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The Mercator newsletter informs you about the news of the five Mercator Network partners:

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Newsletter focusing on multilingual regions dealing with regional or minority languages, but also immigrant languages and smaller state languages, with emphasis on language needs arising from migration and globalisation. Submit your subscription request, comments or suggestions to: **Richard de Boer** (Fryske Akademy).

## NEWS

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## NEWS

### **Both Skype and Google Translate develop real-time translation app**

Last month, Skype, Microsoft's video calling service, initiated simultaneous translation between English and Spanish speakers. Not to be outdone, Google will soon announce updates to its translation app for phones. Google Translate now offers written translation of 90 languages and the ability to hear spoken translations of a few popular languages. In the update, the app will automatically recognize if someone is speaking a popular language and automatically turn it into written text.



Feeding the "corpus," as linguistics engineers call their database of language, has become critical for some countries as well as for the sake of machine learning. Google, which uses human translation to initiate its service, recently added Kazakh after a government official went on television to ask people to help out. "People can ask very, very strongly that we put their language on the service," Mr. Hughes said.

"The technology is potentially magical, but the threats are real too," said Kelly Fitzsimmons, co-founder of the Hypervoice Consortium, which researches the future of communication. "What would it mean to have a corpus of conversations after there is regime change, and a new government doesn't like what you said?"

Source: [New York Times](#) (11 January 2015)

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## Lexicographic conference tackles the standardising of minority languages



On 17 April 2015, the Fryske Akademy is organizing a one-day international conference that will be tackling the role of lexicography in standardisation and purification of lesser used languages.

The Frisian language is one of those. As an emancipating language in the Netherlands, Frisian is acquiring new functions and penetrating into new societal domains, or into domains that are traditionally reserved for the dominant Dutch language. Therefore, it needs new terminology. Dictionaries may play an important role in reinforcing a language, in language codification and language

standardisation. At the same time, making dictionaries triggers critical issues in the lexicographic practice of lesser used languages such as Frisian.

For lexicographers, one of the most pregnant issues is the choice between a loan word and a purism, between an internationalism or a native word, or to put it sharply, between reality and artificiality. Lexicographers and lexicologists from Wales, Ireland, Belgium, Estonia, the Basque Country and the Netherlands will give lectures and discuss these issues at a one-day conference in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.

For more information contact Frits van der Kuip (Fryske Akademy) by [e-mail](#).

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## Only 5% of Valencia parents vote in school language referendum

FEWER than 5% of parents in the Valencia region have voted on which language they want their children to be taught in – but many more say they tried to do so and found it impossible.

Whilst the Federation of PTAs is calling for the regional education minister to resign over the ‘ridiculous level of participation’ in the public consultation, many parents say they were given incorrect passwords for the system or that the information was not supplied in time.

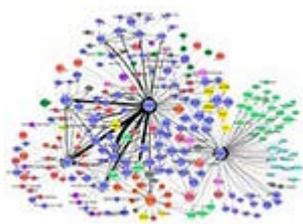


A survey was launched online with just a few days' notice of the Friday deadline asking mums and dads with children in schools in the provinces of Castellón, Valencia and the northern half of Alicante to choose between two potential tri-lingual structures of curriculum. Both would involve 20% of subjects being taught in English, then 30% in the regional tongue, valenciano and 50% in Castilian Spanish, or the other way around. Out of the 312,000 pupils, 95% of their parents or guardians did not vote.

Source: [thinkSPAIN](#) (23 December 2014)

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## Want to influence the world? Map reveals the best languages to speak



Speak or write in English, and the world will hear you. Speak or write in Tamil or Portuguese, and you may have a harder time getting your message out. Now, a new method for mapping how information flows around the globe identifies the best languages to spread your ideas far and wide. One hint: If you're considering a second language, try Spanish instead of Chinese.

The study was spurred by a conversation about an untranslated book, says Shahar Ronen, a Microsoft program manager whose Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) master's thesis formed the basis of the new work. A bilingual Hebrew-English speaker from Israel, he told his MIT adviser, César Hidalgo (himself a Spanish-English speaker), about a book written in Hebrew whose translation into English he wasn't yet aware of. "I was able to bridge a certain culture gap because I was multilingual," Ronen says. He began thinking about how to create worldwide maps of how multilingual people transmit information and ideas.

Ronen and co-authors from MIT, Harvard University, Northeastern University, and Aix-Marseille

University tackled the problem by describing three global language networks based on bilingual tweeters, book translations, and multilingual Wikipedia edits. In all three networks, English has the most transmissions to and from other languages and is the most central hub, the team reports online in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#). But the maps also reveal “a halo of intermediate hubs,” according to the paper, such as French, German, and Russian, which serve the same function at a different scale.

Source: [Science](#) (AAAS) (15 December 2014)

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## Northern Ireland: Legal bid lost for Irish signs on Belfast street

A High Court judge has thrown out a legal bid to overturn a council block on putting Irish signs up on a Belfast street, the [Irish Times](#) reported on 4 December 2014. Mr Justice Horner dismissed all grounds of challenge to the denial of dual-language plates at Ballymurphy Drive in the west of the city. He rejected claims that it was unreasonable to have a policy requiring a two-thirds majority of households to declare themselves in favour of a second street name.



“Unfortunately, in Northern Ireland’s deeply divided society, many on each side of the political and cultural divide, rightly or wrongly, see the other’s language, whether it be Irish or Ulster Scots, as associating that community with a particular political point of view,” the judge said. “In those circumstances, it cannot be unreasonable to require clear and convincing evidence on the part of those who occupy the street that they want an additional street name plate in another language apart from English.”

Lawyers for Ballymurphy Drive resident Eileen Reid argued that the refusal was unlawful and in breach of an obligation to promote Irish. Out of 92 eligible residents on the street canvassed by Belfast City Council, 52 confirmed they wanted Irish signs, with only one opposed. But because the other 39 did not respond to the survey, the two-thirds requirement was not met.

Meanwhile, it was announced that proposals for an Irish language act in Northern Ireland are to be published [next month](#).

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## CEFR digital student tracking system for Frisian Language and Culture



Frisian Language and Culture is a compulsory subject in primary and lower secondary education in the province of Fryslân in the Netherlands. Together with the Inspectorate of Education, schools concluded that proper evaluation of the learning progress of pupils is currently rare, whereas it ought to be an essential part of education.

A consortium of two vocational universities, an organization for educational support and an educational publisher started a new two year project in 2014 with the aim to develop a digital student tracking system which incorporates a range of evaluation instruments. These instruments are for all grades and they can be used for evaluating speaking and writing activities and for assessing grammar. Results of evaluations will be presented per student, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Self-assessment will also be possible, as well as keeping track of the learning progress via an electronic portfolio.

The electronic system will become a module of an electronic learning environment that was recently successfully introduced in secondary education and which will be introduced in primary education in 2016. A temporary website in Dutch is available and will shortly be renewed, see: [www.evaluaasjesysteemfrysk.nl](http://www.evaluaasjesysteemfrysk.nl).

For more information, please contact [Wim de Boer](#) of Afûk.

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## Endangered Languages in Europe: Your Complete Guide

In fact, only a fraction of Europe’s languages are officially listed as the languages of the European Union and some of them are right on the brink of extinction, from northern French dialects spoken by

some 100,000 speakers to indigenous Scandinavian tongues with only a handful of fluent speakers.

GoEuro travel blog teamed up with Dr. Christopher Moseley, author of the [UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger](#), to guide you through the world of minority languages in Europe. The travel blog focused on languages that have been deemed severely or critically endangered by UNESCO.

See here: <http://blog.goeuro.co.uk/endangered-languages/>

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## Expert of the Month December/January: Mirjam Vellinga



**Mirjam Vellinga** is project manager for the language promotion division at the Afûk, which is the organisation in Fryslân that promotes the Frisian language and culture.

"One of the major challenges in my field of work is to convince and educate the Frisian people that they can use their language proudly, in any circumstance they wish or want," Mirjam says. "We (Frisians) all tend to have a bit of an inferiority complex, but we also hate it when someone tells us what to do..."

Read more about [Mirjam Vellinga](#).

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## INTERESTING LINKS

**If we lose our language, we lose everything': the politics of the Kurdish language in Turkey.** With recent breakthroughs in Kurdish education, is the language now opening up?, Yvo Fitzherbert asks.

**The Amazigh of Libya revive their previously banned language** A new generation of Amazigh are discovering their revived minority language that managed to survive despite being banned under Gaddafi, Karlos Zurutuza reports for *Middle East Eye*.

**Is the bilingual advantage a hoax?** According to researcher Angela de Bruin of Edinburgh University, it comes down to selective publishing.

New book: **Language Policy in Higher Education**, edited by F. Xavier Vila and Vanessa Bretxa. See also [here](#).

**Learning a language helps me talk back to the voice of depression**, an anonymous blogger reveals in *The Guardian's* series *The case for language learning*.

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## EVENTS

**25 February 2015, Perugia (IT): More Than One Language in the Brain: Acquisition and Coexistence**, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Perugia, Italy.

**27 February 2015, Bozen/Bolzano (IT): Protecting and including "new" and "old" minorities: challenges, synergies**, EURAC, South Tyrol, Italy.

**2-3 March 2015, Berlin (DE): Economics, Linguistic Justice and Language Policy**, symposium at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany.

**16-19 March 2015, Berlin (DE): Urban fragmentation(s): Borders & Identity III**, Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany.

**27 March 2015, Ghent (BE): Sociolinguistics Circle 2015**, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium.

One-day conference for sociolinguistics with a connection to the Low Countries.

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**13-15 April 2015, Mainz (DE): Multilingualism in Baltic-Sea Europe**, interdisciplinary conference at Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz, Germany.

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**17 April 2015, Leeuwarden (NL): The Role of Lexicography in Standardisation and Purification of Lesser Used Languages**, international conference at Fryske Akademy, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.

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**19-23 May 2015, Teramo (IT): First Worldwide Congress for Language Rights**, XIV International Conference of the International Academy of Linguistic Law, IX Days of Language Rights, Teramo, Italy.

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**20-24 May 2015, New Brunswick (USA): International Symposium on Bilingualism**, New Brunswick, NY, USA.

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**22-23 May 2015, Egmond aan Zee (NL): Anéla Applied Linguistics Conference 2015**, Egmond aan Zee, The Netherlands.

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**27-29 May, Leipzig (DE): International Conference on Language Variation in Europe**, Leipzig, Germany.

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**28-29 May 2015, Joensuu (FI): Receptive Multilingualism: Multilingual Resources in Service of Mutual Understanding**, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland.

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**28-30 May 2015, Belgrade (RS): XV International Conference on Minority Languages**, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, Serbia. Call deadline 31 December 2014.

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**3-6 June 2015, Hong Kong (CN): The Sociolinguistics of Globalization: (De)centring and (de)standardization**, The School of English, University of Hong Kong, China.

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**18-20 June 2015, Leiden (NL): Globalising Sociolinguistics**, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands. Call deadline 15 December 2014.

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**1-4 July 2015, Valencia (ES): 12th International Symposium of Psycholinguistics**, Universitat de València, Spain. Call deadline 15 February 2015.

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**2-3 July 2015, Tours (FR): Bi-SLI 2015: Bilingualism and Specific Language Impairment**, Tours, France. Call deadline 1 February 2015.

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**26-31 July 2015, Antwerp (BE): Complex Linguistic Repertoires and Minority Languages in Immigrant Communities**, Antwerp, Belgium.

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**31 July 2015, Cambridge (UK): 5th Cambridge Conference on Language Endangerment**, University of Cambridge. Call deadline 1 April 2015.

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**14-17 September 2015, Barcelona (ES): 4th Barcelona Summer School on Bilingualism and Multilingualism Workshop**, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain.

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**23-26 November 2015, Auckland (NZ): 4th International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity (LED 2015)**, University of Auckland, New Zealand. Call deadline 1 February 2015.

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