

CFA23 Iaith

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol |
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Cymraeg i bawb? | Cymraeg for all?

Ymateb gan: Iaith | Evidence from: Iaith

1. What are the main barriers that prevent wider use of the Welsh language in areas with fewer Welsh speakers, and what might help to change this?

Welsh speakers tend to use English rather than Welsh with people whom they do not know and people who do not demonstrate their ability / willingness to speak Welsh or understand others who speak Welsh. This is true for all parts of Wales, but in areas with fewer Welsh speakers, those who do speak Welsh tend not to assume that people whom they do not know can speak / understand Welsh.

IAITH was part of LISTEN, an Erasmus+ European project aimed at developing linguistic confidence among speakers of minority languages. The premise of the project was that speakers of minority languages adjust their behaviour by resorting to the use of the majority language and avoiding the use of their own language. In our experience, we see that this applies to Welsh speakers in all areas of Wales.

We understand that adjustments to the behaviour of Welsh speakers and speakers of other minority languages are an example of linguistic submissiveness. Submission means that people prevent themselves (spontaneously) from behaving in a certain way as a result of habit, or fear of being punished. Linguistic submissiveness occurs when people stop speaking their own language and switch to the other language, even when no one has asked them to do so. There are several types of linguistic submissiveness. They can all cause anxiety for the speaker and often induce a sense of failure and helplessness.

In response to challenges around the lack of Welsh language use, and based on the lessons learned from the LISTEN project, IAITH has developed training that builds on the concept of Language Assertiveness (*Cadernid Iaith*).

2. What sort of spaces and opportunities might encourage greater use of, and increase confidence in, the use of the language in areas where day-to-day use of the language is limited?

We must use the Welsh language to create Welsh spaces or opportunities to encourage greater use of the language. By focusing on spaces or opportunities, we potentially overlook the role of speakers themselves. Similarly, perceptions regarding areas with fewer Welsh speakers, or areas with more Welsh speakers, disregard the role of speakers themselves and the variety of linguistic skills and methods of acquisition that characterise the profiles of Welsh speakers today. In this regard, we must place a greater focus on speakers themselves, as opposed to surmising that certain spaces are linked to the use of the Welsh language, or that opportunities are required to use the Welsh language. Every interaction is an opportunity to use the Welsh language. Understanding this is key to understanding the inertia of speakers of minority languages.

Based on training conducted throughout Wales, we are bored of hearing stereotypical views that people from X speak better Welsh, that a speaker's Welsh is not 'good enough', or that there is no Welsh spoken in Y. These stereotypes are linked to the geographical imagination of the Welsh language, or policy and language planning efforts that disengage speakers from the Welsh language through the use of a geographical framework (or opportunities or spaces). Language Assertiveness shows us that it is possible to intervene directly in speakers' language use. Our contention is that language use is what characterises a space or opportunity in which greater use of the language is encouraged. Every space or event is an opportunity to use the Welsh language.

3. Can you share examples of successful initiatives or activities that have encouraged Welsh language use in areas where use of the language is limited?

IAITH offers workshops and training based on the concept of Language Assertiveness. We have conducted our training with prominent organisations that operate through the medium of Welsh and in the education and early years sectors, including nurseries, secondary schools, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Cyngor Gwynedd, Mudiad Meithrin, mentrau iaith and others. People living all over Wales have taken part in this training. While the linguistic behaviour of individuals varies according to their values, habits and levels of language assertiveness, there is a tendency among those who live in areas with a lower density of Welsh speakers to refrain from trying out their Welsh language skills in contexts where they do not know the other individuals (when out shopping, for example). We have received positive feedback from these sessions, including many examples of individuals who have started to change their language habits. We have developed a barometer to measure the impact of our training on the language use and assertiveness of attendees.

4. How could technology and digital tools help to increase the use of the Welsh language, especially among those who use the language infrequently or who lack confidence?

5. What impact, in your view, do cultural events such as national Eisteddfodau or Welsh language festivals have on Welsh language use, particularly in areas with fewer Welsh speakers?

To echo the answer given to question 2 above, there is a risk that events or spaces of this kind reinforce the perception of a divide between spaces or events in which the Welsh language belongs and, on the other hand, events and spaces in which there is no opportunity to use the Welsh language.

6. How might these events (whether large or small in size) be adapted or improved to better serve communities with fewer Welsh speakers?

We note, based on research carried out by IAITH on behalf of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board, that Welsh-speaking frontline staff do not necessarily greet members of the public in a way that invites customers / users to use their Welsh (speaking / understanding). Based on our experience, individuals who provide / organise services and events require language assertiveness training in order to improve their understanding of their language habits and change / modify their language use. Service users / event attendees require the same training.

7. Are there any other matters you would like to draw to the Committee's attention about the Welsh Government's approach to supporting the Welsh language in areas with fewer Welsh speakers?
