LANGUAGE POLICY AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN WALES

POLITYKA JĘZYKOWA W KSZTAŁTOWANIU TOŻSAMOŚCI WALIJSKIEJ

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Summary

Language is a crucial element of any society's identity. Likewise, language policy is a vital social and political issue. Even in the European Union, a geo-political identity based on ideals of unity and shared values, there are visible efforts to construct minorities or nations' institutions and identities through demands concerning language use. It is because the empowerment of language through language policy may shape speakers' identification with a particular nation, their attitudes towards other communities, and their cultural and personal identity. The following article concerns one such case, namely Wales, and its present-day policy of promoting the indigenous language to make the society bilingual. The policy affects both the public sphere, mainly schools and institutions, and the private one, i.e. autonomous organisations and business. It results partly from the regional developments in post-devolution Britain as well as aspirations of all those engaged in preserving the Welsh national heritage.

Keywords: the Welsh language, language policy, bilingualism, identity

Streszczenie

Język jest kluczowym elementem tożsamości każdego społeczeństwa. Także polityka językowa jest istotną społeczną i polityczną kwestią. Nawet w Unii Europejskiej, geopolitycznym związku państw opartym na ideałach jedności i wspólnych wartości, widoczne są wysiłki na rzecz kształtowania tożsamości mniejszości czy instytucji poprzez wymogi dotyczące użycia języka. Dzieje się tak, ponieważ upodmiotowienie języka poprzez politykę językową może oddziaływać na identyfikację mówców z określonym narodem, ich stosunek do innych społeczności czy też tożsamość kulturową i osobistą. Artykuł dotyczy takiego właśnie przypadku, a mianowicie Walii i jej aktualnej polityki promowania języka rdzennego, celem ukształtowania społeczeństwa dwujęzycznego. Polityka ta dotyczy zarówno sfery publicznej, na przykład szkół i instytucji, a także prywatnej, tzn. autonomicznych organizacji i przedsiębiorstw. Wynika ona częściowo ze zmian regionalnych w zdecentralizowanej i unitarnej Wielkiej Brytanii, oraz aspiracji wszystkich tych, którzy zaangażują się w zachowanie języka walijskiego jako części dziedzictwa narodowego.

Słowa kluczowe: język walijski, polityka językowa, dwujęzyczność, tożsamość

Introduction

In popular understanding, a language policy might be defined as a promotion of a particular language, or a number of them, at the expense of others, which is designed at protecting a threatened language or favouring the dominant one that provides a society's internal cohesion. Beside promotion though, there must appear "a determined and explicit policy change" in the form of planned interventions that would enforce and support by law the governmental intentions (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5). However, as Patten (2001, p. 693) acknowledges, a full inquiry into the issue requires taking into account the linguistic autonomy of a language as well as its public recognition. Considering the latter aspect, one needs to realise that language can be considered in broader contexts – ethical, political or legal ones. Only then can its linguistic autonomy be taken into full account.

Patten (2001, pp. 693-695) proposes three models that should help in thinking about language and its recognition: 'official multilingualism', 'language rationalisation' and 'language maintenance'. The first one, i.e. the official multilingualism model, maintains that different languages used in the same community are supposed to be accorded the same recognition. This, in turn, presupposes that public services, be it schools, hospitals or courts, are available in one, some or all of the accepted languages. The model has become an inspiration for Canada, Switzerland or the European Union. The next one, the language rationalisation model, states that authorities assist

languages in regular use but do not necessarily prevent a situation when one or two of them shift into the dominant position (Patten, 2001, p. 700). Surprisingly, it is the United States that experienced a heightened political conflict over language policy. Although its approach to languages seemed rational as it centred on three primary issues: providing minority children with proper education, access to civil and political rights and government services by non-English speakers, at the same time, it advocated establishing English as the only official language of the US (Schmidt, 2001, p. 11). The bill designating English as the federal government sole language of official business was approved by the House of Representatives in 1996, as postulated by the English-only activism movement (Crawford, 2001, p. 4). Accordingly, it has been noticed that, although state English-only laws are often symbolic and non-prohibitive, they still hold and, in conflicting cases, solutions tend to be interpreted in favour of English. Finally, there is the language maintenance model, which gives fuller public recognition to the more vulnerable languages to secure their position. It happens when two or more languages, despite an equal recognition, are not successful enough and there is a possibility that the less popular or known language might not retain its status (Patten, 2001, pp. 705-6). The case of Welsh seems to serve as an example here.

As for identity politics, in Eisenberg and Kylmicka's view (2011, p. 44), it has its roots in political mobilization and conflicts that arise among different identity groups. It is part of most societies' heritage relating to nation-building processes. Most often identity politics is about emancipatory movements seeking social justice as it involves interest groups who use their strategies to advance and secure their position in the most effective ways. It may also relate to social groups constituting elites who use it as some strategic self-interest. In either case, identity politics draws on normative features that refer to deeply held values and beliefs. This way of looking at identity politics, calls into question Schmidt and Schmidt's dichotomy (2001, p. 11) between 'material interests' and 'symbolic politics' in relation to interest groups.

The current strive on the part of Welsh government to enable the Welsh society communication in the indigenous language in different environments and secure the citizens' prospects in what is to become bilingual Wales is a viable public policy. Welsh is being restored through the education system and popularised in all spheres of public and private life. However, are the Welsh secured with a proper context of choice in their homeland? Can they find real opportunities in the kingdom, a predominantly English-speaking community? Finally, is it plausible to shape people's linguistic habits through the exercise of incentives and controls in the global world? To examine the issue of bilingualism, 'linguistic access' rights to public spheres and the recent designation of Welsh as Wales's

official language, the article illuminates the historical, political and social contexts in which the language used to function in the past and the ones highlighted at present. It does not aim to agree or disagree over the current language policy but to present the methods and consequences of introducing Welsh into public domains and its immediate influence on the country's functioning and people's identity. Indirectly, it also answers who the Welsh are, whether they are a homogeneous social group or some communities, unique in their character, but integral as the whole.

Historical background

Numerous sources present the 20th century Welsh language movement as an attempt to overcome the centuries-long effects of discrimination and hostility towards the indigenous population. However, as (Ford, 2016, p. 5) asserts, such an account might be misleading. There are arguments that seem to indicate that, despite English centralist policies introduced in Wales with the Act of Union of 1536 that simultaneously propagated English as the official language, there was no policy to annihilate the native tongue as such. The policy was confined to offices and the immediate cultural elites and, despite banning the Welsh language in public life, it survived. As Jones (2014, pp. 131-132) suggests, there were several reasons for this. Welsh was probably the strongest of the Celtic languages. Next, Wales lacked coherence and distinction even after the Union was certified. Its fragmented and disunited territory was bound by just two elements – the language and faith. Besides, the mere passing of the law on language use in the public sphere did not have immediate effects. The Welshmen holding offices had to be able to speak Welsh as well. It appears that the provision was rather to ensure a certain degree of constitutional consistency and equality throughout the kingdom than to outlaw the indigenous language. Duly, as Ford (2016, p. 33) stresses, the legal bill was partly effective due to "the lawless state of the territory and diversity of its particular jurisdictions".

Accordingly, the drive towards uniformity on the part of the Crown seems to have had nothing to do with eradicating Welsh culture. It did not mean rejecting Welsh, which did come but much later. Welsh gentry were anglicised only by the end of 17th century, but their support for the Crown did not lead to the weakening of their native tongue (Ford, 2016, p. 33). It could be said that the Act opened new opportunities and hastened the adaption of the local gentry to new realities, but it was not seen as detrimental to the Welsh language. Besides, despite the legal provisions of the Act, even by the end of the 17th century, over 90 per cent of the population knew no other language than Welsh, and Welsh justices of peace had to be brought in as interpreters (Jenkins, 1997, pp. 164-169). It is only in the late 1800s that the number of magistrates who were Welsh speakers was reduced to around one-third of the total personnel. Thus, it might

be claimed that the Act alone was neither "as decisive nor as destructive an event at it was presented in later generations" (Ford, 2016, p. 37). Likewise, the abandonment of the native language among the governing classes was a much more lengthy process than it is presently assumed. It was still widespread, but the language regulations did allow for political integration of the people of Wales into English (and then British) state institutions (Ford 2016, p. 31).

Further, the Anglicisation of Wales is often claimed to have resulted from the introduction of English in the field of education, especially in the second half of the 19th century when Welsh-medium instruction was abandoned in schools. In 1847, the Royal Commission published the so-called 'Blue Books', which seemingly outlawed the language utylised in state schools. In fact, the reports blamed the backwardness of the Welsh on their sticking to the own culture and language (Morgan, 2008, pp. 117-118). Thus, although the decline of Welsh allegedly resulted from the imposition of English in the educational system, in fact, as the commissioners reported, the majority of day schools, i.e. 1336 out of 1657, already conducted their instruction in English (Jones, 1998, p. 356). Besides, the English language had long been favoured by ordinary people, particularly in the educational field. As one government commissioner noted "everywhere there was a very general desire that their children should acquire English" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 50). Duly, it seems that the idea that schooling was a means protecting the language at that time should be seen an alien concept.

The predominance of the English instruction was in accord with the wish of Welsh speakers. Also, the secondary education, which had already been made compulsory in the 1870s, was introduced along the English lines (Morgan, 2008, p. 118). Further, even the founding of the University of Wales in 1884 might be seen as an establishment of an academic enclave conflicting with the interests of the traditionally-minded Welsh academics as it was modelled on Oxbridge style curricula. The University gave the Welsh youth new opportunities but, at the same time, introduced them to all trends of the 19th-century critical thought, secularising trends as well as Victorian opportunities (Day, 215, pp. 63-64).

It might thus be more appropriate to claim that the language policies in the educational sphere compounded the process of Wales' Anglicisation, which resulted from some other significant factors, including diasporic movements, the establishment of mixed English-speaking communities or communication and travel opportunities (Joseph, 2014, p. 158). The processes of industrialisation, development of national organisations and institutions, especially visible from the 18th century onwards, undermined the traditional sense of nationhood based on native culture and language. In due course, large parts of Wales lost their Welsh-speaking character as well as their oral traditions maintained by native speakers (Weedon, 2004,

pp. 90-91). By the end of the 19th century, it was becoming evident that Wales had been undergoing a significant social and cultural change. However, the 19th-century language policies seem to have had a negligible impact on the decline of Welsh (Ford, 2016, p. 5). They just exacerbated what had already been happening in other spheres of social life.

In contrast, as Jones (2014, p. 131) points out, the factor that helped Welsh survive was religion. At the time when the Act of Union law was signed in 1536, another one was soon passed that allowed William Morgan to translate the Bible into Welsh in 1588. With its subsequent revision published in 1620, the Book continued to be the standard religious text until the late 20th century, with no other Welsh text being so influential and enjoying such a huge linguistic and literary significance. The result was that Welsh was spoken by a majority of the population for centuries, at least up to the turn of the 20th century, although English predominated in some public fields (Welsh Bible 1588).

The rapid growth of Nonconformity in the 19th century gave the language a considerable status and strength. Arguably, it could be accepted that it was religion, rather than language policies, that turned out to be the decisive factor in maintaining the social position of the Welsh language. In the mid-19th century, the majority of Welsh Sunday schools were bastions of Welsh culture educating children through the medium of Welsh (Jones, 1998, p. 364). Further, Welsh clergymen insisted on providing materials in Welsh assuring that the native language was the most effective way of teaching local population their duty. Besides, they claimed Welsh was cheaper and more efficient than English, treated as a foreign language, which took "too much time to little purpose" (Humphreys, 2010, p. 80).

Population migrations caused the most significant irruptions between the mutual bond between religion and language. There appeared new densely populated English-speaking communities, which automatically led to a division of the country based on language criteria. With time, a massive inflow of English-speaking population into the industrialised the south and along the sea-board of the north forced clergymen to alter their language policy. To deliver their services to new congregations, numerous churches and chapels in south Wales switched to English (Morgan, 2008, p. 119). Besides, the decline of Welsh-speaking Nonconformism to some extent reflected the decline of Christianity itself. As the secularising processes compounded, Welsh yielded to English in most areas of daily life becoming restricted in its use at home and local neighbourhoods (Llywelyn, 1999, p. 52). Soon, the natural links between being Christian and Welsh-speaking were disappearing.

Therefore, it might be claimed that Welsh was losing its dominant position at the turn of the nineteenth and twenty centuries because the Welsh themselves turned their back on their language, approving of the English instruction at schools and turning away from the Welsh-speaking church. Welsh-

speaking communities were in a way overwhelmed by English-speaking immigrants, the result of which were the lines separating distinct areas clearly visible already in the 19th century (Ford, 2016, p. 65). The communities' separation led to the country's division into a decentralised, community bound territory, which found its embodiment in the scheme presented a century later by political scientist Balsom (1985), who distinguished a three-Wales model, i.e. Welsh-speaking heartland (*Y Fro Gymraeg*); Welsh Wales – an area consciously Welsh but not-speaking the language; and British Wales – the reminder, largely in the east and along the south coast (Osmond, 2002, pp. 80-82). Accordingly, it could be said that Wales settled into a land divided by language and comprised of two societies. However, only in *Y Fro Gymraeg* could the mutual connection between language, religion and culture be still observed. The other areas would, to a smaller or greater extent, exhibit mixed loyalties and complex identification patterns. The frame maintains some validity in how Welshness is perceived even in present-day realities, although it seems too simplistic in its categorisation of people's identity predominantly based on the linguistic criteria (Osmond, 2009, pp. 4-5).

Some attempts to foster a stronger position of Welsh had been made at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, but they were ineffective. In 1927, another official (British) report on the status of the Welsh language was published. It was prepared by the Chief Inspector, William Edwards, who concluded that it was the duty of intermediate schools to "conserve and strengthen the position of the Welsh language in the intellectual life of the nation". It seems that the support for Welsh in education at that time was stronger in Whitehall than in Wales. The Permanent Secretaries' efforts met with apathy though, and throughout much of the next fifty years the efforts on the part of Welsh activists to restore their native language were "half hearted". All this despite the official involvement of the British government officials who urged local authorities to ensure instruction schemes in Welsh (Jenkins 1998, pp. 177-178).

Accordingly, it might appear that language policies at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were shaped and reshaped by pragmatism rather than nationalistic ideals or regulatory policies. Constraints in daily communication and educational opportunities were the key factors shaping people's language use habits.

The Welsh language and contemporary Welsh aspirations

Contemporary language policy seems to have stemmed from the work of The Welsh Office, created in 1965, which beside being responsible for such areas as tourism, roads, forestry or Welsh heritage, soon expanded its duties to cover the use of Welsh in the registration of births, marriages and deaths. The

changes were possible due to the enactment of *The Welsh Language Act of 1967*, and abolishment of *The Wales and Berwick Law of 1746*, which automatically assured that any laws introduced in parliament in London included Wales (Welsh Office; Fishlock, 1972, p. 161). The enactment of the new legislation was the first national (British) action towards the Welsh language initiated by the government since the 16th century. The Act was passed although, at first, Welsh was restricted to courts and helped those could not speak English.

However, the changes were caused by a wider social movement for a uniform approach to the indigenous language. In a way, the new law of 1967 resulted from protests in the early 1960s, when the Welsh used nonviolent direct action demanding reforms, for example, bilingual road signs, by painting slogans, refusing to pay TV licences and more. Also, a strong bottom-up community support led to the establishment of the Welsh Language Society, founded in 1962, which campaigned for the preservation of the native tongue (Jones, 2014, p. 135). This pressure group was partly inspired by Sanders Lewis' influential radio speech 'The fate of the Language', broadcast in 1962 by BBC, which advocated using radical methods to defend the native speech. With time, as Fishlock (1972, p. 73) notices, the Welsh Language Society activists' actions and the speech itself managed to stir the Welsh consciousness and enhance the society's rising assertiveness to make the language once again a major social and political issue.

Several other new initiatives appeared in the 1970s. Parents who did not speak the language could send a child to a Welsh language group. It was possible thanks to the establishment of *Mudiad Meithrin* in 1971, a nursery scheme, which again came from the people, not governments or politicians, and was particularly active in the Anglicised areas. This pre-school education was crucial for the subsequent establishment of the primary and medium level of education with the provision of Welsh (Jones, 2014, p. 134). Another significant development took place in the 1980s when the television channel S4C was launched. This enterprise was favoured both by the Welsh Language Society and *Plaid Cymru*, a Welsh nationalistic party, whose endeavours led to the establishment of this world's only Welsh-language channel. The Welsh programmes, in turn, managed to help increase nationalistic feelings in the public life and popularise language use in everyday settings (Jenkins, 2007, pp. 294-295).

Finally, in 1988 another important piece of legislature, i.e. *The Education Reform Act,* was passed, the most vital education legislation in the kingdom after WW II, which fundamentally changed the relationship between the Department of Education and Science in London and local authorities in Wales. Although the new law gave central government in London more powers, it also defined a new role for local educational authorities and provided an

opportunity for institutions to opt out of the national system. Furthermore, the National Curriculum was introduced but, among the foundation subjects, schools in the Welsh speaking areas could teach Welsh instead of a foreign language. The act made Welsh a compulsory subject for students to study until the age of 16 and boosted its importance by making it a core subject (Turner, 2014, pp. 26-7).

Another significant piece of legislature, i.e. *The Welsh Language Act*, was passed in 1993. It did two things. It established a requirement of all public bodies/institutions in Wales to have a scheme that would show how they dealt with providing the public with Welsh and, under Section 61, made Swansea University responsible for preparing a national Welsh Language Scheme, which was finally approved in September 2004. The other provision introduced by the Act was to set up the Welsh Language Board in 1988, an organisation that would promote and facilitate the use of Welsh in every aspect of life. It did so by seeing that public bodies in Wales kept the Act's terms and by approving of language schemes prepared under the provisions of the Act. In case some institution did not comply with the schemes, the Board could hold a statutory investigation, produce a recommendation or ultimately refer the case to the Minister for Heritage, at the already functioning Welsh Assembly Government (The Welsh Language Act 1993).

Accordingly, it seems that the Board was the precursor in promoting bilingual language design in Wales. Its dynamic actions led to the introduction of several new initiatives, which ultimately strengthened the position of the Welsh language. For example, in 2008, the Board involved the private sector into the Welsh language policy by launching 'Investing in Welsh scheme', an enterprise that was to popularise good practices in the consistent and convenient use of the language in private sector. Further, in order to disseminate the language use amongst all Wales' inhabitants, it introduced annual bilingual awards given to all those who worked best in the interest of popularising the Welsh language (The Welsh Language Board).

Devolution, regional language policies and European protection

Another significant change affecting the Welsh society and automatically the language status came with the devolution process and the establishment of the Welsh Assembly in 1998. The British Labour Government, conscious of Wales' "distinctive language and cultural traditions" committed itself to meet the demand of decentralised Britain and devolve power to this country and its people (Labour Party Manifesto, *Because Britain deserves better*, 1997, p. 33). The resulting *Government of Wales Act of 1998* established an Assembly for Wales, also known as the National Assembly for Wales, a body which functioned "on behalf of the Crown to exercise

powers in eighteen different fields including culture and education". The Assembly took responsibilities of the Welsh Office, which since 1999 transformed into Wales Office and continued its work as a department of the central government (Turpin and Tomkins, 2007, pp. 220-222). The foundation of the Assembly was a primary change in many spheres of public life because there appeared an element of planning. For the first time, the total responsibility for the Welsh education was taken by the local government in Cardiff. Until then, it was pushed by parents or organisations and pursued at the local level but not necessarily on the national scale, unless coming directly from the Whitehall.

The Welsh language held a uniquel position in the Welsh Assembly Government from the moment of its creation. It was viewed as an integral part of the national culture, "an essential and enduring component in the history, culture and social fabric" of the Welsh society (Wilson and Stapleton 2016, p. 44). Respecting the native heritage, the Assembly was committed to revising and revitalising the indigenous language. Its broad ambitions were embraced in subsequent initiatives: *Betterwales.com* (2000); *A Plan for Wales* (2001), intended to stabilise the numbers of Welsh speakers by 2004 or increase their numbers among the youth by 2010; *A Bilingual Future* (2002), a national action plan enhancing strategies and resources that were to make the goal achievable; or a *Our Language: Its Future* (2002), a scheme which reviewed the language situation and highlighted issues that had to be addressed (*A National Plan for Bilingual Wales,* 2003: 2). Finally, under its language promotion programme entitled *Iaith Pawb* [language for all], introduced in 2002, Welsh was to be seen as an "added value" in any policy promoting national identity and an integral element of any scheme provided for and by each public body (*A National Plan for Bilingual Wales*, 2003, 17)*.*

While construction its national plan, the Assembly did not start from scratch. It built on everything that the UK governments enacted within the previous decades when subsequent legislation and policies raised the status of the Welsh language and contributed to its stabilisation. The above-mentioned Welsh Acts of 1967 and 1993, the launch of S4C in 1982 (the Welsh television station) or the establishment of the Welsh Language Board (1988) did their work by raising the profile of the language in the public consciousness. Still, the rate of decline of the language in the 20th century or its uneven distribution across the country suggested that some concerted and sustained action was needed that would introduce a national strategy by addressing weaknesses and building on the past experiences (*A National Plan for Bilingual Wales,* 2003: 7).

Since 2006, when *The Government of Wales Act* was published, the Welsh ministers have been made to provide an annual report, also called an annual Action Plan, in accordance with Section 78 of the Act, under which they are to outline how

particular proposals are to be implemented during each financial year (Government for Wales Act 2006). Accordingly, the ministers address the plan to government departments, public institutions, private sector companies, educational organisations, committees and other interested parties. Each such plan reflects the priorities identified for a particular year and makes recommendations on the past neglected matters. The issue of multiculturalism and multilingualism is also a theme, but it has never been a big concern in Wales. Besides, like in the UK, apart for indigenous minorities, one cannot be taught in any other language except for English.

Consequently, the National Assembly for Wales created the right conditions and provided the resources to sustain the Welsh language and make it flourish. The Action Plan described measures whose implementation was left in the hands of the Welsh Language Unit, located within the Assembly, and the Welsh Language Board, the national language planning body for Wales responsible for delivering the government's Plan, with a budget of £16 million. Their goal was to create a national strategy framework that would ensure all bodies and their initiatives a clear role and sense. The Plan was intended to be an evolutionary process with clearly set out policies and identified responsibilities as well as administrative mechanisms (*A National Plan for Bilingual Wales*, 2003, pp. 14-15). For instance, in accordance with the Welsh Government's Welsh Language strategy of the newest Action Plan adopted in 2012, i.e. *A Living Language: a language for living* (Welsh Language Strategy 2012–17), the present Action Plan's provisions include: more focus on the Welsh language and the economy; better strategic planning for the Welsh language; propagating the use of Welsh in the community; and changing linguistic behaviour (Action Plan 2016–17, 2016, p. 2).

Finally, in March 2011, *The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure,* was introduced. The legislation abolished the Welsh Language Board and replaced it with the Welsh Language Commissioner, who together with the Welsh Government, took the sole responsibility for the language matters. The decision met with mixed reaction and evoked protests as all the former structures were changed. Still, the tasks for the Commissioner remained the same. The public and private bodies are to ensure their language plans and keep to 'Language Standards' drafted by the government (Jones 2014, p. 138). Under the Welsh Language Standards, as set out by the government under Section 44, institutions are to provide the public with services in Welsh, which enhances the promotion of the language use. For example, St Fagans National Museum of History, the first to work through the language, as it treats it as an intrinsic part of the heritage of Wales (National Museum Wales' Policy). Besides, the Measure established that Welsh must be "treated no less favourably" than English and gave the language equality for the first time in the history. The Welsh language gained an

official status in Wales and, at the same time, became the only language that is *de jure* official in other parts of the United Kingdom side by side with English (Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011).

The last significant element in the present-day attempts to regulate the status of Welsh result from the Commissioner's work, who in April 2015, under Section 120 of *The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011*, established the Welsh Language Tribunal. This Welsh Court deals with appeals and requests for reviews of the Commissioner's decisions as well as looks at the rights of Welsh speakers as well as ensures that standards are reasonable and proportionate for various organisations. At the same time, individuals can exercise their right to appeal against the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards or to submit an application to the Tribunal, which operates as an independent body (The Welsh Language Tribunal).

The above-discussed developments in the contemporary Welsh approach to the indigenous language owe much to European endeavours. In 1992, when the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was ratified, states which signed up to the law, Britain including, took measures to promote regional languages, becoming more sensitive to local conditions (Schmidt, 2008, pp. 6-7). Thus, the Welsh Acts of 1993 and 1997, both protecting the language by giving it parity with English by making it an obligatory subject in schools, did not appear out of the blue. At the European level, there are several organisations that have committed themselves to protect of cultural identity in Europe. These include the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Their endeavours have secured the status of regional and minority languages in public life. They do it from different angles, as their legislation covers the areas of education, justice, public services and much more. In short, the EU highlights the socio-economic inclusion, the OSCE emphasises the security and conflict transformation, whereas the CoE insists on legal and cultural aspects of minority rights protection. Altogether, European organisations act as an umbrella with their sets of values, encompassing numerous laws and regulations that protect the identity of indigenous peoples and minorities.

Language policies and their outcomes

Despite the numerous efforts to popularise the Welsh language, the outcomes of the last few decades of actions are not clear-cut. In 2011, the Census of British Population reported that the number of those who can be classified as Welsh-users stood at around 362.000 (19%). The latest data informing about a recent increase in the numbers of those who could "understand, speak, read or write" in Welsh from 21% in 2001 to 21,3% in 2011 respectively (Welsh Language Skills, UK Office for National Statistics) seem to indicate some kind of a reversal in language

use preferences. Further, ONS 2014 estimates indicate that over seven hundred thousand people in Wales could speak a primary language other than English. Among them, nearly 23% use Welsh (The 2013-14 Welsh language Use Survey). Although the data come from different sources and illustrate discrepancies and difficulties, it seems that the number of Welsh speakers is growing. Still, the collected information relies heavily on people's subjective assessment of their linguistic abilities. Besides, the more positive data were compiled by the Welsh Language Survey, whereas the other – by the British Statistical Office. Critics argue that the discrepancies might result from the Welsh government language policies propagating bilingual education, providing non-English materials, or facilitating social service and workplace "language rights", which contribute to the more national character of the country and peoples' identification with the language.

Other studies seem to indicate that the former understanding of identity, predominantly caught up in issues of language and religion, appear to have given way to some new consensus already visible since the end of the 1980s. The divisive character of the former understanding of nationhood, community and divisions within the Welsh society has given way to a new, more collective identification (Jones, 2008, p. 21). Due to new political development, establishing of the Welsh Assembly, the Welsh do not want to define themselves merely through the prism of their indigenous language but rather by reference to the institutions which they abide, where language itself is seen as an added value (Carter 2010, p. 140). As Lord (2000, p. 9) stresses, the political rebirth of Wales and the new national awareness give the Welsh more self-confidence and a broader change in perceptions of their nationality. Thus, concentrating too much on language policies seems too narrow and past-oriented.

Further, planning language policies does not necessarily produce people with bilingual skills. For example, it 2006 it turned out that schools produced twice as many fluent Welsh speakers as homes, which provided a solid base on which to continue the language projects outside. However, enabling all those wishing to continue using the language outside remained a challenge (Jones, 2014, p. 135). Besides, as (Tinsley and Board, 2015) point out, the potential benefits of bilingualism are not being adequately realised. Although bilingual students are better prepared to understand certain concepts and learn new languages, the way Welsh is taught particularly in primary schools is not helpful. It does not support language-learning process itself and the knowledge of how language works. Consequently, the use of Welsh is "very patchy". Further, changes in the Welsh Baccalaureate in 2003, and depriving foreign languages of the 'core subject' status, caused that the numbers of entries for modern foreign languages plummeted to as low as 42% in 2014 (The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification). With no knowledge of other languages, little awareness about their mutual

similarities and differences, the patchy knowledge of the Welsh language might not suffice to raise, as indicated by Patten (2001, p. 693), its linguistic autonomy.

Further, it is hoped that the twenty-first century will successfully transcend the former social divisions in the Welsh society resulting, amongst others, from the language criterion. As Ford (2016, pp. 112-113) underlines, it is futile to assume that Welsh could be restored as a living language. It should rather facilitate the life of all those who speak the language, especially in the traditional Welsh communities. In his opinion, the role of the state should be limited to protecting all those individuals and businesses who still use the native language, by coming forward with the appropriate initiative. Moreover, the most effective approach would be to pay special status to the traditional close-knit communities even through positive discrimination. Huws (2014, p. 5), the Welsh Language Commissioner since 2012, sees it differently. She wishes Wales to be a country that ensures the Welsh language proper treatment, no less favourable than that of English. In her view, this can be achieved only through the right regulatory measures and proper promotion as well as facilitating the language use, so that the best possible practices are identified and implemented. It remains to be seen which vision will prevail.

Conclusions

It is too soon to foresee whether the present-day policy of bilingualism and its programmes are going to be successful. They provide an opportunity of making Wales a more democratic society with their wide access to the language resources and assurance of equal rights. Further, they may strengthen the construction of individual and national identity based on indigenous culture by making people proud of Wales' heritage. Finally, the new policy might bridge the present-day ambitions of the Welsh and those of the former activists' who, by getting involved in political and social movements, fought for the society's self-determination and autonomy. It is because any empowerment of language through a language policy shapes speakers' identification with the language, their attitudes towards other languages in the community, and their choices in interpersonal and intergroup communication.

On the other hand, critics of bilingualism see the policy as an attempt to right old wrongs which is based on unrealistic assumptions. The broad application of the governmental programmes seems costly and time-consuming. Besides, the so far outcomes of the increased efforts in promoting the Welsh language use do not guarantee that the bold aims set up by the authorities to make the whole society bilingual in some form – oral or/and written – to some extent are achievable. Finally, it remains to be seen whether regulating language use in the present day global world is at all possible.

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