



Low Saxon in the Netherlands:

Efforts put into protecting, promoting and stimulating the language after signing covenant

‘Nedersaksisch’

MA Thesis

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Abstract

Low Saxon is an official regional language in the Netherlands. In October 2018, the national government and the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and Gelderland signed the covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’ in which they agreed to cooperate to protect, promote and stimulate Low Saxon. This study is about the effort provincial governments and language organizations put into protecting the language. Interviews were held to gain insight into the use of Low Saxon in the provinces and into the activities that were organized. Content analysis was used to gain insight into regional language use by provinces and teaching materials for primary school. Results showed that provinces recognize Low Saxon as a full-fledged language and take care of financing projects. Language organizations organize Low Saxon related activities and design teaching materials. Low Saxon does not have priority in Provincial Councils and almost no analyzed documents contain Low Saxon. In teaching materials, the language is well implemented. Furthermore, this study confirms that speaking Low Saxon evokes positive feelings and connects people. Protecting and promoting Low Saxon seems to be going well, but it is clear that they are still in the start-up phase.

Keywords: Low Saxon, covenant, provinces, language organizations, efforts

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1. Introduction

The motion to speak Low Saxon in the Provincial Council meetings during the dialect month of March 2021 has been passed, announced VVD Overijssel on Twitter on July 1 2020. In this way attention is drawn to the dialect month, but also to the use of Low Saxon.

Recently, much attention is paid to minority languages in the Netherlands and abroad. The United Nations proclaimed the year 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, with the intention to raise awareness of the endangered languages in the world (Visser, 2020). Languages disappear. It is generally known that ‘language lives’, but currently languages are dying rapidly (Beijen, 2019). Tehuelche, the language in Patagonia, Argentina, died when Dora Manchado passed away on the 4th of January 2020 (Visser, 2020). It is simple: languages die when people stop speaking them. That has to do with the literal dying of the last speakers of a language and with education, or the lack of education of that specific indigenous language. Sometimes it is not allowed to speak that specific language anymore or people do not want to teach it to their children. Reker, regional language officer (*streektaalfunctionaris* Groningen), described regional language as ‘a language with bad luck’ (Kok, 2001). Bilingualism where the second language is a minority language is associated with a low social status (Kroon & Liebrand, 1983; Swanenberg, 2019; Visser, 2020; Wight, 1971). Bilingualism where both languages are major languages is seen as a normal situation and is associated with high status. Speakers of standard language achieve a significantly higher level of education, dialect influences the performances at school (Klomp, 2018; Kroon & Liebrand, 1983; Visser, 2020; Wight, 1971).

Moreover, globalization, economic development, migration, mobility, television and radio make the endangered languages disappear (Beijen, 2019; Visser, 2020).

It seems that almost all regional languages and dialects in the Netherlands are disappearing. Sometimes the opposite happens: Jansen and Van Oostendorp concluded in 2004 that *Amelands* was reviving among young people.

Today, more attention is being paid to dialects and minority languages. In North-Brabant in the south of the Netherlands, a ‘dialect renaissance’ took place in the last fifty years (Swanenberg, 2009). Cornips, professor of Language culture (*Taalcultuur*), in Limburg remains hopeful. She states that language is developing: nowadays, people use dialects and regional languages on Whatsapp (Van der Meer, 2019).

What is the situation in the Netherlands? Are regional (minority) languages disappearing or flourishing? What kind of language policy do governments in the Netherlands have?

According to Visser (2020), there are 6, 28 or over 613 dialects in the Netherlands, depending on where the line is drawn. It is difficult to distinguish between dialects, because they often overlap and are not clearly defined. This research is therefore focused on officially recognized languages in the Netherlands.

Four officially recognized languages exist in the Netherlands at the moment: standard Dutch (or *Standaardnederlands*), Frisian (or *Fries*), Low Saxon (or *Nedersaksisch*) and Limburgish (or *Limburgs*). Local governments and authorities can decide in what ways they will promote their local language, for example in education and documents (Van Dinther, 2018). This applies to Limburgish since November 2019. Low Saxon was already recognized (again) in October 2018 (see next paragraph). Regional administrators have had a year and a half to implement the language in education and documents. In addition, the parties will evaluate the

developments within two years of its entry. Results about implementing the language should be noticeable and observable by now. That is why this research is focused on Low Saxon, the official name of the regional language spoken in the provinces of Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and small parts in Gelderland and Friesland as seen on Figure 1.

Figure 1

Language area of Low Saxon and its dialects



Note. There are various forms within the language.

1.1 Low Saxon in the Netherlands

Dutch Low Saxon must be seen in a European context. The manifesto *Europees handvest voor regionale of minderheidstalen* (European Charter for regional or minority languages) was designed to protect and promote minority languages in Europe. The cultural diversity has contributed to the construction of Europe and must be preserved (Bloemhoff, Bloemhoff-de Bruijn, Nijen Twilhaar, Nijkeuter & Scholtmeijer, 2019). It was signed in 1992 by a large number of EU-countries, including the Netherlands. From that moment on, the governments could submit languages for European recognition, Part II or Part III. Low Saxon was submitted for part II and was officially recognized on March 1, 1998 (Bloemhoff et al., 2019; Ministry of

the Interior and Kingdom Relations [MIKR], 2018). Part II generally implies that governments should create a positive feeling towards using and protecting regional languages. With this the government recognizes the regional language as an enrichment for Dutch culture heritage and provinces and municipalities can make their own policy for Low Saxon (Rijksoverheid, 2018). Part II is about promoting a language.

Part III is different and more attractive if one wants to protect a regional language: when a language is recognized as a language in Part III, it has to meet at least 35 requirements regarding education, public services, media, culture and social life. This applies to Frisian (Van der Meer, 2019).

Politicians have long fought for the application of Part III for Low Saxon, but it was and is not yet feasible in the current political situation. There is a fear of far-reaching commitments (Bloemhoff et al., 2019). Efforts are still being made to be recognized in Part III.

This manifesto means that, in 1998, Low Saxon was already recognized as a language. It was already allowed to use the language in schools and official documents. Local governments already had the task of promoting and protecting it. Low Saxon is an old tradition, which must be continued. For this reason, it is important to stimulate and strengthen the image of Low Saxon, so that older generations are motivated to pass their language on to young people and that young people are open to learning the language. About twenty years have passed since the recognition of Low Saxon. In 2018, the provinces thought it was time for a renewal of that acknowledgement to encourage people to speak it again and to give the image of Low Saxon a boost.

1.2 Covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’ 2018

On October 10, 2018 the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, represented by minister Ollongren, and regional administrators signed a covenant for recognizing *Nedersaksisch* again to keep the language alive and to prevent it from disappearing. This is shown in Figure 2. Low Saxon now gets protection from the government, and local and provincial governments have to work together to maintain Low Saxon (Koolhof, 2018; MIKR, 2018; Van Dinther, 2018).

Figure 2

The signing of the covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’

Aldus overeengekomen en in achtvoud ondertekend,

**De Minister van Binnenlandse
Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties,**

Provincie Drenthe,

Mevr. K.H. Ollongren

Dhr. C. Bijl

Provincie Fryslân,

Provincie Gelderland,

Mevr. S.A.E. Poepjes

Mevrouw J.P.M. Meijers

Provincie Groningen,

Provincie Overijssel,

Dhr. H. Staghouver

Mevr. W.H. Maij

Gemeente Ooststellingwerf,

Gemeente Weststellingwerf,

Mevr. F. Hylkema

Dhr. N.A. van de Nadort

Op 10 oktober 2018 te Zwolle

Note: These provinces have agreed to cooperate with each other to preserve and stimulate the regional language.

Article 1 of this covenant is: “*De Minister erkent de regionale taal Nedersaksisch als een wezenlijk, volwaardig en zelfstandig onderdeel van de taalsystematiek binnen Nederland*”, translated: ‘The Minister recognizes the regional language Low Saxon as an essential, fully fledged and independent part of the language system within the Netherlands’ (MIKR, 2018). It is a nice statement, but nothing changes the status of the language. Some people believe the covenant does not contribute anything.

The goal of the covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’ is that governments will coordinate their efforts in the regional language more, in order to learn from each other’s good examples. They will also work together towards Low Saxon speaking regions in Germany (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

Another goal of this covenant is to let people know their regional language is important to preserve (Rijksoverheid, 2018). In this covenant no agreements have been made about financial aid from the national government (Baard, 2018; Koolhof, 2018; Van der Meer, 2019; Van Dinther, 2018).

To preserve a language, it is important that the younger generations learn to speak Low Saxon (MIKR, 2018). Visser (2020), linguist at Lund University, states in Dutch newspaper *Trouw* that we need to continue to speak dialects with our (grand)children. Children have the ability to easily learn and speak multiple languages. According to Visser (2020), society and communities should use those qualities to save our identity and prevent our dialects from becoming extinct. The younger generations have to come into contact with the language in schools, media or culture. One of the ways to stimulate the language is through ‘March dialect month’. In this month extra attention is paid to Low Saxon in schools (Haverkate, 2020).

1.3 Research questions

It is necessary to improve the image and status of Low Saxon in the Netherlands. Low Saxon is still little used in media, education and politics. The covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’ signed in 2018 should have given new impulses to Low Saxon. By now these new impulses should be observable. What are governments doing to protect and stimulate Low Saxon since the signing of the covenant? What have they already done? This lead to the research question:

What efforts do local governments put into protecting, promoting and stimulating Low Saxon in the Netherlands?

In accordance with the 2018 covenant that education may be taught in Low Saxon and official documents may be written in the regional language. This research investigates how this is addressed. To be able to answer this research question, three sub-questions are designed:

1. How do governments and language organizations promote and protect the language?
2. What language is used in teaching materials and communication from provinces in the Low Saxon language area?
3. What influence does the use of language have on people speaking the language?

This research will contribute to scientific literature about the protection, stimulation and promotion of languages in the Netherlands, where little to nothing is written about. Much literature about thoughts and experiences from inhabitants on this subject does not exist or is dated, so the study fills this gap in literature. This study provides insight into the present situation of Low Saxon. In addition, it is important for further policy developments to know how the language is used and what the wishes of inhabitants are. It is imperative that governments have knowledge of current language situations. When governments, but also language organizations,

use the results of this research, they are able to make better policies to protect, promote and stimulate the language. This means this study has a scientific and societal relevance.

2. Literature review

In this chapter the differences between the languages and dialects are investigated and language policies are discussed in more detail, also in the context of Low Saxon.

2.1 Differences between language and dialect

What makes a language a language and not a dialect? Naming both indicates two distinguishable terms, but they are not that easy to distinguish (Haugen, 1966). However, the two concepts are both still being used, so there must be a difference. Diverse answers can be found. McWhorter (2016) tries to explain it in a simple approach. If you are able to understand a language without effort, it is a dialect of your own language. If you are not able to understand it, it is another language. Linguists often refer to Max Weinreich who said that ‘language is a dialect with an army and a navy’ (McWhorter, 2016). Wurm and Laycock (1961) define language as “a system of vocal symbols with conventionalized references accepted by a community or group and understood within it, and having the social function of carrying information from speaker to hearer” (p. 128). This could apply to dialects as well. On the other hand, they give a very clear definition of dialects: dialects are “any form of speech which differs from the standard form of the language which is the sole official language recognized by an authority in power in a given area” (p. 128). They also state dialects are ‘unwritten languages without written literature’ (Wurm & Laycock, 1961). Swanenberg (2009) indicates that speakers

of dialect do not always notice when they speak dialect. The dialect's level of consciousness is often low.

Van Marle (1997) calls differences between languages and dialects historical accidents. There are some systematic archaic differences between a language and a dialect, which means that some features are existing in a dialect, but are missing in the standard language and the other way around (Van Marle, 1997). An explanation for this is that languages exist in spoken and written form, but dialects are usually only spoken. Swanenberg (2009) describes that written standard Dutch has been existing longer than written dialect, while dialect is much older. He also indicates that the spelling of the dialect leads to discussions. Levis (2016) states that writing dialect is only possible by using phonetic script. This can be read by almost no one.

Martin ter Denge has found a solution for this. He proposes a cross-border spelling of Low Saxon, where everything is spelled the same way, but pronounced differently. This is also done successfully in the Faroe Islands (Centrum voor Groninger Taal en Cultuur [CGTC], 2019).

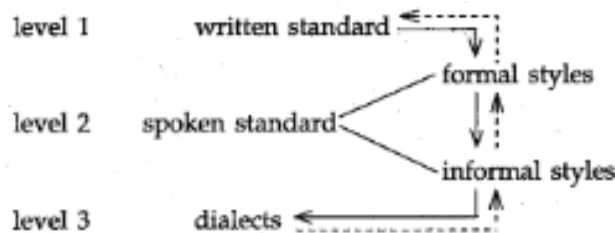
2.2 Relation between language and dialect

The differences between languages and dialects originated in the nineteenth century. Languages have had a life: they were born, changed, they grew and died (Haugen, 1972). Most languages are not isolated. They are the result of the community and the environment in which they are used (Wendel, 2005). The standard language was the language that was written for formal occasions. People spoke dialects. It did not influence one another at first, but after some decades a spoken standard language followed from the written language. This standard language was divided in formal styles and informal styles. This informal form of the standard language influenced the dialects and vice versa. From here, spoken language influenced written language,

as seen on Figure 2 (Van Marle, 1997, p. 19). The spelling of the dialect has led to discussions, which advanced the writing of standard language (Swanenberg, 2009).

Figure 3

The influence of written and spoken language



Note. Dialects and standard language influence one another. Van MARle, 1997

2.3 Language policy

Language policy is made for several reasons. A nationalistic reason could be linguistic assimilation: the government's wish for all inhabitants to speak the same language, despite their origin. International reasons also exist: the government wants to internationalize and picks a language that is used for trade (Cobarrubias, 1983).

Language policy is not always top-down: especially in regional language there are initiatives made by citizens (Leijen, 2011). Making regional language policy has different reasons, like preserving cultural heritage.

A language should be (geo)politics (Kymlicka & Patten, 2003). Geopolitics means understanding the relationship between space and power (Delaney, 2005) and striving to achieve political goals based on geography. Space and language and language and power are strongly connected. Language politics (i.e., measures that focus on regulating, influencing, and promoting a language), has become very important, but studies on language rights stay behind (Kymlicka &

Patten, 2003). According to Baldauf and Kaplan (1997), language politics is a (long-term) process in which a policy aims to change or stop the change in language use. Grin (2003) states that language policy and language politics are intertwined, the term language policy covers it all.

Language policy aims to protect, promote and stimulate language. One good example of the protection of language is scientific research and higher education in Sweden. In most countries English is the main language in higher education, but in Sweden they keep using Swedish (Wright, 2007). Education is often used to strengthen or protect a language, just as media and politics.

Language policy is only possible with a good knowledge of the language area (Deygers, Grondelaers, Van Aken & Van den Heerde, 2002). Every two years *Taalunie* investigates, with the help of 6000 participants, what languages inhabitants of the Netherlands, Flanders, Brussels and Suriname use in certain social situations. The purpose of the research is measuring the use of language and mapping out language areas (Taalunie, 2019).

According to Smeets (2001), language policy has three themes: corpus, status and acquisition. Corpus policy focuses on forms of language and standardizing files. Status policy has to do with functions and language use. It focuses on the (changing) position of language. Acquisition policy is focusing on learning a language, usually in education. Hagen (2002) also says that language policy is mainly focused on education. Hoekstra and Riemersma name education as one of the most important factors as well (2012). Besides policy, experience plays an important role. This refers to the response by the dialect-speaking community to the measures (Hagen, 2002).

Language policy cannot exist without '*taalwil*', which roughly translates to the will to speak a language. People should want to speak the language (Hoekstra & Riemersma, 2012).

Top-down language planning is the most common form of language planning, but is connected to language planning from below: top-down policy needs bottom-up willingness. People will take action to recognize and protect their language, once they realize they are speaking a language (Hoekstra & Riemersma, 2012). According to Klimaszewska (2006) and Swanenberg (2019), language is the most important element of regional identity and a way of creating the feeling of togetherness. Language connects and makes people feel like they belong (Swanenberg, 2019). People want to speak, write and read their own language as much as possible (Hoekstra & Riemersma, 2012).

The question is, does this also apply for young people? Knowledge about youth is of great importance to make regional language policy. Cornips (2016) thinks a digital platform is needed to keep a dialect alive, because if you want to preserve a language, the next generation will have to learn it.

Language policy goes hand in hand with Haugen's theory of 'the ecology of language' (1972). Descriptions of language consist usually of the number of speakers, a brief history and the location. Haugen (1972) was convinced this was too 'superficial' and came up with the ecology of language. He thinks we have to look at language in the same way we look at nature and ecology. Ecology is the interaction between organisms and their surroundings. Haugen describes language ecology as the study of interactions between a language and its environment. Environment in the case of language ecology means the environment of the grammar and lexicon (1972). He means the social and cultural setting in which language is used, not the physical environment. Language could only be understood through the speakers, it is not just a simple system (Garner, 2005). The language environment includes psychological (interaction between languages) and social (interaction between a language and its social environment) domains

(Yang, 2014). Languages live, like in ecology: they are born, grow into another language, new species evolve and they also die (Haugen, 1972). Taking good care of diversity protects a language and keeps a language alive (Kymlicka & Patten, 2003). The term ‘language ecology’ is often used in a loose way and Haugen’s theory of this biological model did not have the influence he expected (Garner, 2005).

Summarizing, language policy is necessary to maintain a language, but also to protect and promote it. This can be done in different ways, like taking care of the environment and diversity. Education plays an important role in language policy (Hagen, 2002; Hoekstra & Riemersma, 2012; Smeets, 2001). In addition, people must want to speak the language. Once they realize they speak a language instead of something that is wrong or bad, they want to speak it (Hoekstra & Riemersma, 2012).

2.4 Low Saxon in the Netherlands

Low Saxon consists of so many variants that you would think it is a dialect, but according to the European Charter for regional or minority languages it is a language.

Despite being an official regional language in the Netherlands, Low Saxon is not financed by the national government (Baard, 2018; Van der Meer, 2019; Van Dinther, 2018).

2.4.1 Context

Low Saxon variants do not have their origin in the Dutch language. They form a unit with the Saxon dialects spoken in Germany, which means Low Saxon as a language is different from Dutch or High German (Van Dinther, 2018; Van Oostendorp, 2002). This makes Low Saxon in the Netherlands a regional language, which are language varieties spoken in a region combined

together. The term ‘regional language’ is used politically and legally for a language that has been recognized as language by a government (Swanenberg, 2019).

Dutch Low Saxon is an element of the Low German language. In total, 4.8 Million people speak a form of this language, divided over the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Russia and Poland (Koolhof, 2018). Low Saxon is spoken in the northeastern part of the Netherlands. According to Bloemhoff et al. (2019), 70% could speak Low Saxon in the northeastern part of the Netherlands. That means there are approximately 2.2 million potential speakers of Low Saxon in this country.

2.4.2 Research

In 2005, Bloemhoff investigated Low Saxon in the Netherlands to provide information about Low Saxon for the handbook Dutch Low Saxon. Bloemhoff (2005) divided the language area in nine parts, based on political and linguistic criteria: Groningen (province), Drenthe (province), Oost-Stellingwerf and West-Stellingwerf (municipalities in south-east Friesland), Steenwijkerland (municipality in Overijssel), Twente and West-Overijssel (parts of province Overijssel), Achterhoek and Veluwe (parts of province Gelderland). Bloemhoff took a survey among adults speaking Low Saxon.

He found that age, gender and education are linked to mastery of Low Saxon. One of the most important results of his research was the closer people live to urban agglomerations, the weaker their dialect. Residents of urban areas estimate their own dialect competences lower (up to 25%) than residents of rural areas (Bloemhoff, 2005; Kremer, 2007). Another result is, as expected, the use of dialect differs per generation: 17,3% of the participants under 40 years old speak Low Saxon versus 39,8% of the participants older than 61 years. Speaking Low Saxon

decreases, which means that the language may become extinct (Bloemhoff, 2005). The younger people are, the less they use Low Saxon and the worse they command Low Saxon.

There are also differences between men and women. Bloemhoff (2005) mentions men are '*dialectvaster*' than women. The women interviewed estimate their dialect competence 10 percent lower than men. This is in line with the thoughts of Dykstra (2015). She writes that men are more likely to speak dialect than women. According to Goossens (1987) this could be explained because dialect usage has to do with status orientation. Dialects are associated with a low status (Visser, 2020) and women value status more and are therefore less likely to speak dialect.

The higher the education, the less people speak Low Saxon at home. However, during the study by Bloemhoff (2005), highly educated people indicated that they master Low Saxon. These were in particular the variants Twents, Drents and Gronings. Bloemhoff explains this by pointing out that this may be related to differences in status between the variants of Low Saxon.

These differences in status still exist. A low status usually means that a variant is rarely spoken. When a language was only used at home, it quickly turned into a language with a low social status (Bloemhoff et al., 2019). According to H. Bloemhoff (personal communication, July 11, 2020) explains that he thinks there is some difference in status, but not in a formal sense. He means that the differences exist in everyday practice and in people's thoughts. Dutch is always seen as 'better'. This corresponds to the imaging process of 'othering', which means that a group of people is not determined by who is in the group, but by whom are excluded. The other is used to define us: we understand ourselves in relation to what we are not (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996).

H. Bloemhoff (personal communication, July 11, 2020) elaborates on differences between Frisian and Low Saxon. Formal differences exist, but it is especially in people's minds that Frisian is more important than Low Saxon. There are also differences within Low Saxon. In general, attention is more often requested for Twents. It is more known than the Sallands what people speak in another part of Overijssel. Speaking Twents is considered normal in the Netherlands. Bloemhoff (personal communication, July 14, 2020) further explains that most people in the region of Veluwe do not have much regional language. This variant is associated with a low status. It is also striking that no regional language institute has been established there.

Summarized, Low Saxon is an official regional language in politics and policy, that consists of different local variants. There is no standard (Low) Saxon.

3. Methodology

In this study, the efforts local governments and educational organizations made on behalf of the minority language were investigated through content analysis and interviews. In this chapter the methods are described in detail. This research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.1 Research area

Low Saxon is spoken in the northern and eastern part of the Netherlands, in the provinces Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel, a large part of Gelderland (Achterhoek) and a small part of Friesland (West- and Oost-Stellingwerf). Provinces have signed the covenant, which is why

provinces were investigated, and not other local authorities. This study is about Low Saxon as a whole, which is what provinces have promised to strive for.

3.2 Interviews

To answer the research questions, interviews were held with employees of language organizations from the research area. Interviews are the best option to collect firsthand personal accounts of experience, opinions, attitudes and perceptions (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

The choice was made to ask language organizations about the efforts of governments, because they can give a more objective answer. Politicians or other government officials may have interwoven other interests in their responses. Language organizations also have the aim of protecting and stimulating the language and are organizing activities and preparing teaching materials in Low Saxon. They are following political language developments and are also (partly) financed by provincial authorities. In addition, they work in the research area and have their own opinion about the use of language. Moreover, they have an overall idea of what the inhabitants think. Employees of language organizations are therefore best suited to interview.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visiting organizations and municipalities in the Low Saxon language area was ruled out. Language organizations were approached by email or telephone. The interviews took place by telephone or via zoom.

The questions were not standardised, so that a flexible response to relevant changes and events during the research was possible (Boeije, 't, Hart & Hox, 2009). The questions were based on the specific region of the interviewee, but the topics were the same in order to compare the interviews. After interviewing the members of the language organizations, the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts have been added to the Appendices (A-D).

3.2.1 Participants

There are several language organizations in the research area that I have asked how governments, residents and the institutes themselves deal with the language and official status of the language. Drenthe has '*Huus van de Taol*' that designs teaching materials, organizes events, keeps up with Low Saxon news and conducts research.

The '*IJsselacademie*' is located in the province of Overijssel. It is a knowledge center where you can go with questions about language, history and traditions in the region. They also have regional language activities, conduct research and produce teaching materials. Part of the *IJsselacademie* is the '*Twentehoes*', which focuses on the region of Twente. The '*Centrum Groninger Taal en Cultuur*' (CGTC) in Groningen is available for everyone who is interested in the local culture and language. CGTC designs teaching materials and organizes themedays and contests. They also provide subsidies. In the province of Gelderland and Friesland only a small part of the population speaks Low Saxon. However, there are language organizations that are actively involved in this. Gelderland has the '*Erfgoedcentrum Achterhoek Liemers*' (ECAL). ECAL is a source of information where you can go for questions about regional culture, history and sayings. Weststellingwerf and Ooststellingwerf also have a language institute. The municipalities are excluded from the Frisian language. De *Stichting Stellingwarver Schrieversronte* focuses on the language, culture and identity of the small region.

These organizations cover most of the research area. In this way, people and their opinions in the research area were reached. Almost all of them were willing to be interviewed. CGTC answered the questions by email. *Stichting Stellingwarver Schrieversronte* did not respond. *Levende Talen Nedersaksisch* is an organization that focuses on teaching materials and education. They have been contacted to obtain more information about teaching materials.

3.2.2 Interviewees

Table 1

Introduction of participants

Number of participant	Abbreviation	Language organization
Participant 1	P1	Huus van de Taol
Participant 2	P2	IJsselacademie
Participant 3	P3	Twentehoes
Participant 4	P4	Ergfoedcentrum Achterhoek en Liemers (ECAL)
Participant 5	P5	Levende Talen

In the table (Table 1) above participants are introduced. The interviewees have given permission for the use of the obtained data. The identity of the participants is known by the researcher, but

because of privacy and ethical reasons, chosen is to not display the participant's names.

From *Huus van de Taol* in Drenthe I interviewed P1. P1 is a regional language officer

(*streektaalfunctionaris*) and is engaged in, among other things, updating teaching materials.

From *IJsselacademie* P2 was interviewed. P2 is a dialectologist and author of several books in Low Saxon. P3 is connected to *Twentehoes* and is very enthusiastic about the history, culture and identity of Twente. From ECAL I interviewed P4, director of the regional heritage center in Doetinchem. Because I was also interested in the language used in education, I contacted P5. P5 is chair of *Levende Talen Nedersaksisch*. This personal communication took place on June 26, 2020. This was not an interview, but information given by P5 is used for results as addition.

3.3 Content analysis

The method used for answering the second sub-question was content analysis, which is according to Hay (2010) a system of identifying terms and phrases in a document, audio fragment or video. There are many forms of content analysis, for example semiology, which focuses on images and symbols, and discourse analysis, which focuses on details in the content (Rose, 2012). In this study, a discourse analysis was used.

3.3.1 Data collection

The provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and Drenthe signed the covenant in 2018, which means that they have agreed to cooperate, promote and protect the language. For that reason, the examined documents and communications are of the provinces. Other government institutions in the research area did not sign and therefore did not enter into an agreement about Low Saxon. Teaching materials were searched on the website of language institutes. They have agreed to work together and have been designing teaching materials for some time.

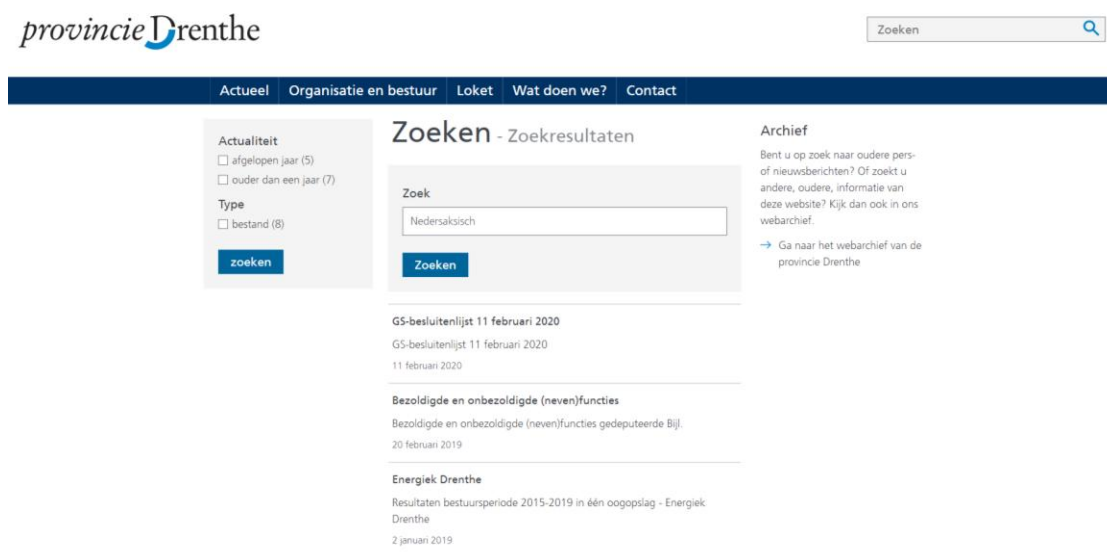
Approximately twenty provincial government documents or other communication by the provinces and ten education related documents were analyzed through an analysis scheme. This

number was chosen because a detailed analysis requires a smaller number of sources to reach a valuable conclusion. The selection of articles was based on the date of publication: the most up-to-date documents were chosen. This makes the content analysis more objective and reliable. The more recent, after signing the covenant in 2018, the more relevant for this study. It could also be better compared to each other.

The websites of the provinces were visited and *Nedersaksisch* was typed in, because that is in the name of the overall language, in the search bar. An example is shown in Figure 4. The first five results were used for the analysis. That could be a decision, or a motion or an introduction. The entire website was searched for the word *Nedersaksisch*. If there were less than five results, all the search results were used.

Figure 4

Search results for Nedersaksisch on the website of the province of Drenthe



Note. Different search results appear.

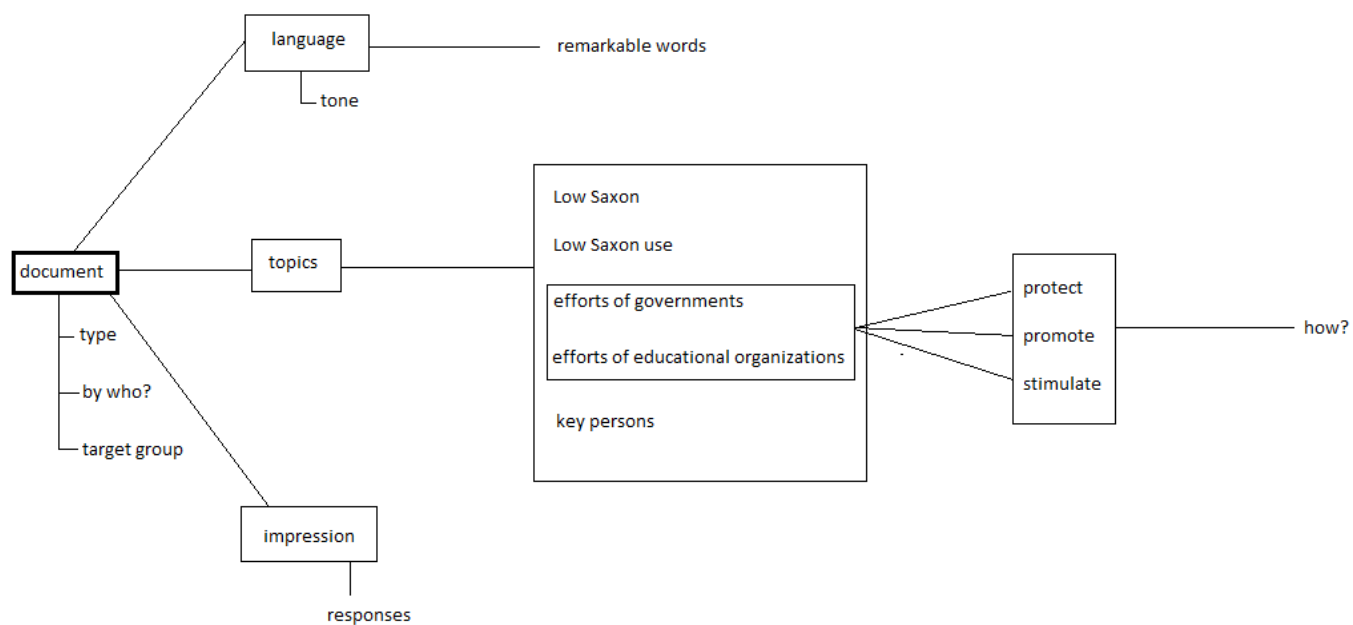
To analyze teaching materials, the websites of language organizations *Huus van de Taol*, *Twentehoes*, *ECAL*, *CGTC* and *Stichting Stellingwarver Schrieversronte* were used. In addition, I used *mijnstadmijndorp.nl* for teaching materials aimed at the province of Overijssel.

Ironically, language could be an obstacle for this research. Most of the websites of those organizations and foundations are in Low Saxon. Whereas I do not speak Low Saxon, it took more time to find what I was looking for.

3.3.2 Analysis scheme

In order to compare the documents with each other, the analysis had to be done systematically. Therefore, a schedule had been designed. In this study and scheme, the focus was on language and language use. There was also attention for the tone in a document. Another goal was discovering which target group they focus on. Furthermore, there was looked at which topics were discussed, topics which were absent and the text devoted to Low Saxon and Low Saxon language areas. The content analysis for the teaching materials is a shorter version of that of provinces.

On the following pages analysis schemes used for this research are placed (Table 2 and 3). In Figure 5 the schematic representation of the analysis can be seen.

Figure 5*Schematic representation*

Note: This representation clearly shows which topics are discussed.

Table 2*Analysis scheme for documents of provinces*

Title	
Date	
By who?	
Type of document	
Language	

Topics discussed and topics absent	
Amount of text about Low Saxon (count) and what does it say?	
Amount of text about the use of Low Saxon and what does it say?	
What efforts of governments educational organizations to promote, protect and stimulate Low Saxon are mentioned?	
How are efforts of governments educational organizations to promote, protect and stimulate Low Saxon mentioned?	
Topics not discussed	
Tone of document	
Remarkable words	
Target group	
Key persons	
Responses	
My impression	

Other	
-------	--

Note: An analysis scheme examines the materials in a systematized but detailed manner.

Table 3

Analysis scheme for teaching materials

Title	
By who?	
Type	
Language	
Topics discussed	
Tone	
Remarkable	

Target group	
My impression	
Other	

4. Results

This chapter contains the results that came out of the interviews and content analysis. From these results a conclusion can be drawn in a later stadium. The interviews were held in Dutch, therefore the quotes used are also in Dutch. After that, the English paraphrased translation is shown. The interviews are added in Appendices A-D.

This chapter is structured according to the order of the sub-questions. A table with participants, organization and function is shown below as a reminder (Table 4).

Table 4

Participants and language organizations

P1	Huus van de Taol
P2	IJsselacademie
P3	Twentehoes

P4	Ergfoedcentrum Achterhoek en Liemers (ECAL)
P5	Levende Talen

4.1 How do governments and language organizations promote and protect the language?

For this question the results of the interviews held with the members of the language institutes are used. These interviews helped to gain insight into the attitude of politicians and language organizations. The participants were asked what the provinces and language organizations are doing to protect and promote Low Saxon.

The results that belong to the first sub-question ‘In what ways do governments and language organizations promote and protect the language?’ are based on themes and key words. These key words are words that have emerged often in the interviews. The themes are shown as bold subheadings, after which the key words and results are described.

4.1.1 Term ‘Low Saxon’

To start the interview every participant was asked if they say the term Low Saxon or the name of their regional language. P1 said: *“In principe zijn wij de spreektaalorganisatie voor het Drents. Onze allereerste taak is om te zorgen dat Drents op de kaart staat. Maar absoluut, dat Nedersaksisch dat speelt daarin een beetje een rol, want sowieso naar buiten toe is het fijn dat je een wat grotere groep hebt om met elkaar op te profileren, maar ook om dingen te kunnen realiseren”*, roughly translated: ‘We are the regional language organization for Drenthe. Our very first task is to ensure that Drents is on the map. But absolutely, Low Saxon plays a bit of a

role in this, because it is nice that you have a somewhat larger group to realize things.’ P3 answered: *“Wij hebben het eigenlijk wel vaak over het Twents maar zeggen er dan wel direct dat het onder het Nedersaksisch valt”*, translated: ‘We actually often talk about Twents, but we immediately say that it falls under Low Saxon’. P4 thinks otherwise: *“Wij vinden het belangrijk om wel te blijven roepen dat het Nedersaksisch is, want dat is de taal.(...) Dus het Achterhoeks is niet echt als taal erkend, het is het Nedersaksisch wat echt als taal erkend is”*, which translates to ‘We think it is important to keep saying that it is Low Saxon, because that is the name of the language. (...) So Achterhoeks is not recognized, it is Low Saxon that is really recognized as a language’.

These results show that the organizations are not quite in agreement yet. They are not aligned.

4.1.2 Covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’

Key word: Awareness

P4 thinks the covenant made a huge difference in raising awareness. P2 explains: *“Ook omdat er dan natuurlijk toch al heel lang gewezen wordt door die organisaties op het belang van de streektaal en dat dat bijzonder is. En dat dat geen verbasterd Nederlands is, maar dat het eigen taal is met een eigen geschiedenis,”* translated: ‘The importance of the regional language has been pointed out by those organizations for a long time. This is not just a version of Dutch, but it is its own language with its own history’.

Since the signing of the covenant, people have become more aware that they speak a language, according to P1, P2 and P3. This awareness shows a positive result of the covenant.

Key word: Rise of new initiatives after 2018

The question whether more initiatives have arisen after 2018 is answered variably. P3 notices that new initiatives are emerging everywhere, and P1 said: *“Ik denk wel dat er een stapje gemaakt is, ja, maar er gebeurde ook al wel dingen, hoor”*, translated: ‘it was a step in the right direction, but things did happen before, too.’ Nevertheless, everyone agrees that initiatives take time and that some started well before 2018, P1 explains: *“Soms moet het ook even landen, denk ik. Of heeft het een lange aanlooperperiode nodig, en nu, je merkt ook dat het iets meer gaat leven.”* translated: ‘Sometimes it has to land for a while or it needs a long run-up period’. P3 also gives another reason for the emergence of new initiatives since 2018. P3 said that ‘Brussels’ will check whether the governments really stimulate Low Saxon, because if you have a right you also have a duty: *“Als je een recht hebt heb je natuurlijk ook een plicht en dat beseffen zij zich ook wel, vanuit Brussel komen ze natuurlijk wel controleren of er ook overheden het stimuleren.”*

These results show that many things had already been set in motion before signing the covenant. It is not the case that all initiatives have arisen since the covenant.

Key word: Goal of Covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’

According to P2 the goal of the covenant was to emphasize that it is just a recognized language, just like Dutch and Frisian. P2 explains: *“Dat komt omdat veel mensen het idee hebben, dat is eigenlijk maar een minderwaardige taal. Dat is niet helemaal gelijk aan het Nederlands,”* translated: ‘That is because many people have the idea that it is really just an inferior language, not quite equal to Dutch’. By emphasizing with the covenant that Low Saxon is a recognized language, the provinces try to convince people that it is a fully-fledged language, which they can also use. P4 disagrees. P4 thinks the covenant was not for recognition, because

Low Saxon already was a recognized language. P4 said the covenant was just for expressing the importance of Low Saxon.

Moreover, provinces try to strive for equivalence between the languages. P2 explained: *“Je kunt op dit moment met het dialect heel veel dingen doen, maar ook heel veel dingen niet doen. Je kunt bijvoorbeeld niet de eed afleggen in de gemeenteraad of in de Provinciale Staten. Je kunt het niet voor de rechtbank gebruiken. Allerlei dingen die voor een taal heel normaal zijn, die gelden voor de streektaal niet,”* which roughly translates to: ‘You can do a lot of things with the regional language right now, but there are things that cannot. For example, you cannot take the oath in the city council, in the Provincial Council or in court. All kinds of things that are very normal for a language, that do not apply to the regional language’. Efforts are still being made to be recognized in Part III, because people feel that they cannot do enough with these agreements.

The final goal of the covenant was for the five provinces to start working together. P2 said: *“Het convenant wil eigenlijk niks anders zeggen dan, Provinciale Staten van vijf provincies hebben met elkaar afgesproken, laten we nou eens gaan samenwerken aan de erkenning van het Nedersaksisch.”*, translated: ‘The covenant does not really mean anything other than, Provincial States of five provinces have agreed with each other, let's start working together on the recognition of Low Saxon.’

These results show that the covenant is more like a symbol. Low Saxon was already recognized as an official regional language in the Netherlands, but it needed more attention. It had to be emphasized that Low Saxon is a fully-fledged language. The covenant also symbolizes cooperation between provinces.

Key word: Working together

Previous results showed that the language organizations are not aligned yet. P1 explained: *“Ik denk dat iedereen uiteindelijk wel hetzelfde doel heeft, namelijk het stimuleren van de taal en het instandhouden en uitdragen van de spreektaal. Absoluut. Maar op het moment dat je het hebt over de invulling daarvan, dan is dat een heel ander verhaal. Want dan heeft iedereen zijn eigen manier al jarenlang”* which translates to ‘I think that everyone ultimately has the same goal, which is to stimulate the language and to maintain and propagate the spoken language, but when you talk about the interpretation of it, that is a completely different story. Because then everyone has their own way for years’. P1 thinks this will change in the coming years.

P3 wants the Low Saxon language area to be a unity, so that they cross-border, both to Germany and to other countries, can also create more cooperation and connection.

Low Saxon is a language spoken in five provinces. P2 describes: *“Daar moeten we dan met zijn vijven ook aan werken en samenwerken. En elkaar opzoeken in plaats van ieder apart het wiel uitvinden.”* which translates to: ‘The five of us must work on this together and look up each other instead of inventing the wheel separately’. That works quite well: they do not work against each other, P1 said: *“Ze werken elkaar niet tegen, dat is stap één”*. There is quite a lot of consultation between the provincial governments, P2 said.

P1 agrees. Communication and collaboration between the language institutes of the various provinces has been improving since 2018. In the words of P1: *“Als je dus kijkt naar wat is er nou structureel wel veranderd, er is wel structureel veel meer overleg”*, which translates to ‘If you look at what has changed structurally, there is structurally much more consultation’. However, P1 also points to the five provinces. That is an extra challenge to really get things off

the ground and to do it together. There is now a coordinator in the field of marketing Low Saxon, teaching materials and apps are made jointly and money is being reserved for interprovincial cooperation. There are people who believe that the covenant does not contribute anything, but these results show that the covenant was not just empty words.

Sometimes getting things off the ground runs side by side, says P1. A colleague of P1 in Groningen is working on a pilot for secondary education. P1 really likes it and would like to share materials, but P1's colleague is a bit hesitant to share. *“Terecht ook”*, says P1, *“maar als je niks deelt en je gaat afwachten van wat een ander je dan maar laat zien, dan blijf je maar naar elkaar kijken”* which translates to: ‘Rightly so, but if you do not share anything and you wait and see what someone else shows you, then you keep looking at each other’.

The answers given indicate that collaboration can be greatly improved. It seems as if they are competitors, while they only speak another variant of Low Saxon.

Key word: Start-up phase

According to P1, all provinces are still in a scanning and start-up phase. P1 explains: *“Alleen het is allemaal nog vrij wiebelig. (...) Er zijn heel veel mooie ideeën en ik denk wel dat we elkaar steeds meer vinden, dat we niet weer opnieuw het wiel willen uitvinden, terwijl Groningen allang met iets heel moois bezig is”*, which roughly translates to: ‘There are a lot of great ideas and I think we find each other more and more. We do not want to reinvent the wheel again’.

The answers given show that provinces strive for cooperation, but it does not quite work out yet.

4.1.3 Governments

P4 is satisfied with what the government is doing now: *“De overheid kan nu niet meer doen dan het erkennen van: jullie hebben echt een eigen taal, en daar mag je trots op zijn, en wij vinden als overheid dat dat gestimuleerd moet worden”*, which translates to: ‘The government can do no more than recognize: you really have your own language, and you should be proud of it. We as a government believe that this should be stimulated’.

Key word: Financing

This stimulating is done in a financial way. The most important act of the provinces is financing, according to P2. Signing the covenant meant that they have to do something now, P2 said. Money must be reserved on the provincial budget for regional language: *“De mensen hebben zich toch verplicht. Hebben de handtekening eronder gezet. En dat betekent dat ze er nu ook werk van moeten maken, dat ze geld op de provinciale begroting moeten reserveren, speciaal voor die streektaal, zal ik maar zeggen. Dus het is niet alleen maar dat het verder geen gevolgen heeft”*, paraphrased: ‘People have committed themselves by putting a signature underneath. That means that they now also have to work on it, that they have to reserve money in the provincial budget for regional language. Signing the covenant had further consequences’.

Provinces take care of the subsidies. P2 said: *“Overheid maakt vooral de middelen vrij om die organisaties te stimuleren en projectsubsidie te geven,”* translated: ‘The government mainly provides the resources to stimulate those organizations’. P4 answered: *“De gemeentes zelf doen dus eigenlijk vrij weinig, dus wat we krijgen is vanuit de provincie”*, which translates to: ‘The municipalities themselves do not actually do much, so what we get is from the province’.

Correspondence with CGTC showed that the province protects the language by submitting orders to the CGTC. CGTC sees the province as a client and advisor. There are various cultural organizations in the province of Groningen that are financially supported by the province and who are therefore regularly informed of whether the assignment is still being fulfilled.

Nevertheless, financial aid sometimes comes from municipalities. In the Achterhoek, agreed is that all Achterhoek municipalities and the province (gremium) contribute money, and all sorts of projects in the field of art, language and culture are organized within the region. ECAL is one of those organizers. P4: *“Dus op die manier, moet ik zeggen, doen die lokale gemeenten en overheden wel wat, maar goed, dat zat in het pact”*, translated: ‘So in that way, I must say, those local municipalities and governments do something, but well, that was in the pact.’

These results show that financing is the most important act from provinces to preserve and promote Low Saxon. It also appears that the provinces really provide financial aid.

Key word: Council meetings in Low Saxon

P4 notices that municipalities are enthusiastic. Councilors like to take their moment to shine when a Low Saxon related activity occurs, but give little in return. P1 also notices that the province of Drenthe would like to show its face at events. The provinces and municipalities do not stick to financial aid or show up at events, they definitely try to do something to preserve and protect the regional language. One example is holding meetings in Low Saxon.

Dinand Leferink, Member of Parliament of the VVD in the Provincial States of Overijssel, tabled a motion to hold a meeting in regional language during dialect month of March

2021. Everyone in their own dialect and those who do not speak it, will receive a translation, P3 said. This motion has been passed.

The municipality of Rijssen-Holten also has meetings in Low Saxon, occasionally. It happens maybe twice a year. P2 explained: “*De mensen willen dan ook zelf het goede voorbeeld geven. Een deel van die gemeentebestuurders komen ook uit de plaats zelf. En zeggen van wij zijn een gemeente en we hebben onze eigen taal en waarom zouden we die nou niet gebruiken?*” which roughly translates to: ‘People want to set a good example themselves. Some of those municipal administrators also come from the locality itself. And say we are a municipality and we have our own language and why should not we use it?’

CGTC also put forward the idea to hold the council meeting in Low Saxon in the regional language month. P2 says that it depends on who is on the city council. P1 agrees: “*Absoluut. Ja, daar zit echt wel een heel groot verschil in op het moment dat je iemand hebt die daar wel interesse in heeft*”, translated: ‘Absolutely. Yes, there is really a big difference when you have someone who is interested in that’. P4 can also confirm this. She asked the municipality of Doetinchem to do a city council meeting in Low Saxon once a year. There are a handful of enthusiastic people, but the majority still says no, that is not possible, because then not everyone can understand each other and that is difficult. It is more difficult in Doetinchem than in, for example, Overijssel or Drenthe, she thinks. They have an entire province that speaks Low Saxon.

These results indicate that City Councils and Provincial States are mostly positive towards Low Saxon at meetings. This shows once again to residents that Low Saxon is an officially recognized language.

Keyword: Communication

The question whether there is ever communication from governments, municipalities or provinces, to citizens in regional language was often answered negatively. CGTC wrote that communication to citizens is almost never done in the local language, but in some cases they are asked for advice. For example when it is appropriate for a project to also communicate in the regional language.

P4 gives the reason why there is little communication in Low Saxon from local authorities: the provinces and national government have signed that covenant, not regional and local authorities. Those local authorities have signed nothing, while they communicate most with the citizens. They are economizing and have more difficult and interesting cases to deal with. There is no money available. In the words of P1: *“Veel gemeentes staan er gewoon slecht voor en dan is spreektaal niet hetgeen wat prioriteit heeft. Logisch, maar wel jammer”*, which translates to: ‘Many municipalities are simply in bad financial shape and regional language is not what has priority. Logical, but a pity’.

However, there is sometimes some communication in regional language. P1 said that a translation to Low Saxon is possible on the website of Coevorden and P3 gives the example of the fire brigade brochure in Twente (Figure 6):

“Die heeft een folder uitgegeven en daarin is wel de bovenste kop in het Twents en daaronder is het in het Nederlands uitgelegd. (...) En ik weet bijvoorbeeld ook dat als je bij de brandweer op de alarmcentrale zit, of in ieder geval op de centrale in Twente, dat je dan wel Twents moet kunnen. Anders word je niet aangenomen. (...) Er zijn ook mensen in paniek, die gaan terug naar de basis, als die in een dialect spreken en je zit achter de belcentrale en je verstaat het niet, dan heb je natuurlijk nog een probleem”,

which roughly translates to: ‘I know the brochure of the fire brigade in the region of Twente, which has issued a folder that contains the top heading in regional language and below it has been explained in Dutch. I also know that if you are at the emergency center at the fire brigade, or at least at the center in Twente, then you should be able to speak Twents. People are in panic and go back to the base. If you do not understand Twents, you will not be accepted’.

The answers given indicate there is barely communication in Low Saxon. There are a few examples, but they are exceptions so far.

Figure 6

Van oonze leu mow't hebn



Note: Fire brigade in Twente communicates in Low Saxon

4.1.4 Language organizations

Keyword: Goal of language organizations

The goal of language institutes is, according to P4, bringing regional language and culture to the attention and encouraging people to use it. That is only possible if it has a positive image, P4 said: “*Wij kunnen als erfgoedcentrum nooit, of als overheid, je kan het nooit opleggen. Je kan niet zeggen: vanaf nu moeten we hier in het Nedersaksisch gaan praten*”,

which translates to: ‘We can never impose it. You cannot say: from now on we have to speak here Low Saxon’.

Language institutes play an important role in the protection and preservation of Low Saxon. “*Het bewaren van de taal en de taal erkenning geven die het gewoon verdient, ja, daar kun je als spreektaalinstituut absoluut wel een bijdrage aan leveren*”, P1 said. Translated: ‘A language organization can definitely contribute to preserving the language and giving it the recognition it deserves’.

Another goal of a regional language institute is organizing, together with the help of many volunteers, all kinds of activities, such as events, researches, lessons and lectures and collection of sayings for dictionaries. ECAL also publishes a book week gift and organizes the Low Saxon dictation and writing competitions for Low Saxon stories. There are also all kinds of festivals such as Plat Gespöld in the Achterhoek or Zunnewende Festival in Overijssel. These are just a few examples. It shows many Low Saxon related events are organised.

Keyword: Focus on young people

Language institutes focus on young people, because Low Saxon disappears very quickly with them. The elderly generally still speak a reasonable dialect, but especially with young people it disappears at a very fast pace. So they try to make them more aware of the dialect and then they try to make parents and grandparents aware that they can speak Low Saxon. They do not necessarily have to do their best to speak Dutch, P2 said, because “*Nederlands leren de kinderen op school ook wel*”, translated: ‘They learn Dutch at school’.

This indicates that young people are most important to preserve the language.

Keyword: Multilingualism

Language organizations link Low Saxon to multilingualism. P4 said: *“Je kan meertalig zijn omdat je zegt: ik spreek Engels en Duits en Chinees, maar jij bent meertalig omdat je Nederlands en Nedersaksisch beheerst”* which roughly translates to: ‘You are multilingual because you speak English and German and Chinese, but you are multilingual because you speak Dutch and Low Saxon’. Realizing being multilingual has a positive influence on people, P4 said: *“Dan ben je meertalig, en dat geeft toch meer een gevoel van zelfwaarde denk ik, als je het op die manier brengt”*, translated: ‘Then you are multilingual and that gives you more of a sense of self-worth, if you put it that way’. P5 said it is important for everyone to have a positive attitude towards multilingualism, and therefore towards regional languages. This indicates multilingualism by regional language is increasingly accepted.

The websites of the language organizations were examined. The websites of *Stichting Stellingwarver Schrieversronte* and *Huus van de Taol* are in Low Saxon, but the websites of CGTC, *IJsselacademie*, ECAL and *Twentehoes* are entirely in Dutch. P3 said *“Hij is nog in wording, de website, dus die moeten we nog uitzoeken,”* roughly translated: ‘It is still in the making’. P3 does have a comment about this: *“Wat wel een beetje een probleem is, als we alles in het, we moeten ook nog wel veel vertalen, maar als we alles in het dialect doen, kan je ook anderen uitsluiten. Iedereen moet, het is inclusief, dus we willen er eigenlijk naar toe om alles tweetalig te doen,”* roughly translated: ‘A bit of a problem, if we do everything in the dialect, you can also exclude others. It is inclusive, so we actually want to do everything bilingual’. This indicates that the website must be bi-or multilingual, according to P3. No one should be excluded.

Linking to multilingualism indicates that Low Saxon is seen as a full-fledged language. Multilingualism is associated with a high social status. In addition, inclusivity is also important. Whatever language you speak, you should always be able to read the website.

4.1.5 Education

Keyword: Lack of teaching materials

The provinces and language organizations try to stimulate and protect Low Saxon through education. P2 said about this: *“Je kunt niet zeggen van, mensen ga dialect spreken. En dat de mensen dan zeggen, maar hoe moet ik dat dan? Dan moet je ook mogelijkheden bieden, dat mensen dat kunnen leren”* which translates to: ‘You cannot say: people, go speak dialect. And that people say, but how am I supposed to do that? Then you must also offer opportunities for people to learn that’. P3 said: *“Als je een taal natuurlijk zou willen verder brengen, dan moet je het onderwijs eigenlijk als uitgangspunt nemen”* which translates to: ‘if you want to take a language further, you should take education as a starting point’.

It is remarkable that each language institute makes its own teaching materials, because there is not enough material available or available online. The teaching materials that are available are very difficult to find, according to P5.

P4 said the greatest lack is of (available) teaching materials: *“Het grootste gebrek is gewoon aan lesmateriaal.”* There really needs to be more thorough, professional and didactic teaching materials. It also has to be digital. This applies to primary education, but also, for example, to introductory lessons at teacher training colleges, P4 explained. Designing teaching materials sometimes runs side by side. People are hesitant to share ideas, so nothing happens and they only look at each other, P1 said.

Levende Talen does not receive any money from the provinces, which makes building a good website unsuccessful. With a little more money, much more material would be available in an easy way, told P4.

The answers given show that there is a lack of teaching materials. Making them now runs side by side. That is inconvenient, because education and available materials should be taken as a starting point to take Low Saxon further.

However, there are teaching materials available, such as books of Miffy or ‘Jip & Janneke’ available in Low Saxon or a Salland Bible that are suitable for the lessons. Wiesneus is a project made at Low Saxon level. This originated from Drenthe and was eventually brought out in several variants. It was a great success, but unfortunately COVID-19 has put a spanner in the works with its distribution. In addition, various provinces are working on the Wordwies app, a game in which people can test their language skills with seven different Low Saxon variants. So there is collaboration, but many of the materials are not yet available online.

Keyword: Low Saxon in all levels of education

P3 told about the wishes of Twentehoes. They want to create a continuous lesson line: *“Vanaf groep één, als je op de basisschool komt tot aan het voortgezet onderwijs. Dat vinden we heel belangrijk en dat was er gewoon nog niet,”* translated: ‘From kindergarten, when you go to primary school until secondary education. We find that very important and it just was not there yet’. In addition, P3 wants to develop the possibility to learn Twents for adults, because P3 explains: *“Want eigenlijk kan je van alles leren op het LOI, je kan van Chinees tot aan Spaans, nou noem maar op, Russisch, alleen, de hele oude taal Nedersaksisch kan je eigenlijk nergens volgen en dat is toch wel gek”* which roughly translates to: ‘Because you can actually learn

everything at the LOI (educational institution), from Chinese to Spanish to Russian, but you cannot learn the very old language of Low Saxon. That is crazy’.

The desire to teach Low Saxon to adults also exists in the Achterhoek. P2 explains that education on Low Saxon already exists in Overijssel. Guest lessons are given in the regional language. At PABO (teacher training) attention is being paid to the regional language and soon also in academic education: *“Dus eigenlijk, die hele range van basisonderwijs tot aan universiteit proberen we nu af te dekken met les over de streektaal,”* translated: ‘We are now trying to cover the entire range from primary education to university with lessons about the regional language’.

P3 receives nowadays, much more than five years ago, many requests from municipalities that want to include the local language and culture in the teaching materials.

P4 would love to see Low Saxon become a compulsory subject in school, but she says: *“Je kan best wel een keer een lesje Nedersaksisch houden, maar je kan dat niet echt een vak op school maken. Dat is gewoon niet aan ons,”* translated: ‘You can take a lesson in Lower Saxon once, but we cannot really make it a subject at school. That's just not up to us’. P3 is trying to implement a lesson where Low Saxon is taught in terms of history and language: *“Al is het maar één keer, al is het maar één uur”*, translated: ‘Even if it is only once, even if it is only one hour’.

These answers indicate that the language organizations are very keen to implement Low Saxon in education. Sometimes with success.

Summarized, governments promote and protect Low Saxon by recognizing it as a fully-fledged language. This is what the covenant was meant for. It is more of a symbol of recognition and striving for cooperation. However, the results show that the provinces and language

organizations do not agree yet. The results indicate that collaboration can be greatly improved. Financing is one of the most important acts of the provinces to protect Low Saxon. The results indicate that City Councils and Provincial States are mostly positive towards Low Saxon at meetings, but communication in Low Saxon towards residents does not exist on a large scale. Language organizations promote and protect Low Saxon by organizing events. The results show that many things had already been set in motion before signing the covenant. These projects and events mainly focus on young people. They make sure that awareness is raised. Language organizations link Low Saxon to multilingualism, which creates a positive feeling. The results indicate that the language organizations are very keen to implement Low Saxon in education, however the answers show that there is a lack of teaching materials.

All these results show that a lot of effort is put into protecting, stimulating and promoting Low Saxon.

4.2 What language is used in teaching materials and communication from provinces in the Low Saxon language area?

For this question the results of the content analysis of the documents from provinces and teaching materials are used. This content analysis helped to gain insight into the use of language of politicians and governments and education in the Low Saxon language area.

The results that belong to the second sub-question ‘What language is used in education and communication from provinces in the Low Saxon language area?’ are also based on key words. These key words are shown as subheadings, after which the results are described.

The results of the provinces are described first. Then the results of the analysis of teaching materials are discussed. The content analysis is added in Appendices E and F.

4.2.1 Provinces

Twenty materials were analyzed. The website mainly provided articles, however policy documents and minutes of council meetings were found too. The selection of articles was based on the date of publication: the most up-to-date documents were chosen, the table below (Table 5) shows schematically which documents have been analyzed on the basis of that selection. The results refer with brackets to the number by which the analyzed document is identified in this table.

As with the interviews, in the analyzed documents is also looked at the use of the term Low Saxon. It is striking that in the analyzed documents of the provinces of Drenthe (10, 12) and Groningen (1), they use the terms Gronings and Drents instead of Low Saxon. The Weststellingwerf municipality also does this (7). The provinces are focused on their own variant of the regional language. The provinces are focused on their own variant of the regional language and the word Low Saxon is rarely used. The provinces prefer to use the term 'regional language'.

These results show that the various authorities are mainly concerned with themselves. However, this is in contrast to the fact that the documents state that they want to cooperate. People think collectively, but not yet at all levels.

Table 5

Content analysis provinces

Groningen	1. Hogere erkenning Nedersaksisch in Europa <i>Higher recognition of Low Saxon in Europe</i>	News article
	2. Rijken regionale overheden op de bres voor	News article

	<p>Nederakische taal</p> <p><i>Rich regional governments in the defense of the Dutch language</i></p> <p>3. Culturele programmering proeftuin meertaligheid</p> <p><i>Cultural programming testing ground multilingualism</i></p> <p>4. Subsidie voor projecten in streektaalen en het Fries</p> <p><i>Subsidy for projects in regional languages and Frisian</i></p> <p>5. Het verhaal van Groningen</p> <p><i>The story of Groningen</i></p>	<p>Subsidy application form</p> <p>Newsarticle</p> <p>Provincial culture policy 2013-2016</p>
Friesland	<p>6. Bescherming van de Friese taal</p> <p><i>Protection of Frysk language</i></p> <p>7. Historie</p> <p><i>History</i></p>	<p>Article on website</p> <p>Article on website</p>
Drenthe	<p>8. GS-besluitenlijst 11 februari 2020</p> <p><i>Provincial Executive decision list 11 February 2020</i></p> <p>9. Bezoldigde en onbezoldigde (neven)functies gedeputeerde de heer. C. Bijl (PvdA)</p>	<p>Decision list</p> <p>Job description of Provincial Executive</p>

	<p><i>Salaried and unpaid (ancillary) positions, Mr deputy.</i></p> <p><i>C. Bijl (Labor Party)</i></p> <p>10. Energiek Drenthe</p> <p><i>Energetic Drenthe</i></p> <p>11. Provinciale Adviescommissie Cultuur</p> <p><i>Provincial Advisory Committee on Culture</i></p> <p>12. Cultuur om te delen 2021-2024</p> <p><i>Culture to share 2021-2024</i></p>	<p>Summary of achievements</p> <p>Introduction of the members of the advisory committee</p> <p>Culture policy</p>
Overijssel	<p>13. Besluitenlijst Vergadering Provinciale Staten van Overijssel op woensdag 23 januari 2019</p> <p><i>Decision list Meeting Provincial Council of Overijssel on Wednesday January 23, 2019</i></p> <p>14. Lijst afdoening toezeggingen/moties/schriftelijke vragen d.d. 20-12-2018</p> <p><i>List of settlement of commitments / motions / written questions dated 20-12-2018</i></p> <p>15, Motie vreemd ‘convenant Nedersaksisch+’</p>	<p>Decision list</p> <p>List of settlement</p> <p>Motion</p>

	<p><i>Motion strange "covenant Low Saxon +"</i></p> <p>16. Besluitenlijst 15 januari 2019</p> <p><i>Decision list January 15, 2019</i></p> <p>17. Beantwoording Statenvragen D66 over covenant Nedersaksisch</p> <p><i>Answers to Parliamentary questions D66 on the Low Saxon agreement</i></p>	<p>Decision list</p> <p>Reply letter to Mooijweer</p>
Gelderland	<p>18. Besluitenlijst van Gedeputeerde Staten 9 april 2019</p> <p><i>Decision list of the Provincial Executive April 9, 2019</i></p> <p>19. Besluitenlijst GS-vergadering van 25 sep 2018</p> <p><i>Decision list of the Provincial Executive September 25, 2018</i></p> <p>20. D.G.C. Daisy Vliegenthart-Goedhart (CDA)</p> <p><i>D.G.C. Daisy Vliegenthart-Goedhart (CDA)</i></p>	<p>Decision list</p> <p>Decision list</p> <p>Introduction</p>

Key word: Language

One of the goals was to find out if the provinces use Low Saxon in their communication, meetings or documents. This is not the case: the Dutch language is used in all analyzed messages and documents. Only the cultural policy document of the province of Drenthe (12) contains one

sentence in regional language: “*Hier kuj Drents praoten!*”, meaning ‘you can talk Drents here’.

These results show that (almost) no regional language is used by the provinces.

It is notable that when the website of the province of Friesland is opened, there is a choice to read the website in Frisian or in Dutch. This is not the case on websites of other provinces. An explanation for this may be that there are so many different variations of the regional language. They might think it is important that no one should be excluded.

Key word: Tone

In general, the tone of the analyzed messages from all five provinces is formal, solemn, serious and informative. Announcements are described in a neutral manner. In addition, the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe are more noticeable. In these provinces, the tone of the analyzed messages was proud, determined and convincing. Groningen seemed very proud of the regional language. The messages were proud and haughty (1, 2, 5). The analyzed pieces ranged from recent and dated. The older reports are about recognition of Low Saxon in Part III (1, 2, 5). This shows that pride plays a major role within the province. More recent reports are mainly about money and subsidies (1, 3). In addition, it is very clear that Groningen collaborates a lot with other provinces of other organizations (2, 3, 4). This also shows that they are proud of the language and want to show it to others. They want to keep the language alive. Collaboration is one way of doing that.

These results show that Groningen and Drenthe stand out a bit more than the rest. This proud tone was accompanied by reports of recognition in Part III or future policies. Striving for recognition in Part III also shows that pride again.

Key word: Priority

An obvious difference between the provinces is the priority and attention given to Low Saxon. In Drenthe, Gelderland and Friesland, there is little attention to the regional language. This can be explained for the province of Friesland because Low Saxon is not a priority language in the province. There are reports about Low Saxon, but they do not go into any detail about the language or measures to protect it. The reports include short introductions or messages aimed at tourists (7). On the websites of Overijssel and Groningen more policy documents (3, 5) or minutes of meetings (13, 14, 15, 16, 17) can be found. This shows that Low Saxon has recently been discussed in these provinces. Overijssel is at the forefront of this.

When Low Saxon is mentioned in the analyzed documents, it is often done somewhere below and very briefly (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20). It usually takes no more than three sentences. This shows that Low Saxon has no priority within the provinces.

Key word: Measures and efforts

Low Saxon may not have a high priority in the provinces, but the analyzed documents do address various measures and efforts to protect the language. A goal of the content analysis was to find out on the basis of a content analysis what the governments say about measures and agreements to promote and protect Low Saxon and how this was formulated.

The most frequently cited measure is the 2018 covenant, which may or may not be combined with (signing of) the European Charter for regional or minority languages. These analyzed documents are mainly about recognition (1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19). Documents mentioning the European Charter want even stricter measures. By signing the covenant in 2018, the provinces show that they recognize Low Saxon as a fully-fledged part of the language in the

Netherlands. However, the analyzed documents show that for some people recognition in Part II is not enough. Efforts are still being made to be recognized in Part III (1, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). This shows that recognition is the most important way to protect Low Saxon, according to several members of the Provincial Councils.

The documents analyzed show that subsidy is an important effort that provinces use to protect and promote the language (1, 3, 4, 14, 17, 18). Working together and collaboration is also an important factor (4, 12, 18). The documents analyzed also show that official regional language organizations (4), an ambassador (20) and deputy (9) have been appointed.

These results show that recognition and financing are the most important efforts of the provinces to maintain Low Saxon. This is in line with the results on this topic from the interviews.

Key word: Key persons

In Overijssel, Jos Mooijweer plays a major role in regional language (13, 15, 16, 17). He filed a motion to use Low Saxon even more. He thinks the recognition that the language is now getting is not enough. He recently demanded attention in the Provincial Council. It has already been appointed, but this shows that it matters which persons are in the Provincial Council.

Another might have paid less or no attention to this.

4.2.2 Teaching materials

Current Dutch education legislation has for many years already allowed Lower Saxon to be taught at primary schools. HAVO and VWO schools can even choose to include Low Saxon as a subject in free space, but the interviews showed that there is a great lack of good teaching

materials. This was also apparent during the search for material. Sometimes there was nothing to be found on the websites of the language organization that say they design teaching materials. P3 also said that teaching materials are not available online. P2 explains: *“Nu is er eigenlijk nog geen lesmateriaal. Dat wil zeggen, er zijn gewoon tekstjes die kinderen kunnen gebruiken. Liedjes in het dialect, verhaaltjes in het dialect, spelletjes in het dialect,”* translated: ‘There is actually no teaching material yet. That is to say, there are just texts that children can use. Songs, stories and games in the dialect’. P5 explains why it is difficult to find. It is impossible to get a complete picture, because the teaching materials are not put together in a systematic way. Sometimes an individual school seems to pay a lot of attention to regional language, because there are one or two teachers who find this very valuable. Much of that material has not yet been found.

Eleven materials were analyzed. Of the eleven, five were a story, three poems, two songs, a magazine and a picture book. The target group for most material is 6-12 years old, excluding the picture book. Teaching material for secondary school does exist, but it is tailor-made or consists of workshops. These cannot be found online and therefore cannot be analyzed. Teaching materials from the province of Gelderland were not found online.

The selection of teaching materials was based on the date of publication: the most up-to-date materials were chosen, the table below (table 6) shows schematically which have been analyzed on the basis of that selection. The results refer with brackets to the number by which the analyzed teaching material is identified in this table.

Table 6*Content analysis teaching materials*

Groningen	<p>1. Bie oma <i>At grandma's</i></p> <p>2. Ain boer wol naor zien noaber tou <i>A farmer wants to go to the neighbor</i></p> <p>3. Aailand <i>Island</i></p>	<p>Story with assignments</p> <p>Song</p> <p>Poem</p>
Friesland	<p>4. De Hollebomebos <i>The hollow trees forest</i></p> <p>5. Gedicht over de Lende <i>Poem about the Lende</i></p>	<p>Story with assignments</p> <p>Poem with assignments</p>
Drenthe	<p>6. Mörge is het feest <i>Tomorrow is the party</i></p> <p>7. De ontevreden koningin <i>The disgruntled queen</i></p>	<p>Poem with assignments</p> <p>Story with assignments</p>

	8. Wiesneus blad 2020 <i>Wiesneus magazine 2020</i>	Magazine
	9. Het rollegie <i>untranslatable</i>	picture book
Overijssel	10. Streektafen in Nederland <i>Regional languages in the Netherlands</i>	Story with assignments
	11. Op hoes opan veur Kesmis <i>Driving home for Christmas</i>	Song with assignment
	12. Bökkers <i>Bökkers</i>	Story
Gelderland	-	

Key word: Availability

Some provinces have teaching materials together, such as Drenthe with *Wiesneus* and *Huus van de Taol* or Overijssel on *mijnstadmijndorp.nl*. This is in contrast to other provinces or language institutes that have not (yet) put their teaching materials online. These are ECAL and *IJsselacademie* and *Twentehoes*. *IJsselacademie* and *Twentehoes* are working on new digital

teaching materials to enable students to grow in their sense of language and a positive attitude towards Low Saxon. ECAL has a curriculum, a book and a DVD in Low Saxon, but these are for sale. They are not available online. Therefore, they could not be analyzed.

Key word: Financial aid

There are differences between provinces who have made their material available. As P4 and P1 said: the teaching materials made by Drenthe and the *Wiesneus* website show that Drenthe has made money available for this. It looks nice. *Wiesneus* is an important magazine and is published in Drenthe, Overijssel and Gelderland. The lay-out is the same, but the stories and puzzles are in the local variant of Low Saxon, P3 said. The website of *Wiesneus* is nice and very extensive. P1 knows why: “*Laat ik het zo stellen, de Drentse Provinciale Staten zijn het meest genereus van de vijf gebieden waarin de Nedersaksische taal is,*” which translates to ‘Let me put it this way, the Drenthe Provincial Council is the most generous of the five areas’. This result show that there is a difference between the provinces when it comes to financing.

Still, the website of *Huus van de Taol* is not very useful, because it summarizes what they have in teaching materials, but they have not added a link to it. You still have to search the internet yourself.

Key word: Language

What immediately is noticeable that most of the analyzed teaching material is (partially) in Low Saxon, and also voiced. This shows that children in primary school can read and understand Low Saxon.

The majority of the analyzed teaching materials (7 out of 11) is in Low Saxon (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12). This is especially the case in the provinces of Drenthe and Groningen. An example of complete Low Saxon teaching material from those provinces is shown in the figure below (Figure 7). This indicates that children can already understand Low Saxon well.

Figure 7

Low Saxon materials from CGTC and Huus van de Taol

Duits, Engels, Drents en Nederlands

Typ het Nederlands derbij.

Aj met de pijl of cursor over de Duutse, Engelse en Drentse woorden beweegt, kuj ze heuren.

Klik daornao op: **Kiek oj 't goed daon hebt**

Lessuggesties veur “Bie Oma”:

Lees t verhoal veur en stel noa ofloop n aantal vroagen.

- Woar binnen Geert en Froukje op veziede?
- Binnen baaide oma's geliek?
- Wat vertelde oma mit ogen over vrouger?
 - over gruinteboer, peerd en woagen
 - over kolenboer, zo swaart as rout
- Wat wil Geert geern doun?
- Wat wil oma doun?
- Woar is opa?
- Welk instrument bespeult opa?
- Wel kin nog meer instrumenten?
- Woarom loat oma heur koppie valen?
- Wat is n schuddeldouk?
- Wat gebruek je nog meer om wat schoon te moaken?

Duits	Engels	Drents	Nederlands
Königin	queen	keuneginne
hässlich	ugly	lillijk
zurück	back	weerumme
ein saures Gesicht	a sour face	een zoer gezicht
ein Sandweg	a dirt road	een zaandweggie
sie riechen gut	they smell good	ze roekt lekker
Goldketten	gold chains	golden kettinkies
Schmuck	jewelry	sieraoden

Note. Not a word of Dutch is used.

4 out of 11 materials contain combined language (4, 5, 6, 11). Dutch and Low Saxon are used side by side, for example: assignments are in Dutch, but the reading text or song is written in Low Saxon. This shows that Dutch is the standard language in primary schools. One of the analyzed materials is written entirely in Dutch (10). This comes from *mijnstadmijndorp.nl* from the province of Overijssel. There are also analyzed materials that involve languages other than

Low Saxon in the assignments, such as Frysian and Limburgish (10), but also German and English (7, 11), as shown in Figure 7. This shows how language organizations link and combine Low Saxon to multilingualism.

The teaching materials from the West- and Ooststellingwerf website are very user-friendly. The translation is included, as shown in the figure below (Figure 8) and the assignments state that when a word is not known in Low Saxon, pupils can also use the Dutch word (5). This shows that in West and Ooststellingwerf they do not assume that every child understands regional language, in contrast to the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe.

Figure 8

Teaching materials used in West- and Ooststellingwerf

Snuffel is een: 1. knien (konijn) 2. hond (hond) 3. katte (kat)

Het bos heet: 1. de Dikkebomebos 2. de Hollebomebos 3. de Hoge bomebos

Wat halen de kraaien op: 1. droppies (dropjes) 2. koekies (koekjes) 3. wottels (wortels)

De kinderboerderij heet: 1. Snip-Snap 2. Hip-Hop 3. Tip-Top

'Draeven' betekent: 1. spelen 2. draven 3. vliegen

Een 'stiekelvarken' is een: 1. egel 2. biggetje 3. ezel

Op de boerderij wonen: 1. twee pony's 2. twintig pony's 3. honderd pony's

Sloompjen is een: 1. haeze (haas) 2. slakke (slak) 3. peerd (paard)

Wat betekent 'gliedaene': 1. zwembad 2. badmusse (badmuts) 3. glijbaan

Krakkemikka is een: 1. oude stoel 2. heks 3. reus

De kleur van de moterhelm is: 1. orange 2. geel 3. paars

'Goelen' betekent: 1. lachen 2. zingen 3. huilen

Note. The translation is included.

Key word: Tone

The tone of the analyzed materials varies. It is noticeable that the analyzed materials of the CGTC are negative. The tone is aggressive and sad (2, 3). Of course, only a small part has been viewed. After inquiring with CGTC it became clear that some stories belong to the old Groningen culture.

The tone of the analyzed materials from West- and Ooststellingwerf is mainly positive and proud. This can be explained by the fact that these municipalities are excluded from the Frisian Language Act. They are allowed to speak in Low Saxon and are proud of it.

Key word: Themes

The themes that appear in the analyzed teaching materials vary per province. The CGTC teaching materials deal with negative topics, such as loneliness (3) and arguing (2). One of the materials analyzed by *Huus van de Taol* is about grief and divorcing parents (6). In addition, cheerful topics are treated in the analyzed materials, such as a party (11, 12) and food (9). All kinds of topics are discussed in the regional language. These results show Low Saxon can be used for everything.

It is striking that local subjects are used, such as a *rollegie* (9), a local river (5) or a well-known Overijssel music band (12). This shows that not only the regional language, but also the local culture and environment is considered important.

Summarized, the results show that (almost) no regional language is in the analyzed documents of the provinces. The various authorities are mainly concerned with themselves. However, this is in contrast to the fact that the documents state that they want to cooperate. The

analyzed documents of the province of Overijssel were the most relevant and recent. This shows that Low Saxon has recently been discussed. However, in general Low Saxon does not have priority in the Provincial Councils. The results show that recognition and financing are the most important way to protect Low Saxon, according to several members of the Provincial Councils, but it matters which persons are in the Provincial Council. This is in line with the results on this topic from the interviews.

There is little teaching material available online, but what there is is mainly written in Low Saxon and has been voiced, which means that children understand the language. There are various assignments with varying subjects, which shows Low Saxon can be used for everything. The results show that there is a difference between the provinces when it comes to financing. Language organizations link and combine Low Saxon to multilingualism and results show that not only the regional language, but also the local culture and environment is considered important.

In short, these results show that the use of Low Saxon and the attention for Low Saxon by the provinces is still very little. Much more could be done, also because they are the ones who signed the covenant. Low Saxon is already very well implemented in education.

4.3 What influence does the use of language have on people speaking the language?

For this question the results of the interviews held with the members of the language institutes are used. These interviews helped to gain insight into the feelings of residents towards Low Saxon and the use of Low Saxon by politicians and language organizations. The participants were asked whether or not people are content with efforts their provincial government makes.

The results that belong to the third sub-question ‘What influence does the use of language have on people speaking the language?’ are also based on key words.

Key word: Satisfied

All interviews showed that residents are very satisfied with the actions of governments and language organizations. P2 has many contacts and mainly hears positive reactions: *“Ik hoor ook, zowel uit de provincie, maar ook wel van mensen die uit hobby overwegingen met dialect bezig zijn, die vinden het allemaal heel leuk. Ja, die willen dan toch graag dat daar aandacht voor is,”* which translates to ‘I also hear, both from the province, but also from people who are busy with dialect for hobby reasons, they all really like it. They would like to see that there is attention for Low Saxon’.

Key word: The right time

As described earlier in the results of the first sub-question, people are now much more aware than twenty years ago that they speak a real language. P1 and P3 indicate that the awareness may have to do with the fact that it is now the right time for Low Saxon. All kinds of new initiatives have been launched since 2018. P3 thinks it is because Low Saxon has been brought to the attention again. She thinks that people now dare to speak Low Saxon. *“Dat als je denkt van nou, het is officieel, het mag. Dat merk ik zelf ook,”* which translates to ‘That if you think well, it is official, it is allowed. I notice that myself’. It is an official language. That gives some kind of extra support: *“Het is gewoon wettelijk vastgelegd. Het helpt mij wel, het had mij ook misschien twintig jaar geleden ook geholpen als ik het toen had geweten.”* translated: ‘It is

just legally established. It helps me, maybe it would have helped me twenty years ago if I had known then’.

This shows there is a different attitude. P1 explains: the world used to be more focused on foreign countries. This globalisation is now changing and countermovements are coming up.

4.3.1 Being connected

Key word: Regional identity

P1 mentions one of those countermovements: “*De waardering voor het lokale wordt wat groter. De taal is natuurlijk ook een onderdeel van de identiteit, dus je merkt dat de houding tegenover de spreektaal anders is,*” translated: ‘The appreciation for the local is growing somewhat. The language is part of the identity, so you notice that the attitude towards the spoken language is different’. P3 also notices this: “*(...) dat is mijn eigen visie hoor, dat is natuurlijk niet wetenschappelijk onderbouwd, omdat er een globalisering is en iedereen zoekt naar zijn eigen identiteit*” which translates to ‘That is my own vision, not scientifically substantiated, because there is globalization and everyone is looking for their own identity’. P3 experiences that through this globalization everyone is looking for their own regional identity. P4 agrees. “*Er is een soort... misschien een soort tegenbeweging, maar dat kan ik ook niet staven, maar dat die regionale identiteit opkomt,*” translated: ‘There is a kind... maybe a kind of counter-movement, but I cannot substantiate that, but that this regional identity is emerging’. The fact that the participants experience this separately from each other indicates that the regional identity is becoming increasingly important in the Low Saxon language area.

Regional identity is already very important in the Achterhoek. The Achterhoek flag can now be seen on almost every street corner, P4 said. Achterhoek themed mouth masks are also made. They are very popular now.

There is also really a lot of demand for a kind of crash course Twents. There is a tendency for people to like to know how to speak Low Saxon and where they come from. P2 said: *“Het schept een soort band tussen de mensen in Overijssel. We spreken dezelfde taal. En in andere gebieden weer een andere taal. Dus het draagt heel erg bij aan identiteit”*, which translates to ‘It creates a kind of bond between the people of Overijssel. We speak the same language. And another language in other areas. So it really contributes to identity’. P3 explained: *“De trots komt wel een beetje weer terug en dat vind ik eigenlijk best wel heel mooi,”* translated: ‘The pride comes back a bit and I think that is actually quite beautiful’. P2 agrees: *“Het is juist leuk om de streektaal te gebruiken om te laten zien van, ik kom uit Overijssel en ik heb daar positieve gevoelens bij,”* which translates to ‘It is nice to use the regional language to show that, I am from Overijssel and I have positive feelings about that’. These results show that speaking Low Saxon evokes positive feelings.

People who come to live (again) in the region say that they would also like to learn more about the area, the language and culture. People are interested in the region. P1 explains: *“En nu is de tendens meer richting het lokale en dichterbij huis, denk ik,”* translated: ‘And now the trend is more towards the local and closer to home, I think’. People want to be able to speak Low Saxon with their neighbors, P2 said.

There is a lot of superficiality now, P3 said, but people want more information about the region and where they and their neighbours come from, because: *“Als je dat niet weet, dan kan je het ook niet beschermen en overdragen,”* translated: ‘If you do not know that, you cannot

protect and transfer it'. These results show that there is more interest in the region and regional language.

Key word: Connecting

Several participants indicate that speaking Low Saxon affects people's lives. P2 explained: *"Mensen herkennen het. Het klinkt heel vertrouwd. Het is iets van de eigen streek. Het is herkenbaar. Dat heeft zeker invloed op mensen"*, translated: 'People recognize it. It sounds very familiar. It is something of their own region. It is recognizable. That certainly affects people'.

Language is part of that identity. P4 said: *"Het is ook je afzetten tegen de rest, want dat is regionale identiteit"*, translated: 'Language is used to put off against the rest'. It is also compared to the other variants of Low Saxon. They sound different, so the identity of people with a different regional language is also different. Sometimes those differences are linked to status. Correspondence with Mr Bloemhoff revealed that those differences exist in everyday practice and in people's thoughts. People think they are different and therefore put off against others. P1 recognizes this: *"Over het Gronings wordt weleens gezegd: dat zijn van die knauwers, dus dat herken ik wel. En het Twents wordt ook wel heel positief neergezet"*, translated: 'It is sometimes said about the regional language of Groningen: those are mumblers. And Twents is always portrayed very positively'.

However, language connects much more than it divides. P4: *"En dat werkt door in alles; wat je zegt, dat werkt door in de zorg, dat werkt door in het nabuurschap wat we hier hebben, dat je toch denkt van: ja, wij moeten toch dit samen doen, en jij bent net als ik. En dan maakt het niet uit in wat voor klasse jij bent opgegroeid of in werkt of in woont of wat dan ook, als je*

allemaal plat, praat ben je allemaal weer gelijk,” which roughly translates to ‘And that affects everything; what you say has an effect on healthcare, that has an effect on what we have here in the neighborhood, that you still think: yes, we must do this together, and you are just like me. And then it does not matter what class you grew up in or work in or live in or whatever, if you all speak Low Saxon, you're all equal again’. These answers indicate that speaking Low Saxon creates equality.

Low Saxon connects. The municipalities are well aware of this, says P3. She continues: *“Ze zitten heel erg met een bereikvraagstuk daar. Het gaat natuurlijk ook om het bereiken van mensen in de kleine kernen en kleine dorpen en heel veel mensen spreken daar nog streektaal en die voelen toch een drempel als een foldertje of aanvraagformulier of een appje in het Nederlands krijgen”*, which roughly translates to ‘They really have a reach issue there. It is also about reaching people in the small centers and small villages and a lot of people there still speak regional language. They still feel a barrier such as receiving a leaflet or application form or an app in Dutch’. When people are contacted in Low Saxon, a barrier will be broken down and someone can be reached easier.

Governments and language organizations realize that a regional language can also connect very different age categories. *“Dus dat als mijn dochter van vijftien iets zegt in een streektaal, dat iemand van 70 dat grapje ook kan begrijpen”*, translated: ‘So that if my fifteen-year-old daughter says something in a regional language, someone 70 can understand that joke too’. There is a very large gap between the perception of older people and younger people, that is a connecting factor. That is why municipalities are building a network structure together with language organizations in Overijssel. Themed afternoons and Low Saxon activities are organized to keep an eye on whether people are doing well.

Another project is regional language in healthcare. According to P1, it is very nice to be able to use Low Saxon to help people and to be more understandable. It goes very well, said P3: *“Dat slaat wel heel goed aan. Dat is eigenlijk wel heel mooi om te zien. Mensen hebben wel door dat als je iemand benadert in hun eigen taal, waar in ze zijn opgevoed, dat dat heel goed werkt en dat je direct een veel betere band hebt en dat ze dat ook als zeer prettig ervaren”*, translated: ‘That works very well. That is actually very nice to see. People do realize that if you approach someone in their own language, where they have been brought up, that it works very well and that you immediately have a much better bond. They also experience it as very pleasant’.

Speaking Low Saxon has an influence on people. It creates a feeling of togetherness. P4 explains: *“Op het moment dat je zegt van: ja, maar omdat jij uit Winterswijk komt en wij zijn hetzelfde, dan wil je ook meer voor iemand doen. Dus je gaat wel dat individualisme tegen, van: iedereen alleen maar op zijn eigen eilandje, ieder moet voor zichzelf zorgen”*, translated: ‘The moment you say: yes, but because you are from Winterswijk and we are the same, you also want to do and mean more for someone. So you are going against individualistic thinking, everyone alone on their islands taking care of themselves’. P4 adds that if you speak the same language, it becomes easier: *“Ik denk dat als jij ergens in de ellende zit, en je ziet alleen maar mensen om je heen die een andere taal spreken, dan is dat lastig. En als iemand dan komt van: maar ik versta je wel, dat het ook allemaal veel makkelijker wordt. Dat is ook zeker in de zorg, maar ook op werk en dat soort dingen, dat maakt het allemaal veel makkelijker. En hier over de grens, over de grens spreken ze ook dezelfde taal, dus je hoeft niet moeilijk in het Duits je uit te drukken of wat dan ook”*, roughly translated: ‘I think if you're in trouble somewhere, and you only see people around you who speak a different language, that's difficult. And if someone reaches out who understands you, it becomes much easier. That is certainly the case in healthcare, but also at

work and things like that, that makes it all much easier. And here across the border they also speak the same language, so you do not have to express yourself in German or whatever'. P4 concludes: "*En dat verbindt als een gek*" which translates to 'That connects like crazy'.

These results show that Low Saxon creates collectivity. Asking for help is easier. Low Saxon connects people of different ages and in different countries. People are equal and belong together when they speak Low Saxon.

Key word: Counter-voices

P3 summarized: regional language is emotion. "*Dat is dan soms het hele moeilijke aan het verhaal*", translated: 'That is sometimes the difficult part'.

Language as emotion is difficult, because language is always in development, P3 said. Language is not static, but people over 70 years old say Low Saxon must remain as it is, which of course is not possible. Passing on the language in a new way sometimes clashes with the elderly. But language will never stay the same, P3 explains: "*Met invloeden van migratie, immigratie, je hebt, je snapt het wel, er is zoveel beweging, het zal nooit hetzelfde blijven. Dat moet je accepteren*", translated: 'With influences from migration, immigration, you have, you get it, there is so much movement, it will never stay the same. You have to accept that'. These results show that language evokes feelings.

P2 does not come across counter-voices often, in the words of P2: "*Dat kom ik maar weinig tegen*". P4 did hear criticism from people who thought that a translation was not good enough. The explanation for this is that there is not one good version, there are many different variants. P5 does also not come across criticism regarding Low Saxon. However, she noticed that knowledge about multilingualism is dated. Some people still think that if you educate children

multilingual, then they cannot express themselves well in any language. Scientific results show something completely different, P5 said. P5 gives the example of the Frisian language. Since Frisian has been extensively discussed as a school subject, children make fewer language errors in Dutch than before.

P1 gives an example from last January. A volunteer has managed to get place-name signs with a Low Saxon translation in Peize (Figure 9). He received positive reactions, but also resistance like *"Dat is verspilling van geld van de belastingbetaler"*, translated: 'That is a waste of taxpayers' money' and *"Dat voegt niks toe"*, translated: 'It does not add anything'.

These results indicate that there are little counter-voices in the field of regional language. There is no more criticism than usual. There has been some commentary on translations, but that's mainly because there are so many variants of Low Saxon.

Figure 9:

Place-name sign in Peize



Note: This sign evoked positive feelings, but also resistance.

4.3.2 Use of Low Saxon

Key word: Daily life

In general, people are positive about the efforts of the language institutes and governments. This can also be seen in the language used by residents and the initiatives that people set up themselves. The elderly are especially willing to do something for Low Saxon. They like to read aloud at primary schools.

Young people also use Low Saxon in their daily lives. P5 even states that people need regional language to function, for example in construction. P3 also talked about people with their own company who ask for shouts for Twente for their website, so that potential customers see that the company is located in Twente. This shows that people are proud of their language.

Another example is the daughter of 15 years old of P3, who uses Low Saxon in other situations than P3. *“Dat is eigenlijk best wel grappig”*, translated: *‘That is actually quite funny’*.

Her daughter uses Low Saxon in combination with slang, in Whatsapp conversations and on social media. She uses sayings, graphics interchange format (GIF) or words in regional language.

Regional language is also used by young people in local traditions. In Twente it is a tradition that your friends make a banner on your 25th birthday. On that banner is a funny text in Low Saxon. Dancing Bruins is a well-known disco that uses Low Saxon as their unique selling point. They make pens, stickers, etc. P3 explains: *“Die zijn heel erg populair. (..) Plakken ze allemaal op de fiets en dat zijn van die hele grappige identiteitsbepalende items eigenlijk, zij zijn daar heel sterk in en doen het ook met opzet”*, translated: *‘They are very popular. (..) Young people put them all on their bikes and those are very funny identity-determining items actually, Dancing Bruins is very good at that and also do it on purpose’*.

These results show that Low Saxon lives in all walks of life, including young people. The attitude towards Low Saxon is very positive.

The positive attitude is also evident from the large amount of music that exists in Low Saxon. This is not organized by governments or organizations, but people do this themselves. About music in Low Saxon, P3 said: *“Je hebt ook op dit moment wat er heel veel popmuziek gemaakt, ook in streektaal. Dat is er nog nooit zoveel geweest als nu”*, which translates to ‘At the moment you have also a lot of pop music in regional language. There has never been as many as now’. An example of music in Low Saxon is from Leon Moorman. Every week he sang a cover in regional language. Another example is Bökkers, a Low Saxon band, which according to P2 and P3 attracts a large audience. These results show that people use Low Saxon in their daily lives of own accord.

Key word: Taalwil

A positive attitude and own initiative are necessary. P4 summarized: *“We kunnen van alles bedenken, maar als niemand het leuk vindt en het niet blijft hangen en iedereen het maar stom blijft vinden, dan kunnen we duwen en trekken wat we willen, maar dan gaat het niet”*, translated: ‘We can think of anything, but if no one likes it and it does not stick and everyone keeps thinking it's stupid, then we can push and pull what we want, but it won't work’. When you start to oblige people, you immediately get opposition, P4 and P2 say. P2 nuances: *“Aan de andere kant, ook als je van buiten komt, dan hoef je maar weinig moeite te doen. Het is ook geen Perzisch of Chinees, dat Nedersaksisch van ons. Dat versta je wel. Dat is net als, ik versta Brabants ook wel. Dus dat is ook een beetje een kwestie van goede wil”*, which roughly translates to ‘On the other hand, even if you come from another region, you do not have to make

much effort. It is not Persian or Chinese, that Low Saxon of ours. You will understand it. That's just like, I understand Brabants too. So it is a bit of goodwill'.

Language and the need to speak Low Saxon must come from the bottom up, P4 said, "*Ze gaan het alleen maar spreken omdat ze het leuk vinden of omdat ze het kunnen, dus dan moet je ze dingen aanreiken, maar wij kunnen die trots niet... wel een beetje voeden, maar niet... we kunnen die niet opbrengen*", which translates to 'They are only going to speak it because they like it or because they can, so then you have to hand them things, but we can't feed that pride. These results show men should want to speak Low Saxon. Taalwil has to be present.

Summarized, the attitude towards Low Saxon is very positive nowadays. The results show that is now the right time to speak Low Saxon. There is a different attitude. The fact that the participants experience this separately from each other indicates that the regional identity is becoming increasingly important in the Low Saxon language area. There is more interest in the region and regional language. Speaking Low Saxon evokes positive feelings. In addition, it creates equality and collectivity. Low Saxon connects people of different ages and in different countries including young people. The results show that people use Low Saxon in their daily lives, which indicates that people are proud of their language. There are little counter-voices in the field of regional language.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This conclusion is combined with the discussion. The results of the three sub-questions are linked to literature and theories.

The findings are related to the three language policy themes of Smeets (2001): corpus, status and acquisition. Corpus is linked to the content analysis, status is communication and use of language and acquisition is linked to education and teaching materials.

5.1 Corpus

No regional language is used in the analyzed documents of the provinces except one sentence in a policy document from the province of Drenthe. In general, Low Saxon does not have priority in the Provincial Councils. Despite the little attention Low Saxon receives, efforts of the provinces like recognition and financing are mentioned. Baard (2018), Van der Meer (2019) and Van Dinther (2018) stated that the national government does not finance Low Saxon related projects. This study shows that provinces do finance those projects. They sometimes give instructions to language organizations. Which is right, according to Hoekstra and Riemersma, because top-down language planning is the most common form of language planning (2012).

Although little teaching material is available online, Low Saxon is very well implemented. It can clearly be seen that some provinces make more money available for education than others. Language organizations link and combine Low Saxon to multilingualism. Bilingualism where the second language is a minority language is associated with a low social status (Kroon & Liebrand, 1983; Swanenberg, 2019; Visser, 2020; Wight, 1971). However, bilingualism is increasingly accepted according to the participants. It is seen as a positive development.

5.2 Status

The five provinces signed the covenant ‘Nedersaksisch’ by which they recognized Low Saxon as an official fully-fledged language again. From that moment on, language politics became more important. According to Grin (2003), language politics is a policy aiming to change or stop the change in language use. This is what the covenant was meant for, because taking good care of diversity protects a language and keeps a language alive (Kymlicka & Patten, 2003).

It is striking that the five provinces have come to this covenant together, but all five are allowed to determine their own policy. In order to learn from each other’s good examples, governments have to coordinate their efforts more (Rijksoverheid, 2018). This is not yet successful. Even the term Low Saxon is used in different ways.

City Councils and Provincial States mostly have a positive attitude towards Low Saxon at meetings, but communication in Low Saxon towards inhabitants does not exist on a large scale. People use Low Saxon in their daily lives, for example in music or on social media. This is in line with the thoughts of Cornips, who said regional language is developing and is used on Whatsapp (Van der Meer, 2019).

According to Klimaszewska (2006) and Swanenberg (2019), language is the most important element of regional identity and a way of creating the feeling of togetherness. This also applies to Low Saxon. Speaking Low Saxon is a way to strengthen regional identity. Regional identity is becoming more important in the Low Saxon language area. Speaking Low Saxon evokes positive feelings and it creates equality and collectivity.

Low Saxon connects people of different ages and in different countries. This corresponds to Swanenberg (2019), who said language connects and makes people feel like they belong. The

results show that people use Low Saxon in their daily lives, which indicates that people are proud of their language. This is in line with the research of Leijen (2011), who said that especially in regional languages initiatives are made by citizens. People come up with initiatives themselves. This shows that they really want to use the language. This is in line with Hoekstra and Riemersma (2012): language policy cannot exist without '*taalwil*'. People should want to speak the language.

5.3 Acquisition

Hagen (2002) and Hoekstra and Riemersma (2012) say that language policy is mainly focused on education. This has also emerged from the interviews. It is policy that education is financed by the provinces. It is important that people are aware that they are speaking an official regional language. They are also aware of this in the Low Saxon language area. This is in contrast with Swanenberg (2009), who indicates the level of consciousness is often low.

Language organizations are very keen to implement Low Saxon in education, however there is a lack of teaching materials. Education should be a starting point for taking a language further. The focus lies on young people. This is in line with the covenant: to preserve a language, it is important that the younger generations learn to speak it (MIKR, 2018). This is consistent with Visser (2020): she states that we need to continue to speak dialects with our (grand)children, because children have the ability to easily learn and speak multiple languages. For this reason, an app has been built in which the different variants of Low Saxon can be learned. This is in line with Cornips (2016), who thinks a digital platform is needed to teach Low Saxon to the next generation.

5.4 What efforts do local governments put into stimulating, promoting and protecting Low Saxon in the Netherlands?

The research shows that attention to the promotion and protection of Low Saxon is being paid in various ways. They are listed below.

The most important effort is recognition through the 2018 covenant. The agreement is that the five provinces will cooperate. It seems that this is still being attempted in vain, because provinces and language organizations do not agree on all levels yet. It seems as if the provinces and language organizations are mainly concerned with themselves rather than with the bigger picture. In addition, it seems as if they compete with each other. Some are hesitant to share ideas. The collaboration could be much better.

One of other important efforts provinces put into protecting Low Saxon is financing. It is clear that financing varies by province. It also depends on who is in the Provincial Council and how much affinity they have with Low Saxon. Perhaps it is better for the preservation and protection of the language that this is aligned. In this way, the attention and money are better distributed.

Municipalities are enthusiastic and councilors like to show up at Low Saxon related events. They also occasionally hold meetings in regional language. It sets an example.

While it may sometimes seem as if there was no cooperation and the language organizations just looked at each other, the opposite is true. Language organizations have consulted more structurally since the signing.

All language organizations design teaching materials to preserve, protect and promote Low Saxon. They do all of this because there is very little material available online. That may be because there are different variants of Low Saxon, but they agreed to work together so they do

not reinvent the wheel all over again. This is not happening yet. People are hesitant to share, so designing teaching materials runs side by side. This can be greatly improved.

There are also positive elements to education. Most of the materials available are written in Low Saxon. Language organizations are trying to cover the entire range of education.

Language organizations organize Low Saxon related events and activities that are well received by the residents. This is not a direct result of the covenant. Before signing the covenant 'Nedersaksisch', many projects had already been set in motion. Not all, but many of those projects are aimed at young people. Young people are important to preserve the language, because otherwise it becomes extinct. In order to reach those young people, there must be sufficient education. There is currently no good cooperation and little money is available. This could get in the way of teaching the youth Low Saxon.

One way of the language organizations to promote Low Saxon is to link it to multilingualism. That evokes positive feelings. Multilingualism with a regional language as an additional language is increasingly accepted and is seen more and more as a normal situation.

Another way to promote Low Saxon by language organizations is stimulating the regional identity and creating a positive attitude towards local culture. Low Saxon is part of that identity, so people will have positive associations with the language. In addition, language connects people and gives them a feeling of togetherness. The governments and language organizations are aware of that, but also know they cannot force Low Saxon. People should want to speak it.

What is still missing in the efforts of the provinces and language organizations is communication in Low Saxon from authorities. It was expected that there would be documents

or letters to civilians in regional language. This is not the case. Also, it seems that Low Saxon does not have any priority within the provinces, while they signed the covenant.

5.4.1 Limitations of this study

The reader should bear in mind that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the research area and the language organizations could not be visited. Interviews therefore had to be done over the phone. This can give a distorted picture or cause misinterpretation.

Only five people were interviewed. Based on these people, it is impossible to know whether the entire region is satisfied, but they do have an overall picture of the residents' wishes. In addition, it was asked whether there were opposing views, so an attempt was made to obtain as complete a picture as possible.

It was expected that the Low Saxon language could be an obstacle, but this was not the case. Most of the analyzed documents were in Dutch. Teaching materials took sometimes more effort to understand, even though the target group was 10 years old.

5.4.2 Follow-up research

Further research should be undertaken to explore how Low Saxon will be used in the coming years. There is agreed to cooperation, it can be investigated whether this has already improved.

This study does not engage with communication from municipalities. Perhaps there were documents in regional language or about Low Saxon by municipalities, but there is deliberately

chosen to analyze provinces, because they signed the covenant. Further research should focus on determining whether or not local governments use Low Saxon in their communication.

5.4.3 Critical note

The thought that sometimes came to mind during this research was 'is it worth putting so much money into preserving a language?' Kymlicka and Patten (2003) state that taking good care of diversity protects a language and keeps a language alive, but taking care costs money. According to Haugen's theory 'ecology of language' (1972), language must be treated as an organism: languages are born, they change and they die. Is it worth investing money in a language that naturally changes?

The research shows that people find it worthwhile. During the conversations it soon became clear that people are proud of Low Saxon and speaking the language creates positive developments and feelings. Language is emotion and people are trying to protect Low Saxon in different ways. They show it is worth the effort.

5.5 Final conclusion

To conclude, protecting and promoting Low Saxon since the signing of the covenant 'Nedersaksisch' in 2018 seems to be going very well, but sometimes it looks like the five provinces and language organizations are still in the start-up phase. Everyone agrees that Low Saxon should be protected and promoted, but the rest is still a bit wobbly and undefined.

There are people who believe that the covenant will not contribute anything, but these results already show that the covenant was not just empty words.

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