The definite article in Frisian and neighbouring dialects from an areal and contact perspective

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In Modern Frisian dialects, the definite article has forms with and without initial *d-*. For example, the North Frisian dialect of Föhr has so-called D-forms, *di* 'the (m)', *det* 'the (f. & n.)', *dö(n)* 'the (pl.)' and vowel-initial or A-forms *a* 'the', *at* 'the f. and n.' and *a* 'the pl.' Furthermore, the shorter A-forms are not only clipped variants but take on a different functional role to the *d*-initial variants. A similar differentiated functional use of the definite article, with and without initial *d-*, is found in East Frisian (Saterland), Jutland Danish, and some German dialects of North Rhine-Westphalia (Kramer 1982: 10; Schroeder 2006: 560–62). In West Frisian dialects, the common gender (i.e., formerly distinct masculine and feminine) article also appears as either *de* or *e*, but there does not appear to be an underlying functional difference to the variation (Visser 1990). An additional difference of West Frisian, compared to other Frisian dialects, involves the neuter article *it* (also *-t* after vowels), which does not alternate with an initial *d-* form. In West Frisian, as in Dutch, the neuter article is formally identical with the neuter pronoun, and appears to have been interpreted as the same form by reanalysis – presumably because both the neuter pronoun and the neuter definite article shared the same enclitic forms (i.e., *t*) in both Old Frisian and Old Dutch. In short, the different variants and usage of the definite article in West, East and North Frisian dialects seem to reflect to forms and usage found in neighbouring, Dutch, German and Danish dialects. In this presentation, I consider this areal patterning in greater detail and consider to what extent it stems from the influences of Dutch, German or Danish influence on Frisian dialects or the other way around.