The influence of social and social psychological factors on the intergenerational transmission of Welsh

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- **The views expressed in this paper are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.**

- **In collaboration with Statiaith and Arad Research.**

- **Full report: http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-language-transmission-use-in-families/?skip=1&lang=en**

- The project aimed to:
  - Examine the patterns of Welsh language transmission and use in families with children between 0 and 4 years old across Wales; and to
  - increase our understanding of the factors influencing those patterns.

- Welsh-language policy context:
  - *A Living Language: a Language for Living* (Welsh Government 2012).
  - *Moving Forward* (Welsh Government 2014).
 - *Consultation on a Welsh Government Draft Strategy: A Million Welsh Speakers by 2050* (Welsh Government 2016).

- 'Bilingual mothers rear monolingual English children because the encouragement, even pressures, for that language generally are stronger and more widespread than the corresponding support and facilities fostering bilingualism in Wales' (Harrison et al. 1981, p. 61).

- Lack of confidence in Welsh among some parents (Harrison et al. 1981; Bellin 1994).

- Tensions over the use of Welsh in some linguistically exogamous families (Harrison et al. 1981; Bellin 1994; Lyon 1996; Bellin & Thomas 1996).

- Intergenerational language donation rather than transmission (Lyon 1996; Evas 1999).

- The role of the Welsh-speaking caregiver on early language socialisation (Jones & Morris 2005, 2007).

- Transmission of Welsh tends to be an unconscious decision for couples who are both from primarily Welsh-speaking backgrounds (Gathercole et al. 2007).

Wales: % of children aged 3 to 4 who can speak Welsh, by household type
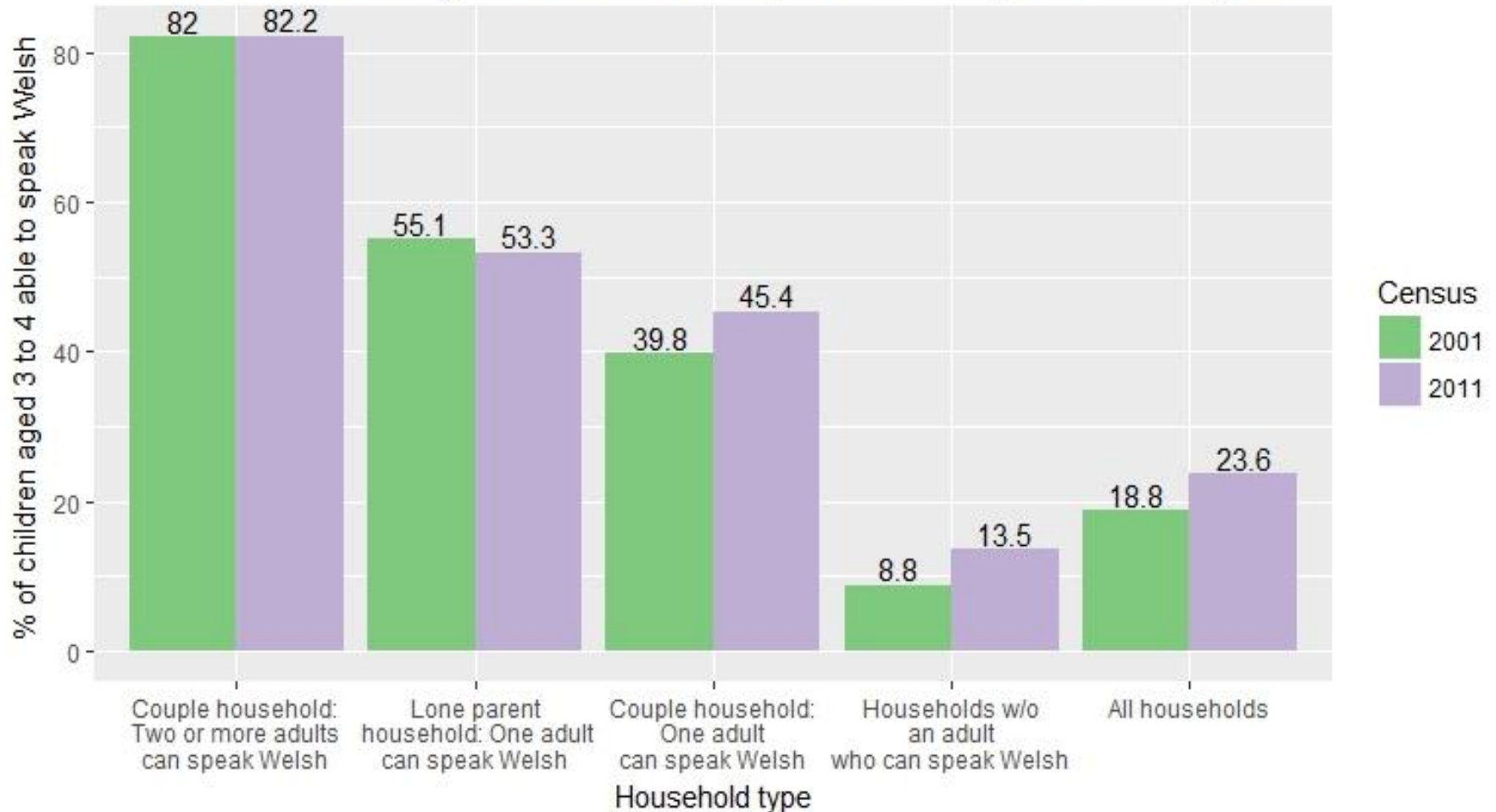
1. What are the conditions that facilitate Welsh language transmission within families, and the conditions that make Welsh language transmission less likely?

2. What are the conditions that influence patterns of Welsh language use within families with children in the 0-4 age group?

- Mixed-methods approach comprising:
  - Quantitative analysis of questionnaire data, incorporating social psychological approaches (*Theory of Planned Behaviour*, e.g. Ajzen 1991).
  - Qualitative thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data.

- 60 main caregivers of children aged 0-4 from north west and south east Wales (note that the study does not present an areal comparison of these areas).

- 32 questionnaires returned by partners (where applicable).

- Recruitment through schools and National Survey of Wales respondents.

Methodology: Sample

- **Majority of main respondents were women (*n*=51).**

- **Respondents aged 20–45.**

- **All of the main respondents reported being able to speak Welsh.**

- **47% of partners reported ability in Welsh.**

Map data ©2017 Google

- **Intention to act is preceded by:**
  - attitude towards the behaviour
  - subjective (or social) norms
  - perceived behavioural control (PBC).

- **Adapted TPB measures presented as seven-point Likert items.**

- **Stepwise regression in SPSS.**
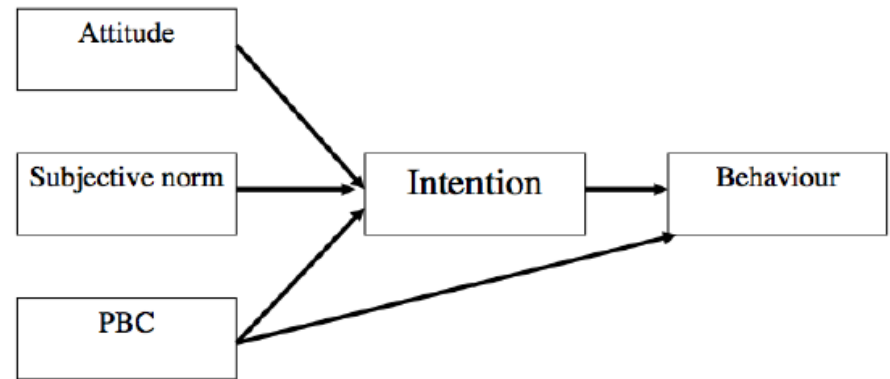
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991)

- Coding of qualitative data:
  - The respondent's language use and attitudes towards Welsh in childhood.
  - The respondent's current language use with extended family, and in their social networks and wider community.
  - The family's current linguistic behaviour in the home.
  - Discussions with partner, extended family, and/or external agencies regarding language use in the home prior to the birth of the child and during early childhood (if applicable).

- Thematic analysis based on these codes.

Results: Quantitative Analysis

- Almost always speaking Welsh with children:
    - 42 per cent of main respondents (*n*=25).
    - 33 per cent of partners (*n*=11).

- Strong correlation between Welsh language background and transmission:
    - *r*=0.70 (*p*<0.01) for main respondents.
    - *r*=0.76 (*p*<0.01) for partners.

- Stepwise regression model with psychological variables only (R^2 = 58%):
    - Welsh language habit (β=-0.36, t=-1.97, p=0.06).
    - Welsh language identity (β=-0.27, t=-1.74, p=0.09).

- Regression modelling with social and psychological variables:
    - Parent's gender (β=-0.37, t=-2.08, p=0.05).
    - Language background (β=-0.42, t=-2.79, p=0.01).
    - Region (β=-0.57, t=-3.90, p<0.001).

- Final regression modelling containing all variables (R^2 = 88%):
    - No variables reach significance at p=0.05.

- **The transmission of Welsh to children as an unconscious behaviour by respondents:**

'Mae bob dim yn fy mywyd i wedi bod drwy'r Gymraeg—mae fy addysg i wedi bod trwy'r Gymraeg, ac wedyn mae fy ngwaith i wedi bod trwy'r Gymraeg, ac mae fy ngŵr i'n Gymraeg, mae fy mhlant i'n Gymraeg felly dydi hi ddim yn rhywbeth dwi wedi gwneud yn 'conscious' er mwyn cael gwaith... mae jyst wastad wedi bod yna'.

'Everything in my life has been through Welsh—my education has been through Welsh, and then my work has been through Welsh and my husband is Welsh-speaking so it isn't something I've done consciously in order to get work...it's just always been there'.

—Mother, Gwynedd.

- Increasing the use of English in a Welsh-speaking home:

'Dwi'n meddwl fod o'n bwysig bo' nhw'n siarad Saesneg hefyd achos mae'r gymdeithas fel mae hi yn ddwyieithog so yr unig anfantais dwi'n teimlo bo' fi di gael ydi bo fi ddim yn *confident* yn siarad Saesneg'.

'I think it's important that they also speak English because society as it is bilingual so the only disadvantage I feel that I've had is that I don't feel confident speaking English'.

—Mother, Anglesey.

- **Discussions about transmission in a linguistically exogamous family:**

'I gychwyn roedd o'n meddwl ei fod o'n syniad bendigedig bod yn siarad Cymraeg ac wedyn...doedd o ddim yn hoffi'r syniad bod ei [blentyn] o a fi a'i [sibling] yn mynd i fod yn siarad mewn iaith na fasa fo ddim yn deall...oedd o'n hoffi'r syniad ond fel oedd y gwirionedd yn dod yn agosach doedd o ddim yn hoff iawn o'r syniad o gwbl'.

'To start with he thought it was a great idea speaking Welsh and then...he wasn't keen on the idea that his [child] and me and his [sibling] are going to be speaking in a language he didn't understand...he liked the idea but when it came to it he didn't like the idea at all'.

—Mother, Gwynedd.

- The transmission of English as an unconscious behaviour:

'If you don't speak Welsh at home, which we didn't, when you have a child, it tends to be that you don't even think about the language…. When they start school, then you make a decision. If you're not used to speaking [Welsh], English is the default setting'.

—Father, Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- Intergenerational language donation:

'Even before I was pregnant I've always said that I wanted my children to go to a Welsh school and my partner has always known that'.

—Mother, Caerphilly.

- Partners openly opposed to Welsh language

'My ex-partner did not want the children to go to a Welsh school whatsoever. Completely and utterly against it. So obviously, that's a massive barrier to begin with...'.
—Mother, Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- Increasing the use of Welsh in the home when the child goes to a Welsh-medium school:

'[My] confidence in Welsh is building. I really enjoy it, it's all still in there. I use more Welsh with them'.

—Father, Anglesey.

'[Language use] is probably 90% English. I'll ask her of a morning if she wants *dŵr* (water) or *llaeth* (milk)'.

—Mother, Caerphilly.

- Lack of confidence in Welsh (often linked to lack of opportunity for use) and perceived negative experiences:

'I probably get a bit flustered [speaking Welsh], I think if I used it a lot more it would come more natural again but I think [daughter] tests me when she's asking me constantly 'what's this in Welsh?' and for the life of me, I'm thinking, eh?'

—Mother, Caerphilly.

'When you speak to them they look at you as if to say, you're not even speaking proper Welsh'.

—Father, Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- Intergenerational language transmission tended to be an unconscious behaviour except in couples where one respondent spoke Welsh (and came from a Welsh-speaking family) and their partner did not.

- Intergenerational language *donation* was considered both prior to birth and/or during early years by most of the respondents who had acquired Welsh through Welsh-medium education.

- Social factors (e.g. linguistic background) seem to be more influential than psychological factors (e.g. attitudes towards Welsh).

- Respondents tended to label language use as either Welsh or/English, though some respondents did note using both (possible limitation in research design).

- Formulaic Welsh used by many respondents who had acquired Welsh through Welsh-medium education once their child had started school.

- Barriers to using more Welsh with their children include:
  - Lack of confidence in Welsh or perceived negative experiences
  - Perceived lack of opportunity to use Welsh since leaving school.

- Observational research of language use among both parents and children in the home.

- Longitudinal studies of Welsh speakers, especially after leaving Welsh-medium education (cf. linguistic *mudes*, Pujolar and Gonzàlez 2013).

- Application of Theory of Planned Behaviour measures to both transmission and other aspects of linguistic behaviour using a larger sample.

- We recommend that initial teacher education and professional learning provision include opportunities for trainees and staff to develop a social psychological approach to positively encourage the use of the Welsh language amongst people who can, but do not use Welsh.

- We recommend that (1) a mapping exercise be undertaken to better understand current levels of provision of opportunities for adults who since leaving Welsh-medium schools have had limited opportunities to use the Welsh language (2) a scoping exercise be undertaken to ascertain what models of school-community outreach exist in non-language-related fields. The suitability of adapting these models to provide opportunities for Welsh-speaking parents who do not routinely use the language to be reintroduced to active language use should be explored.

- We also recommend that (3) potential mentoring initiatives between parents of differing Welsh language ability at Welsh-medium schools are explored and (4) further consideration be given to how work on 'linguistic assertiveness' could help less confident speakers of Welsh use their language skills. The findings of this work should feed directly into new initiatives to encourage the use of Welsh among adults who may wish to use the language more regularly.

Diolch yn fawr!

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