LANGUAGE STANDARDISATION, CORRECTNESS AND SOCIETY

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In this paper I would like to treat the issue of language standardisation historically and sociologically. That is, I do not simply want to take the issue of a language standard for granted, and to offer examples of what has been done with reference to this issue in Wales. That would be too easy and too lacking in imagination.

Perhaps an apt starting point is the minoritisation of our respective languages in 18th century Europe. What is evident at this time is that language standardisation was essentially a tool whereby the boundaries of a fragile state could be consolidated and integrated against external and internal threat. Within the modernist discourse it was argued that societies were subject to laws of development or progress, with some societies being more adept at this proccess than others. The difference between societies involved an evolutionary schema involving the civilised who progressed furthest towards perfection, and the uncivilised or barbarous who progressed more slowly towards that same goal. To this philosophy was added the claim that reality and thought were separate, and that language was the means whereby the reason of humankind was transmitted. That is, language became a reflection or mirror of truth and reality. However, not all languages were capable of this capacity of transmitting reason. The languages of the state became the languages of reason, modelled on the classical languages of Greek and Latin, and called modern. All other languages within the confines of the state were relegated to a position outside of reason, as patois or of expressions of unreasonable and emotive thought. We still live with this heritage. In Wales, despite recent gains, it is difficult to persuade even Welsh activists that science should be taught through the medium of Welsh. It is also evident that it is men who are encouraged to study these sciences, women being encouraged to pursue the arts in its various forms. Science relies on reason whereas the Arts are the domain of emotion. Men are rational, women are emotional. English is rational and Welsh is emotional. It is ingrained in the discursive and manifested in social practice. The past constructs our present without our knowing it.

Let us pause for a moment and consider the implications of standardisation within a language of reason or state language. The distinction that is made within such languages is between the standard form and the non-standard or dialect. Again it is the standard form that is the language of reason, while dialects are outside of reason. When we then realise that the standard form tends to be the prerogative of the dominant class the implication is evident. Issues of language purity carry an inevitable class bias and the entire issue of language standardisation is fraught with implications.

Why therefore should speakers of minority languages take an interest in a discourse that is so unfair in its effect. The reason lies in the fact that it does carry an effect. A language that is not standardised and related to practices which sustain that standardisation is in danger of continuing to be treated as outside of the realms of reason, as also are its speakers. Furthermore, there are processes in operation that oblige the speakers of a minority language to address the issue of 'language modernisation' or to sit back and see space of activity being ceded to the dominant language, thereby promoting the further minoritisation of their own language.

But what is it that suggests that there is increasing space for the standardisation of minority languages? This question obliges us to consider the shifting political and economic space within Europe and how it opens up new opportunities for minority languages. It is increasingly the case that the existing states are 'rolling back', and being obliged, within the European discourse, to be concerned with the Union, leaving new spaces at the local and regional level. These spaces can be accommodated in terms of a form of decentralisation which varies in its effect from the quasi state that you have in Euskadi to the establishment of the Welsh Office in Cardiff, or the ceding of functions to Finistere in Brittany. Its net effect is that it allows room for the development of agencies and institutions which hitherto had been centralised. It allows you to place your own stamp on certain functions. It seems wise that the first thing to consider is hou to resort to language to do exactly what the languages of the reason of the state achieved in the 18th century - the marking off and the defence of the territorial imperative. Thus we find a variety of new claims for the status of language for what hitherto may have been treated either as outside of reason or as a dialect. Asturias may be a case in hand. Such claims are legitimised by reference to the standardisation of the language and the development of an institutionalised or a taken for granted form of reference to language. The key element is distinctiveness vis a vis the outside. The danger is that in elaborating such an external focus we lose sight of how it simultaneously leads to internal differentiation by reference to speakers of the

language that is being promoted. We should recognise that language planning always relates to both policing and promotion.

Welsh was one of the languages which achieved status side by side with Latin, having a rich bardic tradition which flowed over into legal matters as early as the 6th century. The early standardisation was by reference to the bardic tradition. The bards were described as the architects of language by the 17th century grammarians. By the 14th century the religious houses which, hitherto, had been the main seats of learning were in decline and many of the old manuscripts by which the standard was measured were being lost.

It was also a language that was caught up in the European humanist movement of the 16th century. The humanists believe that one way of enriching the mother tongue was by publishing works of learning in it, that is, we have reference to the link between, language, writing, reacon and thought. Many of the early Welsh manuscripts by which the standard was measured were being lost, and there emerged a movement to facilitate translation of the Classics into Welsh. Greek and Latin, of course being the languages of higher reason and the source of learning.

It was felt that Welsh had to be modified in order to accept the ideas that were being brought in through such translation. This is an early reference to the idea of language modernisation. Grammars were produced in the 16th century, at a time when the Welsh intellectuals were fully integrated into European circles.

The main barrier to this high objective was the Act of Union of 1536 which sought to eliminate Welsh from any administrative role and establishing English as the exclusive language of such affairs. Despite this development the Welsh humanists strove to establish Welsh as one of the languages of Europe. This coincided with the link between Protestantism, the vernacular and Renaissance thought. It was also at this time that the argument was made about the relationship between Welsh and the language of Babel in order to establish the status of Welsh against the languages of the continent which were regarded as impure and mixed. It was also a continuation of the argument against the English who for centuries had been regarded as pagan invaders of the Christian Wales that had been established by the Romans.

Important as all of these developments were, it was the translation of the Bible into Welsh during the 16th century that gave status to Welsh. The advent of printing gave fixity of forms while the vocabulary of the poets were a strong ingredient in the translation. Indeed it is true to say that in many respects the language of the bardic tradition has been retained as the basis of the literary tradition to the present. The

humanist interest in lexicography was an echo of the bardic practice of keeping word-lists and memorising them. Furthermore, literary language was to be above that of 'buying and selling, eating and drinking'. Despite the demoting of Welsh in secular and political life it remained as a symbol of continuity and inheritance. The printing press led to a need for a fixed orthography which was to be as similar to Latin as possible in its appearance. The initial attempt at Latinised spelling was dropped by the end of the 16th century.

By the 18th century new tendencies were in evidence. One involved an attempt to resurrect an ancient vocabulary, and the other involved an attempt to arrange Welsh words according to the patterns of English. This led to such strange experiments as a Grammar and Dictionary of 1803 based on the syntax of English and the idea that words could be divided into elements without any fixed meanings.

By the 19th century the pioneering work of Jones on sanskrit had established the misleading idea of language families and trees which fitted in with the general evolutionary trend of its time and which, unfortunately, remains with us today. This led scholars to cultivate the idea of Celtic languages as the earliest of the Indo-European languages to enter Europe. This was the basis of attempts to resort to linguistics in developing models of 'good' Welsh based on prose writing from the Reformation to the 19th century methodist revivals. The common goal was to rid Welsh of the English influence while restoring the Welsh speaker's self-respect. There was also a concern about the gap between written and spoken forms, between language and discourse. There was a desire to represent spoken forms in print, the feeling being that any distinction between the two had to be eliminated. However this idea receded at the beginning of the 20th century. Morris-Jone's grammar of 1913 had a profound influence, being a description of the literary language as exemplified in poetry up to the 16th century. It was also recognised that achieving mastery over written Welsh was something quite different from learning a language orally. As linguists those who forwarded these arguments revealed a greater concern with the primacy of speech and appealed to custom and instinct rather than to logic. The standard became 'what an intelligent, unassuming Welshman would say'.

The increasing literacy of the 19th century and the spread of Welsh language newspapers had generated self-educated writers with a Victorian Welsh which the academic linguists argued against. Nonetheless by the end of the first quarter of the present century it was widely accepted. We should also not lose sight of the advent of Welsh into specific literary forms such as the novel which presented speech in written form.

This served to give a specific status, through the written, to spoken forms. Yet it was literary language which served as the standard of correctness. It is argued that the absence of monolingual speakers has led to the literary form being the only measure of correctness since it is no longer possible to appeal to the authority of the spoken language in order to eradicate the corruption that had affected the literary medium.

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken by poststructuralists looking at the phenomenon of writing, among them Derida, Achard and... It is one thing to consecrate a standard form through writing, but this, in a sense, is a manifestation of modernism and its preoccupation with languages of reason as manifested in writing. When we recognise that linguistic form was, originally, a representation of the normative structure of spoken language or discourse, and that subsequent comments, particularly by Chomskeyans, have imposed on this form, a judgment concerning correctness, we begin to understand how writing serves to fossilise, not discourse, but the judgment of linguists. That is, descriptive grammar assumes an epistemological form that does not necessarily conform with any local tradition. Similarly we must be aware of a certain logicism wherein there is an untenable a priore relationship between 'meaning' and its linguistic expression, or syntax. Rather we should be concerned with a regularity of functioning within discourse. Such an approach overcomes the absurd claim that one language is more logical or rational than another. On the other hand the linguist, in speaking from an academic and epsitemic position, has achieved a position of legitimacy.

I mention this in order to clarify the relationship between the written and the oral, in order to ask the question of what is the literary form of Welsh opposed to? What is evident is that the oral norm has varied historically, and that periodically there is a need to adjust the written norm to accommodate the distance between the written and the oral norm. That is, are we obliged to think of the oral and the written as different constrained version linked to the performing of the same system? What is evident is that the place of writing in Welsh society is quite distinct today than it was when a literary standard was established. In its original form there was some link to Latin, to the norms of the poets, and it was considered as an art form, linked to the practices of the elites in supporting a culture. In this respect it bore little relationship to how the people actually spoke. It seems that today the relationship between norm and 'tradition' is lost and the mastering of the norm is not explicit. Rather norm tends to relate to the legitimacy of the social actor.

This becomes relevant when we consider the role of dialects which, with reference to Wales, were not standardised until the religious revivals of the 18th century. That is, a common spoken form that was understandable across geographical regions was established. This was the language of the pulpit which also became the medium of public address and of formal discussion. It also became, in time, the language of news bulletins on the news media. This pulpit Welsh was resistant to the 'corruptions' that affected literary Welsh in the 19th century. There were two varieties which most people had - that of the street and that of the chapels or pulpit Welsh. Given that the religious institutions drew people together across social class these were not class varieties but status group varieties. This was inevitable given that Welsh was excluded from the agencies of social reproduction which were the agencies that would have generated class varieties. However, they were varieties which had very specific and rigid social contexts by reference to which was used where and when. Where the secularisation of recent years has weakened this distinction the media has, to some extent, succeeded in promoting and sustaining it. This has been one of the sites of struggle in Wales. One group maintains that this form of differentiation must be sustained by reference to an oral standard, others claim that the separation creates enormous difficulties for the 'learners' i.e., those who do not have the social background which gives the distinction relevance.

I did not mean to imply above that regional dialects of Welsh do not exist. Indeed they do but the media has, again, been of relevance in breaking down the lack of familiarity across such dialects. In time it may eradicate the differences but at the moment it is making people aware of the differences and making everyone familiar with the differences so that mutual inteligibility is enhanced. The advent of the novel into Welsh has also had its effect. As the production of the oral in written form it has succeeded in giving the oral form a certain status that it would no otherwise have achieved.

It seems to me that we are obliged to consider the various changes, that have occurred in recent years in order to come to terms with what is happening to Welsh and its standardisation. First of all it is evident that there is a shift in discourse towards what is called neo-liberalism that is having an effect across Europe. This discourse involves the rolling back of the state, the creation of the European Union that the existing states are responsible for, and the simultaneous creation of European, rather than state, regions. What is argued is that these regions are important in opening up new spaces for minority languages, if they can be occupied by such language groups. The rolling back of the state opens up the space of decentralisation which is evident here in Euskadi. This, together with the opening up of new political space can lead to

the claim for a new relationship between language and territory. Languages which hitherto may have been regarded as dialects of the state language are now in a position to argue for autonomous status, linked to a political and territorial hegemony. I don't know if Asturias might be an appropriate example? It means that the number of languages may well proliferate and that moves will take place to standardise and to legitimise such languages. This is fascinating given that the goal of the new discourse is unification rather than diversification. I see this as one of the sights of struggle within the new Europe - unification with diversification.

However there are other processes at work, processes which are not unrelated to this development. Slowly over the years Welsh has been gaining ground in certain spheres of economic life. Given that most of the economic activity in the private sector tends to be English owned on account of the various regional development policies that have been implemented, most of the domain extension has been in the public sector. This means that it has also been focused upon specific localities which carry most of the administrative and service functions. Simultaneosuely there has been a rapid decline in primary sector activity associated with the economic restructuring. As a consequence many parents who themselves did not learn the Welsh of their parents because of the negative identity effect, now want their children to learn the language. Thus we find a shift from language reproduction to language production. There are numerous schools where as many as 90 % of the pupils come from homes and areas where Welsh is not spoken. Under such circunstances we find that those children without a broad domain support function tend not to learn the mutations —which anyway do not carry any linguistic function— and even those from Welsh speaking homes do not master the posessives. Furthermore the separation between the formal and the informal is evident by reference to peer group activity, with children who have mastered the formal register choosing to conform with peer group standards and develop an oral form that is quite distinctive. A new register appears to be developing.

This in turn bears reference to the appearance of class varieties for the first time. Where there is a prestige value for Welsh —prestige here pertaining to the value of the language for social mobility— we find Some tendency towards the middle class variety relating to this new register which contrasts with the Welsh of other areas. This is nowhere consolidated but it does point in a certain direction.

It is such situations, which open up considerable diversity by reference to the oral that leads to demands associated with language purity

and language 'standards', especially with reference to the broadcasting media, which is itself a standardising agency. Thus we find calls for the Welsh equivalent of the French Dictionaire of conjugated verbs which would list the literary paradigms side by side with the localise spoken variations. This would include reference to those verbs which in some dialects and in contrast to the literary forms, take their stem from the verb-nouns. This is not unrelated to what is referred to as 'Cymraeg Byw' or 'living Welsh' which appeared during the 1960s. This was a manifestation of a concern that the conservatism of the literary form was distancing itself from the ordinary user. This was taken by a panel of educationists and developed into a programme of language reform. This was aimed at 'learners', that is, those for whom Welsh was not the Mother tongue. However it seems that it was the publishers who sought to translate this into a kind of standardisation. The argument was made that for example the conjunctive and re-duplicative pronouns were not common enough to justify introduction to the 'learner' when they are very much in existence in the community. This type of complaint was to the fore in the suggestion that what had emerged was something entirely new that, rather than narrowing the gap between the literary and the spoken, was widening the gulf.

Another attempt has been made to avoid the counter-opposition between the literary and the colloquial by portraying all of the varieties of Welsh as belonging to the same continuum. This continuum tends to involve retreat from the Biblical standardisation towards a secular literary idiom. Indeed, the latest versions of the Bible have incorporated this. What is at stake in such development is the tendency to treat standardisation in terms of purity-corruption, but without any reference to any social conditioning. This often tends to involve subjective evaluation based on 'the instincts of any natural Welsh speaker'. Such a subjective evaluation clearly runs into difficulties and demonstrates the lack of any authoritative body which prescribes what is and is not 'standard'. It means that the literary must remain the authority. Perhaps this, in turn, places an even greater burden on the broadcasting media. There is a strong awareness that literary and spoken Welsh should converge, but that each has its own standards and referents of correctness. What is missing is an approach which treats language as discourse, with correctness pertaining to function and effect as the production of meaning. Such post-modernist orientations do not, at the moment, appear relevant.

Institutions responsible:

The idea of deploying legislation in order to standardise language is not common. It is even less common with reference to stateless langua-

ges. Welsh was the language of law until the 13th century. The Act of Union denied it any official status in the 16th century. The Welsh Language Act of 1967 slightly redressed this situation. It was suggested that the Welsh Office should have a panel of translators, together with a panel of experts in language, law, history and other fields to provide advice and guidance. Standard literary Welsh was employed as the medium, one which Welsh speakers were not accustomed to and led to many feeling deficient in their mother tongue. Cymraeg Byw was rejected on account of register and style, primarily because it was not formal enough.

Many academics have sought to use Welsh in their respective subjects. This was expanded upon by the decision to produce glossary's of concepts which were published by the University Press covering a range of subjects from Sociology, Law, History, cookery, mathematics, geography, physics, technical subjects, law, administration to Chemistry. The Board of Celtic studies had already established basic principles: direct borrowing where the words represented few orthographic problems, the creation of new words using well-established roots and terminations and the resurrection of old words giving them a more technological significance. This procedure was primarily for use in education with Welsh medium education expanding considerably at the time.

Broadcasting does have an innovative role in the sense that it is able to portray in fantasy form the use of a minority languages in domains which in real life it cannot be used. This, over time, loads to an acceptance of the potential of the use of the minority language across a variety of domains within which it may not exist. It is suggested that the media, which has an important role, tends, at least with reference to the radio, to show considerable variation and, in this respect, to reflect the usages of the speech community. Television reveals a sensitivity to the appropriateness of use according to context. Factual programmes tend to resort to a high variety of Welsh, and will include glossing the Welsh with the English equivalent. Similarly drama resorts to colloquial or a low register. However it does have enormous difficulty in resorting to language in order to portray class variation because of the absence of class varieties. This usually has to be accomplished by some visual contextualisation. There is also a clear attempt to mix regional dialects while respecting their differences, so that dialectical representivity is retained. There has been a considerable amount of experimentation with English language interviews translation into Welsh with voice overs, subtitles, retention of the English etc. Attempts have to be made to avoid English dominating the programme. The situation is still fluid and flexible.