

---

# Has what was “Too far for you to see”<sup>1</sup> come any closer? Language and identity in Wales

Podlovics, Éva Lívía

---

This article examines issues of language usage in Welsh and the identity of this region’s residents. The stress is upon *people* and *language* as they are inseparably inter- and entwined when forming one’s *identity* (Evans, 2018, p. 7). In accordance with this approach, I focus on three aspects (of this *people*, *language*, and *identity*): 1) the “diachronic”<sup>2</sup> analysis of the Welsh language; 2) bilingual language use in general and in Wales in particular; 3) the recent period and research that slowly led to Welsh becoming an official language, effective in 2012.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I will discuss what has happened since the poet, R. S. Thomas, captured the feelings and thoughts of his era while expressing his worries for his nation’s fate in the poem, *The Welsh Hill County*.<sup>4</sup> I believe that my inquiry suits the environment of languages and cultures as the success story of an almost extinct language that survived its foretold death may provide valuable insight into the actual problems minority groups fighting for their rights face.<sup>5</sup> What is more, I find this question important from the viewpoint of a second language teacher: the way we acquire languages in a naturally (albeit sometimes hostile) bilingual region can furnish further ways to enhance language learning abilities of students. The role played by the Welsh in Wales and the UK serves as a good example of the above interests.

**Keywords:** bilingualism, Wales, identity consciousness, language acquisition, diachronic language analysis

---

<sup>1</sup> The quoted line is a direct reference to the lesser known Welsh poet and patriot R. S. Thomas, and his poem, *The Welsh Hill County*. The poem’s first stanza reads: “Too far for you to see / The fluke and the foot-rot and the fat maggot/ Gnawing the skin from the small bones,/ The sheep are grazing at Bwlch-y-Fedwen,/ Arranged romantically in the usual manner/ On a bleak background of bald stone...”

<sup>2</sup> In this case I refer to a diachronic language analysis that examines such events in history without which the Welsh identity and language would not have survived.

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/1/part/1/enacted>, Downloaded: 21. 05. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> The poem can be found here: Thomas, R. S. *The Welsh Hill County*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11da18FioIQ>.

<sup>5</sup> The complexity of how the question of minority language usage - and autonomy- has been handled in Wales might prove a resource for the treatment of minorities either within or beyond Hungarian borders. For example, the case of Szeklers living in Transylvania, Romania, points to the necessity of such positive examples. See here: Attila Szoó (2020), „Brussels should pay attention to the Szeklers” – *Day of Szekler Autonomy*, <https://transylvanianow.com/brussels-should-pay-attention-to-the-szeklers-day-of-szekler-autonomy/>. Downloaded: 21. 05. 2021.

## Introduction

In this study, I highlight some significant turning points in preserving Welsh as a language in Wales and the language's more current use. The language usage of a country existing within a larger conquering country is inseparably connected to the nation's history, including the different laws that – throughout the course of time – either allowed or forbade the public usage of Welsh. More interestingly, an undeclared, unofficial, and therefore unclarified form of bilingualism has shaped the usage of English and Welsh in the region. By detailing the aforementioned aspects, I will highlight the changes that have occurred since R. S. Thomas articulated the decay of his people. I will also refer to research in this field and some contemporary legal and governmental activities that have been forming the present use of language since Welsh was declared an official language in 2012. My inquiry centres upon the view of the language teacher of students, the expert who wants to make use of success stories, and the constant learner of English as a second language.

### Historical, diachronic aspects of a people, and a language

In the formation of Wales, the first significant change was brought by the Celts who appeared in the British Isles around 700 B.C. The Celts 'are the ancestors of many of the people in Highland Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall today. [...] Celtic languages, which have been continuously used in some areas since that time, are still spoken.' (McDowall, 1992, p. 7). Throughout the turbulent history of the different people living in the Isles, the next important step in preserving the Welsh language occurred between 942–948 during the reign of Hywel Dda (Hywel The Good), a successful ruler who brought many Welsh territories under his control and also *codified the law in Welsh*.<sup>6</sup> The next important points in creating and preserving the language are strongly connected to those leaders of Welsh society who either united their lands or created a national feeling with their heroic struggle for the people. The first to mention is the unity of Welsh as a people and their territories under the reign of Gruffydd ap (son of) Llewelyn in 1057 (McDowall, 1992, p. 18, 32). However, this unity and independence did not last long. After the violent death of one of the consecutive high kings, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd (or Llywelyn the Last) in 1282, the following Welsh kings had to pledge loyalty to the king of England. The first to accept their oath was Edward I, Edward Longshanks, who also made his infant son the first Prince of Wales. This has been a lasting tradition since 1284. Then, around 1400, the new leader Owain Glyndwr started a lasting but finally unsuccessful uprising against the English. Although, his deeds ended in vain, due to his actions 'the idea of a Welsh nation' (McDowall, 1992, p. 52)

<sup>6</sup> BBC, Cymru Wales, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/royalty\\_hywel\\_dda.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/royalty_hywel_dda.shtml), Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. The King invited lawyers and leaders from his kingdom to a place called 'Ty Gwyn-ar-Daf', meaning the 'White House on the Taf' now known as Whitland, to create a unified code for Wales. These 'Laws of Hywel' are shown in illustrated slate plaques around the gardens of Whitland that show the customs, life and activities of medieval Welsh people. Hywel Dda, Canolfan Centre, <https://www.hywel-dda.co.uk/>. Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.

was born as he 'created a feeling of national identity' (McDowall, 1992, p. 52).<sup>7</sup> Later, during the Tudors, another important change occurred when the Bible was translated into Welsh in 1588 during the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>8</sup> After the aforementioned fights for national independence, these salient actions made it possible for Welsh to survive in physical, lasting form. Notwithstanding, the period was also controversial because Wales joined England under one administration between 1536 and 1543. As a result, 'English law was now the only law for Wales.... English became the only official language, and Welsh was soon only spoken in the hills.... Welsh was not allowed as an official language' (McDowall, 1992, p. 76).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, many stopped speaking Welsh even though poets and singers did not. Known as *eisteddfods*, their gatherings have been taking place since 1170 to the present day (McDowall, 1992, p. 76).

While the language was able to survive throughout the centuries, at many points its continued existence was only possible through great effort on the part of those who still spoke it. During the 1901 and 1921 censuses, the data revealed a relatively steady number of Welsh speakers. However, after World War II Welsh started to decline and became spoken less and less. According to census data, in 1951 29% of the population spoke the national language. By 1981, only 19% of the population spoke the national language (McDowall, 1992, p. 176).<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, in a radio lecture the playwright Saunders Lewis foretold and envisioned the disappearance of the language.<sup>11</sup> This prediction prompted the formation of the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg), a nationalist party established in 1962. Its new party members campaigned for reforms of language use. (Members of the Party took serious measures and went on hunger strikes to reach their aims.) Another strong national political force had been formed earlier, in 1925. Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales,<sup>12</sup> was

<sup>7</sup> His appearance caused turmoil, as he was also proclaimed Prince of Wales similarly to the successor of the present English king. Finally, he could not win against the English, even though, his revolt was worthwhile and remembered.

<sup>8</sup> By Bishop William Morgan. See: Llywodraeth Cymru-Welsh Government <https://learnwelsh.cymru/about-us/welsh-language-fast-facts/>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. The National Library of Wales, Welsh Bible 1588, <https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/printed-material/1588-welsh-bible#c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-882%2C-1%2C4726%2C4026>, Downloaded: 21. 01. 2021.

<sup>9</sup> This law replaced the earlier system rooted in the Middle Ages, when the Welsh laws of Hywel Dda were used all over Wales. (See e. g. Eryri Snowdonia, <https://www.visitsnowdonia.info/welsh-language>. Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.) Some sources state that, against all odds, the Act of Union in 1536 helped Wales preserve and improve an independent cultural identity. Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welsh-Language-Society>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.

<sup>10</sup> The numbers, in reflection of census data are the following: the 1901 census showed that about 930,000 Welsh spoke the language, at approximately 50% of the population; the 1931 Census showed that 37% of the people (about 909,000) spoke Welsh, while the 1981 Census showed a huge decline to 19% (about 500,000) Welsh speakers (Baker 1985:1), also in A Vision of Britain through Time, <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1921GEN/11>. Downloaded: 21. 01. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> His famous talk is audible in the original language. Saunders Lewis, *Tynged yr Iaith/ Fate of the Language*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7ntVx4m3YU>. The transcript of the talk is here: <https://morris.cymru/testun/saunders-lewis-fate-of-the-language.html> Downloaded: 21. 01. 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welsh-Language-Society>.

founded with the aim of achieving a complete parliament for Wales with direct international representation. (The first Welsh member was elected in 1966 to the British Parliament!) In spite of the work of these parties, Welsh people rejected London's offer of limited self-government in 1979,<sup>13</sup> an outcome that shocked patriots and caused a deep and long-lasting rift.

As to the present state of affairs, it is true that Wales is a constituent unit of the UK and there are issues determined in London by the British government and Parliament (which also has Welsh members). Additionally, as a result of lasting debates regarding independence, there is also a Welsh governmental body (the National Assembly for Wales/Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru) that has gained increasing responsibility since its establishment in 1999, in Cardiff.<sup>14</sup>

### **Biculturalism means bilingualism?**

In the previous section, I outlined the complicated and difficult history that hindered the Welsh from sustaining their aim of using their mother tongue. At present, regarding their bicultural environment there have been many recent changes in legal matters to support bilingualism in the region.<sup>15</sup> To define bilingualism, we have to see that it has many angles and viewpoints. As Baker says: 'A variety of definitions of bilingualism and ways of classifying bilingual people are possible. Scholars talk about societal and individual bilingualism, subtractive and additive bilingualism and co-ordinate and compound bilingualism' (Baker, 1985, p. 66). Navracsics also emphasises the versatile approach of it as research can detect the educational/language policy viewpoint of bilingualism, the representation of languages in the brain, the

---

Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. This party is generally supported by Welsh who speak their original language.

<sup>13</sup> History of devolution, Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, <https://senedd.wales/how-we-work/history-of-devolution/>, Downloaded: 21. 02. 2021., An Assembly for Wales/Senedd i Gymru, Executive Summary, 15.

<sup>14</sup> See, BBC, Cymru Wales, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/culture/sites/aboutwales/pages/national\\_assembly.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/culture/sites/aboutwales/pages/national_assembly.shtml), Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. Since 2011 the Welsh body has not asked for permission from the British Parliament on a case-by-case basis as their law-making practice has been extended to direct law-making. The National Assembly was not able to levy taxes until the Wales Act of 2014, which regulation has also been outgrown. (Encyclopedica Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welsh-Language-Society>, Downloaded: 01. 02.2021. Recently, the facts about legislation are the following: if Bills (draft laws) are considered and passed by the Senedd (National Assembly) and given Royal Assent by the Monarch, they become 'Acts of Senedd Cymru.' The Senedd is able to pass any Acts that are not dependent on the UK Parliament by the Government of Wales Act 2006 (amended by the Wales Act 2017), Senedd Cymru, Welsh Parliament, <https://senedd.wales/senedd-business/legislation/>. Downloaded: 01. 02.2021.

<sup>15</sup> In the 2011 Census, out of 2,955,841 people, 2,871,405 declared their proficiency in English while 672,828 can understand Welsh, and 672,828 can speak, read, and write in Welsh. (Based upon these numbers, the aim of increasing the numbers of Welsh speakers is very obvious.) Office for National Statistics, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS205EW/view/2092957700?cols=measures>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. Office for National Statistics, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS206WA/view/2092957700?cols=measures>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.

grammar competence, the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and the holistic approaches (Navracscics, 2001). After a lot of viewpoints, we can rely upon one, concluded by Grosjean (1992): 'Bilingualism means the regular use of two (or more) languages, while bilinguals are those who need and use two (or more) languages in their every days' (Bartha, 1999, p. 38).

The Welsh are regionally surrounded by English speakers; a fact that is further supported by the *lingua franca* position of English in the world. Obviously, the latter two factors do not strengthen people's patriotic attitudes towards Welsh, in spite of the fact that they have the opportunity to make use of their bilingual environment. Nevertheless, the present legal system greatly supports the usage of Welsh. In this respect, it is important to know that the language became *compulsory* at schools. After the Education Reform Act in 1988, Welsh instruction was included in the national curriculum *for all learners* from 5–14 (Key Stages 1–3) in 1990. From September 1999, it became *compulsory for Key Stage 4* (14–16) learners too. Strengthening school children's competency in the language is a main idea of language-supporters who want to enlarge the number of speakers to one million by 2050.<sup>16</sup> They believe, the gathered efforts will enable children to use the language in all circumstances (from classical to the digital platforms) (Welsh in Education, Action Plan 2017–21).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, with lessons taught in the two languages, bilingual education serves the purpose of Welsh political aims too: excelling in both of them is not only restricted to language usage but to reconciliation of feelings as well.

The concept of bilingualism perfectly exemplifies English speaking Welsh, or Welsh speaking English people in Wales. We all agree that getting to know and use two (or more) languages regularly is a real asset. From this aspect, the European Union suggests to its member country citizens learning two more languages other than their mother tongue.<sup>18</sup> Obviously, these ideal

<sup>16</sup> Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy.pdf> Downloaded: 21. 05. 2021. To reach their aims, supporters work together on a new curriculum for developing language skills; greater teacher capacity and research into effective pedagogies; communicating with parents and carers about the benefits of learning the language and about how they can support their children.

<sup>17</sup> In reaching their aims they introduced Welsh-medium schools (their number in 2019 was 420 with about 67,000 learners and 49 secondary schools totaling 35,000 students (out of the total 1,569 schools, see in Welsh in Education, Action Plan 2017-21), dual-stream primary schools (the parents choose the conduct of language either English or Welsh), transitional primary schools (Welsh medium with significant use of English - more than half of the curriculum is in Welsh), predominantly English Medium primary schools but with significant use of Welsh (between 20-50%), predominantly English medium primary schools (less than 20% is taught in Welsh). (Defining Schools according to Welsh Medium Provision, (2007), <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/defining-schools-according-to-welsh-medium-provision.pdf>. Downloaded: 15. 01. 2021.

<sup>18</sup> 'The EU encourages all citizens to be multilingual, with the long-term objective that every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue', Europeans and their Languages, Special Eurobarometer 386, 4. 2012. [https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf). Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. Within this document we can find a remark recognising Hungary's at then present state: 'Those

expectations are more easily accomplished in countries where more languages are spoken (e.g. Luxembourg or Wales); where minorities are in huge numbers; or in countries that have overlapping formerly owned regions.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, language learning is easier if the languages are close to each other, namely, they belong to the same language family, e. g. Flemish to Dutch, or the Romance languages stemming from Latin, etc.

When comparing the surrounding positive bi- or multilingual and cultural influences and real-life situations of these countries/nations to less fortunate monolingual countries the difference can be amazing. Monolingual countries mostly rely on their educational system and develop it as much as they can, therefore, it is fortunate if the educational system is supported by governmental decisions.<sup>20</sup> From this respect, the case in the Hungarian education system is that compulsory introduction of second language learning begins at ten years of age, while recommendations, reports and studies all favour lowering the starting age. One solution to this 'problem' is bilingual, or CLIL schooling.<sup>21</sup> The benefits of the latter are stated by Trentinné 'pre-primary foreign language teaching and the concept of educational bilingualism have clearly intertwined with each other recently. Hungarian children attending bilingual (or CLIL = Content and Language Integrated Learning) programmes from an early age have access to foreign languages a lot earlier than their peers who take part in mainstream education encountering the first foreign language only in their 4th grade i.e. at the age of 10' (Trentinné, 2016, p. 1).

---

countries where respondents are least likely to be able to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue are Portugal and Hungary (13% in each), the UK (14%) and Greece (15%); *ibid.* 15.

<sup>19</sup> e. g. Present Slovakian, or Romanian regions (among others with Szeklers) formerly belonging to Hungary speak the official language of their present country and try to preserve Hungarian too. About Hungarian as a minority language and its use by the borders in complexity we can read here: Kontra Miklós and Hattyár Helga (2002, Eds), *Magyarok és nyelvtörvények*.

<sup>20</sup> In the case of the monolingual Hungary, a lot of efforts were collected to enhance the language learning abilities of children in the last decades. Improvement of methods and schools were needed in the educational system to tackle with the unsuccessful language learning/teaching. A compiled volume in this topic is edited by Éva Márkus and Éva Trentinné Benkő (2014), *A korai idegen nyelvi fejlesztés elmélete és gyakorlata*, highlighting the nursery, the primary and the training focuses, while another edited by Éva Márkus, Tibor M. Pintér, and Éva Trentinné Benkő (2017), *Jó gyakorlatok a korai idegennyelvi fejlesztésben Oktatás, fejlesztés, kutatás*, contains the good practices of early language education.

<sup>21</sup> One of the most effective ways is the bilingual use of the mother tongue and a second language at schools with integrating more subjects and real language purposes from early on. The further specification of this field is called CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), that is according to some experts an immersing bilingual development, or by others the newest phase of revolutionary communicative language teaching. (Trentinné, 2014, 2016). Nevertheless, almost exclusively in Hungary at ELTE TÖK, not only are primary school teachers but, also pre-school teachers given the possibility of earning the necessary CLIL-knowledge ('using languages to learn and learning to use languages') to apply in schools, kindergartens and nurseries (Trentinné, 2016).

## Questions of autonomy and language usage in connection with declining a favourable offer

In the previous section I summarised the different viewpoints of bilingualism with the concept of Grosjean. In the following, I will show what happened around 1979 in Wales. During this period, UK Labour Governments (of 1974-1979) wanted to introduce devolution (or Home Rule) to Wales and Scotland but this aim was not successful since it did not receive the necessary support through referendums in the territories (Blick, 2014). This circumstance plainly means that in 1979 Welsh decisively rejected setting up the Assembly of Wales.<sup>22</sup>

The results were shocking to those who cared for Welsh as a language and a culture (Thiec, 1997; Apple, 1979). It showed that, despite the efforts of many patriots, the original Welsh language was declining and close to extinction. One explanation of the event is as follows: it 'almost certainly was because many of them did not welcome wider official use of the Welsh language' (McDowall, 1992, p. 76). To clarify and better the situation, Bangor university professor Colin Baker generated a computer analysis of the 1981 Census data right after the rejected referendum. (He also questioned the scheme and formulation of the national poll questionnaire). In his analysis he gave his warning and concluded the worrying situation: 'Taking the last nine Censuses into account, the statistical prediction is of extinction in the year 2026. [...] The present trend *is* towards extinction. There can be no real optimism until the Census figures show a levelling or an upturn' (Baker, 1985, p. 167). This was the opinion of other researchers, too. Aitchison, Carter, and Williams say, 'It is for this reason that relatively minor movements in population can greatly disturb the balance. Comparing the spatial pattern for 1981 with those of previous censuses underlies the continuing erosion and areal fragmentation of the Welsh-speaking heartland (Cymru Gymraeg Welsh Wales) and the expansion of Anglicised Wales (Cymru Ddi-Gymraeg)' (Aitchison et al., 1985, p. 14). These conclusions contained serious warnings that had to be considered in the future.

Further in his analysis, Baker scrutinised and openly questioned the national poll process and its questionnaire form. In doing so, he collected the weak points of the census to express his doubts about different measures and the results of it (this approach also hints at doubts surrounding the '79 referendum and its dubious questioning. Instead of asking straightforward whether Welsh are in favour of the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, they asked, 'Do you want the provisions of the Wales Act to be put into effect?' which supposed the background knowledge of matters which people were clearly lacking (Thiec, 1997).) First, he expressed the *ambiguity* and (hidden bias) of the questioning (readable and answerable in English and Welsh). As he explains: the question, related to all persons above three years of age was, 'Can the person speak Welsh?' If the respondent answered yes, the census then asks if the person

<sup>22</sup> 'In Wales, however, the devolution proposals were clearly and massively rejected with a two to four majority against the Assembly: 20.3% of the people who took part in the referendum voted "Yes" (i.e 11.8% of the registered voters) while 79.7% voted "No" (46.5% of the registered voters)' (Thiec, 1997).

speaks English as well and, furthermore, whether the person reads and writes Welsh, too. However, according to him, these questions do not specify the language level (beginner or fluent) of the answerer and, therefore mislead. Nor were the Welsh and English language variants of the questionnaire used equivalently: the first asked about the ability (can the person speak Welsh), while the second about the function (does the person speak English) of a language, and so they could have been answered differently by even one person if asked in the two languages. Another questionable point of the census was that it limited the participants only to Wales and so excluded those who lived elsewhere in the U. K., let alone in the U. S., or in Canada (Baker, 1985, p. 5).

Baker also mentions some *psychological factors* that might have influenced the answerers, e.g. the *social desirability response effect* (answer only positively instead of honestly), or the *experimenter effect* (unintentional enumerator influence on respondents. If someone does not feel being Welsh, due to lack of the language, it might have led to the denial of the truth.) A further psychological response mechanism is the *acquiescent response* to distort results (refusing negative answer).<sup>23</sup>

All in all, these limitations of the questionnaire caused over- and underestimations and quite successfully undermined beliefs in official data. The author's conclusion is that: 'Whether the final effect is one of exaggeration of the health of the Welsh language or of underestimation is unclear' (Baker, 1985, p. 6). In conclusion, all the aforementioned possible alterations refer to that seemingly *factual data* of the census are uncertain, and so they are not reliable. To what extent they can be uncertain, he refers to the 1971 *Irish census data*, in which 28.3% of the population declared themselves being able to speak Irish (about 816,000 people), while the Committee of Language Attitudes Research found the totally different result that 9.3% (277,000 people) of the population was really being able to speak Irish at that given time (Baker refers to Greene, 1981).

In this section I attempted to demonstrate how one single but nationwide event can influence a community, how it is interpreted by researchers and what they predict for the future. After seeing these events, we cannot wonder why it has taken so long since the 1960s to popularise the language enough to have it become official in the country.

### **Recent issues. Is Welsh difficult to acquire? How do people in Wales feel now?**

In what follows, I will summarise some contemporary research regarding the process of Welsh language acquisition among infants and the feelings and state of mind of the English and Welsh individuals living in the region of the Welsh-speaking heartlands.

First, I will examine the results of an experiment, regarding language recognition of children being raised in monolingual English/Welsh or bilingual

<sup>23</sup> For example, in the case of 2,340 children above three years of age, data were collected that they could read and write in Welsh. This is obviously not true but rather an expectation of the parents, quasi wishful thinking (Baker, 1985, p. 5).



English-Welsh families (all of whom live in Wales). This survey investigates the untrained (natural) word form recognition of children between the ages of nine and eleven months in the different language environments. The results rely upon the behavioural (a turning of the head) and neurophysiological (event-related potentials, ERPs) reactions observed in the studied children. (ERP is a procedure of recording brain responses from the surface of the infant's scalp). These reactions are very important steps when acquiring language itself.<sup>24</sup> Recognising word forms is a complex process already built upon previously accomplished steps in the brain. The experimental process was connected to first hearing, then segmenting the familiar sounds and syllables, then indicating recognition by turning the head (a signal of brain activity). A lack of movement on the part of the infant was taken as an indication that the word forms were not familiar. (It is also combined with the creation of sounds by the children who gradually improve their own speech.)

An experiment by Vihman, Thierry, Lum, Keren-Portnoy, and Martin shows that behavioural responses (head turn),<sup>25</sup> due to mother tongue familiarity effects were detectable in the case of eleven-month-old *monolingual English* children. At eleven months, these responses were not statistically recognisable in the case of *monolingual Welsh* children.<sup>26</sup> *Bilinguals* also responded quite early (at eleven months) in both languages to the word forms of the familiar languages but not to as significant a degree as was observed in English (or French) monolinguals. (The neurophysiological findings also underpin the behavioural results.)<sup>27</sup>

Due to researcher's findings, differences between the two languages can be seen on 'the accentual, grammatical, and sociolinguistic' levels (Vihman et al., 2007, p. 475). The researchers point to three possible explanations for the differences in word recognition among Welsh monolingual children. According

<sup>24</sup> A similar inquiry is reported by Judit Gervain in her article: Mechanisms of speech recognition and language acquisition in the case of infants. (2011). Gervain argues that infants recognize grammar patterns earlier than was considered, but also underpins the idea of *mother tongue speech filtering through even in the foetal position of a baby*. Her examples suggest the capacities of babies and their *ability to differentiate* among heard languages, as they filter words from the influx of speech and are able to recognise the basic word order of their mother tongue before producing words (Gervain, 2011, p. 918).

<sup>25</sup> 'In a series of cross-linguistic studies it has been established that groups of infants respond with longer attention to untrained *familiar* than to phonotactically matched rare words by 11 months in both French (Hallé & Boysson-Bardies, 1994) and British English (Vihman et al., 2004), although at 9 months they do not yet show the effect (Vihman et al., 2007, p. 476).

<sup>26</sup> Only at twelve months of age did they show the effect of recognizing Welsh words by means of an easier test. A more complex test only revealed a tendency to recognise familiar words. The first findings were already shown by Vihman and DePaolis in 1999.

<sup>27</sup> As the researchers summarise it, 'word learning in a bilingual community is subtly different, depending on the language(s) spoken to the child. For the dominant language, the time course appears to be the same as in a monolingual setting (e.g., French in France). For monolinguals exposed directly only to the minority language, we see a delay and a difference in the attentional response. Rare or unknown words held infant attention in a way that did not obtain for children learning the dominant language of the community, perhaps because these infants are "flooded" with unknown words, and have thus learned not readily to dismiss them' (Vihman et al., 2007, p. 492).

to them, although Welsh and English are trochaic languages (displaying a strong-weak accentual pattern), the *accent in Welsh* is different. For example, the vowel of the first accented syllable is short, the middle consonant is longer, and the vowel of the final syllable is long. As a result, the second (or third) part is stressed, unlike in English words where the stress is on the first syllable. (e. g., Welsh *bwni* (bunny)/buni/ is pronounced as [hɒni]). This can be one underlying reason for later recognition.

Furthermore, depending on *grammatical gender*, the beginning of Welsh initial consonants changes, meaning that the beginning of a word can only be figured out later by a child given that this type of recognition demands quite a complex neural process. Another factor is the *sociolinguistic situation* of Welsh people. They usually all speak fluent English, while the opposite is not true of English speakers.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, children's word recognition of unfamiliar words might have happened, namely, they recognised the not-very-unfamiliar English words since they, as UK residents, are exposed to English speech.)

As a summary of the experimental results, it can be concluded that due to the different accentual, grammatical, and even sociolinguistic characteristics of languages, children may acquire a language detectably and naturally later on as a result of a language's specialty or level of difficulty.

In what follows, I continue with the social and personal aspects of the people living in one of the heartlands of Wales, in Caernarfon, Gwynedd. The author Williams states that language forms our attitude and identity as well as being part of a specific group is ascribed to the person (Williams, 2009, p. 65). However, personalities who incorporate language into their identities, can cause problems if they must live by the scenario of a minority-majority embeddedness within a society. 'It is thus to be expected that sites where language plays a particularly salient role in attitude and identity are those where different language groups come into contact', (Williams, 2009, p. 65). The author's intention is to show this mutual cohabitation and language usages via interviews and the interpretation of three episodes that characterise English/Welsh co-existence. Although Williams describes the phenomenon of parallel language based on the term *diglossia*, this term is neither neutral, nor evidence of social consensus, but rather a reflection of structural conflict between opposing interests (Williams, 2009, p. 67). Williams further states that, over the course of time, English took control of the principal governmental and administrative institutions in Wales as a *colonising force*, and its effects are still recognisable in the country.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> In the 2011 census, out of 2,955,841 people, 2,871,405 declared their proficiency in English, 672,828 understood spoken Welsh, and 630,062 can speak, read or write Welsh. Office for National Statistics, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS205EW/view/2092957700?cols=measures>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021. Office for National Statistics, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS206WA/view/2092957700?cols=measures>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.

<sup>29</sup> As Williams says, 'Wales displays evidence of its colonial history', (Williams, 2009, p. 65). In my opinion, it is appalling that Williams in his 2009 study still emphasises the colonising effects of the English language that can be felt in Caernarfon.

In his article, the author analyses some events (the caravan, football, and car park episodes),<sup>30</sup> and includes six interviews as the data of his survey. These data provide a great scope of interpretation that supports the view of Williams. In connection with the first episode, it is interesting to note that (in one of the heartlands of Welsh-speaking Wales), a strong opposition against a minority and its language is very much visible and filled with hatred as evinced by the burning caravan event. The second episode refers to the slow change in administrative matters, and also the non-recognition of Welsh as an important and official language of Wales. The case might have been an impetus for the Official Languages Bill in 2012. The third episode displays a positive judgement from the Welsh' point of view and was therefore welcomed by them.

The interviews took place with Welsh-speakers (four people) and non-Welsh-speakers (two people). The non-structured questions asked about the beliefs, feelings, and behaviours as *constituents* of the interviewees' attitudes towards Welsh matters in the town. Regarding their analyses, it is clear that these attitudes all reflected the importance of in-group membership (Welsh speaker) and out-group membership (English), that was distinctively featured by the frequent use of the personal pronouns, *we* and *they*. In conclusion, Welsh vs. English individuals still thought of themselves as separate groups in 2009.

Williams's conclusion regarding his varied episodes and interviews underpin his supposition that the present state of affairs is 'a conflict theory of language use in language contact situations, rather than consensually underpinned diglossia' (Williams, 2009, p. 85). However, the author also expresses his hopes regarding the future of the heartland, from which the revival or the 'revitalisation of attitude' towards the language, may depend upon the presence of a *bilingual community*.

## Summary

In my study I conducted a diachronic analysis of the present situation of Wales, a country whose turbulent history led to difficulties in preserving identity and language. Following this, I sought answers in connection with the possibilities of bilingualism in general and in Wales in particular. Later, I showed the warnings of a factual data analysis that also included caution about reading these data. In the last section of this study, I addressed some more contemporary issues regarding experiments about language acquisition, and also textual analysis. The

---

<sup>30</sup> The *caravan episode*: the newly formed (2001) Welsh language and culture pressure group Cymuned ('Community'), parked a small touring caravan in a field near to a busy traffic site close to Cearnarfon with messages to speak Welsh, and affordable house prices for Welsh. In one night, the caravan was turned over and a few months later it was set fire and burnt down. A similar episode happened is the 2006 *football episode*, when the secretary of the Caernarfon and District football league, John Prichard, was banned from holding meetings in Welsh since the association had ostensibly an English policy. After complaining about this treatment based on FIFA standards and the case's subsequent nation-wide status, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) accepted Welsh as a means of communication and started to encourage Welsh lessons for members. The *car park episode* concerns an attendant who charged £2.00 for Welsh and £4.00 for English speakers.

experimental results pointed out that Welsh is a difficult language to learn, but bilingual users of Welsh and English do not lag behind compared to monolingual language learners. The question posed in this paper's title asked whether the situation of the Welsh language and identity of people has changed since the creation of *The Welsh Hill County* written by the Welsh poet, R. S. Thomas. To answer this, I summarised some deeds of the Welsh governmental body to clarify the effort being made to revitalise the national feelings of Welsh society. As a result, the Assembly accepted the general, nation-wide Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 to make Welsh an official language. This measure was followed by the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill in 2012, including amendments.<sup>31</sup> The Positive Planning Implementation Plan 2015,<sup>32</sup> Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers (2017),<sup>33</sup> Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21 (2017)<sup>34</sup> are all middle- or long-term plans serving the region's well-being, language usage, and cultural development.

Having seen the efforts of this nation, I conclude that the state of the country has changed greatly and bilingualism is a far more focused target now. However, as there have been positive legal actions that advance the lasting aim of cultural and language preservation, it can be asserted that the growing number of declared Welsh speakers means that the sustainability of language, culture, and identity is no longer a dream, but rather a reality.

## References

- Aitchison, J. W., Carter, H & Williams, C. H. (1985). The Welsh Language at the 1981 Census, *Area*, 17, 11–17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20002113>
- Baker, C. (1985). *Aspects of Bilingualism in Wales*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Bartha, C. (1999). *A kétnyelvűség alapkérdései*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
- Evans, D. (2018). *Identity and language*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Gervain, J. (2011). *A csecsemőkori beszédészlelés mechanizmusai és a nyelvelsajátítás*, *Magyar Tudomány*, 172(8), 913–919. <http://www.matud.iif.hu/2011/08/04.htm>.
- Kontra, M. & Hattyár, H. (2002, Eds.). *Magyarok és nyelvtörvények*. Teleki László Alapítvány <https://www.mek.oszk.hu/12100/12123/12123.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> About the mutual use of official languages, see the following document: National Assembly for Wales, Official Languages Scheme, July 2013, Downloaded: 01. 02.2021. Assembly Commission. <https://senedd.wales/NAfW%20Documents/About%20the%20Assembly%20section%20documents/ols/ols-en.pdf>, Downloaded: 01. 02. 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Welsh Government, Positive Planning Implementation Plan 2015, [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/positive\\_planning\\_implementation\\_plan.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/positive_planning_implementation_plan.pdf), Downloaded: 02. 02. 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Welsh Government, Cymraeg 2050, A million Welsh speakers. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy.pdf>, Downloaded: 02. 02. 2021. That is the aim of the society to have the abundance of Welsh speakers in Wales.

<sup>34</sup> Welsh in Education, Action plan 2017–21, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/welsh-in-education-action-plan-2017%E2%80%9321.pdf>, Downloaded: 21. 02. 2021.

- Márkus, É. & Trentinné Benkő, É. (2014, Eds). *A korai idegen nyelvi fejlesztés elmélete és gyakorlata: Konferenciaelőadások és háttér tanulmányok*, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó.
- Márkus, É., M. Pintér, T., Trentinné Benkő, É. (2017, Eds.). *Jó gyakorlatok a korai idegennyelvi fejlesztésben Oktatás, fejlesztés, kutatás*. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Tanító- és Óvóképző Kar.
- McDowall, D. (1992). *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Longman, Harlow.
- Navracsics, J. (2000). *A kétnyelvű gyermek*. Corvina.
- Vihman, M., Thierry, G., Lum, J., Keren-Portnoy, T. & Martin, P. (2007). Onset Of Word Form Recognition In English, Welsh, And English–Welsh Bilingual Infants. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 28(3), 475-493. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716407070269>
- Williams, E. (2009). 'Language attitudes and identity in a North Wales town: "Something different about Caernarfon"?' *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 195, 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJSL.2009.006>

## Websites

- An Assembly for Wales/Senedd i Gymru, *Executive Summary*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution-unit/files/4.pdf>,
- Apple Jr. R. W. (1979). *The Welsh Rejected Limited Autonomy, the Scots Split on the Issue*, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/03/04/archives/callaghans-devolution-strategy-didnt-work.html>
- BBC (2014). Cymru Wales, *Hwyel Dda*: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/royalty\\_hwyel\\_dda.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/royalty_hwyel_dda.shtml)
- Blick, A. (2014). *Devolution in the UK: Historical Perspective*, <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/devolution-uk-historical--827.pdf>
- Defining Schools according to Welsh Medium Provision, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/defining-schools-according-to-welsh-medium-provision.pdf>
- Eryri Snowdonia, (2021). *Welsh Language*, <https://www.visitsnowdonia.info/welsh-language>.
- Encyclopedica Britannica (2021). *Government and Society*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welsh-Language-Society>
- Europeans and their Languages (2012). *Special Eurobarometer*, [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf).
- Hywel Dda, Canolphon Centre, (2010). *"The only Garden in Europe dedicated to the Law"*, <https://www.hywel-dda.co.uk/>
- National Assembly for Wales, (2013). *Official Language Scheme*, Official Languages Scheme, July 2013
- Lewis, S. (1962). *Tynged yr Iaith/ Fate of the Language*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7ntVx4m3YU>
- Lewis, S. (1962). *Fate of the Language* (transcript), <https://morris.cymru/testun/saunders-lewis-fate-of-the-language.html>,
- Llywodraeth Cymru-Welsh Government (2020). *Welsh Language-Fast Facts*, <https://learnwelsh.cymru/about-us/welsh-language-fast-facts/>

- Office for National Statistics (2011). *Proficiency in English*, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS205EW/view/2092957700?cols=measures>
- Office for National Statistics (2011). *Welsh Language Skills*, <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS206WA/view/2092957700?cols=measures>
- Senedd Cymru, Welsh Parliament (2021). *Legislation*, <https://senedd.wales/senedd-business/legislation/>
- Senedd Cymru, Welsh Parliament (2021). *History of devolution*, <https://senedd.wales/how-we-work/history-of-devolution/>
- Senedd Cymru, Welsh Government (2015). Positive Planning Implementation Plan 2015, [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/positive\\_planning\\_implementation\\_plan.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/positive_planning_implementation_plan.pdf)
- Senedd Cymru, Welsh in Education, Action plan 2017-21, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/welsh-in-education-action-plan-2017%E2%80%9321.pdf>
- Senedd Cymru, Welsh Governemnt, Cymraeg 2050, A million Welsh speakers. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy.pdf>
- Szoó, A. (2020). „Brussels should pay attention to the Szeklers” – Day of Szekler Autonomy), <https://transylvanianow.com/brussels-should-pay-attention-to-the-szeklers-day-of-szekler-autonomy/>
- Thomas, R. S. *The Welsh Hill County*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11da18FioIQ>
- The National Library of Wales, Welsh Bible 1588, <https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/printed-material/1588-welsh-bible#c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-882%2C-1%2C4726%2C4026>
- Thiec, A. (1997). *Devolution to Scotland and Wales: From the Failure of 1979 to the Success of 1997*, [https://crini.univ-nantes.fr/medias/fichier/thiec\\_1207554092397.pdf?ID\\_FICHE=421226&INLINE=FALSE](https://crini.univ-nantes.fr/medias/fichier/thiec_1207554092397.pdf?ID_FICHE=421226&INLINE=FALSE)
- Trentinné Benkő, É. (2014). *A kétnyelvű fejlesztés és a pedagógusképzés*, [http://nevelestudomany.elte.hu/downloads/2014/nevelestudomany\\_2014\\_3.pdf](http://nevelestudomany.elte.hu/downloads/2014/nevelestudomany_2014_3.pdf)
- Trentinné Benkő, Éva (2016). *Ten Years of CLIL Teacher Training at ELTE TÓK*, <http://www.irisro.org/edusoc2016nov/33TrentinneBenkoEva.pdf>
- University of Portsmouth, *A Vision of Britain through Time*, <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1921GEN/11>
- Welsh in Education, Action Plan 2017-21, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/welsh-in-education-action-plan-2017%E2%80%9321.pdf>