

Culture Committee - CC-1-02(p.4)

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Time: 9.00am-12.30pm
Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly

CULTURE COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Paper by Dylan Iorwerth, Managing Editor, Golwg

Background

Golwg is a publishing company which specialises in magazines and marketing materials. It is a company limited by guarantee which means that any profits must be used to fulfil the company's objectives - to create attractive, high quality materials in the Welsh language. The company was established in 1988, and based deliberately in an area where Welsh is the main language. One of the company's other aims is to create good jobs which use Welsh as a medium.

The company's main publication is the weekly current affairs magazine, Golwg, which receives a grant from the Welsh Arts Council for its arts coverage; we also publish three other magazines - WCW a'i Ffrindiau for children, Atolwg for young people and Lingo Newydd for learners - all of which receive support from the Wales Books Council to fill gaps in the market.

WCW a'i Ffrindiau includes an English translation to help non-Welsh speaking parents to use it with children who go to Welsh-medium nursery or primary schools.

The company does not discuss political matters or take public positions. So, the Managing Director, Dylan Iorwerth, will be presenting his evidence as an individual, but doing so on the basis of the company's experience working in a crucial field.

This evidence is divided into ten points:

1. Basic principles

Welsh has now gained a passive status for itself. That is, there is a recognition of its existence and public recognition for it. The time is now ripe to move on, with a strong campaign for the language, stimulating pride in it amongst all the people of Wales and making it a natural part of

the nation's life.

The language is not something for 'the Welsh-speaking areas' or for Welsh speakers - in order to meet the Assembly's aim of a bilingual Wales, action must be taken in all communities, although the details and emphasis will vary from place to place. The language should not be something that's added to other activities but should be an integral part of them.

Certainly, this means operating across communities, amongst Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speaker alike and, in areas where the language is a minority language, it means ensuring that it develops and flourishes to become an alternative cultural choice for all.

This process, in turn, could create new confidence which would release innovation and creativity to contribute to wider economic and social prosperity. It should also lead to more pride in Wales' unique English language culture which has grown partly out of the relationship between the two languages and the two - or more - cultures in Wales.

2. Population changes

There are several fundamental population changes happening throughout Wales. In the case of the Welsh language's 'strongholds', there is an outward movement of young Welsh speakers (many to Cardiff) and a substantial influx of older people who cannot speak the language. This position is not sustainable in terms of community, economy or language.

If this process continues, we have no doubt that the Welsh will cease being a community language of any significance within the next few years. A generation of natural Welsh-speakers will die within the next 15 years and, although children learn Welsh at school, there are great doubts whether many of them will use it socially and culturally later.

Obviously, tackling this is a difficult task, politically and socially. We believe that the answer lies in promoting the language and communities, with the emphasis on creating the conditions for success rather than on blocking or restriction.

Nevertheless, for a period, there will be a need for measures that protect the language, positive steps which discriminate in its favour rather than discriminating against anyone else.

An environmental analogy may be helpful:

When a rare species is in danger, steps are taken to protect it and halt any further decline - these may be defensive steps. But, in the long term, one needs more than protection. It's necessary to create or recreate habitats where the species can flourish and various kinds of agreements are created to ensure this. The same kind of approach, on a much wider scale, could work for the Welsh language.

3. Cultural use

As publishers, we need more than an audience which has the ability to use the language. We need an audience that chooses to use it both culturally and socially. There is a danger that Welsh is becoming a language of school, of official documents and a few cultural and broadcasting media.

In the predominantly Welsh-speaking and less Welsh-speaking areas alike, for different reasons, there is a need to increase the opportunities for using Welsh and there are many possible instruments for achieving this - cultural and artistic grants and others to promote the development of the language in the fields of business and employment.

4. Education - building on investment

By now, every child in Wales in the public education sector is taught Welsh up to GCSE age and an increasing number of children receive their education through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

Up to now, the post-16 provision has been very weak, in terms of vocational education and higher and further education too. This means that a massive investment by the people of Wales is being lost.

Welsh should be one of the 'basic skills' in the post-16 field. Having gained Welsh language skills up to that age, everyone should be given the opportunity and encouragement to develop those skills to a higher level - for work or for cultural and social use.

The new education and learning body ELWa should have the aim of ensuring that there is no loss of Welsh language and bilingual skills from one education level to the next and that everyone in Wales gets the opportunity to develop and maintain those skills. If this does not happen, it will not be a failure of language policy but a failure of education.

Language awareness training is also needed throughout the public and private sectors - to improve service levels and competitiveness.

5. Equal opportunities

There are two aspects to this point.

Equal opportunities for Welsh speakers - to use the language in all aspects of their lives. Without a bilingual community around them, this may be impossible. This is particularly important in the caring services where the difference between using a first and second

language can be crucial.

Equal opportunities for non-Welsh speakers and learners - everyone should have the opportunity to apply for any job in Wales. As Welsh and bilingual skills will be necessary for some jobs, everyone should receive training which puts these jobs within their reach.

6. Translation and origination

Bilingualism doesn't mean working in one language and then translating into another. There is a danger that Welsh is becoming a translated language - that is the result of its passive status.

Language plans which ensure that people answer the phones with a Welsh greeting are not enough either, welcome though that is. Bilingualism must be a natural part of the life of communities and organisations.

We should aim at the principle of bilingual communication, where materials are created in both languages as part of a natural process.

7. Economic development

For years, the economic development sector has recognised that prosperity entails more than putting up factories and attempting to fill them - it includes the wellbeing of the whole community. The Welsh language and communities should be a consideration for economic development policies.

Several instruments could be used, using the examples of the conservation sector or the field of equal opportunities for people with disabilities or special needs.

By now, any developer expects to have to obey regulations on environment and access and, often, public grants are conditional on this. The same could be done with the Welsh language.

Tourism is an obvious field. The Wales Tourist Board has stressed that cultural tourism is one of the main hopes for the industry in Wales. If so, any financial support they give should take this into consideration, in terms of the language and character of each community. So, in naturally Welsh-speaking areas, any tourism development should include the Welsh language - the nature of the requirement would be different in an area where Welsh is less prominent.

8. Learning Welsh

The assumption behind all these ideas is that Welsh is a language for all the people of Wales and we can all take pride in it and take ownership of it. Because of this, Welsh language teaching/learning is vital.

In the less-Welsh speaking areas, there is an opportunity to think of whole community learning, rather than isolated groups of individuals doing so for different reasons, from children at school to adults in the workplace. Out of this, it should be possible to develop community activities which give the language roots in community life. The Welsh-medium schools, for instance, could become powerhouses for this kind of development.

Learning Welsh should be an obvious and easy option for anyone moving into Wales - we need to develop models which take the language to them.

Language awareness lessons should also be part of the education of every child in Wales and part of pre-natal courses etc.

9. Media - new and traditional

Up to now, Golwg has been working in the traditional media, mainly print. We are in the process of moving into the new field of multi-media but, for a small private sector company working in a minority language, a lack of resources is a major inhibitor. It's vital that the Assembly invests substantially and quickly in ensuring a strong presence for Welsh on the new media. This is an extension of the enlightened support for a knowledge based economy - it's a combination of language promotion, economic development and community development.

10. The Arts

From the beginning, Golwg has taken a particular interest in the arts. By looking at the handouts and press releases we receive from different arts centres, it becomes obvious how little promotion there is of home-grown activity - either in Welsh or English.

There are arts centres in Welsh speaking areas which, apart from a superficial use of Welsh or bilingualism, are identical to any arts centre in England. Using arts monies in creative and inspirational ways to promote the culture of Wales and use it to reach out to the world - rather than importing culture - would make a great difference in terms of the economy, as well as language and culture.

Dylan Iorwerth, December 18, 2001.

Dylem nodi fod Golwg hefyd yn gwneud gwaith masnachol sylweddol i gyrff a chwmnïau, gan weithio yn Gymraeg a Saesneg ac yn ddwyieithog. Mae hynny'n cynnwys cynhyrchu deunyddiau marchnata a hyrwyddo i amrywiaeth eang o gyrff, gan gynnwys cyrff cyhoeddus.

Background - additional point

We should note that Golwg carries out a substantial amount of commercial work for organisations and companies, working in Welsh and English and bilingually. This includes creating marketing and promotional materials for a wide range of organisations, including public bodies.