

Role of language policy and planning and language revitalisation



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

With reference to one of the minority languages within the British Isles, discuss the role of language policy and planning and language revitalisation.

One of the flourishing areas of sociolinguistics is “ Language policy and planning”. Important decisions regarding language policy and planning are made globally by governments on a daily basis. These decisions play a significant role in deciding which languages are nurtured and inevitably which languages will be left to die out and eventually become extinct. In accordance to the most recent definitions in the Oxford English dictionary, Language policy refers to a language unit used to ensure coordination of language policies across all departments of government; making sure that the same methods are used in all areas. Alongside this, Language planning defines as the preparation of a policy or proposal on language use and the standardization of the language to be used in a nation with many local languages or dialects making it easier for people to communicate. This essay will examine the role language policy and planning has played in the revitalisation of the minority language Welsh and the methods used to do this.

In accordance to Parry and Williams the 1891 census was the first to assemble reliable information regarding the language spoken by the people of Wales. Out of the 1.5 million individuals 54.4% were able to speak Welsh. From this 54% approximately 30% was able to speak only Welsh and had no understanding of any other languages. This decline continued throughout 1961 whereby only 26% of the Welsh community had the ability to speak Welsh (Jones). This was the point that prompted the revitalisation of the Welsh language through policy and planning and many measures were put <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-language-policy-and-planning-and-language-revitalisation/>

into practice. This was first done through the Welsh language act in 1967 whereby both English and Welsh were regarded as having equal validity; this made a significant impact on the status of Welsh. As beforehand only English was used within places of power such as the courts; as a result of this English was the desired language of the Welsh population.

Cunliffe, Honeycutt and James infer that Twitter alongside other social media platforms provide a new domain for the consumption of the Welsh language while also facilitating connections between members of the Welsh speaking community. They imply that this has helped establish Welsh as a language. This approach could be regarded as a more successful and modern technique of revitalising Welsh focusing on a younger generation opposed to the traditional language policy and planning. Despite this, a major factor that is often ignored is that whilst Twitter may provide a new domain for the Welsh language; Twitter also encourages the English language to thrive amongst dominant Welsh speakers which can eventually cause Welsh speakers to switch to using the more universal language, English. As a result of this, the overall aftermath of social media on the maintenance of the Welsh language remains problematic to determine due to the combination of high costs and benefits.

On the other hand, research suggests that the language policy and planning efforts for the Welsh language is currently one of the most effective models of how to reverse and halt language shift. Language planning in the form of status planning has successfully revitalized Welsh in many ways; such as making Welsh a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum and

encouraging bilingual education at both primary and secondary level which <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-language-policy-and-planning-and-language-revitalisation/>

made it easier for children to acquire and maintain their knowledge of Welsh alongside English. This attempt at status planning aided the removal of stigma towards the Welsh language as learning Welsh alongside other subjects made children take Welsh more seriously. Efforts of language planning also aided Welsh language schemes, in particular public organisations such as the right of the public to interact with the organisation in Welsh giving a purpose to the language. As a result of this people felt there was a purpose to Welsh which was absent before

However, The Welsh Language board also state how 40% of children who complete primary school education as first language Welsh speakers generally commence their secondary education as second language Welsh speakers, taking their curriculum through the medium of English as often the standard of Welsh taught in primary schools fails to be maintained to the same level in secondary school education . This may depict how in defiance of the efforts to revitalise Welsh it is a considerable challenge and unrealistic to expect a drastic Welsh language revival. As a lingua franca, English appears to be a more desired language, used in the media, academics, films etc. explaining the eagerness of Welsh speakers to shift to English.

Furthermore, The Welsh Language Board has also contrived a series of campaigns targeting parents including an information pack providing answers to the questions raised by future parents discussing topics such as the benefits of early bilingualism. The language pack “ Bringing up Bilingual Children” allows health professionals to discuss any questions raised. The pilot study was conducted in South Wales in 1998 which illustrated that 78% of parents remembered receiving the pack and 33% had kept the documents

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-language-policy-and-planning-and-language-revitalisation/>

for future reference. Some argue that such projects make crucial interventions but there are doubts as to whether they actually contribute to language shift. Despite this, this effort of Prestige planning clearly creates a positive attitude towards Welsh.

In further accordance to The Welsh Language board, the corpus planning of Welsh centres around two areas. Firstly, the need for linguistic standardisation which is met by producing specialised dictionaries which are free to access on the internet from a Welsh Language Board server.

Secondly, a popular form of Welsh is needed which has been addressed, so far as forms and related material are concerned by Cymraeg Clir, which seeks to do for written Welsh what the Plain English Campaign does for English. In order for Welsh to become a more certified language Welsh must continue to adapt, spread new terminology and continue to gain acceptance for forms of Welsh that will make it a living language for future generations. As a result, further developments are needed with regards to Welsh language corpus planning.

With regards to the future, according to the Welsh Language Unit the government intend to continue language planning with the strategy plan including aspects such as: an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language, more opportunities for people to use Welsh and finally an increase in people's confidence and fluency in Welsh (Welsh Language Unit). Alongside this, according to Williams the visibility of Welsh has rocketed due to an amplifying interest in localism and genealogy- nowadays people desire to know what their ancestors spoke. As a result of this Welsh has become more of an established language suggesting that <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-language-policy-and-planning-and-language-revitalisation/>


more people may speak Welsh and have an interest in the language than initially recorded.

Overall, the main driver of language revitalisation in Wales has been the extensive commitment of individuals fulfilling roles such as parents, local socio-political activists etc. Initially, the Education system was targeted and the platform this work has created for significant developments in creating a partial bilingual society should not be repressed and ignored. The Welsh government has shouldered responsibility for the lack of language policy and the little affect the policy in place has had on revitalising Welsh. In line with this, despite the fact that the demographic reality may continue to disappoint, as it is clear that many of the Welsh speakers produced by the education system inevitably migrate, those speakers who remain face a more positive future where more opportunities to learn, live and work in Welsh are being provided.

In conclusion, if anything is to be learnt from the Welsh example of language revitalisation it is that stubborn persistent action by the community must be stimulated before the government language policy will respond in an appropriate manner. Although, to ensure long term momentum and prevent a loss of direction the community engagement must be maintained.


(Williams)


Reference List

 **Cunliffe, D. Honeycutt, Z. and James Jones, R. (2013) Twitter and the Welsh language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* [online], pp 653-671. Available from: Taylor & Francis Online Journals [accessed 21 November 2018].**

 **Dewaele, J. and Housen, A. (1982) *Bilingualism: Beyond Basic Principles*. Great Britain: Cromwell Press.**


- Jones, Hywel. (2012) *A Statistical Overview of the Welsh Language* . Cardiff: Welsh Language Board
- Oxford University Press (2000) Oxford English Dictionary [online]. Oxford University Press. Available from: [accessed 9 January 2019]
- Parry, Gwenfair and Mari A Williams. (1999) *The Welsh language and the 1891 Census* . Cardiff: University of Wales Press

 **Vaughan, R. (2011) Census 2011: Number of Welsh speakers falling. *BBC News* [online], 11 December. Available from: [accessed 20 December 2018]**

 **Welsh language board (1999) *A strategy for the Welsh language: Targets for 2000-2005* . Cardiff: Welsh Language Board.**

- Welsh Language Unit. (2012) *A living language: a language for living Welsh Language Strategy 2012-2017* . Cardiff: Welsh Government

 **Williams, C. (2017) The lightening Veil: Language Revitalization in Wales.**

 **Williams, H. (2013) Mind your (minority) language: Welsh, Gaelic, Irish and Cornish are staging a comeback. *Independent* [online]19 January. Available from [accessed 20 December 2018].**