

Motivation and Gender: A Welsh Case Study

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This paper attempts to show why one particular group of students has chosen to learn the Welsh language. Self-reported data reveals certain gender oriented motivational differences, with the male learners somewhat more inclined towards total linguistic and cultural immersion than their female counterparts. The author concludes with a brief discussion on the theoretical and practical significance of such findings.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Only recently has research pursued the role of gender in language learning, with the emphasis very much being on the relationship between learner characteristics and language learning performance. It is taken as an established fact by people in general, that girls are better than boys in language ability, although the area of listening comprehension has proved to be an interesting exception (Boyle 1987). Few studies have addressed the question of motivational differences between the sexes, although many of those that have have found female students to be more positively oriented towards language study than their male counterparts. Gardner and Lambert (1972) reported that female learners of L2 French in Canada were more motivated than male learners and also had more positive attitudes towards speakers of the second language. Spolsky (1989) noted that girls learning Hebrew in Jewish schools showed more favourable attitudes to Hebrew, to Israel and to Israelis. In the case of Welsh similar conclusions were reached by both Sharp (1973) and Baker (1992). Studies on gender and motivation among adult

language learners are rarer and the results often conflicting. Ludwig (1983) found that male university students were more likely to undertake a language course because of the usefulness of it than were female students. On the other hand, Bacon and Finnemann (1992) reported that, in their analysis of university students of Spanish, it was the female respondents that tended to stress the practical reasons for learning the language, with increased job prospects being a prime attraction.

THE WELSH SITUATION

The reasons that learners give for learning a language can be categorised as integrative or instrumental (Gardner & Lambert 1959). Integrative motivation may be defined as learning a language to take part in the culture of its people, whilst instrumental motivation implies learning a language for a career reason or some other practical reason. Naturally the nature of integrative and instrumental motivation may change according to the status of the language being learnt. As stated by Spolsky (1989: 164) "it is the social situation then that indirectly affects second language learning by determining the learner's attitudes and motivation." When Jones (1949, 1950) undertook his pioneering work on attitudes to Welsh it was clear that positive attitudes towards the language decreased with age. The social and political climate has since changed somewhat - enough for C. Williams to be able to state in 1986 that a knowledge of English by itself is no longer considered a sufficient pre-requisite to prosperity and success in certain areas of Wales. Fluency in Welsh is now seen as a significant advantage in opening doors to further career opportunities. This new, positive regard for the language is reflected in the 1991 Census which gives the Welsh-speaking population of Wales as 508,098 - 18.6% of the total population. Aitchison and Carter (1994) make an interesting observation in their analysis of these figures:

In terms of the total population able to speak Welsh nearly 10% (48,919) were born outside Wales. This is of some significance for it demonstrates the degree to which incomers have committed themselves to learning the language. (Aitchison and Carter 1994: 108)

13,388 adults registered in Welsh night classes in 1993, compared to 8,000 in 1988 (Prosser 1994). Is this marked increase economic, vocational, cultural, social or affiliative in origin? The adult-learning movement naturally hopes that the students' goal is integration. Baker (1992: 97) makes the following comment on the aims of the movement:

The recent considerable expansion in the teaching of Welsh to adults in Wales by Ulpans, evening classes and summer schools presumably aims to influence attitudes to the Welsh language and culture in addition to teaching language skills.

Ulpán courses were introduced into Wales during the early seventies and were modelled on the adult-learning institutes which had been in operation in Israel since the 1950s to teach Hebrew to a large number of immigrants. Intensive courses teaching via the direct method, with the emphasis on active communication and participation, their aims in Israel were likewise twofold:

The Ulpán is regarded in addition to its being a second language teaching system as a socialising agent in Israeli society and culture (Yehudit Rosenbaum in Crowe, 1988: 17).

THE LAMPETER SUMMER ULPAN

One particular Ulpán course which has proved extremely popular and successful during its twenty year history is the eight week residential Ulpán held annually at the University of Wales, Lampeter. The only one of its kind in Wales, it presumes no previous knowledge of the language and at the end of the four hundred hours of study, the

conscientious student can expect to have absorbed between three to four thousand items of active vocabulary. He/she should also be thoroughly familiarised with all the main sentence patterns and grammatical variables of the language. The opportunity to become virtually fluent in such a short space of time attracts a wide cross-section of prospective learners, from local newcomers to West Wales to students and researchers of minority languages world-wide.

PURPOSE AND METHOD OF STUDY

This study sought to discover why some majority language speakers choose to learn a minority language and whether male and female learners' attitudes and motivations are in anyway different from each other. During the summer of 1994, those attending the Lampeter Residential Ulpán, namely 18 women and 20 men, were asked at the end of the eight weeks to complete a questionnaire which was divided into three sections:

- A. Personal
- B. The Course
- C. Reasons for learning the language

Although the number of learners involved was small and self-reported data is naturally limited, providing little indication of the actual effort learners put into their learning, I am confident, having taught on this course for a number of years, that the results and comments expressed here accurately represent those who choose to attend an intensive course of this nature.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Discussion will concentrate on the learners' response to section C., namely reasons for learning the language. Twenty-four reasons for learning Welsh were presented on the questionnaire and the learners were asked to respond to as

many or as few of these as they wished. They were also given the opportunity to add their own reason and frequently these were extensions of statements 1-24. The percentages below show how often a particular statement was chosen by both the male and female course members:

	Male	Female
1. Welsh will be useful in my work	50%	55.5%
2. I will be a more complete Welsh person	40%	11.1%
3. I want to live in Wales	40%	44.4%
4. I live in an area where the majority of people speak Welsh	30%	44.4%
5. I am Welsh	50%	33.3%
6. I live in Wales and I ought to learn Welsh	50%	44.4%
7. I enjoy coming to Wales on holiday	15%	16.7%
8. Improved job prospects	40%	44.4%
9. My parents were Welsh speaking	35%	16.7%
10. Welsh is the mother tongue of my partner	15%	11.1%
11. My children attend a Welsh school	10%	11.1%
12. I want to help my children to learn Welsh	30%	16.7%
13. I've got Welsh speaking friends	80%	50%
14. To keep the language alive	60%	72.2%
15. I like the language	85%	66.7%
16. In order to read magazines and light novels	40%	27.7%
17. I am interested in the history of Wales	65%	66.7%
18. I like to learn about other cultures	35%	22.2%
19. A general interest in Celtic languages/ in minority languages	40%	33.3%
20. I want to read and study Welsh literature	50%	22.2%
21. To attend Welsh cultural events	45%	22.2%
22. To join Welsh societies	45%	16.7%
23. To follow Welsh radio/television programmes	40%	33.3%
24. To fulfil a dream	40%	5.5%
25. Any other reason	40%	11.1%

It has frequently been observed that learners on an immersion type programme are more positive and homogeneous generally speaking in their attitudes and motivation with regard to learning a second language, than students maybe attending an evening class once a week. The percentages noted here certainly display a positive commitment to the language by both sexes, with the importance of belonging, identity and duty clearly apparent.

To quote one male and one female learner:

I feel at home here. I shall do my utmost to belong. (f)

I want to understand Welsh people through their language and learn about their way of life. I want to become part of it and through my work serve the Welsh in their own language. (m)

Such comments are welcomed by those involved in trying to preserve and sustain the language, as stated by Baker (1988: 168):

To want to learn the indigenous language 'to belong' may create an enduring lifeline thrown by Welsh language teachers to their students, who reciprocally throw that lifeline to a future for the language.

The somewhat romantic notion of fulfilling a dream was popular interestingly enough, with the Anglo-Welsh male members of the course, who as statement 2 indicates tended to see the ability to speak Welsh as the true symbol of Welshness. Half of the male course members were of Anglo-Welsh origin and half of the female course members. Bourhis *et al.* (1973: 457) conclude their research paper into Welsh identity with the statement that, in their opinion, "to possess a full Welsh identity one needs at least to be involved in learning the language." Although this seemed the case with regard to the male course members, the female Anglo-Welsh learners did not appear to equate language with identity to the same degree. Such a variation merits further detailed study and a further analysis of other intensive Welsh courses is in progress, this time using a questionnaire based on scalar responses, so as to ensure a more textured view of the motivational factors involved.

Returning to the present study, closer observation of all twenty-five statements reveals that the desire to join the Welsh community, especially in the case of those born outside Wales, had in fact, regardless of gender, less to do with the language itself than the culture it represents:

Through the Welsh language I can better appreciate the history of the Celts. (f)

Thus echoing the sentiments of Bobi Jones (1993: 41):

In Wales it is quite impossible to know the past, emotionally and intellectually, in its full significance as a comprehensive tradition without knowing the Welsh language.

It is true that 14% of the male course members and 16% of the female course members were Celtic Studies students, but this positive interest in Welsh history was expressed by over 65% of the learners in general. Interestingly Ludwig (1983) stated that although more men than women tend to dislike courses with low cultural content, none of the male students in her study exhibited any marked interest in cultural or literary values.

The opposite was also true here in the case of literature as indicated by the response to statement 20. The responses to statements 16, 18, 19 and 23 show a similar, if not so exaggerated, trend, with the male learners appearing slightly more in favour of total cultural and literary immersion than their female counterparts. This may not have been their original intention - many cited the growing attraction of such values as their fluency increased.

Now I am more interested in Welsh literature - I want to learn about Wales, its history and its literature, not just the language. There is more to Welsh than the language. (m)

I want to learn more Welsh now because I want to understand Welsh programmes on t.v. and on the radio and read books and magazines. (m)

Second language learning to many became synonymous with second culture learning and as their knowledge of the language developed, social orientations came into play. Here too findings differ from certain previous studies. In Politzer's (1983) study of language learning

strategies, females reported a significantly greater likelihood than males to engage in second language social interactions with others outside the classroom. Bacon and Finnemann (1992) also noted that the women they questioned were more likely to report that they had Spanish-speaking friends than the men questioned. Here as indicated by statement 13, the male learners seemed to put far greater importance on the role of Welsh-speaking friends in the motivation process than did the female learners. Of course friendship can mean many things and duty and respect have a role to play:

My Welsh speaking friends turn to English when I am there - they're very polite. I should be polite also and learn their language so they don't need to turn to English. (m)

The popularity of statements 21 and 22 amongst the male members of the course once more implies that they were, or intend to be, more socially interactive with regards to the Welsh language than the female course members. It should be noted however that Welsh societies were often treated with suspicion or contempt by those of either sex not living in Wales. Comments such as:

Welsh societies give a false picture of those living in Wales (f)

were not uncommon, suggesting the need maybe for Welsh societies, both in Wales and further afield, to reconsider their image.

As mentioned earlier, some language surveys have shown men to be more instrumentally oriented than women whilst others have shown the opposite. In this particular instance there was very little difference between the two sexes, with reasons 1 and 8 proving popular choices with both. When asked to give their prime motivation based on the twenty-four statements already noted, together with number 25, any other reason, the result was as follows:

	Male		Female	
Statement	1	28.3	1	26
	8	16.6	8	20.3
	15	15	14	14.8

Does this imply therefore that both sexes were learning the language purely for personal gain? I think not, for to cite Ely (1986: 28)

It is not always easy to distinguish between integrative and instrumental motivation. In fact, it is possible that a particular reason for language study can be either integrative or instrumental depending on the social and psychological factors involved.

Of course there is a great difference between having to speak Welsh at work and choosing to do so, and had the statement been worded differently then the percentages may have been very different. But it is important to remember that for many individuals the ability to use a minority language such as Welsh in an everyday work environment is 'to have arrived', as it were. It signifies complete integration and total acceptance by first language Welsh speakers, as the following learner explained:

Now that I've gotten a start I plan to become fluent, so I can do everything in the language, work through it as well as play in it. (f)

This was not true of all, of course; the increased public awareness surrounding the language did and does play a part:

I am unemployed and hope that by knowing some Welsh it will be easier to find a job I like. (f)

What does seem important, even if the reason is largely instrumental, is that there should be, to quote Lennon (1993: 42), "some sort of personal involvement with the language." The popularity of reasons 15 and 14 seems to reflect such an involvement in this instance, although I

appreciate that the percentages and numbers involved are small.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Whilst the increasing use of the Welsh language in public life and education can be seen even from this small sample of Welsh learners, to have a significant role in the growth of the adult-learning movement, committed learners attracted to a course of this kind are not generally purely mercenary in nature. Trosset (1986: 183) states that in the light of her own experience, "one cannot learn Welsh without entering in a significant way into the culture of Welsh-Wales," and such a sentiment seemed generally shared by both sexes in this survey. These statistics do indicate, however, rather a greater commitment on the part of the male course members to "become part of the social world of its speakers" (Wong-Fillmore 1976: 666).

An interesting comparison can be drawn with Davies' (1986) survey of Welsh learners in night classes in Clwyd, North Wales which also concluded that men are more likely than women to choose integrative reasons for learning the language. Davies found that women learners of Welsh were more inclined to be motivated by partners or families. Such motives played little part in this case study, but it must be stressed that this is not the type of course that would appeal to learners with young children. Not only is it held in the summer holidays, but the lessons continue until 8:15 each evening. However on the subject of integrativeness, it should be noted that 30% of the males, compared to 16.7% of the females, expressed a wish to pass the language on to their children or future children. Of course these figures may be due in part to the fact that 35% of the male respondents, compared to 16% of the females, cited Welsh-speaking parents as a motivational factor. Given the smallness of the sample discussed here, it would have been impractical to have separated the responses of those with Welsh-speaking parents from those without;

however, the more extensive research project now in progress intends considering the possible influential role of this variable.

It is clear therefore, that whilst personal comments and statistics presented here suggest that the Ulpan is succeeding in its aim, much work remains to be done on a theoretical as well as a practical level. Unfortunately the gulf between researcher and teacher remains wide, both in Wales and beyond. Teachers frequently see motivation in a different light to researchers:

When teachers say that a student is motivated they are not usually concerning themselves with the student's reason for studying but are observing that the student does study (Crookes and Schmidt 1989: 227).

Researchers need to deal with motivation from the teacher's point of view, whilst teachers and course organisers need to be made more aware of the results of investigations in order to plan and develop their teaching strategies. With regard to the practical implications of surveys such as the one discussed here, Cook (1991: 75) makes the following observation:

The choice of teaching materials and the information content of the lesson for example should correspond to the motivations of the student.

In view of the above comment textbook writers concerned with providing an optimum learning environment for all students should consider the question of gender oriented motivational differences when designing syllabuses. A national survey of the communicative needs of 979 Welsh learners in 1989 considered this question carefully (Hughes 1989). It concluded that females tended to stress the importance of social communicative objectives whilst males were more prepared to select objectives such as giving advice or disagreeing. Interestingly, the variations were not considered sufficient enough to have any effect on the provision of communicative material. The high level of

motivational homogeneity present in my own small sample leads me to a similar conclusion although I do feel that another national survey is called for, especially as the drop-out rate among female Welsh learners on non-intensive courses remains high. With regard to motivational homogeneity, I would stress that the importance placed on the media by both genders in this survey suggests that additional second language programmes based on the communicative method would be beneficial as well as being a valuable and important step towards extending the current provision. Another aspect worthy of further attention, considering the emphasis placed by both genders on the importance of learning a language in a cultural context, is the provision and role of extra-curricular activities in residential, intensive courses. Learning fatigue is common in intensive courses and variety in both teaching methods and extra-curricular activities is a must.

Bearing the above suggestions in mind, it is to be hoped that this paper will contribute to the process of assessing the communicative needs of the adult Welsh learner, as well as to the development of effective teaching methods. The growing emotional awareness of the language, together with a sense of social responsibility, is encouraging. In the restoration of minority languages such as Welsh, as stated by Jones (1993: 10):

... the determining factor is and must be the adult-learning movement.

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