

PLANNING the REGENERATION of the WELSH LANGUAGE

Cynog Dafis



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Dyfodol wish to see a shift in policy regarding the regeneration of the Welsh language, whereby **comprehensive Language Planning** takes centre stage. What follows is a clarification of what we mean by this.

1 / The Aim

Let us begin with the Welsh Government's target to create a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The ambition and the emphasis on growth – reinstating Welsh as the national language to all purposes – is to be commended. However, unless we analyse the practical implications of this, simply reciting the mantra, 'a million speakers by 2050' can become superficial, misleading, and even dangerous.

Let us therefore remind ourselves that the meaning of language regeneration – 'reversal of language shift' to use the technical term – is to create communities of Welsh speakers. Language is a social phenomenon, not a skill to be taken out and aired at our convenience from time to time. For it to *live*, a language needs a community of speakers, people who speak it confidently, and for whom it is the main means of communication. Within such a community, the language becomes automatic, the default option.

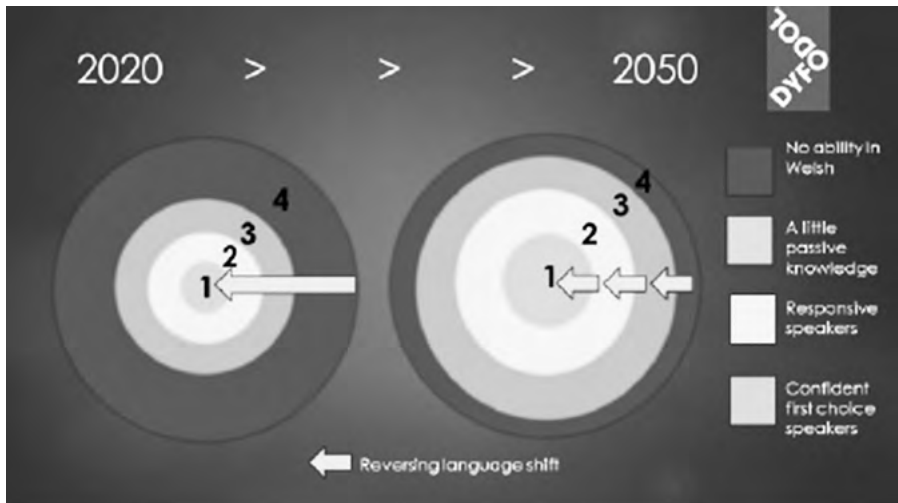
Such a community can be

- **geographical** – an area where Welsh is the majority language
- **institutional** – the National Eisteddfod, S4C, Welsh-medium schools, some local authorities, chapels, and various other institutions
- **networks** – Welsh speakers who are dispersed among a

non-Welsh speaking majority but who come together to use it in various ways and for different purposes.

For a million speakers to have any meaning, these communities must grow and become stronger.

Here is a diagram to illustrate the process



The complete circle represents the nation.

The central circle (circle 1) is the Welsh-speaking community, in whatever form – geographical, institutional or a network. This group has its own identity within the wider national group and its use of the Welsh language is both natural and essential to its identity.

Circle 2 represents those who have a good knowledge of Welsh, but seldom use the language. However, were you to speak Welsh to anyone in this group, they would be likely to *respond* in Welsh.

Circle 3 shows those who have a smattering of Welsh, but who hardly ever use it.

Circle 4 represents non-Welsh speakers.

The arrow shows what needs to happen if we are to regenerate Welsh language: an attraction towards the centre, gaining momentum over time. Now then, the solidarity and growth of the central circle is key to the success of the project. The existence of this central circle is by and large the reason for those in circles 2 and 3 to set about improving their Welsh and to try to speak it oftener and for people in Circle 4 set about learning Welsh.

Conversely the growth of Circles 2 and 3 is essential to the confidence of people in Circle 1 – e.g. when receiving services or when a speaker needs to be interviewed by Radio Cymru regarding a subject or event.

This is the process, but how do we put it into action? The answer to that is through **comprehensive Language Planning**. Let us now look at some key aspects of how this might work in practice.

2 / Disseminating Understanding

It is essential that the whole nation understands what creating a million Welsh speakers means and that it supports the enterprise. This means that we must demonstrate the significance of the language to the nation, why its regeneration is so important and exciting, why is it advantageous to be able to speak it, and how all of this can be achieved. It entails explaining how bilingualism actually works, giving the Welsh language prestige and raising the confidence of its speakers through its promotion and through marketing.

The first step is therefore to initiate a comprehensive programme of language awareness, which would promote the language to all and at all levels.

Next, and in the face of the immense pressure of English, a powerful, global and remarkably dynamic language, we need, methodically and systematically, to set about creating more Welsh speakers.

3 / Creating Welsh speakers

(i) The Early Years

The early years are of key importance in terms of establishing both fluency and the habit of using the language.

During these years, the transference of the language through the home and family is of central significance – currently about 7% of homes are Welsh-speaking. We need to encourage and support parents to transmit the language to their children. The Twf plan (created by Cwmni Iaith Cyf., but now administered through Mudiad Meithrin) shows how this can be done.

In parallel with this, the use of the Welsh language needs to increase within the childcare system – in nursery classes but also the whole range of locations which provide care for young children. At this age, immersion rather than bilingualism is the fundamental principle. Much excellent work has already been done and the results have been impressive, but major gaps remain.

4 / Creating Welsh speakers

(ii) Statutory, Further and Higher Education

More designated Welsh-medium schools are essential. All schools have their contribution to make, but Welsh-medium schools are uniquely well-placed to make a difference by functioning as *Welsh-speaking communities* and thus producing confident speakers of the language. In other schools, some teaching through the medium of Welsh will be essential.

What is needed is a process of moving through a continuum with the aim of reaching, wherever possible, the status of a designated Welsh-medium school. In Euskadi (the Basque Country), following self-government, there has been a consistent movement from Spanish-only schools to bilingual schools and then to Basque-medium schools, with the former category shrinking almost out of existence and the majority falling into the third category. In Carmarthenshire, following the unfortunate experience but final success at Llangennech, the same process is now being implemented with no parental resistance.

In today's mobile society, there is always the challenge of those who enter the Welsh system at different stages of their schooling, and the only satisfactory solution is the provision of intensive courses in language centres.

Much remains to be done within further education and training, which is now the responsibility of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. The work of this organisation within higher education must also be further developed and protected.

If we want to see substantial growth in Welsh language education, we need, as Eluned Morgan has noted, to do more than meet demand. We need to stimulate and lead demand.

4 / Creating Welsh speakers

(iii): Parents and Developing the Workforce

One significant challenge in Welsh-medium education, and to which the response is at present insufficient, is *developing the workforce*, both teachers and classroom assistants, to undertake the work and do so to a high standard. The only way of doing this is to release teachers from their posts for extended periods, either to improve their language skills or to learn Welsh from scratch.

This is absolutely fundamental and there is no option but to invest heavily in this. Habe, the organisation responsible for this in Euskadi, has an annual budget of 40 million Euros. If we are serious about creating a million Welsh speakers, we need a comparable sum and to focus on two things:

- Workforce development, particularly teachers and classroom assistants
- Supporting parents whose children receive Welsh-medium education, particularly in the early years, who want to create Welsh-speaking homes to learn Welsh or develop their confidence in using it.

The effect of such investment would be cumulative: creating new Welsh speakers who in turn would produce a host of new speakers through the education and care sectors.

5 / Promoting Language Use

As we all know, it is one thing to ‘know’ Welsh, but another to use it. The tendency of pupils in Welsh-medium education to use English is almost a cliché, but not as much attention is paid to the fluent Welsh speaking Assembly Member who chooses to use English in our national Senedd, despite there being every facility to use Welsh, or indeed the Welsh-speaking witness appearing before a committee who turns to English. What this demonstrates is the need for a change in attitude and culture and to foster confidence, pride and resolve.

It is therefore obvious that we need to set about intelligently and energetically promoting the use of Welsh.

As argued above, it is essential to establish language use during the early years, but this alone is not sufficient. What therefore are the

factors which influence language choice? Here are some:

- The presence of the language within the social environment, both visually and aurally
- That Welsh language services are available, on offer and accessible; particularly in shops, cafes, bars etc. A cheap, simple but highly effective solution would be for all Welsh-speakers providing a service to wear an appropriate badge.

We believe that the Welsh Language Commissioner and the language standards process should place particular emphasis to these two aspects.

Another key matter is developing the Welsh language within the workplace. We should look at developing a Welsh-speaking workforce and also Welsh-speaking workplaces – starting with the public sector in those areas where the language is strongest.

Even more important however is the range and quality of all kinds of activities and experiences that are available in Welsh.

Much of this work is to be done at grass-roots level, through a network of Welsh Language Centres working closely with the local Mentrau Iaith, the Welsh-medium schools, Mudiad Meithrin and other organisations. The aim would be to create a powerful, lively and creative network, nurturing the vitality of the Welsh community which becomes attractive to all.

6 / Demography

Demography is the relationship between people and territory. The term is used here to cover several aspects – economy, housing, land use, town and country planning etc. – in relation to the Welsh language. This section is concerned with areas where the Welsh

language is the normal medium of communication, mainly located in the west but including many other areas too. This is a complex and challenging field.

Adam Price, the leader of Plaid Cymru, has proposed linking the western areas together as a region, Arfor, so as to address their economic weaknesses and the haemorrhaging of young (often Welsh-speaking) talent from the area – one of the main contributors to the decline of the language. The Welsh Government, comprising Labour and the Liberal Democrats, have embraced the concept. Or view is that this vision should be developed as a key component in the general strategy for developing Wales a confident and successful nation. The intention would be for the Arfor region to offer diverse and exciting career opportunities and encouragement for innovation and enterprise, so that young people can create their own futures within this region, by staying, returning or moving into the area. Tied to this would be the intention of protecting and strengthening the Welsh-speaking community and communities.

Town and country planning and housing policy would reflect the needs of and empower the needs of the region and its communities rather than serving the interests of powerful commercial developers and the current drive towards damaging and insensitive over-provision.

7 / Technology and the Media

It is plain to see this is where culture, the economy and social interaction are being transformed at an extraordinary rate. It is central to the project.

How to use technology and the media to strengthen the Welsh language and to serve Welsh speakers is too large a question to discuss in detail here. But the main players, S4C and the BBC, need

to accept their responsibility not only to provide content, but also to promote the Welsh language in the digital world including the social media. An essential step, which Cymdeithas yr Iaith are campaigning for, is the establishment of a Welsh Ofcom.

8 / Language Planning

The priority areas outlined above need action if we are to regenerate the language through the process of language planning. Many of the things we have outlined have already been done, creatively, inventively and with excellence and that is why the language finds itself in as strong a position as is the case. However, they have never been done together in a strategic manner.

Language planning means that action is taken in an integrated, holistic and co-ordinated manner so that all aspects reinforce each other. We need continuity and persistence over an extended period (30 years to get to the million). We need consistency, along with experimentation and the flexibility to adapt to new circumstances. The question is, who is to do all this?

9 / Structures

In setting about the task, it is essential that the organizational structure is fit for purpose. Two national bodies are currently responsible for leading and implementing Welsh language policy

1 The Welsh Language Commissioner is mainly responsible for ensuring that the rights of Welsh speakers are upheld through the Standards system. The legislation also states that s/he is also responsible for promoting the language but hitherto s/he has concentrated on regulation.

2 The Welsh Language sub-department has responsibility for all

that falls outside the Commissioner's remit. The sub-department is located deep inside the Welsh Government civil service, accountable to the head of the Education Department, who is accountable to the Director General of the Education and Public Services Group, who is accountable in turn to the Permanent Secretary. Politically, the Welsh Language Sub-department is accountable to the Welsh Language Minister, currently Eluned Morgan.

In the past, there has been some overlap between the responsibilities of these two bodies, but it is to be hoped that the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commissioner and the Government will clear up any confusion.

Dyfodol i'r iaith believes that this structure needs to be revised.

We call for the establishment of a Language Authority or Agency. Our preference would be an arms'-length body to the Welsh Government – a quango, to use old-fashioned terminology. Our second choice would be that this body be part of the Welsh Government civil service. However, it should

- have to be a high-status entity that could powerfully influence all Government departments and other relevant bodies
- be recognizable to the public and transparent
- be directly accountable to the Permanent Secretary, the head of the civil service and, of course, the relevant minister.

Another option would be to establish a Welsh Language Directorate on a par with the other four Directorates within the civil service.

This Agency would need sufficient capacity, as well as expertise in the fields mentioned above as well as in Sociology of Language and Language Planning. A degree of continuity and stability in its leadership

would be essential. (In fairness we should note that the Minister announced at the beginning of August 2019 that the Welsh Language Sub-department is to be strengthened through the appointment of a full-time head and a number of part-time staff with language planning expertise. We see this as a step, but only a step, in the right direction.)

If all of the measures outlined above are put in place, added to unambiguous political will and leadership, together with financial resources adequate to the task, we will be, as the saying goes, in business.

Never before has there been such an undertaking in Wales. As the Basque experience demonstrates, it can work. It is a progressive, exciting project. It is essential to the wider national enterprise.

We believe that now is the time to set about it.

Appendix

It has often been asked what kind of financial investment is needed to implement a plan for the regeneration of the Welsh language.

As we have already indicated, the programme would consist of many strands. We would assume that top of the new body's agenda would be a full mapping exercise, noting where investment is needed to ensure the essential progress.

Dyfodol i'r laith has attempted to estimate the essential expenditure. We would expect that all this expenditure could come from various Government Departments, including, for example, Education, the Economy and Planning. It should not be assumed that all the money comes from the budget allocated to the Welsh Language.

Here is an outline of our suggestions, which we hope will provide a basis for discussion with planners within the Government:

£3 MILLION Administration of a strong language authority to lead and implement policy

£30 MILLION Welsh for Adults. Why? Because we must train thousands of teachers and public sector workers. This is the foundation for effective learning of the language and the creation of Welsh language jobs

£10 million for training and work-release for childcare providers and teachers

£10 million for language lessons and work-release for public sector workers

£10 million for teaching Welsh to parents; increasing the number of Welsh-speaking households is a must

£10 MILLION On bringing the language to the high street so that towns are seen to be supporting the language. This would include Welsh lessons for shop assistants and waiting staff

£10 MILLION To establish Welsh Language Centres, based upon local support to create more Welsh communities

£10 MILLION To introduce more Welsh into our Universities and Further Education Colleges

£10 MILLION To support sports teams, social activities and entertainment to use the language

£20 MILLION To boost the economy of Welsh speaking areas

£10 MILLION To sustain Welsh institutions and societies

That comes to £103 million each year. The priorities, of course, may change from year to year. This kind of funding would provide a boost to the Welsh language across the whole of Wales.

Dyfodol i'r Iaith was established in 2012 as a lobbying organisation in the field of language planning. For more information, go to our website:

www.dyfodol.net