf of FEL I congratulate our hosts – who were also thoughtful in suggesting and providing excellent local accommodation in Ljouwert, and kept us well fed and watered between sessions – as well as thanking their sponsors, Friesland bank and the Netherlands Royal Academy of Sciences.