

Journal Article

**Damned if you do and damned if you don't: Language choice
in the research interview**

Madoc Jones, I. and Parry, O.

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DAMNED IF YOU DO AND DAMNED IF YOU DON'T:
LANGUAGE CHOICE IN THE RESEARCH INTERVIEW

IOLO MADOC-JONES and ODETTE PARRY

Abstract

European language activists have successfully campaigned for the right to use regional or minority languages in a range of social contexts. Despite this, such rights are rarely exercised. Non-use is generally understood as a function of the unavailability and/or inaccessibility of appropriate language services and Governments across the European Union have been criticised as a consequence of this. The article draws on qualitative data to examine the negotiation over language use in a research encounter where the Welsh or the English language might have been used. It is argued that the availability of language choice is only one of a number of factors likely to influence which language is selected for usage in any context. Indeed, language selection is shown to be the outcome of complex and situated negotiation. The findings challenge oversimplified understandings about minority language use and non use.

Keywords: minority language; language choice; Welsh.

1. Minority language use

The opportunity for minority language users to use their languages is acknowledged as important for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most compelling of these is that some minority language speakers are best able to understand and express themselves in their first language, and where provision is not made accordingly then they may be disadvantaged (Misell 2000; O'Hagan 2001). Language, however, assumes importance to speakers over and above the issue of their understanding and expression. A key issue here is the importance of language to identity, which has been the subject of a significant body of work (e.g., Barth 1981; Borland et al. 1992; Day 2002). This is certainly the case in Wales, one of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland¹ where, similarly to other linguistic minorities, Welsh

people have been described as having a “highly developed sense of nationhood linked to the language” (Hourigan 2001: 83). Indeed, Livingstone et al. (2009) have suggested that:

A key aspect of Welsh national identity is the importance of the Welsh language. It is the most important dimension defining Welshness, even for those who do not speak it. (Livingstone et al. 2009: 759)

Williams (1999) has argued that historically Welsh identities have been constructed in opposition to English identity, and that, linked to this, an internal colonization discourse has been “accepted and embraced” in Wales (Williams 1999: 79). The discourse celebrates a distinctive and separate Welsh cultural identity, linked to language which has been historically oppressed and continues to be under threat from England and the English language.² A key reference point for this discourse is the exclusion of the Welsh language from the state sphere following the official administrative unification of the laws of England and Wales in the sixteenth century (Williams 1999). Although private use of the Welsh language was not overtly prohibited in Wales, the exclusion of the Welsh language from administrative and judicial contexts from this time onwards created a situation of diglossia in Wales. As a result, whilst in 1801 the national census in the UK suggested that 80% of the population of Wales could speak Welsh, by 1911 this figure had dropped to 43.5% and by 1991 to 18.7% (Higgs et al. 2004).

In Wales and elsewhere, language and availability of language choice, however, has increasingly become an important and emotive issue which has emerged in tandem with what Kymlicka (2002: 7) has described as the development of “rights consciousness” in Western societies. In some cases, following centuries of linguistic oppression, minority language groups have secured rights to use their language in contexts where these were previously denied. Between 1992 and 2010 twenty-four European Union member states signed up to and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), committing them to the principle that regional and minority language speakers should be able to use their first language in dealings with the state (including criminal justice, health and social care contexts). In some countries such rights then became enshrined in domestic law. The UK ratified the ECRML in 2001 but by 1991 had already passed a Welsh Language Act that gave Welsh speakers some rights to use the Welsh language in administrative, health, social care and judicial contexts in Wales. Such rights may make a contribution to reinvigorating a minority language. The most recent UK census results suggest that the number of Welsh speakers in Wales has increased to around 21.8% of the population (Office for National Statistics 2001).

Welsh speakers are a sizeable minority group in Wales and some of them will inevitably come into contact with judicial, health and social care services. Research on, and reports about, Welsh language use in health settings (for example, by Misell 2000; Cwmni Iaith 2002; Roberts et al. 2007), social care settings (for example, Lindsay et al. 2002; Davies 2008) and in criminal justice settings (Huws 2006; Rooney 2007; Jones and Eaves 2008) however, have suggested Welsh language services are rarely used. The non-use of a minority language is not confined to Wales. The majority of reports produced by the Council of Europe Committee, appointed by the ECRML to monitor the implementation of language rights across Europe, suggest minority languages are rarely used in dealings with signatory states. This is generally understood to be because services are not routinely offered in the minority language, and/or use of the minority language is not appropriately encouraged (Cardi 2007). As a result, some member states have been charged to more actively promote and facilitate minority language use. In 2007, and again in 2010, for example, the ECRML committee reported that the UK Government should do more to meet its obligations to protect the Welsh language and take further measures to ensure that health and social care facilities offer services in Welsh (Council of Europe 2007, 2010).

Such recommendations are based on an understanding that more use of minority languages in judicial or administrative contexts would occur if barriers to using those languages were removed. That is, minority language usage might increase were language choice to be offered, translation facilities made available or sufficient numbers of minority speakers employed in key service delivery contexts in order to facilitate such provision. Such a conclusion is supported by some of the academic literature in general (Timmins 2002; Johnson et al. 1999; Cioffi 2003) and research conducted in Wales in particular (Misell 2000; Pugh and Jones 1999).

To reiterate, non-use of minority languages in some (for example health and social care) contexts is understood as problematic, because this may disadvantage users (Misell 2000; Roberts et al. 2005). Non-use can also be problematic because the expense of providing the necessary facilities is arguably unjustified where these are not taken up (Barry 2001). Moreover, giving voice to a threatened language in high prestige contexts, such as those associated with state services, is deemed necessary to revive or sustain that language (Fishman 2001). While uptake of minority language services has largely been understood as a function of availability and access, the evidence that available services are frequently not utilised suggests that the issue may be more complex. It may therefore be useful to explore the way in which bilinguals make linguistic choices in formal encounters in order to understand more about the uptake of minority language services in judicial and administrative contexts.

To this end the authors explore the issue of language choice in bilingual encounters through an examination of the linguistic choices Welsh language speakers made when they were presented with the option of using the Welsh or English language in a research interview. The research focussed on language use in the criminal justice system by a sample of 25 individuals who had been sentenced to and, in some cases, released from custody in the preceding five years (Madoc-Jones 2010). Elsewhere (currently under review) the authors have examined respondents' accounts of language use in the criminal justice system. Here we wish to explore an aspect of the interviews that was not initially intended to be a focus for the research: the negotiations that took place between the researcher and interviewees over the language of the actual research interview. This we believe yields a deeper understanding of the dynamics affecting linguistic choices bilinguals make and the related challenges involved in promoting minority language use in service settings.

2. Methods

The article presents a discourse analysis of qualitative interview data collected as part of a study on language use in the Criminal Justice Service in Wales by first language Welsh speakers (Madoc-Jones and Parry, forthcoming). The research focussed on the experiences of Welsh speakers drawn from North West Wales because upwards of seven out of ten residents in this region are bilingual and biliterate (Williams 2009). Hence, it was anticipated that use of the Welsh language would be more the norm among these respondents than in other areas of Wales. Linked to this, it was anticipated that being offered, asking for, or receiving services in the Welsh language would be a fairly common occurrence.

Participants were recruited to the study with the assistance of the Prison Service, Probation Service and Youth Justice Staff. Individuals meeting the study criteria were identified by gatekeepers from these agencies and were then given a bilingual letter and information sheet about the study inviting them to participate, indicating that they could make their contribution in English or Welsh. Whilst those willing to participate were instructed to contact the researcher to arrange a meeting, in practice the gatekeepers assumed responsibility for making the arrangements. In almost every instance the researcher and interviewee met in the absence of the gatekeeper. Interviewees were greeted by the researcher in Welsh and permission for audio-recording to be taken was obtained in the Welsh language. Respondents were then offered a choice of being interviewed in the English or the Welsh language. This offer was invariably made bilingually so that the acceptability of either language was demonstrated. Here we argue that, in many respects, the conditions were maximised

for use to be made of Welsh; interviewees would be interviewed by a Welsh speaker who had initially greeted and spoken to them in Welsh, and the discussion would focus on their use of the Welsh language.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Glyndwr University Research Ethics committee. Interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. A software package (NVivo) was used for data management and storage purposes.

Here we draw on accounts of six respondents (five male and one female) from the larger study sample whose narratives best illustrate the discursive positions which form the focus of the article. These narrators were identified because they were deemed to be typical of, or representative of, the wider sample. While the discursive constructions they employed did not differ from those in the wider sample, they were generally better articulated and more clearly presented than was the case for some other respondents.

This article most closely identifies with a critical realist perspective, drawing on Parker's (1992) definition of discourse as a system of statements that constitute an object. In order to identify a discourse it is necessary to establish what is talked into existence, how this positions subjects, and how this relates to other discourses. The article takes analytic direction from discursive psychology, which holds that there is rarely, if ever, one definitive version of events or a story to be told. As a result, accounts of social phenomena are understood to be developed purposefully (Austin 1962). For discursive psychologists the concern is not so much with *truth* but with acts of "discursive instantiation" or *talk* and what it achieves (Potter and Wetherell 1992: 90).

As individuals talk they are positioned as particular types of subjects (Davies and Harre 1990). Subject positions are understood as locations within a conversation which individuals come to occupy by deploying discourses in their talk (Edley 2001). Because discursive positions pre-exist the individual, subjectivities may be constrained by the actual availability of discourses. Positioning can also work, however, through the active and purposeful uptake of subject positions. That is, individuals may actively take up subject positions and deploy discursive constructions that offer positions that assist them to meet objectives within particular social contexts (Willig 1999; Gillies 1999).

The focus in this article is on the broad semantic content of talk rather than the fine detail. This is because, although interviews were conducted in the Welsh language, the transcribed data are translated here into English. The risk of introducing, or excluding, data during the translation process was minimised by repeatedly returning to the original data and engaging in reverse translation during the data analysis stage.

In presenting the data the following transcription notation rules, indicated by brackets, are observed: (. . .) indicates where data have been deliberately omitted to protect participant anonymity/confidentiality. The nature of the

data, however, is highlighted e.g. (*Welsh town*). The insertion of { . . . } indicates where participants used the English language and where, therefore, there was no need for translation. All respondents have been allocated pseudonyms.

3. Findings

3.1. *Identity and language use*

Because of the known link between language and identity, and the emphasis respondents in this study placed upon the importance of Welshness, our examination of language choice is prefaced by narrators' accounts of the relationship between language and identity. Speaking Welsh was presented in respondent narratives as an important, and at times necessary, condition of Welsh identity.

Gavin: If you can't speak Welsh {you're not Welsh} at all to me, if you don't speak Welsh {you're not Welsh} even if you have been {born} here.

Interviewer: What if you come to live here from England and learn Welsh-, would that make you Welsh?

Gavin: {No no way}-, you'd have to be born in Wales too.

Here, Gavin creates a boundary between those who are Welsh speaking and those who are not Welsh speaking, where only the former can legitimately describe themselves as Welsh. As the boundary prescribing Welshness is tested, it becomes more rigid. The account positions the narrator, and others who are born in Wales and speak Welsh, as authentically Welsh in a way that people who have been born outside of Wales, and subsequently learn the Welsh language, are not.

An expectation that Welsh speakers would elect to use the Welsh language with other Welsh speakers was evident from narrators' accounts of language use. In the following account, for example, Nansi describes her use of the Welsh language:

Nansi: I speak {English with my sister}, something I've always done, {Welsh with my boyfriend} and my son, but {English with my older sister}, I don't know why because she speaks to my {boyfriend} and my son in Welsh.

While claiming to speak Welsh with both her son and her boyfriend, Nansi reports using English when she talks to her sister, despite her assertion that her sister talks to Nansi's significant others in Welsh. While speaking Welsh to her boyfriend and son appears not to require justification, using English with

her sister(s) appears more problematic for Nansi, and thus requires explanation (which she is unable to provide). Hence, even where the normative expectation to speak Welsh was not realised, use of the Welsh language among Welsh speakers was presented as the norm. In Nansi's account, therefore, the exception proves the rule.

Because speaking the language was presented as an important, if not necessary, aspect of Welshness, its level of usage had implications for the legitimacy of claims to a Welsh identity. Hence, frequency of Welsh language use could render Welsh speakers more or less "proper" Welsh, in the eyes of others. The more use made of Welsh language, the more legitimate, or valid, the claim to Welshness:

Geraint: I have a problem with Welsh people who don't speak Welsh. I have a friend and he's Welsh speaking but all his children yes, they all speak English and he does, and they don't speak Welsh in the home- they speak English with each other all the time, and he sees himself as a hell of a Welshman. And, you know, in a way he is but I think sometimes, though I never say it to him, "ok so you're Welsh but what does that mean to you?"

Interviewer: And what does it mean to him?

Geraint: It's rugby, really into the rugby team- he's {mad} about Welsh rugby. I've never been into sports of any kind but he'll be there at Cardiff cheering on Saturday, dressed in red singing 'Calon Lan' and all that but to me that doesn't make you really Welsh, it just makes you a sports fan.

While Geraint's friend is able to speak Welsh and sings the national anthem at Welsh rugby matches, the legitimacy of his claim to Welshness is problematic. That he is only Welsh "in a way", implies that "in a way", he is not Welsh. This is because he does not make extensive use of the Welsh language, his children are not Welsh speakers and Welsh language is not the language of his home. Geraint challenges his friend's claim to Welshness on the grounds that he does not engage in activities perceived to promote the Welsh language. Indeed, activities, which might be associated with being Welsh, such as supporting Wales at rugby and singing the national anthem, are presented in the above account as indicating attachment to sport rather than Welshness. In this account, Geraint is positioned as "more Welsh" than his friend, because he uses the Welsh language routinely and in a range of appropriate domains.

The ways in which language usage conferred degrees of Welshness were evidenced in many respondent narratives:

Interviewer: Is it important to you that your children learn Welsh?

Matthew: Very

- Interviewer: Is it important to your girlfriend?
 Matthew: She's training to be a nurse.
 Interviewer: Is she Welsh?
 Matthew: Oh yeh- she's {worse} than me.
 Interviewer: In what way?
 Matthew: {Really Welsh} you know, every word is Welsh, I even like English names but my girlfriend {no way}, {100%} her kids will have Welsh names

Here, Mathew portrays both his own and his girlfriend's strong commitment to the Welsh language. Mathew's boast "she's {worse} than me", however, presents his position as more moderate than his girlfriend, in regards to language. In some accounts, over-identification with the language was explicitly problematized. Bryn, for example, distances himself from over-commitment to Welshness when he describes his mother's allegiance towards the language and being Welsh:

- Bryn: Mum was a {different kettle of fish}, she was really Welsh.
 Interviewer: Explain that to me.
 Bryn: Welsh all the time, she didn't like the English, didn't like the idea of the English moving into (*Welsh town*), ym {anti-royalty} you know, obviously wanting {independence for Wales}, using Welsh all the time, stuff like that.
 Interviewer: You're not like that?
 Bryn: Welsh yeh but not like that, not {anti-English}.

Bryn's mother is described as "really Welsh" because she uses the Welsh language extensively. Here, Welshness is not solely a function of language use, but is also conferred through anti-English, anti-royalist, pro-independence positioning. Bryn, while claiming Welshness, distances himself from those aspects of Welshness which are constructed in opposition to the English.

In the following extract, Geraint talks about his previous activism in support of the Welsh language, at the same time distancing himself from those activities in the present:

- Interviewer: Were you ever involved with the Welsh languages society or anything like that?
 Geraint: Yes, yes, I knew them all you know back in the day (*names two well known Welsh language activists*) and (*names another well known Welsh language activist*). I didn't feel, perhaps as strongly as they did about it, you know, never went to jail for it or stuff like that but I went on marches, sprayed a few signs and things over the language

Interviewer: What about now?

Geraint: No, not now, I'm older grown out that kind of {Welsh Nash}³ stuff really, I've worked in England for (. . .) over the years and you just learnt to be more accepting really.

Whilst Geraint's earlier involvement in language activism is associated with his pride in the Welsh language, it is also described as "Welsh Nash(ionalism) stuff" that he has since "grown out" of. The account serves two purposes. It eulogises Welshness but at the same time distances the narrator from a "nationalist" identity which might position him as judgemental and/or exclusionary towards the English. Narrator positioning as non-extremist (or non-"Nash") is evidenced practically in the following extract of Gavin's accounts of his consideration to English only speakers.

Interviewer: Do you use the Welsh language a lot, in your day to day life?

Gavin: Yes lots loads, all the time I hardly ever speak English

Interviewer: You can live your life in Welsh

Gavin: Almost everyone I know speaks Welsh so I speak it yeh, I'll speak English if I have to, you know with English speakers, I don't you know exclude them or anything {racist} or anything like some, just speak Welsh when I have to and English when I have to

An example of non-extremist positioning is also apparent in the following account of the narrator's unwillingness to insist on the receipt of Welsh language services:

Interviewer: In what kind of situation could you not have said {"can I speak to someone in Welsh please"}?

Meic: No I wouldn't- that would make the other person feel {very uncomfortable} wouldn't it?

Interviewer: Why?

Meic: Well, that they're not good enough for me to talk to them, I was a {Welsh Nash} or something, not wanting to talk to an English person

3.2. *Negotiating language choice*

Given that in respondent narratives, linguistic choice/usage appeared to position speakers as more or less Welsh, it might have been anticipated that respondents would readily elect to use the Welsh language in the research interview when offered a choice between Welsh and English. While in the event, the vast

majority (24 out of 25) interviews were carried out in Welsh, the research encounter in almost all instances opened with negotiation over language use. For example:

- Interviewer: {What language is easier for you}?
 Bryn: {Whatever's easier for you}?
 Interviewer: I speak both.
 Bryn: It doesn't make any difference to me.
 Interviewer: Ok then we'll use Welsh.
 Bryn: Ym, if you want to use {academic} words I'd rather speak English, ok, but if you don't want {complicated} words I'll speak Welsh, WEnglish.
 Interviewer: Ok WEnglish, that's what I talk too.

Here, a linguistic game of ping pong is played out, where responsibility for choosing the language of the interview is passed between the interviewer and Bryn. Bryn is initially reluctant to commit himself to any particular language and passes the responsibility for the choice back to the interviewer. This is presented as an act of politeness. In turn, the interviewer passes the responsibility back to Bryn, who repeats that he is unconcerned about which language is used. This has the effect of passing the responsibility for choosing the language of the interview back to the interviewer for a second time, and thus Bryn avoids making a choice.

In the above narrative, while the interviewer addresses Bryn using the informal version of the pronoun 'you' - (*ti*),⁴ Bryn, responds using the formal version of the Welsh 'you' (*chi*). This signals that he understands the interview as a formal encounter in which deference to the interviewer is appropriate. At the same time, he expresses concern about the form of Welsh language that will be used, and, related to this, his ability to understand and use "academic" Welsh. Hence, Bryn seeks clarification that the interviewer is amenable to using English, if the version of Welsh to be used is "complicated".

While unwilling to use the formal Welsh associated with this type of encounter, Bryn acquiesces to the interviewer's proposal to use WEnglish. This form of Welsh is differentiated from academic Welsh because it does not use "complicated" words. Equally, however, it is rendered less authentic or pure than academic Welsh because it is an elision of English and Welsh.

Arguably Bryn is unwilling to choose a language for the interview because any inclination to use Welsh is tempered by lack of proficiency in formal Welsh. Non-use of Welsh, however, has the potential to threaten Bryn's claim to Welshness (which is based on both level of usage and an expectation that he will speak Welsh with other Welsh speakers). Ultimately, by avoiding making a linguistic choice, responsibility for the consequences are passed to the interviewer. If the English language is chosen then the interviewer is positioned as

responsible for any spoiling of the respondents' Welsh identity. If Welsh is chosen then the interviewer is also rendered responsible for any difficulties that might arise as a result.

Bryn was one among several respondents who anticipated that the interview would be conducted in formal Welsh, and who was concerned about how his proficiency in Welsh might be perceived. In the following narrative Gavin expresses these concerns as the language of the interview is negotiated:

- Interviewer: {So what language would you like to use?} I can speak both?
Gavin: Don't really mind.
Interviewer: Welsh then
Gavin: {Ok Ok} we'll use Welsh . . . yyym, like if you don't use like big words yeh
Interviewer: I don't know many big ones myself
Gavin: I speak Welsh, but Cofi Welsh, yeh.

Here Gavin also avoids expressing a linguistic preference. The use Gavin makes of the formal pronoun 'you' (*chi*) suggests he understands the interview is formal and that deference to the interviewer is appropriate. When the interviewer suggests they speak Welsh, Gavin acquiesces. He also anticipates having problems with formal Welsh, however, and his tentativeness and fragmented response indicates that this is potentially a difficult or threatening issue for him to negotiate. When the interviewer (in order to reassure the respondent) himself owns to only having a limited range of "big" words, Gavin asserts proficiency in Cofi (a local dialect of Welsh) thus re-legitimizing his claim to the language and Welshness.

Some narrators, like Nansi, were more explicit than others about the situated context of language use:

- Interviewer: Before we begin I should ask what language you want to use {which language do you want to use (*respondent name*)}
Nansi: Doesn't matter, {bothered}
Interviewer: I'm comfortable using either English Welsh {I don't really mind either}
Nansi: {Not bothered, English if you want}
Interviewer: {Ok English is fine}
Nansi: I don't speak official Welsh very well, just Cofi Welsh yeh, I'm still Welsh but just can't use official Welsh in like meetings and with {social workers}
Interviewer: I'm happy with Cofi Welsh too
Nansi: {Ok} Welsh then

The two different forms of Welsh identified in this narrative are associated with distinct contexts and speakers. One form, designated as official, is spoken by those in authority; while the other form is one which Nansi uses routinely. Again, designation of the former as “official”, serves to render that version of Welsh as the more legitimate form.

Presented with the option of being interviewed in English or Welsh, Nansi initially states she is unconcerned about which language is used. Later, however, she expresses reservations about using Welsh in formal meetings, where she routinely uses English. That voicing concern about using Welsh was problematic for narrators is evident in the way in which Nansi initially manages the issue of language choice. English is presented initially by Nansi as the interviewer’s preferred language choice (“English if you want”). Her subsequent assertion of Welshness (“I’m still Welsh”), spoken in Welsh, indicates the potential of (English) language choice to undermine, or spoil, Welsh identity.

Of note in the last three extracts is that the exchange over language use concludes when the interviewer makes a statement that legitimises the form of Welsh the respondent anticipates using. That is to say when the interviewer, effectively, gives permission for this form of Welsh to be used.

In only one case did a respondent opt for Welsh at the outset:

- Interviewer: {What language would you like to use for the interview?} What language would you like to use?
 Geraint: Welsh
 Interviewer: {Ok} Welsh
 Geraint: Yeh, up every English person’s arsehole yeh (laughs) Wales forever that’s me
 Interviewer: Quite {passionate} about it then?
 Geraint: Yeh that’s just me yeh, no joking, not really, English, Welsh it doesn’t bother me
 Interviewer: Which one shall we use then?
 Geraint: Whichever is easier for you
 Interviewer: Is Welsh {ok}?
 Geraint: {Ok} Welsh.

In the above narrative extract, Geraint uses the formal form of the pronoun ‘you’, designating the status of the meeting as an official encounter. Although initially assertive regarding language choice, Geraint subsequently defers to the interviewer’s suggestion. What is interesting in the above account is the narrator’s awareness of how language choice may position him as more or less committed to the Welsh language and Welshness, and, related to this, Welsh extremism. Here, humour is used by the narrator to pre-empt and refute any accusation of extremism, which otherwise might position him as anti-English.

4. Discussion

Because of the strong link between language and identity, language choice positions Welsh speakers as more or less Welsh according to where, when, and how often they use the language. It therefore constitutes a powerful (although not exclusive) marker of Welsh identity. Thus at the outset of the study it might have been anticipated that respondents would elect for the interview to be carried out in Welsh. When asked directly which language they wanted to use, however, narrators avoided and/or abdicated responsibility for that decision. Previous research has focused largely on availability and access to language services as key to promoting minority language use. Here we suggest that the issue is more complex than this and that it is important to understand the linguistic terrain which is negotiated when bilinguals make linguistic choices.

The interview context for this research, in many respects, maximised opportunities for Welsh to be used. The interviewer was a Welsh speaker, the study was about language use in the criminal justice system and only first language Welsh speakers had been invited to take part. That said, it is important to note that prior to the interview each respondent had received an information sheet and letter that set out in formal terms the focus of the study, and was aware that the interview, which was to be conducted in a formal setting, would be carried out by an academic researcher. Moreover, because the researcher did not use the regional Welsh dialect in his initial greetings and conversations with respondents, he was clearly identifiable as not local to North West Wales. All these factors may have had implications for respondent choice of language in the interview.

In this study, the bilingual interview context emerged as diglossic and a question such as “which language would you like to use” as potentially threatening to research participants. Interviewees, who understood the interview as a context in which a formal version of Welsh was appropriate, expressed concerns about their proficiency in formal Welsh. This constituted a dilemma for participants, because they understood the ‘informal’ Welsh which they routinely used to be inappropriate and/or inadequate in this context. Moreover, both the inability to use (formal) Welsh, and the expressed preference to use English in this context, constituted a potential threat to their “Welsh” identity.

The Welsh language, like all languages, is made up of a number of different dialects but unlike majority languages is historically a low status language which has only recently been reintroduced into the public sphere. In this context it has been difficult to disseminate a standardised variety of the language. The Welsh Joint Education Committee has been promoting a form of Welsh called *Cymraeg Byw* ‘Living Welsh’ as the standard form of the written and spoken Welsh language in schools and further education settings in Wales. By

dint of this, however, *Cymraeg Byw* is a form of Welsh more familiar to those who do well at school and who are employed within the administrative bureaucracy in Wales rather than those who, like respondents in this study, may reside in more marginalised communities.

The preference expressed by respondents in this study to use English in formal exchanges does not sit well with the imperative of Welsh speakers to demonstrate commitment to the language (and related to this, to Welshness). This imperative may, as previous research suggests, be strengthened by pressure to conform to normative expectations of the group, particularly apparent among members of minority groups (Eisenberg and Spinnner-Halev 2005). Hence, for example, the term *Oreo*, which discursively marginalises black people who do not adopt “black” behaviors or norms, is quite commonly deployed by members of black communities in the US to regulate and police the behaviour of other black people (Cook and Ludwig 1997). Here, it could be argued that among those with “spoiled identities”, which might include ex-prisoners, the imperative of “inclusion” may serve to strengthen allegiance to group identity. In other words, those marginalized within wider society may be particularly disposed to adhere to group identity markers.

While the imperative of commitment to the language and Welshness was highly evident in respondent narratives, in some accounts the strength of this commitment was rendered problematic. Hence, in some narratives, expressions of commitment were tempered by a desire to maintain distance from extremist (nationalistic/racist) positions. Indeed, the celebration of diversity in the post-modern era has led to some resistance to non-inclusive and/or racist positions (Nelkin and Michaels 1998; Stepney 2006). Hence, while presenting themselves as committed to a Welsh identity, narrators simultaneously positioned themselves as patriots rather than extremists. Equally, it was noted that whilst narrators talked about support for and involvement in nationalist protest activities, these activities were associated with the respondents’ younger selves. Indeed, narrators distanced themselves from those activities in the present. Here our analysis suggests that the imperative of narrators to position themselves as rational and inclusive has implications both for the choice of language used in different domains and for the inclination to use or request Welsh language services in some contexts. Hence respondents talked about their unwillingness to appear rude by speaking Welsh in front of English only speakers, and a reticence towards insisting on Welsh language service provision for fear of being positioned as extremist by others.

Respondents were thus faced with the following dilemma. The selection of Welsh as the language of the interview was problematic on two counts. The first count was because narrators perceived themselves as lacking proficiency in the version of (formal) Welsh associated with the interview context. Additionally, for some narrators, insistence on use of Welsh potentially risked posi-

tioning them as extremists, as opposed to Welsh patriots. Selecting English, however, was also problematic because it posed a threat to narrators' legitimate claim to Welshness on two counts. First, in not taking up the opportunity to speak Welsh when offered, and second (relating to this) not speaking Welsh to another Welsh speaker. Hence, in respect of choosing to use Welsh, respondents were damned if they did, and damned if they did not.

5. Conclusion

While the uptake of minority language services has largely been understood as a function of availability and access, the evidence that available services are under-utilised suggests that the issue is more complex. The examination of linguistic choices made by Welsh language speakers when they were presented with the option of using the Welsh or English language in a research interview indicates that the linguistic choices made by minority language speakers are perceived to carry specific risks, particularly in relation to the legitimacy of their claims to Welsh identity.

Of note is that most of the interviews in this study were eventually conducted in the Welsh language. Further research might usefully explore the possibility that this outcome is more likely when, as in this study, statements are made that legitimise deviations from formal versions of a language and render code switching acceptable.

Glyndwr University

Correspondence address: jonesim@glyndwr.ac.uk

Notes

1. England and Wales became a political kingdom after the laws of the countries were unified in 1532. Great Britain came into being when England, Wales and Scotland became a single political kingdom in 1707. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland came into use in 1922 after the constitution of Northern Ireland.
2. Welsh is a Celtic, rather than a Germanic language like English and hence the languages are not mutually intelligible. That said, there are very few monolingual Welsh speakers in Wales, most being bilingual English/Welsh speakers.
3. Activities such as the daubing of English-only road signs became fairly commonplace in Wales from the 1960s onwards. More recently sections of the media and business community in Wales have been targeted by those seeking to promote the use of Welsh. Over the years several prominent members of a pressure group called the Welsh Language Society have been imprisoned for their activities. The activities of so-called "Welsh nationalists" attracted greater attention between 1979 and 1994 as a result of an arson campaign targeting English owned

holiday homes in Wales by a group, now inactive, calling itself *Meibion Glyndwr* 'Sons of Glendower'.

4. *Chi* is the equivalent of the French *Vous* or Spanish *Usted* (formal 'you') whereas *Ti* is the equivalent of the French *Tu* or Spanish *es* (informal you). The formal *chi* is conventionally used in Wales when one is addressing someone older than oneself or in a more powerful position. The informal pronoun *ti* is used in Wales when one is addressing someone younger or who is known or in a less powerful position.

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