

IXe Congrès de l'Association Française de Science Politique
5-7 Septembre 2007, Toulouse
Atelier 33 : « Les acteurs du régionalisme : nouvelles perspectives »

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First draft – do not quote

La région coopère-t-elle ? Les stratégies de deux autorités infra-régionales en tant qu'acteur de planification linguistique au Nord-Ouest du Pays de Gales

Alors que la relation entre l'État et les acteurs régionaux est largement utilisée pour analyser l'interaction entre les institutions politiques et les politiques publiques linguistiques, dans le contexte du lien régional-local, la planification linguistique (PL) en faveur des langues les moins répandues a plutôt été négligée. Cet article s'intéresse aux stratégies destinées à revitaliser l'usage de la langue galloise au sein des administrations et des communautés qu'ils servent, stratégies portées par les Conseils de Comté de Gwynedd et d'Anglesey au Nord-Ouest du Pays de Galles. Dans un premier temps, la communication situe ces stratégies dans le contexte politique et culturel local, dans un second temps l'analyse détermine la marge de manœuvre laissée à la promotion de cette politique linguistique au Conseil selon la perception que le gouvernement régional a de ces finalités. Les données contextuelles visent à démontrer les différences au sein des deux conseils en termes de ressources financières, de politiques publiques et de pratiques. Utilisant cette base empirique, l'article fait le point sur leurs différences, en mettant en perspective et en critiquant le succès de leurs stratégies respectives.

Is the region co-operating? The strategies of two subregional authorities as language planning actors in North-West Wales

Although the relationships between state and regional actors have come into greater focus as a means of analysing the interplay between political organization and language policies, language planning (LP) for the use of lesser-used languages has been generally overlooked within the context of the regional-local nexus. This article deals with strategies by the county councils of Gwynedd and Anglesey in North-West Wales to plan for revitalizing the use of the Welsh language within their internal administration as well as in the communities served by them. The paper frames these strategies firstly within a local political and cultural context and secondly analyses the degree to which the councils' LP is context-bounded by the regional government's own perception of overall LP goals. Empirical data goes on to demonstrate the variance within the two councils' financial resources, policy-making capacity and practices. Using this empirical basis, the article concludes by contrasting and critiquing the success of these strategies.

1.0 Introduction

This paper discusses the degree to which two adjacent local authorities in North-West Wales – Gwynedd Council and Anglesey County Council¹ – have come to consider themselves purposeful actors in language planning (LP)² within a wider uncertain regional-subregional relationship regarding the use of Welsh in public life. I consider differences in LP activity by the two councils and ask what is responsible for these. With reference to Sydney van Morgan’s model regarding solidarity, collective identity and language to regional nationalist campaigns (2006a) and Alys Thomas’ visioning of substate language use as an instrument of political accommodation (1997), I focus on the functions of GC as a proxy bottom-up language planning agency and seek to explain why there have been since local government reorganisation in 1974 and 1996 concerted attempts in Gwynedd to offer an increasing bilingual panorama in council services. Although Anglesey County Council as a democratically elected local government organ does not begin until 1996, the council shows distinct undecidedness regarding the desirability of increasing bilingualism of services and could be described as having atrophied LP functions. With this in mind, I make three statements.

Firstly, Gwynedd Council since its inception has been the elected entity most relevant to language planning in Wales, according high priority to LP within budgetary constraints both within the council and in the communities it provides services to. Secondly, Anglesey County Council has not accorded a similar priority to its language policy which is currently marshalled strategically to varying degrees at an executive, corporate and departmental level. I explain these phenomena due in large degree to, on the one hand, control of Gwynedd County Council by the regionalist party Plaid Cymru, and on the other hand, of Anglesey County Council by a subregional independent coalition which is not motivated by the same ideological underpinnings regarding the use of Welsh in public life. Different visions of ethnicity are at work here and have meaning not only at the level of social and political mobilisation (May, 2001), but in the region under study these are played out to different degrees at the subregional institutional level and manifested partly through LP activity by political actors.

Thirdly, since devolution, LP within Wales has generally been viewed from top to bottom and has concentrated on language strategies emanating from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the arm’s length statutory LP agency the Welsh Language Board (WLB), established under the terms of the Welsh Language Act 1993.³ Academic literature in Wales which evaluates planning for the use of substate autochthonous languages at local government level,⁴ and its relationship with other

¹ From here on referred to as GC and ACC. At the 2001 census, Gwynedd’s population was 117,000 of whom 69% spoke Welsh compared to 67,000 (60%) in respect of Anglesey. At an all-Wales level, 20.8% of the population of Wales (582,000) reported in 2001 that they spoke Welsh. This compares with 18.7 (508,100) who in 1991 said they spoke Welsh, and 19.0% (503,500) in 1981. See http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/census2001/KS_LA_Wales_in_English.pdf.

² I deliberately paraphrase Cooper’s (1989; 98) broad ‘accounting scheme’ for LP thus; ‘what actors, attempt to influence what behaviors, of which people, for what ends, under what conditions, by what means, through what decision-making process, with what effect’.

³ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1993/Ukpga_19930038_en_1.htm

⁴ This has hitherto been the uncontested territory of autobiographical material, mostly in Welsh, see Wyn Roberts, 2006; Wigley, 1993; Lewis, 2006; Humphreys, 2000; Wyn, 1997

governance levels, is scarce⁵ and this raises wicked issues concerning the contested yet unaccounted nature of LP in Wales, and more explicitly, the relationship between the LP activities of the regional WAG and those unitary authorities below it. Subregional government in Wales is responsible for £4 billion of public expenditure, equating to more than one third of the total Welsh budget, and is one of the major employers in Wales with 150,000 employees.⁶ Both Gwynedd and Anglesey account for almost 10,000 public sector employees (Welsh Local Government Association, 2005). Being such a major player in socio-economic terms, it would seem appropriate to ask why language planning activity in North-West Wales seems to have gone under the radar of both academics and practitioners.

2.0 Demolinguistic and legislative context

Local government in Wales has seen reorganisation twice in the two past generations, in 1974 and 1996 and is deemed to have had the current settlement of 22 unitary authorities imposed on it by a Conservative Westminster government ‘mindful of the centre’s continuing quest for controls on local autonomy’ (Pemberton, 2000; 82; Thomas, 1994; 51-2).⁷ Labour held the majority (14) of the newly formed authorities, four were in Independents’ hands, one being on the control of Plaid Cymru (Gwynedd) and three were left with no overall control (Anglesey being one). Close on the heels of the 1996 reorganisation came the resounding Labour victory of 1997 which paved the way for a regional elected National Assembly with secondary legislation powers. Subsequent enhanced legislation in the form of the Government of Wales Act 2006⁸ has resulted in the formal transformation of a corporate assembly structure into an architecture comprising legislature and executive and has enabled the assembly to legislate on devolved matters (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000), although the intergovernmental mechanics of such legislation is still to be evaluated.⁹

The past decade has seen further statutory legitimation for the use of Welsh in public life, after a break of more than 400 years following the Act of Union 1536 (Morris 2000; May, 2001). The current manifestation has come through enabling legislation in the form of the Welsh Language Act 1993, whose main conceptual thrust, whilst not encapsulating a rights-based approach, is that of equality of English and Welsh in public business and administration of justice. Institutional features are the setting up of the WLB and its oversight of language schemes for public bodies designed to provide and enhance bilingual public services.¹⁰ Welsh has also become a compulsory subject through all schools in Wales following the Education Reform Act 1988, although this was achieved not without difficulties as local government requests were presented for opt-outs, thus registering a degree of resistance to all-Wales geographical coverage (Thomas, 1997). All-Wales figures, however, show growth in Welsh-medium education.¹¹

⁵ Notable exceptions are Morris, 2000; Williams, 1978; Williams, 1981.

⁶ See <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/content.php?nID=146;IID=1>

⁷ For attempts to introduce a proportional representation voting system into Welsh local government, see Closs Stephens, 2004.

⁸ <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/20060032.htm>

⁹ See Wales Devolution Report http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/devolution/MonReps/Wales_April07.pdf April 2007.

¹⁰ For a critique of the 1993 Act’s non-directionality, by which the citizen’s needs are responded to through diffusion rather than government specifying goals, see Williams and Morris, 2000.

¹¹ In 2005/06, there were 54 Welsh-medium secondary schools with 40,828 pupils compared to 44 schools with 27,897 pupils 15 years previously <http://www.bwrdd-yr->

The remainder of this paper will analyse LP activity conducted by Gwynedd and Anglesey County Councils in terms of their ideologies, strategies and practices. This will be couched in terms of their relationships, where relevant, with pre- and post-devolution regional actors. I will discuss first Gwynedd as this is the original territorial base from which the two councils currently operate post 1996.

In her attempts to explain regional nationalist campaigns in Wales and Galicia, Sydney Van Morgan (2006) uses a three-pronged model for understanding the importance of solidarity, collective identity and language. Van Morgan operationalises the model through the *consolidation* of regional solidarity, the *politicisation* of language-related grievances and the *actualisation* of the targeted community. I contest, however, that such a model is also useful for the study of institutional politics and, in this case in particular, the LP function adopted and moulded throughout 30 years of a subregional authority in the form of Gwynedd Council. As I hope to show, the only diversion here from the second point in Van Morgan's operationalisation is a gradual move away from politicisation of language-related grievances to the *legitimation* of the substate language and its subsequent *institutionalisation* within a level of elected government. This dual feature of a prolonged bilingualisation process I regard as leading onto the third of van Morgan's points, that is actualisation - strategies and practices exercised by GC during this period and their acceptance by the population of Gwynedd, and this will be examined later in the paper.

Van Morgan's consolidation phase was originally developed to analyse the wider regional mobilisation context and in this respect Alys's Thomas' analysis of 'flawed' consociational regional language policy and nationalism in Wales (1997; 338) before devolution may also shine light on the relationship in this period between regional mobilisation, regional language policy and the lines of communication between Plaid Cymru interlocutors at both regional and subregional level. This model of interaction between the Secretary of State for Wales and political elites and interest group representatives can be seen as being beneficial for all the actors involved in this process. For the conservative administration in Wales, engagement with language policy could be:-

'predicted to reduce the salience of an issue and gain time, show concern to elite and militant pressures yet at the same time avoid decisive action and provide temporary modification to a pattern of inactivity' (p. 337).

The result of such a drip-approach to language policy would thus be to remove and exclude a raft of pressure groups from the formulation of policy. For Plaid Cymru, the benefits of such a consociational arrangement as the traditional regional platform for language grievances were manifold. The party was created in 1925 on a culturalist single-issue language ticket but in the 1960s transformed itself into a party evincing progressive and radical socialism, a call for a Welsh parliament and a socio-economic programme linked to Welsh autonomy (Christiansen, 1998). It has however throughout its recent history been caught between maintaining its hegemony and

iaith.org.uk/cynnwys.php?PID=109&nID=2610&langID=2. Education in the UK is a part-delivery, part-policy competence of subregional Education Authorities (LEAs) and the past two decades have seen a tendency to rest policy influence and direction from the local level (see Chandler, 1996; Morris, 2000 and Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000).

credibility with voters as ‘the party of Gwynedd’ whilst expanding its socio-economic agenda in the south of the country. As van Morgan (2006b) assiduously points out, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system in Britain resulted in Plaid Cymru returning in 1970 its best results by far, increasing its vote almost threefold nationally yet failing to return a single member to Westminster due to the geographical dispersion of the vote. There would seem to be little doubt that the gaining of three parliamentary seats in 1974, with a full 0.7% less in national Plaid Cymru turnout (p.259) would galvanise the party in its bastion of Gwynedd, coinciding as it did in the same year with local government reorganisation. This regional success would in turn result in what Thomas refers to as ‘competing strands’ and a ‘somewhat Janus-like’ approach by the party towards the language. The dilemma facing the party in subsequent years was how to create some distance from the traditional objectives centred around the promotion of the language in order to woo new voters in the south whilst assuring traditional voters that cultural issues would still be attended to. More than 30 years on, this is still a cause for concern within some Plaid Cymru related circles in GC, the message being voiced that GC and its work in promoting the Welsh language has not been adequately acknowledged on a national level.¹²

In what Thomas Christiansen coins ‘*a complex Welsh national identity which remains largely unmobilised*’, the party’s ambiguity becomes not only a strategic instrument for deployment, but also an acknowledgement that this is what is demanded of in highly divided national polity (1998; 131) in which engagement in dialogue on a developing linguistic framework for the polity is regarded as walking into ‘a lion’s den’ (Thomas, 1997; 336-7). This background demonstrates the uneasy waters which language policy has had to tread when object of discussions at the regional level. However, Plaid Cymru’s ‘pragmatic tailoring’ (Thomas, 1997; 332) of its requirements according to the particular situation throws into relief the tensions that have existed since GC embarked on language planning within its territory. These tensions have been carefully marshalled within the party and the ‘flawed’ consociationalist method for regional language policy would seem to have corralled GC, in the first period of local government reorganisation between 1974-1996, into adoption of more covert strategies for the pursuance of subregional solidarity around the language.

3.0 Gwynedd Council - towards legitimising the use of Welsh

Before the creation of 8 powerful county councils and 37 districts in Wales in 1974, a two-tier system for local government existed, except for larger cities and towns (Davies, 1990). In North-West Wales, the use of English was predominant at county council level from where the vast majority of services were planned and delivered. A diglossic situation pertained however whereby Welsh was used as an oral medium in a number of borough, urban and rural councils whereas minutes would be recorded in English.¹³ One district council on reorganisation in 1974, Dwyfor District Council,¹⁴ stands out in this period as standing in stark opposition to such diglossia, understood as ‘institutionalised behaviour associated with discursive structures’ (Williams and Morris, 2000; 26). Following on from previous acts of progressive bilingualisation in

¹² Interview – Senior Elected Member, GC

¹³ Interview – Elected Member, GC

¹⁴ The following 1981 census for Lleyn shows 82% of the area as Welsh-speaking cf. <http://www.penllyn.com/biz/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=171>

the previous administrative structure, Dwyfor adopted a Welsh-medium internal administration and has been referred to as ‘a conductor leading to the present Gwynedd Council’.¹⁵

Interviews conducted in October – November 2006 in North Wales indicate that a political opportunity structure came to the fore in 1974 with local government reorganisation. Territorially and logistically, the ‘big is better’ equation was one element in the creation of larger units (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000; 25; Pemberton, 2000; 84) and although James Chandler argues that the new units had little cultural congruity compared with the previous arrangement, citing the case of Dyfed (1996; 24), it could be argued that many local synergies were brought together in the case of Gwynedd with its headquarters centred on Caernarfon. Institutionally, the previous preponderance of non-elected aldermen¹⁶ comprised of a core of Labour party members in North-West Wales. With this arrangement no longer existing, gains for Plaid Cymru were widely expected locally. Although only 6 Plaid Cymru councillors were elected out of a total of 60 in the first council elections, many independent councillors were either card-carrying Plaid Cymru members or amenable to effecting a change in council language policy (Lewis, 2006; 159). This did not go unnoticed by civil servants at the Welsh Office¹⁷ who, in response to the claim that the council was politically plural, noted that all the committee chairs were drawn from the ranks of Plaid Cymru (2006; 165). The decision of Ioan Bowen Rees, the Chief Executive whose term of office is most connected with GC in this period, to come to Gwynedd expressly due to expected changes in the institutional life of the newly-born council (Humphreys, 2000; 126)¹⁸ is a marker of the changes afoot.

Upon reorganisation, in matters of ‘language lobbying’, an interlocking triangle of influence emanating from Gwynedd can be traced between the regional, the subregional and the sub-subregional levels. An influential Plaid Cymru councillor, Maldwyn Lewis, mobilised forces around the language question and would mobilise, with others, to bring about linguistic change in the institutional fabric of the council (Lewis, 2006). Local district councillors, for example, were lobbied by Gwynedd county councillors to ensure the election of a district council chief executive who would be ‘understanding’ of efforts soon to be carried out at the subregional county level.¹⁹ In addition, Lewis, as electoral agent for the member of parliament Dafydd Wigley would have had access to regional Plaid Cymru deliberations around language policy and how far subregional activities could affect regional policy. GC therefore mobilised language planning around three main activities, internal administration, progressive provision of bilingual education and a proxy external language ombudsman;-

3.1 Internal administration

During the cross-over ‘shadow’ year of 1973-74, local Plaid Cymru branches petitioned the council favouring the adoption of a bilingual policy as well as stipulating that, as part of this, all senior council officers should be able to speak

¹⁵ Interview – former Elected Member, GC

¹⁶ Until 1974, up to one third of a local authority could be comprised of aldermen, cf. Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000; 14.

¹⁷ The pre-devolution department of the central UK government responsible for Welsh affairs.

¹⁸ Cf. also Interview: Senior Officer, GC (retired).

¹⁹ Interview: Senior Officer, Dwyfor District Council (retired)

Welsh. The first meeting of the shadow council²⁰ adopted this policy and created a committee to implement the policy,²¹ which three weeks later reported '*it is anticipated that much of the work of Gwynedd County Council will be carried out through the medium of the Welsh language*'.²² Welsh became very quickly the main language used internally within the council as the majority of staff were Welsh-speakers, and although the vast majority of written internal material continued to be written in English, staff were encouraged to use Welsh in internal administration (Morris, 2000; 562). Committee work, however, changed to Welsh overnight as the council developed simultaneous translation expertise which would, a quarter of a century later, be consulted upon in the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales. Services directed at the public became increasingly bilingual.

Study of council minutes, however, show a distinct hesitancy in disclosing exact financial costings for what was nothing short of a revolution in sociolinguistic terms. Time and time again, progress reports on language policy show a dearth of information regarding costings for language classes, cover for these classes and the cost of increasing bilingualism.²³ As already alluded to above, this reticence may not have been so marked had GC been advocating and implementing regional language policy. This was obviously not the case as no deliberated and structured policy strategy emanating from the Welsh Office existed, in line with Thomas' proposition in that what strategy there was at regional level was premised on:-

'a desire to offer concessions to the section of Welsh society demanding a formal recognition of Welsh identity ... the evolution of the Welsh Office and the secretary of state since their inauguration has tended to be a process by which each incumbent has left his mark and powers have been won ... It can certainly be argued that the approach to language policy is equally ad hoc and dependent upon the approach of the incumbent' (1997; 333) .

This left GC language planning activity until the mid-1990s without explicit regional legitimation and open to claims of discrimination.²⁴ The expectation, however, of regional regulatory intervention in the form of the Welsh Language Act 1993, is probably a factor leading to a revision of the policy in 1991 both in terms of social neo-liberal terminology, '*enabling everyone who receives a service from the Council or contributes to the democratic process to do so through the medium of English or Welsh according to their personal choice*' as well as raising expectations of the policy from staff and other subregional actors by '*[nurturing and promoting] the use of the Welsh language in the internal administration of the Council, in its dealings with other public bodies and also by bodies that provide services for the public in Gwynedd*' (Gwynedd County Council, 1991). This again highlights the intricate calibrations between regional and local language policy, the exact choreography of which is still to be mapped out.

²⁰ Minutes: council 03 May 1973

²¹ This would later become the heavily influential Bilingualism Sub-Committee under the stewardship of councillor Dafydd Orwig.

²² Minutes: steering committee 20 May 1973

²³ E.g. Bilingual Policy Committee, 25/06/1974; Finance Committee, 27/01/1987; Bilingualism Sub-Committee 06/04/1995

²⁴ Interview: Senior Officer, GC: Wigley, 1993; 395; Morris, 2000; 563. See also McLeod, 1998 <http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/1998/issue1/mcleod1.html>

3.2 Education

As both pre- and post-18 education in 1974 remained a competence of local government with discretion for local manoeuvring, education became an obvious strategy with which to increase bilingualism in the county and was to become the focus of the council's LP efforts, not least due to education taking up more than half of council expenditure (Humphreys, 2000: 145). Again, in the shadow year of 1973, Plaid Cymru councillors would meet once a week to discuss how to steer what would be an innovative and radically different education policy through the nascent council committee stages (Lewis, 2006; 167).²⁵ Although the aim was clear, '*Gwynedd Education Authority is adopting a bilingual policy to be put into operation in all schools in Gwynedd, with the aim of making every child in the country thoroughly bilingual*' (Gwynedd County Council, 1975; 3), the realisation of such a target was couched in incremental terms, according to geography and curriculum area.²⁶

However the willingness of the council to show its credentials as community language planner can be seen in the establishment and success of a dual linguistic integration model. After entering 'latecomer' centres, children aged between 7-11 would be immersed in Welsh for a period of 4 months before accessing the main-stream school system. This would be then supported by teams of peripatetic teachers. That the ex-Director of Education stated 'Gwynedd had a set of targets years before the Government introduced them' (2000; 147) and a 10% increase by 1991 from 69% to 79% of pupils *able* to speak Welsh (Lewis, 2006; 171) would tend to confirm this role as bottom-up language planner, although a full evaluation of the *success* of GC's strategies and practices is still forthcoming.

3.3 The Bilingualism Sub-Committee

This organ of the council lived a rather hybrid existence. As noted before, it began life as a tool with which to oversee implementation of internal bilingualisation procedures. It met 64 times between 1973 and 1995 yet gradually took on the form of a proxy language planning agency. This is borne out by the fact that 426 of the 456 items alluded to during this time referred to matters external to the council. An exhaustive range of governmental and public bodies as well as private companies in Wales and England were lobbied and advised upon regarding developing bilingual policies and some were invited to present before the sub-committee on progress made (Orwig, undated). As discussed above on regional and subregional relations, the pattern and mode of contact was jagged and variable. Records show that the sub-committee between 1987-1990 continued to lobby both the Secretary of State and the (at that time) non-statutory WLB regarding the need for language legislation. These communication lines between GC and the Welsh Office were uncemented and fleeting.²⁷ It is unclear how much access council actors had to Dafydd Wigley, the Plaid MP who, as part of a Welsh Office sponsored 'Eight Wise Men' policy committee on the Welsh language, fronted Plaid Cymru attempts at the regional level to forward work on draft legislation. However, party links already existed between

²⁵ Interview: Senior Officer, AC

²⁶ For more details, see Humphreys, 2000

²⁷ Dafydd Orwig reports the refusal by Minister of State Wyn Roberts to accept a representation from GC on this matter – 16/05/1988. On the other hand, Lewis (2006) reports a good relationship with the previous Secretary of State, Nicholas Edwards.

influential GC councillors and Dafydd Wigley and it would be disingenuous to think that these channels of communication would not have been used.²⁸

The sub-committee's relationship with the Chief Executive would appear to be seamless and the council's recommendations to the Welsh Office for positive action around existing planning and housing legislation, which it was argued would improve the panorama for the use of Welsh in Gwynedd, show the council's desire to legitimate the work of one of its own committee's as well as extending itself to the limits of its competences²⁹ (Gwynedd County Council, 1988).

4.0 Gwynedd Council – towards institutionalising the use of Welsh

Another political opportunity structure was to come about in the mid-1990s. Legislation in 1993 in the form of the Welsh Language Act and changes to the territorial, and thus demolinguistic, structure of the county gave GC the legitimation necessary to extend the language policy begun twenty years earlier.³⁰ Before reorganisation in 1996, the population of Gwynedd was 235,000 with 61% stating they spoke Welsh. After this date, the population of Gwynedd halved due to the creation of Anglesey County Council and Conwy County Borough Council which had previously formed part of Gwynedd. This had the effect of immediately increasing by 8% the numbers of Welsh-speakers in Gwynedd to 69%.³¹ In addition, Plaid Cymru had majority control of the council³² without support of independent councillors and continue to do so.

During the shadow year of 1995-96, deliberations began both internally and with trade union involvement³³ regarding the adoption of a new language scheme³⁴ which denoted Welsh as the *official* internal language of the council. This established Gwynedd Council therefore as the first elected body of governance in the UK to adopt all of its *internal* workings in a language other than English. As a condition of employment, non-Welsh speaking staff would be required to reach levels of competency agreed between them and the Council within a period of 2 years.³⁵ Interviews report that the changed focus in 1996 created a 'shock to the system' and that between the three newly-created unitary councils there was a subsequent transfer of staff, although not reaching large numbers.³⁶ Despite the 1993 legislation, however, councillors were mindful of an unsatisfactory conclusion to previous language requirements by the council upon staff and this led to dropping advertisement straplines referring to Welsh as the official language of council administration, despite receiving assurances from the council Secretary and Solicitor that a suitable wording could be reached³⁷ and lobbying by a community group³⁸ on this issue.

²⁸ Personal communication:- ex Senior Elected Member, GC

²⁹ Personal communication: ex Chief Officer, GC

³⁰ Interview: Senior Officer, GC

³¹ www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/download.php/pID=5544.4

³² 45 out of 83 seats

³³ Policy and Resources Committee – 06/12/1995

³⁴ The Welsh Language Act having created the statutory requirement for public body language schemes.

³⁵ This 2-year period was later removed from subsequent language schemes as being 'ineffectual and unproductive' - Interview: Senior Officer, GC.

³⁶ Interview: Senior Elected Member, GC

³⁷ Language Sub-Committee, 19/07/1996.

³⁸ The group, named The Citizens of Gwynedd, are mentioned in minutes, Language Sub-Committee, 16/04/1996

In line with these developments, later years have seen the creation of separate committees, a Language Committee³⁹ dealing with internal issues, as well as a multi-agency Language Promotion Task Group⁴⁰ whose task is the moulding of synergies around the revitalisation of Welsh as a community language. The secretariat for this group is located within and funded by the council and is an example of the Council's logistic and financial commitment to extend into possible non-statutory language planning activity in community-based activities. Again, this would seem to suggest that LP undertaken by GC has positioned itself at the forefront of what is perceived to be possible within legislative, social and financial restraints, whilst being acutely aware that regional language policy, although now legitimising the council's internal activity, is far from engaging logistically with the mantle laid down by GC's political leaders' desire to drive forward opportunities to enhance the use of Welsh in Gwynedd.

5.0 Anglesey County Council – an uncertain consolidation

On its inception in 1996, Anglesey County Council had inherited many of the features of Gwynedd's overarching language policy. Indeed, both local education authorities established at this time an arm's length advisory company dedicated to curriculum improvement,⁴¹ suggesting a pooling of efforts around bilingual education and an acceptance that this policy area would be heavily shielded. Being part of the larger Gwynedd until 1996, the influence of the former council could be clearly felt. During the shadow year of 1995-96, a kernel of councillors close to Plaid Cymru ran a campaign to raise the profile of the language's relevance to citizens' daily lives in Anglesey⁴² among their peers and participated in the drawing up of what would be the first language scheme to be approved by the WLB.⁴³

As in the case of Gwynedd, the statutory stipulation for language schemes provided a legitimacy that would be taken advantage of at the beginning of the council's life. The scheme's main content i.e. '*Welsh shall be the Council's main language for internal administration*'. (Anglesey County Council, 1996; 10), placed the responsibility for delivering this step change on the shoulders of chief officers, many of whom had transferred to the new council from a Gwynedd imbued with well-heelled bilingual practices.⁴⁴ However, with the transfer of competences in education and social services, added to technical departments already existing, an internal language survey⁴⁵ in late 1996 reported that although 83% of the staff could speak Welsh, the tradition inherited from the former district council was that of oral and written internal administration through English.⁴⁶

³⁹ http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/gwy_doc.asp?cat=4730&doc=16577

⁴⁰ http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/ADNPwyllgorau/2007/Is%20Bwyllgor%20Iaith/2007-06-26/english/07_01_Welsh%20Language%20Scheme%20Monitoring%20Report%202007.pdf

⁴¹ <http://www.cynnal.co.uk/cartref/index/index.asp>

⁴² Interview: Policy specific Officer, ACC

⁴³ Interview: ex-Policy specific Officer, ACC. The framework of this scheme was based on Gwynedd's anticipated language scheme.

⁴⁴ Interview: Chief Officer, ACC

⁴⁵ Report to Bilingualism Sub-Committee, 05/11/1996

⁴⁶ Interview: Senior Officer, ACC

ACC language policy in the past 11 years has developed in a piecemeal manner on a department by department basis and is acknowledged to have been ‘parked’,⁴⁷ although the provision of bilingual services to the public is not in doubt. Linguistic flux has emerged at ACC with major committees and the Senior Management Team meetings all conducted in Welsh with simultaneous translation available. English remains the oral and written language used by the majority of the staff. Interviews report a feeling of helplessness on the part of the officer cadre who have not received the political support needed to drive through what is necessarily a multi-generational commitment. Despite well-intentioned attempts by officers, e.g. ‘*X would prime the bullets, and Y would fire them*’, the political make-up of the council has demoted the priority of the policy, ‘*politically speaking, there was a real lack of vision. There was a golden opportunity to make a difference and take a lead on the national arena*’.⁴⁸

ACC’s political composition is one of the few in Wales that is ruled by a coalition of subregional political groupings. Between 1998 and 2007, of the 12 grouped affiliations represented on the council, only two are regional parties. Group loyalty is extremely low with multiple movements across this volatile panorama. Indeed, the legitimacy of the council itself, following investigations into standards and conduct, has been called into question.⁴⁹ Regarding language policy, the council does not have the same institutional momentum as in Gwynedd since the now defunct Bilingualism Sub-Committee⁵⁰ interpreted its role as simple executor of the council’s scheme, choosing not to drive forward both the spirit of the scheme and concurrent regional developments and pursue additional policies generated from within the officer core.⁵¹

The atrophy of ACC in respect of its internal language policy is mirrored in its lack of promotion of Welsh as a community language. Whilst recognising that the market is more of a driver of communities’ futures rather than local authorities, a council partner berates officers and elected members for failing to realise that socio-economic well-being is integral to the continued use of Welsh and that short-termism has become a built-in feature of council culture.⁵² Unwillingness on the part of the council to take a lead role in Anglesey’s Language Forum⁵³ would seem to reflect an uncertainty regarding the authority’s aligning itself with language revitalisation as a policy outcome.

In this adapted version of Van Morgan’s model of consolidation, institutionalisation and actualisation of regional solidarity around language policy, the lack of influence of Plaid Cymru within ACC as the main political manifestation of an actor allied with these factors would seem to suggest that subregional identity and language politics is mobilised around the degree of leverage this regional party has within the subregional institutions under study. This is minimal in the case of ACC and strong to optimum in the case of GC.

⁴⁷ Interview: Chief Officer, ACC

⁴⁸ Interview: ex-Policy specific Officer, ACC

⁴⁹ Interview: senior officer, ACC. Cf. also <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/JOINT-REVIEW/0E0B632E-F414-4221-B914-484AD04216CA/anglesey.pdf>

⁵⁰ This committee came to an end in 2000 and has been resuscitated since 2006 following an independent report on ACC’s implementation of its language scheme [personal communication].

⁵¹ Meetings referred to are 01/02/1996, 13/05/1996, 30/07/1996 and 05/11/1996.

⁵² Interview: Council Economic Partner, Anglesey

⁵³ Interview: Policy specific Officer, ACC and Senior Elected Member, ACC

6.0 Conclusion: An uncertain future – regional and subregional language policy

If there is mileage in the ‘flawed’ consociational devices which Alys Thomas sees deployed by UK conservative governments around the cleavage of the Welsh language since the failed devolution campaign in 1979, then we must consider GC attempts to bolster support and legitimation between 1974 and the onset of the National Assembly of Wales to be on the whole unsuccessful as the only subregional authority in Wales to engage in demonstrable LP practices had no continuing and open communication channels with the Welsh Office. Despite this, mobilising strongly around subregional linguistic solidarity would continue apace within the council. Through the practices outlined in this paper, this would gradually lead to an institutionalisation of earlier language mobilisation within the council itself and the inclusion of the language agenda as a front-line mission statement for the communities it serves. However, lack of regional legitimation has invariably meant that, at certain junctures, the council has shown signs of unwillingness to be fully overt regarding its practices. This in fact mirrors the ambiguity quotient of Plaid Cymru at the regional level on language matters. Whilst GC has in the past employed ambiguity mainly as a *tactical* defence mechanism, Plaid Cymru has used this as part of an electoral *strategy*. Such a structuring of regional and subregional relationships has invariably diminished the ability of GC to serve as a conceptual and practical model for other subregional governments in Wales with not dissimilar demolinguistics.

In 2003, WAG published its National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales under the branding of *Iaith Pawb/Everyone’s Language*.⁵⁴ Colin Williams (2004; 2) has noted that, being the first time that the creation of a bilingual Wales has become part and parcel of regional governmental policy,⁵⁵ expectations have been raised regarding cross-party political commitment to the realisation of the policy, its ability to make inroads into what are undoubtedly wide-ranging objectives and the assiduousness of WAG in how it markets the project as a viable multi-generational going concern within and outside the region. Williams is undoubtedly correct when he states that ‘initiatives’ undertaken by subregional authorities cannot be in any sense described as ‘national language plan[s] or strateg[ies]’ and that the rump of local government still needs to be persuaded that the use of Welsh is a public good (p.14). If the blockage of flawed consocialisation has now been removed from the regional government in the form of devolution and more specifically in the promise afforded by *Iaith Pawb*, an unresolved question remains at the heart of the new regional/subregional relationship on the use of Welsh. In the first place, this would suggest itself as the degree in which mobilisation of regional solidarity around language, its premises and its subsequent practices, can cohabit with William’s envisioning of ‘a plenary inclusion’, through which ‘the learning of Welsh and ... access to a more universalist, inclusive society and culture, are potentially available to all’ (p.24). Secondly, and more importantly

⁵⁴ Cf. http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/welsh_language/iaith_pawb/?lang=en

⁵⁵ Regional governmental sign-up to the tenets of a bilingual society in Wales has indeed changed in the quarter century since Williams referred to ‘the lack of a comparatively strong political commitment to incorporate Welsh into the machinery of government, which in part is reflected in the absence of a comprehensive national language policy within which local authorities could establish their own priorities regarding language regimes’ (1978; 176).

for the long-established trailblazer in planning for the use of Welsh, how will the new arrangements help to further legitimise and support the cutting-edge work that Gwynedd Council is now undertaking at the peripheries of its competences?

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