

Revitalizing Dying Languages: A Case Study

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要約

本稿は、19-20世紀の大半の時期を通して急激に衰退してきた少数派言語であるウェールズ語のリバイバルについて検討する。まずこの言語の衰退の理由を精査し、その後、この言語の保存のために取られてきた方法について説明する。20世紀には、世界の言語のおそらく半分以上が死に絶えると予言されていることから、ウェールズ語を含む多くの少数派言語がなぜ絶滅の危機にさらされているか、また、そうした言語の生き残りのために、どのような具体的なステップを踏むことが可能なのかを理解することは重要である。本稿は、国や地方政府の努力、また地域社会が共に協力してウェールズ語の保護のために尽力している実態を述べる。ことに本稿が強調するのは、ウェールズ語習得を推進するため、民衆の中でのウェールズ語の地位向上のため、また、日常にウェールズ語を使用する機会を増やすために、一貫した言語計画がいかに重要であるかという点である。

Keywords : language planning; language status

Introduction

The issue of endangered languages is one that has received a lot of attention in recent years. Alarming statistics have underlined what many perceive to be nothing less than a worrying decline in the variety and wealth of the human experience. The twenty first century is predicted to be one in which we will see an unprecedented number of languages disappear. Out of the approximately 7000 languages spoken today, more than half will probably have disappeared before the year 2100, and some linguists even go so far as to predict that 90% of them will have become extinct by then (Krauss, 1995, as cited in Baker, Andres, Gruffydd, and Lewis, 2011). To underscore the imbalance in the numbers of those who speak these languages, just under half of the world's population – around 3 billion people – speak just ten languages. In stark contrast, there are 3500 languages that are spoken by a mere 8 million people (Rymer, 2012). While languages have always disappeared, they are now dying at an accelerating rate and their demise usually goes hand in hand with the “loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems” and all that that entails (Hinton, 2001, p. 5). As a result, there have been efforts over recent years to stem the decline of such languages and, if at all possible, revitalize them.

Despite the seemingly bleak situation that many languages find themselves in, Hinton points out that “this is also a time of unprecedented efforts on the part of minority peoples to keep their languages alive” (2001, p. 4). Indeed, communities, linguists, national governments, regional governments, and international organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union are actively trying to recognize and preserve endangered languages through a process of documentation, revitalization, and maintenance. UNESCO has even defined four levels of endangered language which range from unsafe (spoken by children, but mainly at home); definitely endangered (not spoken by children); severely endangered (only spoken by the older generation); to critically endangered (spoken by only a few members of the older generation) (UNESCO, 2003).

However, in the case of language endangerment, no two situations are alike and this serves to complicate matters; what may work to preserve, or even revitalize one endangered language, may not work for another. Although a “wealth of research...demonstrates that the survival or demise of languages crucially depends upon the extent to which the language is passed on from one generation to the next within the family” (Morris & Jones, 2007, p. 484), there appears to be disagreement on how this situation may be reversed. Due to a widely-held belief that languages have historically been threatened by the malign actions of governments, “it is no wonder that hopes of reversing language shift have so regularly been pinned on [official policies]” (Romaine, 2012, p. 194). However, some critics (such as McCarty & Watahomigie, as cited in Romaine, 2002) see legislation at best as well-intentioned (if often ill-thought out), or at worst, a cynical ploy by governments to pacify the voices of discontent from within their boundaries (Romaine, 2002). This paper will attempt to demonstrate, through an analysis of the revitalization of the Welsh language, that a combination of well thought-out language policy, leading to coherent language planning, is an effective way in which to raise the levels of acquisition and the perceived status of an endangered language. This in turn can then serve to validate and encourage grassroots organizations to further increase the opportunities to use the language, and to help maintain the language within the home, workplace and community. The Welsh language is seen by many now as a clear example of how the fortunes of a moribund language can be turned around in a relatively short space of time. Even with the best efforts of national and regional governments, as well as a desire by many to promote it at the community level, Welsh has always had one major obstacle: the English language, the most potent linguistic force in the world, existing alongside it. To understand how this revival was implemented, it is important to take a brief look at its recent history and how it came to be in the situation it was back in the latter half of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is the reversal of historical attitudes towards Welsh that went a not inconsiderable way in ultimately helping to retrieve it from the brink of extinction.

Historical Background

One of the oldest languages in Europe, Welsh derived from the Common Brittonic language which can trace its roots back to around 600 B.C.E. Despite pressure from the arrival of the Romans in 43 C.E., as well as the Anglo Saxons somewhere between 500 – 700 C.E., the Brittonic language survived, albeit in remote areas not under the control of the Anglo Saxons. The geographical isolation of its speakers facilitated the evolution of the Brittonic language into three separate, but related languages in Great Britain: Cumbric in the north, Welsh in the west, and Cornish in the southwest.

For centuries, the Welsh language maintained its vitality, even weathering the twin storms of the annexation of Wales by England in the 13th century, followed by the Act of Union in 1536, which effectively promoted English as the official language of Wales. It was from this time that Welsh entered a period of “benign neglect” (Griffiths, 2000, p. 8): neither officially supported nor overtly persecuted. Indeed, thanks to its comparative geographical isolation, as well as the translation of the complete Bible into Welsh in the latter half of the 16th century, the Welsh language was never in any apparent danger of disappearing.

As recently as 1851, the English writer George Borrow embarked on a tour on foot of the country which he recounted at great length in his book *Wild Wales*. It is quite clear from the stories he tells, that without a facility in the Welsh language, he would have had a much impoverished experience. The first time he heard the utterance *dim Saesneg* (no English) in the town of Wrexham, he eagerly proclaimed ‘I now feel I am in Wales’ (1914, p. 43). It was no idle, intellectual exercise on his part to master the language before he began his epic walk; he realized that without it he would have little chance of conversing with the population at that time, many of whom were monoglot Welsh speakers. However, it was at the very time of Borrow’s walk that the Welsh language was in the midst of a decline that would very nearly see it disappear. The industrial revolution, and its concomitant influx of outside labor into the coal heartlands of South Wales, had already initiated the dilution of the language. In fact, the percentage of those who claimed to speak Welsh sharply declined from a peak of 80% of the population in 1801 to approximately 67% by the time that Borrow was visiting the country (Deucher, 2005).

A Royal Commission into the state of the Welsh language in its education system in 1847 adopted an unusually insensitive and brutal tone towards the native tongue. It was felt that the language posed a threat to the country’s ‘moral progress and commercial prosperity’, kept the Welsh people behind their English neighbors ‘in every branch of practical knowledge and skill’ and condemned them to life in an underworld, bereft of any chance of social progress (Royal Commission, as cited in Bragg, 2003, p. 294). The Commission was published in a couple of volumes bound in blue, and

became known as the notorious ‘Treachery of the Blue Books’ throughout Wales (Bragg, 2003, p. 293). As much as this Commission was despised in Wales, it led inexorably to the 1870 Education Act in which Welsh pupils were mandated by law to receive an English-medium education. Such were the social pressures at the time to fall in line with Victorian progress and advancement, that many teachers and parents zealously followed the call and saw English as the way forward for their children. In many schools, punishments were meted out to those caught speaking in their native tongue, the most infamous being a wooden notice hung around a pupil’s neck with the inscription ‘Welsh Not’. It was also assumed at that time that school masters were far too sophisticated to be able to converse, let alone teach, in the Welsh language. In short, the very status of the language was under direct threat, not only in the home, but just as importantly in the education system as well.

The decline of the Welsh language had been politically motivated, and as the twentieth century wore on, census after census told the lamentable story of a language rapidly going out of existence. By the middle of the last century, the number of monoglot Welsh speakers had all but disappeared, and less than 30% of the population claimed to be bilingual (Deucher, 2005). If the UNESCO levels of endangerment had been in existence at that time, Welsh would have been at around the ‘definitely endangered’ level; i.e., predominantly spoken by the older generation and disappearing amongst the young.

However, fast forward sixty years and the Welsh language is anything but moribund; indeed, there is cautious optimism that its survival is secure. Welsh is just one example of a number of minority European languages that have reaped the benefits of improved attitudes and government attention to minority peoples, religions, cultures and languages since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, in the Basque country, Catalonia, Ireland as well as in a number of other areas, greater regionalization of government has resulted in varying degrees of success in language revitalization (Baker, 2008). This paper will now set out the methods by which this remarkable turnabout has been achieved in Wales, and illustrate the specific language policy and planning initiatives alongside local grassroots efforts that have aided its revival. Government policies can be distilled into several broad, and often overlapping areas: acquisition language planning; status language planning; and usage, or opportunity language planning (Baker, Andres, Gruffydd, and Lewis, 2011). Indeed, in the words of Huws, “Welsh is often used as an exemplar in other jurisdictions where protection of a minority language is sought” (2006, p. 141).

Acquisition Language Planning

According to Baker, acquisition language planning represents “possibly the essential foundation of all elements of language planning” (Baker, 2008, p. 105). In effect, it encompasses

the area of language reproduction by “increasing the number of speakers...by, for example, initiatives with parents, language learning in school and adult learning classes” (Baker et al., 2011, p. 42). Even before the child has started pre-school, what occurs in the family home is a crucial element in the survival of any minority language although perhaps the most difficult area to reach through legislation. This has been a constant source of anxiety to language planners in Wales, bearing in mind that according to the 2001 National Census results (as cited in Morris & Jones, 2007, p. 485) only 11% of households in Wales were completely Welsh speaking and a further 14% were mixed Welsh-speaking and English-speaking. This left a considerable proportion (72%) of households in which the Welsh language wasn’t used at all. In addition, the Census showed that in houses where only one parent spoke Welsh, only 61% transmitted the language to their children, as opposed to 91% in the case where both parents spoke Welsh (Morris & Jones, 2007). This has therefore added more importance to the role of adult education, as family language reproduction is reliant upon one or both of the parents being confident enough to use the minority language to their children in the home. Since the 1970s, there have been concerted efforts to provide Welsh language classes to adults mainly under the auspices of the University of Wales, Further Education colleges, LEAs and voluntary organizations.

At first, these courses tended to provide hour-long weekly classes, but more intensive and ambitious courses were introduced in the 1980s largely due to a concerted attempt to duplicate the huge success that Israel had had in promoting adult learning of Hebrew as a second language among newly-arrived immigrants. The first so-called *Wlpan* course (in Israel it is known as *Ulpan*) was held in Cardiff, and such was its success that a number of similarly intensive courses were opened in other areas of Wales. Since that time, such *Wlpan* courses have become the responsibility of Higher Education institutions (Baker et al., 2011). A longitudinal study of adult learners was carried out between 2008 and 2010 by Baker et al., with participants initially being asked about their initial motivations and expectations for taking such courses. In line with language planning theory, the study found that over 60% of respondents were “strongly motivated by language reproduction in the family” through talking to their children and helping them with homework (Baker et al., 2011, p. 49). The paper concluded that there were a lot of positives to take from the study, but as recent census statistics have shown, there is little room for complacency and the family environment remains a crucial battleground in the survival of any minority language. Welsh government policy places a large emphasis on encouraging the transmission of Welsh within the home and considers it as one of its key strategic areas in preserving and increasing use of the language.

One of the other priorities is of course, the education system. According to Crystal “one of the most important ways in which a country’s language policy manifests itself is in the kind of provision it makes for the linguistic education of children” (2010, p. 376). Turning to the state of Welsh

transmission in the education system, it may be relevant to provide a brief appraisal of the current situation. The Education Act of 1870 led to a decline in Welsh as a medium of instruction and had a profound effect on the numbers of young people who could use the language with any reasonable facility. As previously mentioned, many Welsh-speaking parents were complicit in this trend, seeing English as the most progressive medium in which their children could be educated. Where a second language was taught, many preferred their children to study French rather than Welsh for similar reasons. However, in the early part of the twentieth century there were dissenting voices that held the view that giving children the opportunity to study through the medium of the Welsh language was important, not least because it aided the transmission of the country's unique culture. O.M. Edwards, Chief Inspector of Welsh schools at that time, was instrumental in raising awareness within official circles, but his efforts gained little traction. In 1907, the Welsh Department of the Board of Education drew up regulations allowing school subjects to be taught in Welsh, as well as a provision for the instruction of Welsh history and literature, but the regulations had little effect in the day to day running of schools (Griffiths, 2000). As it was, the almost complete dominance of English in the education system continued for a few more decades until the 1944 Education Act became a law with unintended consequences. This new Act made it incumbent upon Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to take it as a general principle that children should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. Although this section had been added to the Act as a way of guaranteeing denominational choice (particularly among Anglican and Roman Catholic parents), it opened up an opportunity for parents to demand Welsh-medium schools (Griffiths, 2000). Subsequently, the first publically funded Welsh-medium primary school opened in the south Wales town of Llanelli in 1947, and the first such school at the secondary level opened nine years later. The 1960s saw further increases in the number of LEAs offering Welsh-medium schools as the perception grew that they achieved higher examination performance levels than their English-medium counterparts. Indeed, this even resulted in more and more non-Welsh speaking parents sending their children to Welsh-medium schools (BBC, 2014).

The end of the 1970s saw the beginning of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, a politician who vigorously campaigned on the issue of 'Britishness' rather than the aspirations of any particular region of the United Kingdom. As a result, she strongly opposed any Welsh devolution as she did any government intervention to protect the Welsh language. Ironically, it was to be during her leadership that arguably the most far-reaching educational reforms in Wales were achieved. As Edwards et al. point out, the policy of the Conservative party during the 1980s was "progressive and interventionist and became the cornerstone of subsequent Welsh language policy" (2011, p. 535). Successive Welsh Secretaries of State (notably, Nicholas Edwards and Peter Walker) were keen to display a departure from traditional Thatcherite policies and demonstrate their ability to stamp their own mark on Welsh policy decisions. Thatcher, displaying a touch of real politik, was also keen to woo moderate, middle-Wales at a time when Welsh Conservative Members of

Parliament were very few and far between. Ironically, government policy during the Thatcher years laid the foundations for the revival of the language. In effect, crucial policy decisions of the late 1980s culminated in the prominence of the Welsh language as part of the 1988 Education Reform Act. This Act, which introduced the National Curriculum throughout the United Kingdom, now elevated the Welsh language as a compulsory fixture in schools throughout the Principality. If students did not attend a Welsh-medium, or a bilingual school, then they studied it as a second language subject. Such provisions initially included Key Stages 1, 2, and 3 of the National Curriculum, but were ultimately extended to Key Stage 4. As a result, it is the current situation that all students in publically-funded schools throughout Wales are obligated to study Welsh for twelve years (BBC, 2014). The Act has had a remarkable impact on the growth of Welsh language use in Wales, particularly amongst the young. For example, by 2008, around 20% of primary school pupils received an education either wholly or mainly in Welsh and there was also a significant increase in the number of pupils receiving a secondary education in similar circumstances. As previously mentioned, as a result of the prioritizing of Welsh in the education system, more and more parents have become keenly aware of the need to help their children with their studies in this language. In effect, good legislation and sound planning have had a knock-on effect in the communities in which the language is seen as more and more relevant to the future of their children. If we regard the census of 2001, it revealed remarkable gains from that ten years prior, and figures produced in 2007 showed that more than a third (36.5%) of primary school children could speak Welsh, compared to 24.6% in 1987", the year before the Act had been introduced (Evans, 2010).

However, there is still a need for better qualified teachers in the schools if such successes are to be consolidated and built upon. Evans, writing in the TES, points out the results of a recent report by Estyn, the Welsh schools inspectorate, in which they found a lack of reading and writing skills among pupils, even when their listening and speaking skills were well developed. Furthermore, the report also called for more provision for professional development by the LEAs in order to address the very real problems of teachers who lack fluency in the language (Evans, 2013). This problem could well be addressed by increasing the prominence of the organization known as *athrawon bro* who provide support services for Welsh language in schools throughout Wales. Once regarded as peripatetic Welsh teachers, they are now mainly involved in helping teachers in English-medium schools by providing support and on-the-job training to teachers who lack confidence in their Welsh abilities (Welsh Government, 2011). An increase in the presence of *athrawon bro* in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools would be a most desirable development, but with increasingly tight budgets among LEAs, this is unlikely to occur in the near future. While there has no doubt been a huge sea change in the attitude towards the role of the Welsh language in the education system, much has to be done, not least to ensure that the requisite number of qualified teachers with the right skills are able to do justice to the very real opportunities that have been granted the language by recent policy and planning.

Status Planning

In addition to acquisition language planning, another pillar of revitalization is that of status planning, as defined by Hamers and Blanc as “artificially interfering with existing status relations between languages in contact” (2000, p. 312). By raising the status of a language the perception of it can be altered, particularly in communities that had hitherto preferred the majority language. The process of improving the status of the Welsh language can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century, when the language was in severe decline. A landmark event was the foundation of the political party Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) in 1925, which regarded one of its central tenets as the preservation of Welsh culture and, by extension, its language. The party undoubtedly served to raise awareness of the language issue throughout the first few decades of its existence. Although this growing consciousness was reflected in certain acts of Parliament (notably the Welsh Courts Act 1942), much of the provisions in the legislation were left unimplemented and could be regarded merely as tokenism. It took a remarkable radio broadcast in 1962 by one of the founding members of Plaid Cymru, Saunders Lewis, to add credibility and impetus to the campaign to revitalize the language. His speech *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language) predicted the imminent demise of the Welsh language and led to broader awareness of the plight of the language as well as the establishment of the *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* (Welsh Language Society) which campaigned in non-political ways for its status to be raised. According to Deuchar, among its supporters, such activities involved “the refusal to fill in forms available only in English, ignoring court summons in English, tearing down monolingual English road signs in the late 1960s, and campaigning for a Welsh language television channel” (2005, p. 623). An early success saw the introduction of bilingual road signs throughout Wales from the early 1970s, with the Welsh language featured first in predominantly Welsh speaking areas. The area of broadcasting provided further boosts to the status of the language, with the launching of the Welsh-language radio station BBC Radio Cymru in 1977, and the creation of the television station *Sianel 4 Cymru* (Channel 4 Wales) five years later.

It can be argued that while the Education Reform Act of 1988 was a step in the right direction for the Welsh language, it took the far-reaching Welsh Language Act (1993) to tackle the very real problems that the language had in terms of its perception as a low-status language. The Act guaranteed the equal validity of the Welsh language with English in public life and obliged public bodies to provide all official literature and other services both in Welsh and English (Huws, 2006). In parallel with this legislation, The Welsh Language Board was created as a statutory body with twin roles. One of these is to act as a regulator, and the other is to act to promote the language more broadly (Welsh Government, 2012). Although this has undoubtedly been seen as a step forward, there are those who feel that the powers of The Welsh Language Board do not go far enough and have called for the compliance of the private sector as well as the public sector

(Deuchar, 2005). However, it is true to say that the board has worked with both the public and private sectors to assist in the provision of Welsh-language services to the public. The uptake of such services by the general public has often been hampered by a lack of general awareness as to what is available to those able to confidently function in the Welsh language, as well as situations where it may be perceived as causing inconvenience. This has been exemplified in the case of those public bodies involved in the administration of justice. Whereas the Act of 1993 unequivocally placed Welsh on an equal footing with English in the courts, this has only really transpired in the lower courts where every effort is made to ensure the provision of a Welsh-speaking judge, bench and clerk. However, in a Crown Court setting, there is no legal requirement for a juror to understand Welsh and an interpreter is thus required by law. Whereas the right of a defendant to speak Welsh in such a court is enshrined in law, they may feel it prudent to rely on English rather than their preferred language so as not to risk creating a negative impression among those who will ultimately judge them (Huws, 2006). Although there are certainly areas that need to be ironed out, it is nevertheless true as Huws points out, that the Act has afforded Welsh a status in legal proceedings “significantly higher than the protection afforded to minority languages under international documents and instruments” (2006, p. 158). Whereas recent legislation in the Republic of Ireland has been able to enact legislation impacting on an entire sovereign state, the Welsh language is predominantly restricted to its native land, and this is an unavoidable limitation to the extent to which practical bilingual policies can be legislated for and carried out.

Increasing Opportunity

Further to the enhancement of the status of the Welsh language, the Welsh government has adopted a number of key strategies with the express aim of increasing the opportunities where Welsh can be spoken in any sphere of life. Strategic area 4, for example, focuses on the use of Welsh in the workplace and the challenges that lie therein. Evidence suggests that many people suffer from a lack of confidence in their ability to speak Welsh in the workplace and this has hampered efforts to boost its use in this very important area. Language-awareness training has met with some success in improving general attitudes towards Welsh, but there clearly needs to be more quantitative research in this area if it is to be tackled successfully (Welsh Government, 2012). However, like the home, it is an area that doesn't lend itself readily to legislation, and only committed efforts to boosting the status of the language as well as facilitating its use will overcome some of these obstacles. The increasing omnipresence of the Welsh language is the most crucial strategy with these aims in mind. The Welsh Language Board, set up in 1993, initially leaned on banks, stores and other service providers to increase information in the Welsh language and this provided a foundation for the introduction of legislation in the 1990s (Kravitz, 2013). The use of Welsh in technology has become another effective way in which the opportunity to use the language has been expanded. Welsh online services, applications and interfaces are playing a role,

and the government has made committed efforts to encourage more people to opt for Welsh with regards to the growing area of social media. Young children are also exposed more and more to interactive websites which help in their early language socialization (Morris & Jones, 2007). With the aim in mind of further introducing Welsh to every area of life, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 created a Welsh Language Commissioner whose powers embrace not only the promotion of the language but even “to undertake investigations into allegations of interference with individuals’ freedom to use Welsh” in any circumstance (Welsh Government, 2012, p. 21). The first such Commissioner, Meri Huws, started her role in 2012. With such political support, it can be envisaged that the opportunities to use the Welsh language will increase and this can only serve to encourage the ongoing revival of the language.

It is clear from legislation that has been enacted in recent decades, as well as the efforts of a lot of committed people, that there has been much support to maintain and promote the Welsh language. In particular, the pillars of acquisition planning and status planning have been instrumental in not only facilitating the transmission of the language, but just as importantly, raising the status of the language in the eyes of the Welsh people. As a result, these factors have increased the opportunities where Welsh can be used in everyday life. Government policy, while ad hoc at first, has become more coherent and effective with regards to this issue. The formation of a devolved Welsh government has further solidified the current consensus that the language should play a central role in everyday life in Wales. Indeed, the Welsh Language Act in 1993 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure in 2011 have further enhanced this perception and Welsh government strategy is very much directed towards this goal. However, as mentioned previously, there is little room for complacency as Welsh remains a minority language, not just within the UK, but within the borders of the Principality itself. Further to this, the increasing mobility of labor within the European Union has meant the loss of Welsh speakers to other countries as well as the influx of non-Welsh speakers. Along with other demographic changes (including fewer children), the proportion of those able to speak Welsh dropped from 20.8% in the 2001 census, to 19.0% in 2011. Furthermore, there was an increase in those unable to use Welsh to any level at all, from 71.6% to 73.3% over the same period. However, any despondency should be tempered by the fact that there have been significant increases in the number of preschool children who are learning Welsh and modest increases in the proportion of young adults who are able to speak it. Languages are in danger when only the older generations are able or willing to use it, and in this sense, we are seeing the reverse situation in Wales. There is room for cautious optimism in the case of the Welsh language, and it can certainly be seen as a case study in how governments and their citizens can cooperate with the sole purpose of promoting a minority language.

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