

From Dutch to Frisian: Learn by Decoding

A transformation manual for Dutch speakers acquiring Frisian — rules auto-generated from IE-CoR gold cognate data; pedagogy authored

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Provenance & scope. The rule tables (§2–§3) are sound correspondences harvested automatically by aligning Dutch↔Frisian cognate pairs in the IE-CoR database (expert cognacy), ranked by frequency; they are phonemic (IPA-ish), not spelling rules, and are a data-driven first draft. The pronunciation, bridge-sentence and instructor sections are authored and illustrative — validate all of it against a full corpus and a native speaker before course use. Counts are small (a Swadesh-sized list), so treat low-count rules as tendencies.

1. The good news: your crib

Of 164 basic concepts, 132 (80%) are cognate — the Frisian word is a regular transformation of the Dutch word you already know. Only 32 (20%) are genuinely different words to memorise. Your learning target is therefore mostly a rule system, not a vocabulary.

Sounds that usually stay the same (transfer for free): /t/, /l/, /s/, /b/, /k/, /m/, /ŋ/.

2. The rules to learn — consonants (the recognition skeleton)

Consonants carry most of a word's identity; these are the highest-leverage rules.

rule	count	reliability	examples
/n/ → ∅	20	65%	bɛitən→bitə (bite); zɛɣən→sɪzə (say)
/z/ → /s/	14	100%	zaut→sɔ:t (salt); zant→sɔ:n (sand)
/v/ → /f/	13	81%	voɣəl→fuɣəl (bird); valən→fɔlə (fall)
/w/ → /v/	8	50%	zwɛmən→svɪmə (swim); warm→va:rm (hot)
/x/ → /x/	7	58%	bɛrx→bɛrx (mountain); nɔxt→naxt (night)
/ɣ/ → /g/	7	54%	ɣrot→grɔt (big); ɣələik→glɛ:t (smooth)
/r/ → ∅	7	78%	wɔrtəl→watəl (root); zwart→swat (black)
/d/ → /t/	6	86%	dichtbij→tɪxtəbɛi (near); dɛŋkən→tɪŋkə (think)
/t/ → ∅	4	50%	zant→sɔ:n (sand); wint→vin (wind)

3. The rules to learn — vowels (the main body of shifts)

Vowels shift more than consonants; this is where most of the transformation lives.

rule	count	reliability	examples
/e/ → /ə/ (variable)	9	36%	navel→nɔ:lə (navel); bit:er→bitər (bitter)
/a/ → /a/ (variable)	6	30%	naxt→naxt (night); zwart→swat (black)
/o/ → /ə/ (variable)	5	36%	rot→rɪət (red); bom→biəm (tree)
/a/ → /ə/ (variable)	5	29%	zat→siət (seed); stan→stiən (stand)
/ə/ → /j/ (variable)	4	31%	spelən→spiljə (play); wasən→vɔskjə (wash)
/ɔ/ → /o/ (variable)	4	40%	tɔŋ→tɔŋə (tongue); bɔs→bosk (forest)
/œ/ → /ø/	4	100%	bæyk→buk (belly); høyt→hu:t (skin)
/i/ → /ɪ/ (variable)	4	25%	dichtbij→tɪxtəbɛi (near); bit:er→bitər (bitter)
/ɪ/ → /i/	3	75%	bindən→binə (tie); wit→vit (white)
/ɛ/ → /o/ (variable)	3	20%	rɛχts→rjɔxtər (right); rɛχt→rjɔxt (straight)
/y/ → /u/	3	60%	bæyk→buk (belly); rœykən→ruke (smell)
/u/ → /ɔ:/ (variable)	3	33%	aut→ɔ:t (old); zaut→sɔ:t (salt)

4. Genuinely new words (no rule bridges them) — and your hidden access points

These 32 concepts are not cognate, so no rule turns the Dutch word into the Frisian one. But your language often still keeps a cognate of the Frisian word — as a cultism, technical term, archaism or regional word, sometimes with a shifted meaning. That word is an access point: a hook already in your head. Where the meaning differs we flag the false friend, so the hook helps you remember the Frisian word without misusing it. (E.g. Spanish has no everyday cognate of Portuguese vermelho ‘red’ — but it has bermellón ‘vermilion (pigment)’: the colour is not the same, the word is.)

meaning	Dutch (everyday)	Frisian	access via Dutch	note — meaning may differ
ant	mier	ɪəmældər	—	
bad	slɛxt	mɪn	—	
bark	sχɔrs	bɔst	—	
bone	bɔt	boŋkə	—	
breathe	adəmən	sik ^h ɛljə	—	
burn	brændən	brɔ:nə	—	
chest	borst	bwast	—	
dirty	vis	smwarx	—	
earth	ardə	grun	—	
fog	mɪst	di:zə	—	
hide	verstop:ən	frbɛryjə	—	
left	lɪŋks	lɪŋks	—	
leg	ben	fuət	voet	NL voet ‘foot’ is the cognate of FY foet; Frisian uses the ‘foot’ word here — meaning shifted foot→leg.
live	leven	le:və	—	
liver	levər	le:vər	—	
meat	vles	flais	—	
mouth	mɔnt	mule	muil	NL muil (an animal’s mouth / muzzle) = cognate of FY mûle.
neck	nek	hɔls	hals	NL formal hals ‘neck’ = cognate of FY hals — you already have it, beside everyday nek.
pull	trekən	lukə	—	
push	dywən	trjouwə	—	
river	rivir	rævər	—	

meaning	Dutch (everyday)	Frisian	access via Dutch	note — meaning may differ
round	rɔnt	run	—	
run	ren:en	dra:və	draven	NL draven 'to trot' = cognate of FY drave 'run'.
sew	najən	na:jə	—	
small	klein	lits	luttel	NL archaic luttel 'little/few' = cognate of FY lyts 'small'.
thick	dik	dɪk	—	
thigh	dij	bɪl	—	
throw	ɣojə	smite	smijten	NL smijten 'to fling' = cognate of FY smite.
turn	draiə	dra:jə	—	
wet	nɔt	viət	—	
wing	vløxəl	vjok	—	
woman	vrau	frɔu	—	

5. Pronunciation, rhythm & parallel listening

Reference accent — the one closest to you. Standard West Frisian (the 'common dialect', between Klaiifrysk and Wâldfrysk) — the most neutral form for a Dutch learner; avoid strongly local dialects at first.

Rhythm & sounds to train:

- Word stress falls early, as in Dutch — the rhythm is familiar; the work is in the vowels.
- Frisian keeps falling diphthongs and shows breaking (brekking): a long vowel becomes a rising diphthong under inflection (e.g. beam 'tree' → beammen). Train the ear to these glides.
- Realise Dutch fricative /ɣ/ as a stop [g] in Frisian (groot → grut), and drop many final -n (bite → bitte).

Parallel listening. For each bridge below (next section), hear the target sentence, then its bridge echo in your own language, back to back. You train not only the sound rules but the mode — the rhythm and melody the target speaks in.

6. Bridge sentences — feel the mode

A bridge is your own language bent toward the target: real words of your language, sometimes less usual ones, chosen so the sentence lines up almost word-for-word with the target. It is not the most natural phrasing — that is given too — but it lets you cross into the target's form and mode in the smallest step. Read the target, then the bridge, then the natural line.

- Frisian (target): De man rint nei it hûs.
- Dutch (bridge — bent to align): De man rént naar het huis.
- Dutch (natural): De man loopt naar het huis.
- The man walks to the house — bridge bends NL rennen 'run' to echo FY rinne 'walk'.

- Frisian (target): Wy drinke kâld wetter.
- Dutch (bridge — bent to align): Wij drinken koud water.
- Dutch (natural): Wij drinken koud water.
- We drink cold water — already transparent; hear the vowel shift koud→kâld, water→wetter.

7. How to study (decoding drill)

1. Trust the crib: read Frisian and let the Dutch cognate surface.
2. Learn the consonant rules first — they let you recognise.
3. Drill the vowel rules by conversion: take Dutch words and produce the Frisian form, then check.
4. Do parallel listening on the bridge sentences in the reference accent — internalise the mode, not just the segments.
5. Memorise the short new-word list.
6. Watch for false friends (form matches, meaning does not) — they are the rules' failures.

8. Pedagogical distance (this pair)

Cognate coverage 80%; 12 regular correspondence rules carry the bulk of the crossing; 32 new words. A close, cheap key — the method is at its strong end here.

9. For the instructor

Sequence. Teach recognition before production: the consonant rules (the skeleton) first, so learners decode what they hear and read; then drill the vowel rules by conversion. Use the bridge sentences. For each sentence show three lines — the target, the bridge (the student's language bent to align), and the natural phrasing — so students internalise the transformation of form and mode, not just the meaning. Fix one reference accent (the one closest to the student, in the Pronunciation section) and do parallel listening in it from day one: the mode — rhythm, vowel quality, nasality — is half the crossing. Teach false friends explicitly as the rules' failures. Keep sessions short and productive: a few rules + one bridge sentence + a conversion drill each.

This pair specifically. Dutch and Frisian share function words that differ just enough to trip beginners (het→it, een→in); drill these as a tiny closed set early.

Rules generated by *build_manual.py* from IE-CoR; pronunciation, bridges and instructor notes authored. Refine against a full corpus, add the orthographic layer, a false-friend list and a native-speaker pass before use as a real course.