

# **From The Margins To The Centre: Language Sensitive Practice And Implications For Social Welfare In Wales**

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## **Introduction**

Any attempt to address language sensitive practice from the standpoint of the Welsh language in Wales relates to three core issues. Firstly, it requires individual practitioners to address the affective or the subjective, an exploration of personal attitudes, values and perceptions of the language. It links with personal experiences, family histories and group identities and requires an honest exploration of each. It also has to do very clearly with the social domain of the Welsh language and an understanding of the complex factors which affect language use in Wales. This helps ensure that social welfare practice and policy may be grounded in a firm understanding of factors which relate to the history, status and current use of the language. And thirdly, and most importantly, it has to do with an appreciation of power, disempowerment and empowerment as they affect Welsh speakers.

Language sensitive practice also requires the adoption of basic principles, inclusivity being foremost. Rather than building barriers and creating fortresses, as has sometimes happened in the past, it is vital to identify common ground and to look at ways of forging alliances and engaging people who would otherwise be on the outside. This means recognising the role not only of Welsh speaking

practitioners, but also of non-Welsh speaking colleagues, in the task of furthering language choice for bilingual users. The vision of 'one Wales' is also central as opposed to the more traditional tendency of seeing Wales as a country divided by its geography and economy, its language and culture. By locating language sensitive practice firmly in the context of empowerment, it becomes more possible for old misunderstandings to be aired and resolved and for language sensitive practice to be given a rightful place on the diversity agenda in Wales.

Discussions of power, empowerment and their links with language sensitive practice raise vital questions about the relationship between the periphery and the core. Fishman sets this in a sociolinguistic context with reference to 'centralizing the periphery' and working on the 'cultivation of marginality'. Reflecting on this relationship between the periphery and the core, he states that

*"The periphery magnifies and clarifies. Above all, it refuses to take matters for granted. It refuses to confuse peripherality with unimportance, or weakness in numbers or in power, with weakness vis á vis equity, justice, law and morality."* (Fishman, 1990: 113)

It is this tension between the periphery and the core, between marginalising and mainstreaming, which underpins much of the following discussion. To this end, the chapter aims to address why social welfare practitioners in Wales need to engage with the Welsh language and language choice in their work with bilingual

service users. It will also discuss what they need to know about the Welsh language and its speakers, that is, the knowledge base needed to inform practice and policy, as well as touching on how social care providers can strengthen the delivery of bilingual services.

### **The legislative and policy drive**

It is the Welsh Language Act, 1993 which sets the legislative framework with its aim to *“promote and facilitate the language in Wales, in particular in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice on the basis of equality with English”*.

As well as introducing the principle of equality, the Act also requires public sector providers to prepare statutory Language Schemes stating the steps they intend taking to implement this principle in their service provision. It also established the Welsh Language Board with the duty of overseeing the implementation of these Schemes and promoting the language in a wider sense.

In the context of social care, it is important to refer to the guidance provided by the Welsh Language Board to agencies preparing Welsh Language Schemes.

*“... in circumstances where stress, vulnerability, illness or disability are key factors, not being able to communicate in their first language may place those concerned at personal disadvantage. Given the sensitive*

*nature of many of these discussions, it is important to offer language choice wherever possible.” (Welsh Language Board, 1996: 26)*

The Act has no doubt heightened awareness of the language; for many public sector providers it now registers on the radar for the first time, with the production over the last decade of Welsh Language Schemes setting out changes in relation to the way these providers operate. Many voluntary sector providers have also produced similar sets of policies and strategies. But, despite these attempts to afford the language greater equality, there is scant evidence of any real change in the ease and extent of language choice made available to bilingual users across Wales as a whole. There is a considerable body of anecdotal evidence suggesting that bilingual users are still faced with the dual block of low personal expectations and correspondingly low levels of actual bilingual provision. The little empirical evidence available confirms this clearly as in the Welsh Consumer Council Report prepared by Misell (2000), and Thomas' (1998) research on Welsh-speaking women and bilingual maternity services.

With a growing lobby of opinion in Wales now in favour of new and more robust Welsh language legislation to encompass the private sector and, amongst other things, to strengthen the rights of Welsh speakers, a cursory evaluation of the 1993 Act may conclude that among its successes has been the creation of a more positive climate for the language generally. But this is offset by its failure to bring about any real improvement in the bilingual services available to users in

Wales as a whole, and especially to social care users, often vulnerable and marginalised and least able to invoke their linguistic rights.

Whilst recognising the limitations of the '93 Act, it has to be acknowledged that devolved government has given a new drive to the process of addressing the status and use of the Welsh language. In 2003 the Welsh Assembly Government published its strategic document, *Iaith Pawb*, in which it outlined its vision of creating a bilingual Wales.

*“Our vision is a bold one and was set out in our policy statement on the Welsh language, Dyfodol Dwyieithog: A Bilingual Future published in July 2002. Our aspiration is expressed in the title of that document – a truly bilingual Wales, by which we mean a country in which people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either or both Welsh or English and where the presence of the two languages is a source of pride and strength to us all.”* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003: 1)

This affirmation of bilingualism - of a society in which both languages co-exist with one another and of the need to accommodate this inter-relationship in public policy - is significant and helps set the tone for the development of the inclusive, equality based social policies which were touched on in the introduction.

*laith Pawb* also emphasises the rights of the individual to use the Welsh language. This reference to the rights agenda as an aspect of public policy regarding the Welsh language is seen for one of the first times in *laith Pawb* with the assertion that “*The Welsh Assembly Government aims to safeguard and promote the right of individuals to use the Welsh language.*” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003: 47)

The strategy goes on to identify the importance of language sensitive provision in health and social care, referring to the specific needs of certain user groups, for example, older people, young children and people with learning difficulties and mental health problems, and states its determination “... *to impress the importance of being able to deliver services in the service users’ language of choice in key service areas such as health and social care.*” (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003: 47)

So, the Welsh Language Act and, more significantly perhaps, the *laith Pawb* strategy, create an impetus for addressing language sensitive practice. For local authority providers, the Generic Equalities Standard is also significant, offering as it does a framework for mainstreaming and monitoring performance in relation to the four statutory equalities in Wales - race, gender, disability *and* language. (A revised Standard for Wales is expected towards the end of 2007 to reflect changes to equality legislation and the local government policy context since its launch in 2002).

In relation to local government and social welfare policy, the unifying strand in much Welsh Assembly Government policy during recent years has related to citizen-focused services which are responsive to the needs of individuals and communities. References to the Welsh language dimension are often explicit and set firmly in the context of the need to develop services shaped by the specific needs of individuals and communities. This is seen, for example, in:

*Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004)

Among the principles guiding the development of public services in Wales is the need to place the citizen at the centre and to promote equality and social justice. It states that services focusing on citizens' needs are not universally available in Wales and that changes are needed in the way in which services are designed, planned and delivered. Actions needed include "*radical approaches*" to the way in which services are delivered to particular groups, including Welsh speakers.

*Beyond Boundaries – Citizen Centred Local Services for Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006)

It re-affirms the importance of citizen-centred policies and models of service delivery which create "... *new opportunities to respond more flexibly and*

*creatively to the diversity of Wales's communities: the particular mix of rurality, industrial valleys and urban areas, as well as its unique language and culture."* (7.8)

*Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities, A Strategy for Social Services in Wales over the Next Decade*, (Welsh Assembly Government / NHS, February 2007)

The thrust of this policy document relates to the *"... need to shape services around users and to rebalance services towards the community."* (2.2)

*"The Welsh language is an essential part of the Welsh culture and life, It must be reflected in developing effective social care strategies as well as in planning, delivering and improving services for individuals whose language of preference is Welsh"* (3.29)

Public policy therefore firmly supports the provision of services sensitive to the needs of individuals and communities. More specifically, the Codes of Practice and the National Occupational Standards for social care professionals offer a further thrust towards integrating language sensitive practice with their recurring themes of cultural sensitivity, respect for diversity, appropriate communication, individual rights and interests, and service user choice. These all offer a sound rationale for getting to grips with language, bringing it in from the periphery to the core.

On the wider stage, the UK is a signatory to the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages with its underpinning principle of respect for diversity, language rights and equality of opportunity.

### **Language sensitive practice: the knowledge base**

#### *Language, Identity and Communication*

In the mid 1990s the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work published training materials whose title, *'They all Speak English Anyway'* (Davies, 1994), summed up a not uncommon assessment of language use amongst bilingual Welsh-English speakers in Wales. Underpinning this assertion that 'they all speak English anyway' is an assumption that language is merely a means of communication.

At the time of publishing the CCETSW materials, and contrary to this popular view, there was a wealth of anecdotal evidence from bilingual speakers themselves and a growing body of international research on bilingualism (Grosjean, 1989 and 1994), suggesting that language use amongst bilingual speakers is complex and multi-dimensional. Shortly before the publication of *They All Speak English Anyway*, the Anglo Welsh writer, John Barnie, had described his experience of learning a second language, saying

*“... I had the common experience that speaking another language alters the ‘I’ that is being expressed. I had not realized before that you are is partly formed by what you speak.” (Barnie, 1992: 119)*

Almost simultaneously with the CCETSW publication in 1994, Aitchison and Carter were also affirming the link between language, ethnicity and identity.

*“... language is much more than a means of communication. Not only does it carry a view of the environment, using that word in its proper inclusive sense, but through its vocabulary and its structure, through the associations generated by its literature, through the symbol which it is and the symbols which it transmits, it creates a distinctive identity which is at once a derivative of tradition and an expression of the present.” (Aitchison and Carter, 1994: 6)*

Language was therefore seen as something which powerfully roots speakers in their past, helps them make sense of their present and creates a sense of affinity and shared territory, all themes which were echoed in Fishman’s work.

*“Language was also the surest way for individuals to safeguard (or recover) the authenticity they had inherited from their ancestors as well as to hand it on to generations yet unborn, and finally, that worldwide*

*diversity in language and in culture was a good and beautiful thing in and of itself...*" (Fishman, 1972: 46)

Since the mid-nineties, researchers have drawn on evidence to firmly challenge the notion that language is merely a vehicle of communication. Emotion and expression, they argue, are often shaped by the social and cultural context in which they are experienced. Altarriba and Morier, for example, draw on research of language use amongst bilingual service users in mental health settings; much of this is based on work with Hispanic users and other minority communities in North America. They come to the conclusion that in psychological assessment and diagnosis, *"... a bilingual may appear to present him or herself in different ways depending on the language used."* (Altarriba and Morier 2004: 252)

They quote Gutfreund who had already concluded in 1990 that

*"for the Hispanic population the therapeutic process may be far more meaningful in Spanish, because members of this population are likely to feel more comfortable expressing their feelings in Spanish."* (Gutfreund 1990: 606)

Altarriba and Morier conclude that:

*“... past experiences are often coded in the language in which they occurred and that the appropriate language can be used successfully as a retrieval cue when engaging in dialogue with a bilingual client.” (Altarriba and Morier, 2004: 274)*

A recent publication, edited by Pavlenko, draws together research and analysis from several communities addressing more fully these links between language and meaning, expression and emotion, language and self. The questions raised address whether bilingual and multilingual people experience themselves as different people to some extent when speaking different languages. Do they behave differently in their different languages? And are they perceived differently by those with whom they speak?

Based on several strands of empirical research among bi- and multilingual speakers, Pavlenko concludes that

*“Reflections and explorations by linguists and psychoanalysts show that languages may create different, and sometimes incommensurable, worlds for their speakers who feel that their selves change with the shift in language.” (Pavlenko, 2006: 26-27).*

Some bi- and multilingual people may perceive the world differently, she says, and change perspectives, ways of thinking, and verbal and non-verbal behaviours when switching languages.

*“Yes, when I am using Italian especially. I am more emotional and use my hands more. My husband has also commented that I adopt the Icelandic attitudes when I am using Icelandic especially when speaking to officials. If you pick up the language in the country where it is spoken then you pick up the traits and habits of those people.”*

[Wendy, 30. Speaks English – French – German – Italian – Icelandic].

*“I feel much more sophisticated when I speak English probably because I learnt it from sophisticated people in private college in York some time ago. When I speak Dutch I feel like a more precise person. I learned to use it in a very precise and accurate way and for example never to mix up one word with another.”*

[Clement, 18. Speaks French – Dutch – Italian – English].

(Pavlenko, 2006: 12)

*“In Welsh I’m more confident and in control. The words flow more easily. In English, I struggle more to express myself. I always think that I sound authoritative in Welsh; in English I sound less intelligent and less in control.”*

*“Some things are far easier to discuss in Welsh. I can talk about business matters in English, no problem. In many ways, it’s easier to talk about things like this in English. But when it comes to talking about my personal life – ill health, worries about my family, anxieties about the future ... all of these things have to happen in Welsh to have any meaning.”*

[Jenny, 45. Speaks Welsh-English].

It could be argued that this body of work has helped cast a more favourable light on the previously discredited sociolinguistic work of Sapir and Whorf, often referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, based on the view that the language we speak directly influences the way we think. For several years people argued that if the Whorfian hypothesis were true and if languages created different worlds for people, then bi- and multilingual people would be doomed to confusion and difficulty in translating meanings and making sense of different language related experiences. And yet the work of Pavlenko and others suggests that the dismissal of linguistic relativity in the work of Sapir and Whorf may be misplaced, because

*“... our respondents tell us that their thinking, behaviour, and perception of the self and the world do change with the change in language.”* (Pavlenko, 2006: 13)

Clearly in relation to social welfare practice in Wales, this shift away from seeing language merely as a medium of communication is significant. Language use for bilingual speakers is complex; shifts in language use create subtle shifts in the tone, texture and nature of what is being said. To be authentic and meaningful, some experiences and emotions are bound to be related in one language rather than the other.

This is summed up by a bilingual Welsh–English speaker relating her experience of operating a phone helpline for a large voluntary organisation in Wales.

*“Welsh speakers often phone for advice. They often start the conversation by asking for factual or practical information and then move on to talk about a far more personal problem which is more difficult to discuss. Although it is difficult to put one’s finger on the reason why, I get the impression that they move on to the second subject, often the real reason for phoning, because they are able to speak Welsh. The nature of the service would be different if I was unable to speak Welsh.”* (Davies, 1999: 9)

It is this relationship between language, experience and expression which was described by the bilingual service users quoted in the 1994 CCETSW publication. Asked why they would value a Welsh speaking social care worker, they stated:

*“Dwi’n meddwl ei fod e’n bwysig iawn achos fel gweithiwr cymdeithasol ’dach chi eisio cael allan o rywun y teimladau dwfn y mae rhai’n cael trafferth i ymdrin â nhw. Ella bod nhw’n corddi yn ei feddwl a’i fod yn cael trafferth, fel dwi’n cael rwan, i siarad. Ond sw’n i’n gorfod siarad Saesneg rwan, sw’n i byth yn gallu gwneud hynny.”*

*(I think that it’s important because as a social worker you want the client to be able to express those deep feelings which s/he has difficulty coping with. They could be causing a lot of turmoil and the person has trouble expressing himself, just as I’m having now. But if I had to speak English now I’d never be able to say what’s troubling me.) – 38 year old man with physical disabilities.*

*“Dyw llawer o bobl ddim yn deall eich bod chi’n hapusach yn siarad Cymraeg. Er fy mod i’n siarad y ddwy iaith ... dwi’n llawer mwy cartrefol yn siarad gyda rhywun sy’n Gymro.”*

*(Many people don’t understand that you are happier speaking Welsh. Although I speak both languages ... I’m much more comfortable talking with a Welsh speaker). – 75 year old woman. (Davies, 1994: 72)*

*Language and Power*

Issues to do with power are at the core of each and every language. John Edwards sets this in context:

*“While there exist something like 5,000 languages in about 200 countries ... only a quarter of all states recognise more than one language. Also, even in those countries in which two or more varieties have legal status, one language is usually predominant, or has regional limitations, or carries with it disproportionate amounts of social, economic and political power.”*

(Edwards, 1994: 1-2)

In the relationship between one language and another, the power dimension is a force to be reckoned with. This is especially salient, as Edwards suggests, when one of those languages has a recognised status and the other has less status and prestige.

In her analysis, Siencyn differentiates between perceptions of low status, low prestige languages on the one hand, and high status, high prestige languages on the other. These are the common perceptions to which Siencyn refers:

| <b>High status languages</b> | <b>Low status languages</b> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| easy to learn                | difficult to learn          |
| pure, with no borrowed words | full of borrowed words      |

|                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| widely used              | of limited use         |
| easy on the ear          | full of strange sounds |
| sophisticated and modern | old fashioned          |

(Siencyn, 1995: 25)

According to Siencyn, people often reach ill-founded conclusions based on perceptions such as these, for example, that:

- some languages are more important than others
- some languages are more modern and relevant than others, and
- some languages are of limited use and of little value.

When perceptions such as these are aired consistently over time they tend to influence speakers of the language; negative judgements are internalised. And when individuals feel that they are the butt of criticism, insecurities are generated and confidence drained. They are then more likely to change or adapt behaviour in order to reduce anxiety and embarrassment. This helps explain in part why Welsh speakers are often so ready to switch language and why they often play down and denigrate their ability to speak Welsh. Fluent speaker will often say, for example

*Cymraeg talcen slip sydd 'da fi*

*(My Welsh is just street corner Welsh)*

*Tydi 'Nghymraeg i'n dda i ddim*

*(My Welsh is good for nothing)*

All these characteristics are significant for bilingual users of social welfare services in Wales. Added to that, their personal circumstances may mean that they feel particularly fragile and disempowered. In this respect it is worth referring to Dafis' distinction between strong and weak linguistic contexts.

| <b>Weak linguistic contexts</b>   | <b>Strong linguistic contexts</b>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when the situation / context are unfamiliar and where there is no training or preparation</li> <li>• when there is a sense of threat</li> <li>• when there is anxiety, fear and negative emotions</li> <li>• when power and authority back up the other speaker</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when there is training and preparation</li> <li>• when there is no threat</li> <li>• when there are no obvious emotions and when the speaker is relatively neutral</li> <li>• when the speaker has power and authority</li> </ul> |

(Dafis, 1996: 12)

Romaine summarises this discussion of language and power in a bilingual society with her analysis of what is known as 'diglossia'- a distinct differentiation in the function of both languages. And Wales offers an excellent example of a society in which both languages have occupied very distinct and separate domains

*“Many bilingual communities are characterized by diglossia, a term used to refer to a kind of functional specialization between languages (referred to as High and Low) so that the language used within the home and in other personal domains of interaction between community members is different from the one used in higher functions such as government, media, education.”* (Romaine, 2004: 393)

### *The shadow of history*

Bilingual service users in Wales will be influenced unconsciously by several of the factors discussed above. Deep-seated structural and attitudinal obstacles help explain why, for many, their language is something to be kept under wraps. The disproportionate power allocated to the Welsh and English language in Wales was nowhere more acutely expressed than in the language clauses of the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1542. At this time, Wales was incorporated within England and it was legislated that English would be the only official language of Wales; people using the Welsh language were not to hold any *“... manner of office or fees within the Realm of England, Wales or other of the King’s dominions.”*

The language clauses had a profound effect on the Welsh language. It was marginalised and came to occupy the private, unofficial sphere of everyday life.

The historian John Davies describes the impact on Welsh speakers in these terms:

*“Ni allai Cymro uniaith lai na themlo'n anfreintiedig o dan drefn o'r fath, a thros y canrifoedd byddai'r ymwybyddiaeth hon o faint siaradwyr y Saesneg yn meithrin agweddau at y Gymraeg a fygythiai einioes yr iaith.”*

(Davies, 1990, 225-226)

*(A monoglot Welsh speaker could only feel underprivileged under such a system and over the centuries this awareness of the privilege of English speakers would nurture attitudes towards the Welsh language which would endanger the existence of the language).*

As the domains of the language shrank, it lost its status and over the centuries Davies argues that this had a marked effect on attitudes towards the language. For example, on:

- **Where and when to use the language** - Welsh speakers learned not to use the language when dealing with public bodies and with authority. Interestingly, a NOP survey commissioned by the Welsh Language Board showed as recently as 1996 that amongst Welsh speakers confidence in using their language was highest at home and while socialising with friends and family, and far lower when making more formal contact with

public and private sector organisations – the council, the bank, the privatised utilities, for example.

- **The self confidence of Welsh speakers** – Welsh speakers historically lack confidence in their ability to speak Welsh. Through the language clauses of 1536 and 1542, the language took a severe battering and, as a result, so did the linguistic confidence of Welsh speakers.
- **The readiness of Welsh speakers to change language** – Over the course of centuries, Welsh speakers became acutely aware of the lack of status attributed to their language; this in turn created a sense of inferiority and shame. The language tended to be a source of unease and embarrassment, something to be kept hidden.

A very cursory exploration of some of the more significant milestones in the history of the language has to take into account the events of 1847. In that year a report was published on the condition of education in Wales; it came to be known as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* / The Treason of the Blue Books. This quote, lifted from the report itself, is characteristic of its tone and findings:

*“The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. It is not easy to over-estimate its evil effects.”*

Writing of the significance of the Report almost 150 years later, the historian Gwyn A. Williams comments that

*“The Education Report of 1847, accurate enough in its exposure of the pitiful inadequacy of school provision, moved on to a partisan, often vicious and often lying attack on Welsh Nonconformity and the Welsh language itself as a vehicle of immorality, backwardness and obscurantism. The London press, led by a racist Morning Chronicle, called for the extinction of Welsh.”* (Williams, 1985: 208)

Soon afterwards came the 1870 Education Act which made no provision at all for the teaching of Welsh in elementary schools in Wales. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century came evidence from several parts of Wales of children being punished for speaking Welsh. They had to wear a block of wood around their neck with the letters WN (Welsh Not) carved on it. When a child wearing the Welsh Not heard another speaking Welsh s/he would eagerly pass it on, keen to be rid of its stigma. This would continue throughout the school day and the child wearing the Welsh Not at the end of the day would be chastised by the teacher before being sent home.

*“The Welsh Not slung around a child’s neck to accompany his or her punishment for speaking his or her own language has become notorious.*

*It was not very effective but it enormously reinforced the image of Welsh as an inferior and gutter tongue.” (Williams, 1985: 246)*

The Welsh Not was not in any way unique. A similar device - a small wooden clog - was used in Brittany to deter Breton-speaking children from using their language in school.

By the end of the nineteenth century English was the language for getting on in the world. With the growth of industrialisation Wales saw an emerging middle class, the owners and managers of the new iron and coal works, who were predominantly English-speaking. This became a further threat to the Welsh language as working people aped the mores and language of the middle class. They attached little economic value to the Welsh language and saw little point in transferring the language to their children. What then followed was a rapid decline in the number and percentage of Welsh speakers throughout the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century almost 50% of the population of Wales was Welsh-speaking, close on one million people. By the end of the century, the number of Welsh speakers had dropped by almost a half and the loss in proportionate terms was even greater.

1901 – 929,800 (49.9%)

1951 – 714,700 (28.9%)

1971 – 542,400 (20.8%)

1991 – 508,098 (18.6%)

It is this stark demographic trend which is reflected in the personal and family history of hundreds of thousands of Welsh people for whom the language was lost during the last century. Many, however, are now regaining the language and this is witnessed in the changing demographics of the 2001 Census.

*The Welsh language today - implications for service provision*

The 2001 Census showed an upturn in the number and percentage of Welsh speakers, from 508, 098 (18.6%) in 1991 to 575,640 (20.5%) in 2001. It also confirmed a trend which was already beginning to emerge in 1991, with boundaries shifting eastwards beyond the traditional heartland of the Welsh language in north and west Wales.

The 2001 Census confirmed that 60% of Welsh speakers now live in urban areas, with very significant numbers living in the urban and industrial centres of south Wales. Aitchison and Carter (2004) refer to two key areas, the former stretching from Kidwelly, through Pontyberem, Ammanford and Gwaencaeurgurwen to Ystradgynlais, and the other in Cwm Tawe, the Swansea Valley, spreading from Ystalyfera, through Pontardawe and Clydach to Swansea and westwards to Gorseinon and Llanelli. Jointly these two areas include

100,000 Welsh speakers. Aitchison and Carter also refer to the density of Welsh speakers in Cardiff, with over 30,000 speakers. Just as significant, they say, are a cluster of wards in Newport and parts of the south Wales valleys with substantial numbers of Welsh speakers.

*“... while it is customary to identify the Welsh speaking community with rural areas of north and west Wales (Y Fro Gymraeg), the actual heartland of that community in terms of absolute numbers lies in south Wales, embracing longstanding Welsh-speaking communities of the former western coal-field and the burgeoning areas to the east, with Cardiff as a powerful focal point.” (Aitchison and Carter, 2004: 56)*

However

*“... [in these areas] whilst there are some strong clusters where Welsh speakers are locally dominant, these are relatively small in number. The great majority of Welsh speakers are widely scattered and live in areas where percentages are still relatively low.” (op.cit., 53)*

When considering the implications of these demographic trends for service planning it's important to avoid the temptation of concentrating Welsh medium service delivery solely on those areas with a substantial percentage of Welsh speakers, the traditional Welsh-speaking areas, such as Ynys Môn (Anglesey), 59.9%; Ceredigion (51.8%) and Gwynedd (68.7%), for example. Alongside these,

it is essential to consider the needs of Welsh speakers in south and north east Wales where percentage rates may be low but where actual numbers are significant. For example, Swansea – 28,581 (13.2%); Rhondda Cynon Taf – 27,505 (12.3%); Flintshire – 20,277 (14.1%).

In his review of the Welsh language in the health service, Misell teases out the service provision implications in these terms

*“It should be remembered that it is as an individual that patients approach the National Health Service for treatment, rather than as representatives of communities, and the needs and wishes of each individual patient are equally important. From this viewpoint, the linguistic ‘Welshness’ or otherwise of the region a patient is living in is wholly irrelevant when considering whether provision should be made for him or her through the medium of Welsh.” (Misell, 2000: 15)*

Misell compares the situation of the Welsh speaker with speakers of other minority languages in Britain and draws on the work of Balarajan and Raleigh who refer to the risk of concentrating resources wholly on those areas with a density of minority language speakers.

*“The issue is important not just for health authorities with large black and minority ethnic communities, but also for authorities where the numbers*

*are smaller and hence there is a risk that their needs will be overlooked.”*

(Balarajan and Raleigh, 1995, quoted in Misell, 2000: 15)

In interviews with health care professionals, Misell hears about the experience of service users – ‘the hidden Welsh’ as he calls them – in parts of Wales thought of as non-Welsh speaking areas and where the needs of the Welsh speaker are often overlooked. In an exhortation to those responsible for planning local services, Misell comes to the conclusion that

*“... there is not, and never has been, such a thing as a ‘non-Welsh speaking area’ in Wales, and such old-fashioned ideas about the geographical territory of the Welsh language can only stand in the way of any attempts to increase and develop the provision of services through Welsh. Welsh speakers are to be found in all parts of Wales and it is in some of the most Anglicised areas that the greatest growth of the Welsh language is to be found. There is therefore no point attempting to justify restricting Welsh language provision to certain parts of Wales.”* (Misell, 2000: 15)

The other significant demographic trend which needs to be considered in relation to social care provision is the growth in the number and proportion of young Welsh speakers. In the early 1990s when analysing the 1991 Census data on Welsh speakers, the *Western Mail* carried the headline, *The Welsh Language is*

*Getting Younger.* This trend continued, and the 2001 Census witnessed a further increase in the number of young Welsh speakers with 31.2% of 3-15 year olds reported as having an ability to speak Welsh (Aitchison and Carter, 2004: 87), compared with 22.3% in 1991 (Aitchison and Carter, 1994: 104).

In parts of south and south east Wales the percentage of young Welsh speakers, as a proportion of the local Welsh-speaking community as a whole, is striking. For example, in Torfaen 69.5% of Welsh speakers fall into the 3-15 age group; 70.2% in Newport; 54.5% in Caerphilly and 68.2% in Blaenau Gwent.

Each speaker's individual language profile will vary: some will speak Welsh at home; others will be fluent in Welsh through school but may not use the language at home, and others may be learning the language without yet being fluent. But from what is known about complex patterns of language use amongst bilingual speakers, and the inter-relationship between language, expression and emotion, it is argued that questions regarding language choice should always be addressed in any work with bilingual children and young people. Language sensitive practice is key to securing the child's voice, enabling sound assessment and ensuring the best outcome.

### **Language sensitive practice - the way forward**

Bringing about a shift in the profile of the Welsh language and the availability of services in the user's language of choice – a shift from the margins to the centre

– requires social welfare agencies to engage with language as a mainstream issue. In guidance published in 1996, the Welsh Language Board stated that

*“The key to providing a high quality service through the medium of Welsh is to make the language a natural, integral part of the planning and delivery of that service.”* Welsh Language Board, 1996: Guideline 2)

Since then, the Welsh Assembly Government has firmed up the theme of mainstreaming and embedding language sensitive provision in many of its policy statements (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007). The language, rather than being a problematic after-thought, becomes a core consideration in all aspects of policy implementation, planning and monitoring.

Using workforce planning frameworks offers one way of doing this. This may result in an audit of workforce language skills; the compilation of data on the language profile of the local community as a whole, and of users and carers in particular, and an identification of the match or mismatch between staff capacity and user need. It then becomes possible to identify skill deficits and to consider the adoption of recruitment policies which may include affirmative action in relation to the recruitment of a bilingual workforce. Such frameworks may also highlight education and training issues, some of which may be addressed in the short-term through in-service training, for example, language skills training to top up the language competence of the existing workforce. Other issues, such as the

promotion of the social welfare professions amongst bilingual speakers and the development and support of appropriate educational frameworks, may need to be addressed on a longer term basis and in collaboration with sector skills councils and higher education institutions.

Another core consideration in terms of mainstreaming and embedding Welsh language sensitive practice relates to the role of users and carers. By placing language sensitive practice firmly in the context of empowerment, it follows that the drive for change has to be rooted very much in the perspective of users and carers. Based on the available sociolinguistic evidence of the inter-relationship between language, experience and expression, as well as evidence regarding the historical disempowerment of Welsh speakers, the development of language sensitive practice becomes much more than just a concession or a marginal consideration. It becomes a core practice issue – a matter of hearing the voice of those who are otherwise silenced.

An inclusive approach towards both language communities in Wales, and an accompanying focus on equality and empowerment, also secures a role for all social welfare practitioners, regardless of language. At one end of the continuum will be those who are able to work with users through the medium of Welsh. At the other end, will be those practitioners who may not be able to speak the language but whose values are sound and who have a vital role to play in identifying need and advocating on behalf of Welsh-speaking users and carers.

Across the continuum there will be opportunities for practitioners to acquire different levels of linguistic skill appropriate to their professional capacity, and for all to embrace practice which is informed by principles of equality and empowerment.

Williams (2000) sets this in the context of devolved government in Wales with an affirmation of the importance of inclusivity and equality.

*“If the National Assembly is to succeed as a political institution people from all over, and from both main linguistic groups, must be able to engage with it and feel a sense of shared ownership. In order for this to occur, the potential sensitivities of the linguistic politics of Wales will need to be recognized and addressed. If, however, the Welsh language is seen in terms of a resource rather than as a problem or, indeed, simply a matter of rights and entitlements, then this will be an important contribution to the development of a common Welsh civic identity – the emergence of which is surely a precondition for the success of the National Assembly and ultimately for the complete rehabilitation of Welsh as co-equal language of everyday life in Wales.”* (Williams, 2000: 377)

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