

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE MENAI? PLANNING FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN NORTH-WEST WALES

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Abstract

In this article, the legitimisation of the Welsh language by two contiguous local government entities, Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council in north-west Wales, is contrasted with its increased institutionalisation by means of language policies carried out within the two entities over a period of 40 years. Using grey and professional literature as well as field interviews, political claims around the increased use of the non-statewide language are mapped onto language planning activities impacting upon both internal administration and external engagement with local communities and national stakeholders. Contrasts between legitimisation and institutionalisation activities within and across the two entities are explained in terms of interaction between local, substate and statewide political actors.

ALS DOS COSTATS DEL MENAI? LA PLANIFICACIÓ DE LA LLENGUA GAL·LESA AL NORD-OEST DE GAL·LES

Resum

En aquest article es compara la legitimació del gal·lès per part de dues entitats de govern local contigües: el Consell de Gwynedd i el consell del comtat de l'illa d'Anglesey, al nord-oest de Gal·les, amb la seva creixent institucionalització mitjançant les polítiques lingüístiques que s'han portat a terme a les dues entitats en un període de 40 anys. Per mitjà d'una literatura grisa i professional i d'entrevistes de camp, es visualitzen les reivindicacions polítiques al voltant de l'augment de l'ús de la llengua no estatal en forma d'activitats de planificació lingüística que tenen impacte tant en l'administració interna com en les relacions externes amb les comunitats locals i les parts interessades a nivell nacional. S'explica el contrast entre activitats de legitimació i institucionalització dins i entre de les dues entitats des del punt de vista de la interacció entre els actors polítics locals, subestatsals i estatals.

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Summary

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References

1 Introduction

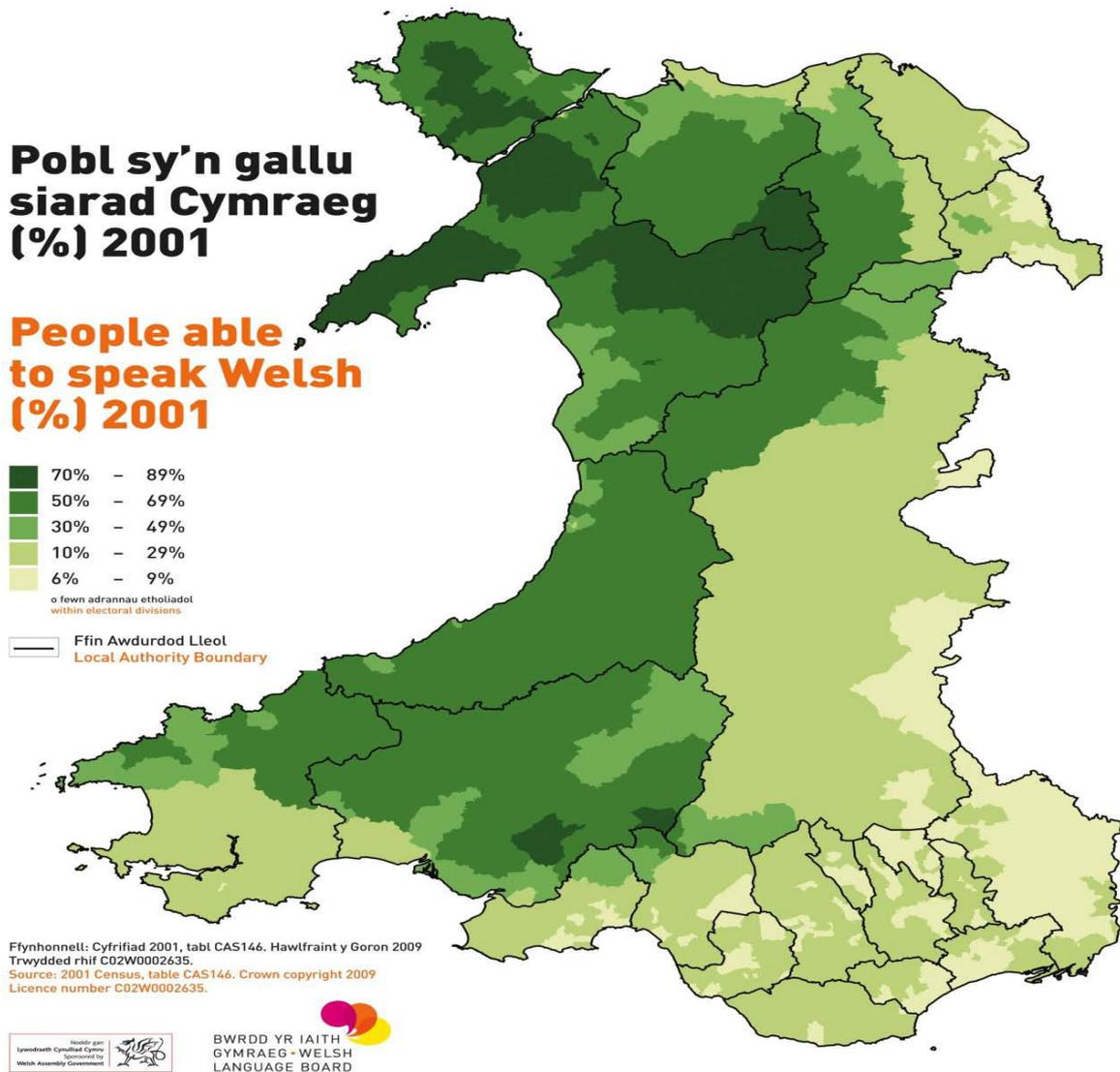
This article analyses language planning activities carried out by local government in north-west Wales over a period of 40 years. Attention will be given firstly to mechanisms by which local government councillors and senior officers in the territory – now administered by Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council – took advantage between 1974 and 1996 of structural, governance and legislative developments in order to execute a nuanced, incremental and, to some extent, veiled language policy. Both councils provide a singular opportunity for local language policy comparison since the territories of the two current councils formed, prior to local government reorganisation in 1996, part of a larger local authority dating from 1974.¹ Secondly, the article highlights the period since 1996 which has been characterised by the divergent policies, and political ideology, of two sets of elected members with significantly varying values regarding the mainstreaming of language policy within the councils' workforce day-to-day activities and the services they provide to citizens.

Both councils are located in north-west Wales where the Welsh language is spoken by a majority of the population (see Map 1). That both Gwynedd Council and Isle of Anglesey County Council have followed divergent language policy paths since local government reorganisation in 1996² is explained in terms of political control. On the one hand, Gwynedd Council is dominated by Plaid Cymru / The Party of Wales which has a marked sub-state and national multi-policy agenda platform (McAllister, 2001). The Council, in both its earlier formation as Gwynedd County Council and its current embodiment as unitary authority since 1996, has engaged in the continuous and nuanced development of language policy for more than 35 years.³ However, its role as a significant language policy actor has been at times fraught with tensions regarding the role of language within Plaid Cymru itself (Christiansen, 1998) in its attempts to adapt itself from being a party of protest to a party of power within increasingly devolved governance structures (Elias, 2009). On the other hand, there is evidence that the contiguous Isle of Anglesey County Council, since its inception in 1996, has not accorded a similar level of policy priority and Council-wide co-ordination to its internal or external language policy. This is largely explained due to the political control of the Council until 2011 by a number of localised and politically independent coalitions. Finally, the article alludes to the location and relevance of local language policy within the emerging substate political system, arguing that it is majorly dependent upon the power, governance and partnership relationships between local and *meso* actors. In situating this article, a brief outline is given of the incremental development of Welsh institutions during the past century and of the development of the Welsh language movement.

¹ The description of the first 20 years of Gwynedd County Council's language policy as 'pre-emptive', due partly to its being instigated before the onset of demonstrably relevant language legislation, is given elsewhere. See Carlin, 2013.

² See maps 2, 3 and 4.

³ For a discussion of Gwynedd County Council's extensive language policy respective of its responsibility for statutory education, see Wyn Williams, 2002 and Deacon, 2002.



Map 1: Percentage able to speak Welsh (Jones, 2012)

2 A 'long' Welsh century

Appropriating somewhat the Eric Hobsbawm's reference to a *short* 20th century, it can with confidence be argued that a *long* twentieth century can be invoked with regards the institutional 'creep' of increasingly Wales-relevant institutions from the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth (Carter, 1970; Deacon, 2002). Although officially sanctioned administrative devolution did not emerge in Wales until the inception of the Welsh Office in 1964, with executive and legislative devolution coming later, a gradual increase in functions increasingly populated the administration of public life (Griffiths, 1996). By the time, thus, that the Welsh Office came into existence, it did not do so in an institutional vacuum. For the best part of a century, therefore, no 'big bangs' in Welsh political life obtained but rather sustained institutional and administrative growth. Political communities may or may not coincide with the boundaries of a state, but self-ascribing nations may exert influence on *some* level of government, and the plurinational UK is no different in this aspect. Interpreted as a union state, the UK has sanctioned, and to some degree subsequently given free rein to the growth of cultural and administrative flexibility within its constituent nations (Wyn Jones, 2005: 29-30). In the case of Wales, in the absence of political institutions at the national level, local government took on significant substate symbolism (Carter, 1970: 49). The

‘flawed consociationalism’ of policy-making (Thomas, 1997: 338) which is attributed to the pre-devolution system became terrain to be negotiated by a multi-faceted language movement which comprised of both language pressure groups and policy communities seeking to extract concessions from government. This occurred specifically within the sphere of statutory education, as bilingual education has remained a constant desideratum emanating from a broad civil society lobbying front (Jones, 2000). Seen thus, bilingual education in Wales has grown in an organic rather than an overtly planned manner, with local government rather than the meso-state being the principal locus of decision-making in statutory education for the majority of the twentieth century (Fitz, 2000; Rawkins, 1979).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the incremental growth of Welsh medium education in North Wales in general had been championed by a number of influential politicians within the Labour Party, being the ruling party in the region (Ellis and Owens, 2002). However, the linguistic change agenda that Plaid Cymru brought about, in taking control of Gwynedd County Council in 1974 (see map 2), expanded an incremental language policy largely concentrated around statutory education into that of government administration. In this respect, it could be argued that this *modus operandi*, resulting in functional and institutional incrementalism throughout the 20th century, reflects the development of an ongoing form of elite accommodation within the Welsh polity until the onset of political devolution at the end of the century (Thomas, 1997). It is to the agency of local government within civil society in North-West Wales that the article now devotes itself. The following sections will focus mainly on policy impact upon the language of internal administration, and to a lesser extent, the degree to which local government in north-west Wales acknowledged the value of, and implemented, a wider language policy more specifically directed at the region’s communities.⁴

Gwynedd County Council (1974 – 1996)



Map 2: The eight Welsh County Councils between 1974 and 1996 showing (in bold) Gwynedd County Council

One way of analysing the development and implementation of the nuts and bolts of local language policy in north-west Wales is through seismic agenda shifts whereby equilibrium in relatively stable systems becomes punctured, leading to variance in the rate of both policy activism and change (John, 1998). Punctured equilibrium can lead to altered balances of power and changes in path dependencies. Local

⁴ Internal and external facets of local language policy in north-west Wales are dealt with more extensively in Carlin, 2014 (forthcoming).

government reorganisation is an example of such a punctured equilibrium or ‘big bang’, occurring twice in Wales over the past 40 years, in 1974 and in 1996 (Pemberton, 1999). This has given rise to favourable conditions under which increased policy activism, language included, can occur. County councils are thus significant political and social actors, freezing a set of political participants into the policy process and excluding others. Institutions will attempt and often succeed to create equilibrium after structural changes but some do not, as will be seen later in the case of the Isle of Anglesey County Council.

A note is required here on interview data, collected mostly in winter 2006. Scant literature exists on the language policy, not immediately related to statutory education, developed Gwynedd County Council and its successor, Gwynedd Council.⁵ The author is aware that institutional and political memory may depend considerably on the extent to which interviewees felt that they held a personal stake in event or policy outcomes, or indeed that memory can also be subject to significant silences (Fraser, 2012), yet the addition of an oral history record to that of secondary and grey literature seems opportune for a subject so sparsely researched even within Wales.

Following local government reorganisation in 1974, eight county councils and thirty seven smaller district councils were created in Wales (See Map 2). From a party political point of view, the new legislation providing for the reorganisation facilitated more robust party politics at local government level, lessened the number of independent councillors and put an end to the system of unelected aldermen. This legislative and institutional development concurred with a rise in Welsh nationalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s both locally and nationally (Edwards, 2011). It is this increase of sub-state nationalism, exemplified by the rise of Plaid Cymru, coupled with the Local Government Act of 1972, which was to harness the power of a new, expanded and much more powerful council. One result of this political and administrative confluence was a linguistic metamorphosis in the north-west which would be interpreted as a response to the fall in percentages of Welsh speakers in successive census returns between 1951 and 1971, where for example the percentage of Welsh speakers in Caernarfon County had fallen from 71.7% to 62.0% (Aitchison and Carter, 2000).

Within the council itself, although only 6 of the 60 councillors were elected on a Plaid Cymru ticket, a large number of the other councillors were in fact card-carrying members of the party and felt that changes needed to be effected in order to bolster the language in the region (Lewis, 2006: 159). This did not go unnoticed by a high-ranking Welsh Office representative, who upon being informed by the Chair of the Council that Gwynedd was an *apolitical* council, was reported to have replied ‘now, it’s strange that an *apolitical* council would choose committee members of the *same* party’ (Lewis, 2006: 165).⁶ According to Maldwyn Lewis who was the new council’s education portfolio holder, there was now an opportunity ‘to create the council with the strongest Welsh ethos that the country has ever seen by developing a revolutionary language policy’. (Lewis, 2006: 159).

The creation of Gwynedd through the restructuring of administrations and boundaries, as well as the electoral rise of Plaid Cymru in north-west Wales, led to an unrivalled political opportunity. Senior council politicians and officers could now induce the support of nationalist MPs on a raft of issues.⁷ However, the personal agency and interaction of both officers and elected members was key. An example of the former is that of Ioan Bowen Rees who left a local government position in South Wales to become chief executive of the new Council specifically because of the language policy which was being mooted. In the shadow year of 1973, he was key in ensuring that appointments to senior officer positions would require the ability to speak Welsh (Humphreys, 2000: 126). This was the first time that an elected authority in the UK with such a wide range of functions would make an unequivocal statement regarding the use of a non-statewide language, with Council minutes stating ‘it is anticipated that much of the work of Gwynedd County Council will be carried out through the medium of the Welsh language’. (Shadow Gwynedd County Council, 1973).

⁵ This may be partly due to intra-party tensions referred to later in this article.

⁶ Quotes from Lewis, 2006 are this author’s translations, as are quotations from all interviews. This is also the case for minuted council records and documentation where the original is in Welsh.

⁷ Plaid Cymru success at local government level was mirrored in the general election of October 1974.

A start was made in respect of the evolving language policy when the Plenary Committee changed overnight to Welsh along with simultaneous translation facilities for a minority of non-Welsh speakers. Key in these changes was the councillor Dafydd Orwig who was instrumental in bringing into existence the Bilingualism Subcommittee (Shadow Gwynedd County Council, 1973). Orwig is recorded to have stated its aim of '*planning for the victory of ideals*' (Lewis, 2006: 164), underpinning the sense of steeliness executed by dint of a hard-nosed pragmatism. During the period of the shadow council in 1973, this committee had already formed and focused firstly upon practical issues such as the setting up of a translation service due to the rapid change to council committees functioning in Welsh, as well as ensuring increased oral and written bilingual provision for the public.

Official council recognition of the implementation of this policy in the period between 1974 and 1996, however, is less than fully transparent. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, Wales in this period did not enjoy political devolution and thus, in the absence of a national language policy framework, the development of the Welsh language took on sectorial and localised dimensions (Edwards et al, 2011; Thomas, 1997). Gwynedd County Council had thus no significant national language policy drivers with which to base their local policy upon. Secondly, the issue of devolved powers for Wales has represented, until relatively recently, a faultline in the political landscape (Thomas and Taylor, 2006), with the importance accorded to the Welsh language as part of national identity and civil society constantly negotiated (Mann, 2006). In interview with a senior elected member of Gwynedd Council, such political accommodations were understood to be trade-offs among a raft of national Plaid Cymru priorities. In such a scenario, frustration was expressed at the perception that the policy priority the party traditionally accords to the Welsh language can at times prejudice attempts to widen the party's appeal to the largely populous English-speaking south-east Wales (Interview, 2006).⁸

It may be reasonably argued for this reason that Gwynedd County Council in this period was less than fully open about the cost involved in implementing its bilingual policy or the budget line needed for staff language skilling. For example, financial monitoring in 1987 reports on departmental language skilling costs but does not give a global spend (Gwynedd County Council, 1987). However, other reasons exist which hint at reasons for less than full disclosure. On recruitment, Council minutes are silent on language competence criteria required for designated posts, due to uncertainty and nervousness regarding a somewhat cryptic judgement⁹ involving the Council by the Employment Appeal Tribunal the previous year (McLeod, 1998) and recalled in interview by a senior executive officer as having exerted a restraining influence both upon the promotion of its language policy to the public at large as well as upon its sharing of language planning experience with other local government bodies (Interview, senior executive officer).¹⁰ 13 years after the onset of the council in 1974, hard data on the progress of staff attending language classes and their use of Welsh in the workplace as well as the amount of work being conducted through Welsh were unavailable, this despite Dafydd Orwig's own personal account of the Bilingualism Subcommittee's activity reporting that by 1995 staff language development courses were being rolled out and that data relating to language was being collected for the purposes of advertising and recruitment (Orwig, 1995). One thing is clear from this period: the internal language policy was piecemeal, cumulative and less than fully transparent, but for all that there was also a resolute and determined stance that the internal language of use could be changed to Welsh, but that due to national, political and local human resources considerations, time was needed to bring this to fruition.

Gwynedd's external language policy was driven by both the Bilingualism Subcommittee as well as by its obligations in statutory education. The Subcommittee met 64 times between 1973 and 1995, with 426 of the 456 items covered during this period dealing with efforts by the Council to promote the use of Welsh in Gwynedd and further afield (Orwig, 1995). Indeed, in the absence in this period of a national language planning body, the Bilingual Subcommittee could be regarded as taking upon itself the regulatory mechanisms of an unofficial Language Commissioner or Ombudsman. Not only did it request

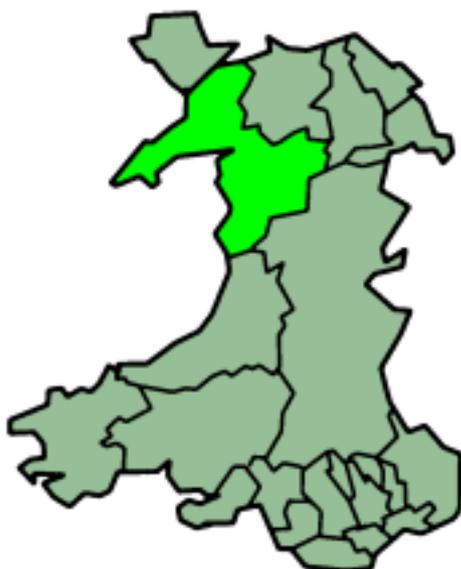
⁸ Interview, 01 November 2006.

⁹ In this case, knowledge of the non-statewide language was deliberated upon using race relations legislation and terminology.

¹⁰ 19 October 2006.

representatives from public, private and voluntary bodies located in north Wales to appear before it, but it also received representations from national bodies. The Subcommittee was a strident lobbyist in the campaign for a new Language Act (Orwig, 1995).¹¹ With the objective of securing a new Language Act,¹² the Council cannot be said to be acting in an ersatz national capacity only. Significant local actors felt that its *local* language policy required shoring up by robust *national* drivers.

Gwynedd Council (1996 –)



Map 3: The twenty-two unitary authorities in Wales showing (in bold) Gwynedd Council after 1996

Local government reorganisation in 1996 represents a second major puncture point which impacted significantly upon the gradualist yet discernible path dependency within which the emerging language policy evolved in Gwynedd over the previous twenty years. Structural changes resulted in a reduction of the Council's boundaries and population. Significantly, however, the percentage of Welsh speakers increased overnight to 69% as opposed to 61% in the larger Gwynedd County Council (Jones, 2012), with Plaid Cymru assuming political control of the Council. Despite reservations on the part of both officers and councillors (Caernarfonshire and Meirionethshire Council, 1995)¹³ due to remaining uncertainty regarding the possibility of litigation on employment and recruitment issues relating to language, significant changes occurred. At the heart of the new Council's policy was a statement to the effect that that internal administration would from now on be carried out in Welsh (Caernarfonshire and Meirionethshire Council, 1996), thus becoming the first UK county council of its kind to operate internally in a non-statewide language. The Council had noted in 1995 (Caernarfonshire and Meirionethshire Council, 1995) that the Commission for Racial Equality henceforth acknowledged that requesting knowledge of Welsh as a job requirement would not constitute racial discrimination. It is very likely that this development facilitated the Council's decision. Another decisive factor was the Welsh Language Act (WLA) 1993 (Edwards et al, 2011; Williams, 2007). Taking advantage of a neoliberalising promotion and service enablement discourse

¹¹ For example, under the heading of January 12, 1987, the Subcommittee considered 'the Chief Executive's response to the Language Bills of Dafydd Wigley [M.P.] and Lord Prys Davies'. Furthermore, on January 1990, the Welsh Language Board's draft language measure was discussed, with 'comments forwarded suggesting how it could be significantly strengthened'.

¹² On the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the status it conferred upon the Welsh language in the governance of Wales, see Williams, 2007.

¹³ This was the name of the shadow council of 1995-1996.

at the heart of the WLA – as opposed to a rights based discourse – the Council could now take advantage of the mechanism of an emerging national language implementation framework which could be used to legitimise Welsh as the official default internal language of administration. However, the significance of WLA 1993 in *Gwynedd* lay overwhelmingly in its post hoc legitimisation of what had been up to that point a semi-transparent and locally-derived overarching language policy which had begun twenty years earlier.

Change in 1996 did not occur completely smoothly. Union involvement – and concern – was noted at the time and that the foreknowledge of this revision to the policy led to a number of staff transferring to neighbouring councils (Caernarfonshire and Meirionethshire Council, 1995; interview with retired senior executive officer, 2006).¹⁴ The Leader of the Council in 2006, Richard Parry Hughes, stated in interview¹⁵ that this constituted a shock to the system, an example of which was the decision of the newly fashioned Language Subcommittee that the inclusion of a strapline in all recruitment advertisements stating that Welsh would constitute henceforth the default internal language of the Council would not be judicious, despite the council's Secretary and Solicitor confirming that the requirement was indeed legal (Gwynedd Council, 1996a).

Since 1996, however, a much more corporate understanding of mainstreaming responsibility for language policy has begun to emerge, and although the Language Committee had strategic oversight for the new language scheme emanating from the requirements of WLA 1993, the status of the scheme became strengthened when the Chief Executive was specifically mentioned as the officer par excellence charged, in connection with other senior officers, with the implementation of the scheme. Reference and engagement with language policy became a common occurrence in committees not previously directly engaged with the language policy. For example, the Social Services Committee recommended in 1996 that, with increasing use of voluntary agencies to undertake core council activities, external agency response to language choice should be more closely monitored (Gwynedd Council, 1996b). In its language scheme monitoring report for 2004, core services such as Town and Country Planning and Economy and Regeneration had incorporated linguistic criteria into 3rd party services (Gwynedd Council, 2003). These instances of a more holistic language policy radiating away from specific drivers within the institution strengthen the argument that an initial and gradual *legitimising* of the Welsh language, begun in the mid-70s, was now moving towards a stage whereby the language was being *institutionalised* (Williams and Morris, 2000). Indeed, a telling slip in a number of initial Language Subcommittee's minutes (Gwynedd Council, 1996c), whereby the desire was stated to match core language skill criteria within recruitment packs with national requirements hints at possible lack of dialogue, understanding and co-ordination between the Council and national language planning bodies. Simply put, no such consensuated national language skill criteria existed in 1996 or indeed currently exist.

Posts were subsequently designated as either 'bilingual essential' or 'bilingual desirable' and from a total of 1,330 of administrative and office staff, the following training needs were identified as of 1996:

¹⁴ 01 November 2006.

¹⁵ 01 November 2006.

Table 1: language training according to recognised need

Staff numbers	Required training	Percentage of staff (%)	Estimated cost (£)
43	Courses for learners	3	
90	Courses for advanced learners	7	
342	Training/support for Welsh speakers	26	
			37,500

Source: Gwynedd Council, 1996a

The significance of these figures lies not only in the stated data but also in what is revealed by their inverse, i.e. the vast majority, approximately 90% of the administrative and office staff was Welsh-speaking in 1996, compared to the general census population percentage in Gwynedd of 69% in that period. However, although it was estimated that a yearly cost for 30 replacement temporary posts would be needed (Gwynedd Council, 1996a), no figures are provided nor totals for in-class contact hours although the courses were for the most conducted internally for 10 weeks and the main spend seen in Table 1 is the post of internal language tutor.

By 2006, as the Plaid Cymru-controlled council (Gwynedd Council, 2012a) marked 10 years of the stated policy of implementing an internal administration in Welsh, Council data show that language support training for Welsh speakers had become increasingly disused as the vast majority of internal administrative work was being conducted through the medium of Welsh (Gwynedd Council, 2006a). Interview data with a senior elected member confirms that almost all internal electronic correspondence and memoranda were being created in Welsh, and all departmental heads were creating documentation in Welsh. The same informant, however, reported that some specialised formal reports originated in Welsh were taking time to become ‘institutionalised’.¹⁶ The nuancing carried by this data is reflected in the comments of a councillor who stated that officers were aware that the overwhelming majority of councillors actively supported the language policy and that this was a significant factor in their choice of language, even in cases where they would be called upon to draw up complex documentation requiring a corpus capacity that might stretch them.¹⁷

Monitoring in 2006 for those council staff learning Welsh had become more sophisticated, with a four language skills matrix developed and breakdowns across the four council directorates given (Table 2). Under the directorate ‘Care’, language skilling figures for both office-based and non-office based staff, were accounted for the first time and subsequently referred to in interview by a senior executive officer as representing a weak link in the edifice of an overarching language policy.¹⁸

¹⁶ 01 November 2006.

¹⁷ 26 October 2006.

¹⁸ 15 November 2006.

Table 2: language training in 2006 according to council function and location

	RESOURCES	ENVIRONMENT	DEVELOPMENT	CARE
Staff Total: 82	11	11	24	36
Office-based: 49	10	10	19	10
Non-office based: 31	1	1	4	25
Other: 2			1	1

Source: adapted from Gwynedd Council, 2006a

Figures across the Council for 2011 in Table 3 hint at consistency as regards the number of staff receiving language skilling with those of five and fifteen years previously and would suggest that the overall aim of achieving an internal administration in Welsh is being maintained.

Table 3: Number of staff receiving language skilling

	Jan – July 2011	Sept – Dec 2011
Total Learners – all staff	48	47

Source: adapted from Gwynedd Council, 2012b

It should be borne in mind that the language policy and connected budget spends are incurred by the Council itself, as internal language skilling is not a local government function which draws down national funding. To this extent, it is unsurprising that Gwynedd Council LPP expenditure was 0.2% of total authority expenditure in 2006 (Gwynedd Council, 2007). However, translation requirements are responsible for the the bulk of this percentage.

Internal administrative data unrelated to language skilling would seem to corroborate the direction of the language policy and the degree to which the stated aim of achieving Welsh as the ‘internal language of administration’ can be discerned. The Council Translation Unit gives us an insight. In 2007, for instance, 70% of documents which go forward to committee were translated into English, being drawn up originally in Welsh, whilst the corresponding figure of documents being drawn up originally in Welsh and going

straight to the public stood at 34% (Gwynedd Council, 2007). Seemingly, day to day email, memoranda and internal documentation is carried out in Welsh but that, as stated earlier, in the case of lengthier documentation for the public, this is still an ongoing ‘from legitimation to institutionalisation’ process, and that the *audience* receiving the documentation is key. Council officers are thus aware of the premium elected members place upon originating documentation in Welsh. However, an intervening variable in officers’ language choice in any given circumstance may be language corpus and grammar accuracy in those cases where documentation reaches the public without specialised language revision. This phenomenon would seem to warrant further enquiry.

Another mechanism shedding light on the efficacy of the internal language policy is that of recruitment monitoring. In 2003, 324 out of 327 posts advertised specified the language requirement, with subsequent monitoring explaining why the outstanding posts were not subject to this (Gwynedd Council, 2003). These data would seem to converge and confirm that the language policy regarding securing the vitality of internal administration in Welsh has been achieved. As a possible parallel development, the previous two-year in-post language skilling requirement set by the Council has been downgraded. While this requirement still exists, it now takes the form of a ‘progress meeting’ against language criteria expectations between employer and employee rather than a prescriptive approach.¹⁹ As of 2012, 94.8% of staff were stated to be able to speak Welsh (Gwynedd Council, 2012b).²⁰

The Council’s ability since 1996 to develop a more corporate and cross-departmental approach as well as an increased ability to ‘hook’ national language legislation, strategies and discourses onto local objectives in its internal language policy is also reflected in aspects of its external language policy.²¹ The main institutional differences to the pre-1996 external language policy arrangements are in the creation and coordination since 2006 of a regional multi-partner agency, chaired by the Council Leader and Corporate Director, and tasked with integrating and implementing projects designed to strengthen the Welsh language across North Wales. This agency uses the dedicated capacity of two Council officers with the aim of ‘promoting and strengthening the presence of the Welsh language and culture in everyday life whilst embracing diversity within society’ (Gwynedd Council, 2006b).²² In interview, the point was raised that the time has now come for the council to take a much more proactive approach to language planning in the socio-economic sphere, taking advantages of partnership working to ‘export’ the council’s vision across the region, an example being the Council’s issuing of language requirements upon third-party providers who maintain the A55 road running 140km across North Wales, as it is the Council which is tasked with lead responsibility (Interview, senior elected member, 2006).²³

With the *de facto* lead taken by Gwynedd Council on the North Wales regional multi-partner agency, a situation now exists whereby one committee deals with internal language policy and the other deals with the social use of Welsh in the community. This dual-focused approach has led to Council discussion around possible overlap of oversight responsibilities (Gwynedd Council, 2006c), yet this in itself would seem indicative that, since the inception of the nascent policy in 1974, the Council’s stewardship of questions regarding the use of Welsh in Gwynedd has become more legitimated, focused and overt. Given the ongoing devolution process, it is highly likely that national policy drivers over the past decade have emboldened Gwynedd Council to adopt a more transparent approach to local and regional language policy.

¹⁹ Although not corroborated, the reasons for this development may be associated firstly with the council’s perception that the internal language of administration is not now in doubt, and secondly there may be a perception within the Council that mandatory language skilling requirement for learners could be legally contestable. This latter point mirrors the uncertainty regarding the Council’s language policy during the 1980s when it faced a legal challenge on language requirements in the case of two staff members. See McLeod, 1998.

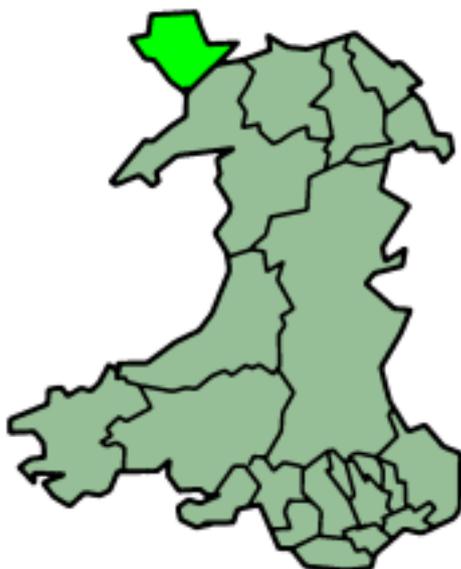
²⁰ This is an aggregate figure by the author from data given for individual council departments and units.

²¹ This article does not discuss the impact of Gwynedd Council’s language policy upon town and country planning considerations, which is dealt with elsewhere (see Carlin, 2014).

²² Author’s translation.

²³ 01 November 2006. Such partnership working brings into focus the relationship between language planning and the outworkings of the regulatory state.

Isle of Anglesey County Council



Map 4: The twenty-two unitary authorities in Wales showing (in bold) the Isle of Anglesey County Council

As argued above, Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council (see Map 4) offer insight into the linkages between attempts to plan for language use within administrative institutions and the political culture within which such planning becomes embedded. The latter council was controlled since its inception in 1996 by coalitions formed by non-national independent political groupings until 2011 when the Welsh Government intervened in the day-to-day governance of the Council after grave doubts were raised concerning the Council's capacity to deliver services and ensure local democracy (Welsh Government, 2012a).²⁴ Previous to 2011, multiple movement of councillor loyalty across groupings was endemic and described in interview thus by a senior executive officer at the council, '*they change their party more often than they change their shoes*'.²⁵

Upon local government organisation in 1996 therefore, from one large council two smaller councils emerge, the smallest of which is the Isle of Anglesey. In addition to borough council functions already on the island such as waste collection and libraries, more complex functions such as statutory education, transport and social services were added. As regards language use in the pre-1996 Council, interviews point to English being the language of internal communication.²⁶ Use of Welsh in committees depended on the particular Chair,²⁷ although 39 out of 40 councillors were Welsh speakers.²⁸ From 1990, however, a voluntary language policy was developed which included simultaneous translation in plenary Cabinet sessions, release from work to attend Welsh lessons, for example intensive but irregular classes for 50 staff members in 1991-2, as well as language support for Welsh speakers.²⁹ The language regime footprint of

²⁴ Although materially relevant to this article, a wider discussion on whether such party political subsystems are more vulnerable to deviations from full local accountability than regional, national or statewide political systems is not undertaken here.

²⁵ 17 November 2006

²⁶ Interview with senior executive officer, 13 November 2006.

²⁷ Interview with policy officer, 10 October 2006.

²⁸ Knowledge of Welsh on the island is recorded on census returns as 62% in 1991 (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 1996a).

²⁹ Interview with ex-policy officer, 09 November 2006; interview with senior executive officer, 17 November 2006.

Gwynedd County Council is noted to be a factor in these developments along with a small but influential number of Plaid Cymru councillors on the island.³⁰

Administrative and legislative factors transpired to stimulate language policy on the island upon reorganisation in 1996. Firstly, a substantial transfer of senior officers from Gwynedd County Council to the new unitary authority in Anglesey occurred, bringing with them institutional knowledge of the gradual implementation of a language policy which had been evolving in Gwynedd for more than 20 years, and this ‘bounced effect’ would benefit language policy implementation in Anglesey until approximately 2000. Secondly, the WLA 1993 put the hitherto voluntary policy on a statutory footing and, indeed, Anglesey became the first unitary council to prepare a language scheme according to the new legislation, in which the bold yet cryptic declaration was made: ‘Welsh will be the main internal language of administration of the Council’ (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 1996a). The WLA 1993 would then be used as both a discursive and operational hook with which to develop the voluntary development which had occurred between 1990 and 1996. A small but effective group of councillors, closely aligned to Plaid Cymru, would work with a number of senior officers in the development of the new policy: ‘It would often be the case that Officer X would prepare the bullets, and Councillor Y would fire them’.³¹

Although significant changes were to follow in the following years, nevertheless deep structural transformation in the realisation of Welsh as the main language of Council administration has not occurred, with the Language Scheme of 2012 echoing somewhat the institutional diglossia of its predecessor in 1996:

Staff shall be encouraged to use Welsh in communicating with one another

orally and in writing. However, members of the Council’s staff will have a right to work through the medium of Welsh or English insofar as that is consistent with this Scheme and does not substantially impair the effectiveness of internal communications (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 2012: 9).

In 1996, however, the language of the senior management team changed overnight as the majority of those on this team had transferred from Gwynedd County Council, heading up functions such as education and social services.³² A similar transformation from English to Welsh occurred in the Council Executive and this had a positive effect both upon the language use of councillors but mainly upon other senior officers those who felt unsure of their linguistic abilities in Welsh.³³ As regards administrative staff globally, an internal 1996 linguistic skills audit (Table 4) revealed the following data at the Council headquarters in Llangefni, revealing a council whose staff was overwhelmingly Welsh speaking:

Table 4: Isle of Anglesey Council Linguistic Audit (figures in brackets represent staff numbers)

Department	Number of Staff	Spoken Welsh (%)	Written Welsh (%)
Leisure and Heritage	104	71 (74)	66 (69)
Education	38	100 (38)	100 (38)

³⁰ Interviews, 10 October and 09 November 2006.

³¹ Interview with ex-policy officer, 09 November 2006.

³² Interview with policy officer, 10 October 2006.

³³ interview with senior executive officer, 13 November 2006.

Highways and Technical Services	23	74 (17)	70 (16)
Planning and Economic Development	56	89 (50)	64 (36)
Finance	80	74 (59)	59 (47)
Central Services	49	88 (43)	84 (41)
Chief Executive	8	100 (8)	100 (8)
Social Services	108	85 (91)	74 (80)
Public Protection	46	85 (39)	72 (33)
Housing and Property	97	90 (87)	87 (84)
Total	614	83 (506)	74 (452)

Source: Isle of Anglesey County Council, 1996.

However, it became manifest towards the end of the 1990s that the implementation of the language scheme was beginning to follow the underlying rationale of the majority of unitary authorities' language plans in Wales, that is, concentrating – on the whole – on bilingual services for the public rather than the connected objective of gradually impacting upon the internal administrative language of the council. This was the positioning of the majority of elected members of the newly-established Bilingualism Policy Subcommittee who rejected from very early on two significant reports from the office of the Central Services Director (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 1996b; 1996c) on how a gradual strategy could be put in place to achieve an internal administration functioning in Welsh. A senior policy officer framed the systemic inability to take forward the expectation inherent in the language scheme of 1996 by reference to the fragile and fissile nature of the island's internal politics, leading in turn to a lack of strategic direction and institutional uncertainty.³⁴ Another senior officer described this in the following manner: 'politically, there was a huge deficit of vision – a golden opportunity to make a difference as well as lead nationally was squandered'.³⁵ A linguistic mosaic now obtains across the council, with monitoring reports in the early period (e.g. Isle of Anglesey County Council, 2000) giving a vivid snapshot of departments linked with directors transferring from Gwynedd implementing steps which could lead to the gradual institutionalisation of Welsh contraposed with those departments which barely give a nod to the legitimisation of the language as an internal vehicle of communication (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 2001). Seen globally, the lack of political engagement by the Council's Bilingualism Policy Subcommittee in the intervening years has resulted in the Language Scheme being 'parked'.³⁶

³⁴ 06 November 2006.

³⁵ 09 November 2006

³⁶ Interview with senior executive officer, 06 November 2006.

In recognition that there were significant obstacles from within the Bilingualism Policy Subcommittee, a number of elected members succeeded in 2004 in commissioning an external language consultancy to conduct a comprehensive review of, and recommendations for, the council's language scheme. Although the Council subsequently initiated a Language Task Group, in 2010 however, it was reported that:

the status, role and remit of the Language Task Group is currently being reviewed ... it was resolved to set the membership of the group on a strategic level within the organisation in order to ensure it has the necessary influence.' (Isle of Anglesey County Council, 2011: 11-12)

This would suggest that this Group has not at any stage had strategic oversight of the language policy. The stated aim, thus, of Welsh being the main language of work has since atrophied in a council where the overwhelming majority of officers and elected members speak Welsh.

Concerning the societal use of Welsh in the community, political and institutional engagement with language policy would seem to mirror that of the hesitancy within Council walls. In forging links between language use on the one hand and socioeconomic and social regeneration on the other, Council intervention and partnership activity is criticised for stalling between policy rhetoric and implementation as well as for attaching itself *post hoc* to initiatives instigated by the community, with unfavourable comparisons made with external language partnership activity over the Menai strait in Gwynedd.³⁷ Within the Council itself, the relatively small size of the unitary authority is listed as an influencing factor in its capacity to be constantly proactive across the substantial range of services delivery.³⁸ In reference to various stalled attempts to develop a multi-agency Language Forum on the island led by the Council, uncertainty was expressed at taking a dominant lead³⁹ whilst a senior elected member was unsure of the priority that the Council should accord the Forum, noting that 'we don't want to be seen holding the baby'.⁴⁰ With a hinterland of uncertainty borne of the incapacity of an overwhelmingly local, i.e. non-national, system of political parties on the island to take forward the aims of successive Language Schemes, it is unclear whether Council-wide governance intervention by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2011 will result in a refocusing on core aims of the Council's language policy.

3 Conclusion

This article brings into focus the relationship, in one specific policy area, between regional party politics linked to substate and state politics on the one hand and localised political systems on the other: that of local language policy. Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council offer themselves as particularly apposite cases for comparison for a number of reasons. Firstly, a wide range of local government services now administered by both councils formed part of a larger Gwynedd County Council between 1974 and 1996. The two current councils are territorially contiguous but also shared local government functions during this period. Secondly, Gwynedd County Council was to witness a gradual and deliberate linguistic institutional transformation when a core group of elected members, influenced heavily by Plaid Cymru, in tandem with senior executive officers approving of the policy's direction, resolved to a nation-building change agenda writ local which would be supported by other councillors and Council officers. With this aim, both the former Council and the current Gwynedd Council harnessed national legislation and strategies in the coming decades to legitimise its local policies. Seen thus, the local party political system in Gwynedd Council, seen through the paradigm of local language policy, bear witness to the continuing interplay between emerging visions of democratic claims around identity. Conversely, despite the early confidence and vitality surrounding the Language Scheme developed by a

³⁷ For example, interview with senior executive officer at an Anglesey-based regeneration and training provider, 15 November 2006.

³⁸ Interview with senior executive officer, 06 November 2006; interview with senior elected member, 06 November 2006.

³⁹ Interview with senior policy officer, 24 October 2006.

⁴⁰ Interview, 03 November 2006.

nucleus of Isle of Anglesey County Council elected members and officers, this unfolding dynamism soon evaporated in the face of disinterest and lassitude on the part of political leadership within the Council unable or unwilling to make strident steps towards fully legitimising the place of Welsh within both Council institutional life and the wider socioeconomic fortunes of the island. From a wider national perspective, it remains to be seen whether language policy mechanisms developed in Gwynedd over the past 40 years will contribute to, and exercise synergies in, developing a conceptual and institutional platform for the Welsh Government's vision (Welsh Government, 2012b: 14) regarding the increased use of the Welsh language.

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