Minority language communities, technology and social networks

Daniel Cunliffe – University of South Wales
Digital Language Vitality

• Digital fitness
  – Connectivity, digital literacy, keyboard…

• Digital presence and use
  – Presence and use of digital media, production, social media…

• Digital performance
  – Range of things that can be done using the language - prestige, authority, identity…
## Digital Ascent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thriving</strong></td>
<td>extensive digital use by both native and foreign speakers and well supported with software resources from both Apple and Microsoft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vital</strong></td>
<td>digital use by native speakers, but lacking software support from Apple and Microsoft</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emergent</strong></td>
<td>community use of texting and social media, digital use mainly private and informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latent</strong></td>
<td>digital ascent is still possible, but not currently evident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Heritage   | there are archived digital materials for the language, but no current digital communication by native speakers                               |
| Still      | there is no observed digital use of the language and digital use is very unlikely to occur in the future                                        |

Social Media Benefits

• New domain for language use
  – Particularly for written language

• Connects speakers
  – Low speaker density, mobility, diaspora

• Affective benefits
  – Modern, cool, appeals to young people
Decreasing share of voice

• “…new media, including broadcast media and the Internet, usually serve only to expand the scope and power of the dominant language at the expense of endangered languages.”

(UNESCO, 2003, p11)

• Increased share of majority voice in traditional media
• Increased share of majority voice in digital media
• Increased share of majority voice in social media

• Multiply the share of voice of the majority language

• Penetration into the home and social sphere
• Increasingly personal, increasingly on!

Necessary conditions

- Grin argues for a language to be used, people must have:
  - The **capacity** to speak the language
  - written form, read and write
  - The **opportunities** to do so
  - digital literacy, affordable, low technology barriers… perceived as opportunity
  - The **desire** to use the language
  - desire to use social media

There isn’t anything stopping us from using Welsh on the web, we’re just lazy. We can’t be bothered to speak Welsh.

...after we leave school every computer we see will be in English. If we learn how to do things in Welsh it will be more difficult to do things in English, because we wouldn’t understand what the words say.
Desire: Twitter

• Connect with others (37.9% of responses)
• Curiosity (33.6%)
• Share information (22.5%)
• Business/work related (22.5%)
• …
• Welsh community (4.7%)
  – The respondent made specific reference to using Twitter to connect with, or share information about, the Welsh cultural community, including (but not limited to) the Welsh language.
Opportunity: Language Policy

“while SNS are sometimes seen as unregulated spaces, they in fact represent highly regulated linguistic environments…” de Bres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderators</td>
<td>Moderated space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM platform providers</td>
<td>SM platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government etc.</td>
<td>It varies…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ukraine's Poroshenko to block Russian social networks

Thailand backs off lese-majeste Facebook ban threat
Opportunity: Expectation

• Respondents were asked how many tweets they expected to read and write in Welsh before they started using Twitter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>No idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Indicates the extent to which Welsh language use online has become normalised and is expected to be used in new online domains.
Opportunity: Social Proof

- Mentrau Iaith Cymru identified factors which Welsh speakers believed inhibited the use of Welsh in social media, these included:
  - a lack of Welsh-language content on social media as compared to English language content;
  - other Welsh speakers lack of use of the language on social media, particularly lack of use by famous or influential Welsh speakers;

<<When I joined Facebook, some of my Welsh friends were there, and only they were there, so I spoke Welsh with them and it’s carried on.>>

Schematic language choice model for Frisian and Dutch on social media

Jongbloed-Faber, L. (2015) Friezen op sosjale media. Translation provided by Lysbeth Jongbloed-Faber
Audience

• Welsh, Frisian, Irish…

• Generally the intended audience appears to be the single biggest determiner of language choice across social media platforms among those who use minority languages.

• Probably under-reports those who simply choose not to use it.

Individuals

- Individuals tend to speak just one language with another individual and do not change according to the medium of communication.
- Specific (known) audience – more likely to be in shared minority language
- Language use on SNS an extension of language use in people's daily lives.
Wider audiences

- Wide, general audience – more likely to be in majority language
  - Original tweets, status updates…

- Likelihood increases as perceived proportion of minority language speakers in the audience falls…
  …share of voice influences production as well as consumption

- Desire to reach a wider (international) audience
- Not wishing to appear rude – language politeness
- Majority language default when minority language proficiency not known

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Audience on Facebook

<<It depends on what language I would usually use with them in school and around.>>

<<It depends if their first language is Welsh or English. If they usually speak Welsh in their home with their parents, I’ll write in Welsh to them, so that if their parents see it, they know that they still speak Welsh with me. If they usually speak English, as a first language, I’ll speak English with them.>>

<<It depends who are the majority of people who need to understand it.>>
Choice on Twitter

• To direct to a specific audience (54.1% of responses)
  "If I want to connect with another person who speaks Welsh."

• Topic-related (42.6%)
  "If the tweet were relative to the Welsh language, culture or media; sometimes if related to other Celtic languages or linguistics. I’ll occasionally tweet in Welsh if it’s related to my current location in Wales, such as my hometown, university, or the weather."

• Tweeting in Welsh feels natural (13.1%)
  "Welsh is my natural language, it feels odd to tweet my ideas/thoughts/comments in English."
Different SM Platforms

• Jongbloed-Faber observed differences in the likelihood of Frisian being used on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, suggesting that the platforms support different types of audience and ties.

• Many Welsh-speakers appear relatively unconcerned that their Welsh-language content uploaded to YouTube may be viewed by non-Welsh-speakers.

  “This is a short clip of the beginning of our GCSE Drama performance. If you don’t understand the language its because its welsh.”

• Might in part be due to the less critical role of language in the predominantly audio-visual nature of YouTube content.

Jongbloed-Faber, L. (2015) Friezen op sosjale media.
The Network

- People create their own audience and choose which audiences to be a part of.
- To some extent, and not necessarily deliberately, they control share of voice.
Social networks

«I would say, even though we are in school with each other all day, we just speak with us! We have other friends who we’ve known over the years, but most of the time, we keep in touch with our closest friends.»

«People I know from school. People in my year who I like, but if I don’t like them I don’t add them. Also, because I used to live in America, I have lots of friends over there.»
Share of voice

• The groups in which Welsh was used had more than double the proportion of Welsh speakers than the general population.
Our Facebook is a Welsh section of the Internet, where our friends speak Welsh.

You have Welsh groups, so you are encouraged to speak Welsh. I think there are much more Welsh speaking people on it.

Apart from Facebook, there aren’t a lot of websites that have Welsh.

MSN and hotmail are in English, Twitter is in English...
Respondents (n=240) were asked if they were more or less likely to follow someone on Twitter if that person tweeted entirely or mainly in Welsh.

- 32.9% would be ‘much more likely to follow them’.
- Networks of Welsh speakers with relationships that cut across the boundaries of friendship and Interest-based networks.
- Networks with more Welsh speakers than would otherwise expect to be the case – greater share of voice.
Twitter conversations among top 500 Tweeters in Irish and Welsh

Conjecture

• If we can influence the network…
  we can influence the share of voice…

• If we can influence the share of voice…
  we can influence the use of the minority language.
The Network

- Social influence.
- Role of recommender algorithms.
- Building networks.
- Aggregating content.
- Creating ghettos.
Dyddlyfr y Bachan Main: Mwynglawdd 'Cymro'. Colorado ac Arizona.

Cyhoeddwyd ar 17 Mai 2017 gan Y Bachan Main

Pwt arall a ddodwyd gennyf ar y fforwn "Enwau Ileoedd":
"Enwa Cympreb a Chymyre Dymoran:
Ar bwyrs Central City, S wydd Gilpin, Colorado, bu mwynglawdd o 'Cympreb'.

"Er ei fod yn prospector prifyddol (= George Griffiths), ac wedi darganfod y
mwynglawdd "Cympreb", "Wales" a "Bangor" yn wydd Gilpin, nid oedd yn deall nwy
amddarganfoddiadau y tro hwn." Hanes Cympreb Colorado. Evan Williams. Denver, 1889

Fodd hynny, mae'r "Rocky Mountain Directory and Colorado Gazette For 1874" yn yr
am James R. Jones fel darganfodwyr y wythien.

http://www.blogiadur.com/hafan/
http://ffrwti.com/
Ghettos

• Lackaff and Moner argue that there may be a benefit in creating exclusively minority-language social media platforms
  – a sufficient number of speakers
  – speakers who are used to operating across a range of different social media platforms.

Lackaff, D. and Moner, W.J. (2016). Local languages, global networks: Mobile design for minority language users
Ghettos

https://maes-e.com/
https://www.clecs.cymru/
Conclusions

• Technology acts as a multiplier for the majority language share of voice.
• Share of voice in a social network influences consumption of the minority language, but also its production.
• It may be possible to increase minority language use by increasing the share of voice in particular spaces within social media.
END
Peer Policy

Aaron Ramsey @aaronramsey · 8 Jun 2015
Un fiwyddyn heddw ❤️

Liam @LiamJPMc · 8 Jun 2015
Replying to @aaronramsey
@aaronramsey English plz

siadtsujkm @MkJustSaid · 8 Jun 2015
Replying to @aaronramsey
@aaronramsey gxjib ncsaydyy

Forever World Tails @Bielik · 8 Jun 2015
Replying to @MegatronAFC
@MegatronAFC @aaronramsey it's welsh Imao it literally is just random gibberish the entire language

362 994 2.9K
Peer Policy
Moderator Policy

Peace in Ireland message board manager posted:

“This board is designed for English speakers and Gaelic postings are not allowed [...] posts in Gaelic [even with an English translation] will be removed without further recourse to the person who posted it.”

WalesOnline. Businesses banned from advertising in Welsh on Twitter prompting complaints from firms. 19 August 2015, http://www.walesonline.co.uk