

The suitability of Welsh language provision in English-medium schools to produce speakers of the language

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the characteristics of teachers' lessons and conceptualization of the Welsh-language programme in English-medium schools, Key Stages 2 and 3, in order to see whether they supported pedagogy aimed at developing pupils' communicative proficiency. This is considered in light of the new curriculum for Wales which will be fully implemented by 2022, and its emphasis on teaching Welsh primarily as a means of communication in English-medium schools, within the context of the Welsh Government's linguistic vision to ensure a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The article raises the question of the extent to which the current Welsh language provision in English-medium schools is suitable to produce speakers of the language

Key words: Welsh, Communicative Competence, second Language (I2), *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), approach, Structural Approach, Communicative Approach, content-based learning, *Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching* (COLT).

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Introduction

Following the decline in the number of Welsh speakers highlighted by the 2011 census, at the Abergavenny National Eisteddfod 2016, the Welsh Government (WG) launched its vision of reaching a ‘million Welsh speakers’ by 2050. WG document (2017), *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* refers to the responsibility of the education system to achieve that vision. It states: ‘Education is central to our vision, but we must ensure our young people come out of the education system ready and proud to use the language in all contexts.’ (2017: 2). The results of the 2011 census showed that more and more people are now learning the language through the education system than in the home (Jones, 2011). As a result, it can be argued that responsibility will fall on the education system to maintain and regenerate the Welsh language.

The Education Reform Act 1988 granted the Welsh language status as a core subject in the national curriculum in Welsh-medium schools and status as a foundation subject for all other schools in Wales. The Welsh language has been a compulsory subject for pupils aged 5–14 since 1990. It became a compulsory subject at Key Stage 4 (14–16 years) from 1999. Following the introduction of the Foundation Phase, the Welsh language is now introduced to children from 3 to 16 years of age. However, bilingual education in Wales is a complex phenomenon, and not one that is simply limited to either ‘Welsh-medium’ education or ‘English-medium’ education. There are a range of Welsh-medium provisions on offer across Wales. WG published a bilingual typology in 2007 in order to categorise schools according to the Welsh language provision they offer. At one end of the typology there are Welsh-medium schools that teach most of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh except for English. At the other end, there are English-medium schools that teach most of the curriculum through the medium of English. The Welsh language is taught only as a foundation subject in those schools (WG, 2007). Between these two ends of the spectrum, a wide range of bilingual provisions depend on the percentage of school subjects being taught through the medium of Welsh.

StatsWales’s most recent statistics (2019) show that there are 1,238 primary schools in Wales, of which 806 are ‘predominantly English’ schools. This means that as many as around 65 per cent of primary schools in Wales are English-medium schools, except for two-stream primary schools (schools offering either Welsh-medium or English-medium education). In addition, there are 187 secondary schools in Wales, of which

132 are ‘predominantly English’ schools. As many as around 70 per cent of secondary schools in Wales, therefore, are English-medium schools.

These statistics show that a majority of children in Wales receive their education through the medium of English which, in turn, means that a majority of children in Wales follow a foundation Welsh programme, where the Welsh language is introduced as a school subject in the same way as modern foreign languages. This situation clearly highlights the key role of English-medium schools in maintaining and regenerating the Welsh language and in achieving the WG’s vision. It is recognised in the government’s latest strategy, *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* (2017: 38), that ‘the English-medium sector has an important contribution to make to our aim of developing Welsh speakers’. It further states:

To reach a million speakers, we need to transform how we teach Welsh to learners in all other schools, in order that at least half of those learners report by 2050 that they can speak Welsh by the time they leave school. We intend to develop a single continuum for the teaching of Welsh as a language, with an emphasis on learning Welsh predominantly as a means of communication, particularly oral communication. (WG, 2017: 38)

The issue

Welsh language education in English-medium schools has been a subject of criticism in recent years. Since the introduction of Welsh as a compulsory subject from primary to the end of Key Stage 3 (KS3), i.e. 14 years old, in 1990, and from primary to the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4), i.e. 16 years old, in 1999, standards of attainment have continued to be a cause of concern. Despite 13 years of instruction between the ages of 3 and 16, a limited number of pupils leave school with any significant proficiency in the language.

‘It is undeniably the eleventh hour for Welsh second language.’ Professor Sioned Davies’s words above in her foreword to *One language for all* encapsulate the gravity of the situation (WG, 2013: 4; emphasis added). This review followed years of damning Estyn annual reports (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015) which portrayed a state of failure and a continuous decline in Welsh-medium education in English-medium schools.

The most common criticism found in several annual reports is the lack of opportunities for pupils to develop their communicative skills (Estyn, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014). According to Estyn (2013: 45), pupils will not

have the opportunity to 'structure simple sentences independently' or to use Welsh across the curriculum. This problem was highlighted over a decade ago by Estyn in its *Survey of Welsh as a Second Language in Key Stages 2 and 3 and Transition*:

In order to raise standards from satisfactory to good and very good, there is a need to: ask for longer oral responses from pupils and to test their ability to apply what they have learned to natural situations of communication, including making spontaneous and extended contributions (2003: 4).

WG has not specified any specific pedagogy for the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools. However, 70 per cent of subject level assessment is at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) and 60 per cent at the end of KS3, is based on oracy performance (WG, 2009). The percentages indicate that the Welsh programme of study in English-medium schools is an oracy-orientated programme. When discussing the approach used to teach the Welsh language, the report *One language for all* (WG, 2013: 33) states that 'the underpinning philosophy has varied across the years from a structured grammar-based approach to a more communicative approach. By now teachers settle on methods which draw from each of these strands.'

Language learning and teaching

Language learning and teaching is a broad area and it is essential to recognise that, ultimately, several psychological and social factors influence the linguistic outcomes of any provision. As has already been mentioned, bilingual education in Wales is a complex phenomenon, and it is not one that is simply limited to either 'Welsh-medium' education or 'English-medium' education. The provision on offer varies across Wales. Only Welsh-medium schools are available in Gwynedd while a majority of schools in South Wales are confined to either Welsh-medium or English-medium schools. There is a range of bilingual schools elsewhere in the country, such as Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion in West Wales. Currently, it is in English-medium schools that the foundation or mainstream Welsh study programme is provided which is considered in this study. A feature of a mainstream language programme is that it is taught as a school 'subject' that is part of the curriculum. In the case of English-medium schools, the Welsh language is currently introduced as a school subject only in KS2, 3 and 4.

There have been major changes in this type of bilingual provision over the past century as a result of the influence of linguists, educators,

psychologists and politicians. Two main mechanisms can certainly be asserted to have had a major influence on the provision of mainstream programmes since the mid-twentieth century. The advent of Structural Approach was seen around the second half of the twentieth century after the Second World War. Comparisons between first language acquisition and second language acquisition (L2) have been an important feature of Structural Linguistics. In tandem with the Structural Approach, a link between learning L2 and behaviourism was developed. The Structural Approach placed emphasis on the spoken language based on the ideas of the Structural Linguists regarding learning linguistic structures and the behavioural psychologists regarding learning by means of a conditioned response. The advent of mainstream, language-orientated methods such as the audio-visual method, the oral method and the structural-oral-situational method as well as alternative methods such as the natural method, community learning, suggestopedia and desuggestopedia, complete physical response and the silent method were seen during this period. This was the age of 'the methods'. The structural approach was ultimately criticised for the lack of learners' ability to produce language naturally or to use language structures beyond those modelled and learned during their instruction.

Chomsky's (1965) attack on behaviourist theories is regularly referred to as the starting point to replace the structural approach and the development of the Communicative Approach (Savignon, 1987; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Talfryn, 2001; Cook, 2008). Chomsky's universal grammar theories (1965) and his definitions of 'competence' and 'performance' had a major impact on linguistics and, in particular, on the area of language learning and teaching, triggering a revision in language teaching methodology. Chomsky's definitions of 'competence' and 'performance' prompted extensive discussion of the linguistic meaning of 'competence' and paved the way for other theorists to develop their ideas (Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1973; Widdowson, 1978; Canale and Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990, and Bachman and Palmer, 1996). The aim of the communicative movement is to develop the Communicative Competence of the learners, a term coined by Hymes (1972). In essence, communication is the main purpose of language. The Communicative Competence theories sought to conceptualize the understanding needed for effective communication in the target language. However, the early Communicative Approach syllabus introduced in the second half of the twentieth century eventually lost popularity. It was argued that its syllabus was not based on language

functions in fact or different or preferable to the syllabus of the Structural Approach which it sought to replace.

The Communicative Approach has adapted, developed and evolved since its advent and its notional-functional syllabus. By today, the Communicative Approach has a range of branches which all aim to develop learners' Communicative Competence. Immersion Education approaches are a popular provision which have become established to varying degrees based on the principles of the Communicational Approach; Language Learning through Topical Content; and Task-based Language Learning.

In recent years there has been considerable interest in content-based learning programmes, such as the *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) provision, a term coined by the European Union in order to reflect its linguistic needs and differentiate between European bilingual education and the rest of the world (García, 2009). A feature of CLIL pedagogy is a balanced emphasis on content and language within a single integrated educational programme. Pérez-Cañado (2012) describes CLIL provision as a natural 'descendant' to immersion programmes. There appears to be a clear link between the principles of the Communicative Approach and immersion programmes based on the same principle of setting a language in a context and using it for appropriate purposes through topical content. Learners' success is assessed according to their ability to discuss content or perform a task rather than their ability to use particular language forms. Indeed, *Welsh second language: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3* (WG, 2009) refers to the benefits of language learning via a medium.

According to Tavakoli and Jones (2018) in their assessment of evidence about effective L2 teaching methods, the evidence about the benefits of CLIL provision was inconsistent in the report. The study reported benefits related to the oral proficiency of CLIL students. However, it was noted that CLIL provision tended to go hand-in-hand with intensive contact hours and, therefore, the proposed benefits could not be attributed solely to CLIL provision (Tavakoli and Jones, 2018). However, it can be argued that the success of any programme is largely dependent on adequate contact with the language.

While research into the effectiveness of Content-based Language Learning programmes continues to divide opinion, there is no doubt that the evidence so far bodes well in terms of the competence of the programme type to develop communicative skills (Harris and Ó Duibhir, 2011; Puerto and Lacabex, 2013; Pérez Cañado and Lancaster, 2017; Pérez-Cañado, 2018). According to Pérez-Cañado (2018: 19), 'Studies from the very

outset of CLIL Research (1999) to the present moment (2016) have recurrently indicated that CLIL not only positively affects FL [foreign language] learning, but also L1 [first language] development and content acquisition.’ In fact, Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011) state: 42) in their report on effective approaches to second language teaching: ‘The tendency has been for CLIL practice to precede research and much of the evidence for therefore is anecdotal. This may be because the positive effects are available apparent to teachers.’

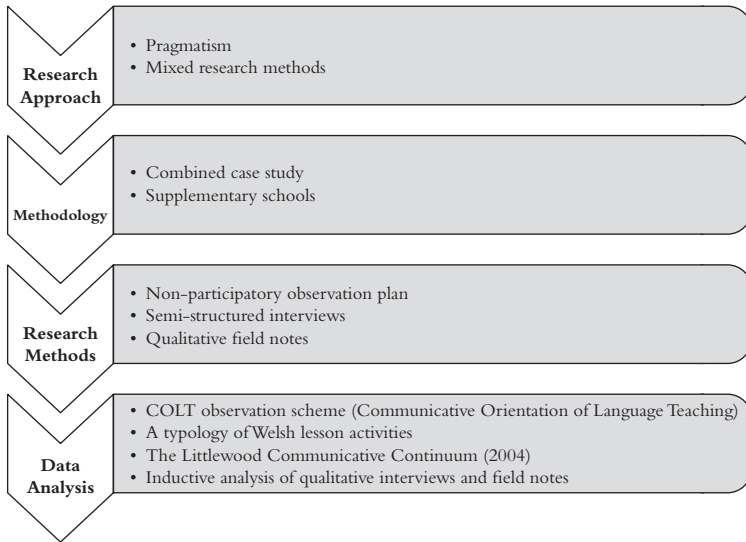
Following the publication of Professor Graham Donaldson’s review of the national curriculum, *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales* (WG, 2015), the Minister for Education and Skills accepted each of the 68 recommendations he made. 10 of those recommendations involved the Welsh language in the curriculum as a result of the *One language for all* review (WG, 2013). One of the recommendations of *Successful Futures* (WG, 2015: 60) was that ‘There should be a renewed focus in schools on learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication, particularly oral communication and understanding.’

What exactly are the practical implications of learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication? Is this not the aim of the current oracy-orientated study programme? The objective of this research, therefore, was to examine lesson conditions and teachers’ conceptualization of the Welsh language programme in English-medium schools to see whether they supported pedagogy aimed at developing pupils’ communicative proficiency. With the exception of Estyn’s annual reports which offer valuable insights into Welsh lessons, no study has been undertaken into the current pedagogy adopted to teach Welsh through detailed observation of lessons in English-medium schools.

Methodology

A pragmatic theoretical position (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013) was adopted for the study using a mixed research methods approach; that is, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. From a pragmatic theoretical perspective, the research objectives may require both qualitative and quantitative data; qualitative data also offer quantitative data and vice versa. A combined exploratory case study was chosen as the research methodology, namely, a group of individual case

Figure 1. Research design.



studies in order to gain a more detailed picture of the class to which the cases belong rather than being limited to one particular case (Stake, 1995). The design of the research is outlined in Figure 1.

The Participating Schools

‘Mainly English’ primary and secondary schools participated, based on WG definitions (2007) of schools according to their Welsh medium provision. Two secondary schools and two primary schools in the local authorities of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Cardiff were part of the voluntary sample: that is, one secondary school and one primary school that fed that school in both local authorities. These schools were selected to represent the *case schools* because they agreed for the researcher to observe 10 Welsh lessons and conduct interviews with the staff who were observed.

In addition, two Welsh language officers in education agreed to be observed teaching one lesson each in the two primary case schools. In addition to the four case schools, one secondary school in Carmarthen local authority agreed to an observation period of five Welsh lessons and

interviews, and one secondary school and one primary school in Monmouth local authority, and one secondary school in Powys local authority agreed for the researcher to observe one Welsh language lesson and interview. These schools are called *supplementary schools*: that is, primary and secondary schools that are similar to the case schools in the sense that they fall into the category of 'mainly English' in terms of Welsh language provision. It was decided, therefore, to conduct research in schools that were supplementary to the main case schools in order to provide a wider picture of Welsh language education in English-medium schools.

At the time of the research, secondary school pupils were receiving four hours a fortnight of Welsh lessons. Primary school contact hours tended to vary between one and two hours per week.

Observation

The data collection methods used include observing 50 lessons over a period of a year and conducting semi-structured interviews with all observed teachers. The observation scheme used was the *Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching* (COLT) observation scheme developed by Allen, Spada and Fröhlich in 1987 and later adapted by Spada and Fröhlich (1995). The COLT design is a quantitative observation scheme based on a detailed observation of lesson characteristics including: activities, interactions, content, skills and materials in order to measure the communicative nature of lessons. The scheme is process-orientated and analyses what happens within lessons by recording and timing at the time. The scheme also allows the production of *low inference* data: that is, a description of uninterpretable observable facts. The original scheme was adapted for the purposes of this research. Table 1 shows a coded example of a COLT design.

Each activity/episode was timed to calculate the percentage of time spent on the different features of the scheme. One activity usually consisted of several episodes. One episode represented the unit of analysis. The activities and/or episodes formed the units for analysis. Features such as drilling, language game, reading and comprehension would represent separate activities analysed in more detail according to different episodes within those activities. An episode had to continue for over a minute. A short episode that continued for less than a minute, such as a case where a teacher asked for the attention of the class in order to correct an error during an oral group's work, would be included as part of the group work.

Table 1. Coded extract from the COLT scheme.

(A) Time, activity and episode	(B) Description of the activity/ episode		(C) Interaction						(D) Content					
			Class			Other			Instructions	Language				
			A ↔ Di/D	Di ↔ Di/D	Joint	Group	Pair	Individual		Form	Form/Meaning	Meaning	Social-linguistic	Discourse
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1 1	Reviewing 3rd person language forms	/							/	/				
10										1				
2 1	Reading text on the whiteboard						/				/			
3														
2 2	Discussing the text as a class	/		/						/				
4														
2 3	Reading text on the whiteboard						/				/			
1														
2 4	Discussing the text as a class	/		/						/				
3		/												
3 1	Activity instructions	/						/						
7														
3 2	Writing activity	/					/		/					
8							1							

Following the observation period, a ‘Typology of Welsh lesson activities’ was formed using COLT scheme data and qualitative observation notes in the form of detailed descriptions of lessons. The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) was used to analyse the typology of Welsh lesson activities.

Table 2. The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004).

Name on form		Focus on meaning		
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, M. substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. 'question- and- answer' practice	Practising pre- taught language in context where it communicates new information, e.g. information- gap activities or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations that elicit pre- learnt language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role- play and simple problem- solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role- play, more complex problem-solving and discussion

Table 3. The total number of semi-structured interviews.

Counties	Sector	Interviewees
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Secondary school	3
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Primary school	1
Cardiff	Secondary school	3
Cardiff	Primary school	2
Carmarthenshire	Secondary school	4
Powys	Secondary school	1
Monmouthshire	Secondary school	1
Monmouthshire	Primary school	1
Welsh language officers in education	Primary	2
Total number of interviews		18

The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) is a continuum that distinguishes between ‘focused form’ exercises and ‘communicative tasks’ to measure the communicative nature of classroom activities. It was decided that the Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) would be an effective research tool to measure the communicative nature of Welsh lesson activities. It has been a systematic approach to analysing lesson activities by counting the percentage of time spent on the different dimensions of the continuum.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview was held with 18 observed teachers. Table 3 below shows the total number of interviewees in each school. Interviews were conducted through the medium of Welsh or English according to the choice of interviewees. 15 of the 18 were Welsh teachers of their subject. Three primary teachers were in year 6 who did not specialise in Welsh. The interviews were conducted at the end of the observation period to ensure that the interview questions would not directly influence the pedagogy of the practitioners.

Results and discussion

The objective of this research was to examine lesson conditions and teachers' conceptualization of the Welsh language in English-medium schools to see whether they supported pedagogy aimed at developing pupils' communicative proficiency. The purpose of this research was not to generalise to the target population of primary and secondary schools across Wales falling into the 'mainly English' category based on WG definitions (2007) of schools according to their Welsh medium provision. However, the results allowed the researcher to generalise to those schools that participated in the study and draw conclusions that will be relevant to other English-medium schools as well as other stakeholders in the Welsh language learning and teaching field. The results are discussed below according to the lesson characteristics of the schools who participated.

Interaction

Table 4 shows that on average pupils spent a total of 44.5 per cent of the time interacting as a whole class led by the teacher. Similar results were seen across the case schools and supplementary schools. However, that percentage was higher in the secondary case schools, with a total of 53.6 per cent in the Rhondda Cynon Taf secondary school (RhCT1), and 50.2 per cent in the Cardiff secondary school (C1). The results show that the Welsh lessons in the secondary case schools are more teacher-focused than the Welsh lessons in the primary case schools.

Group work was not a prominent feature in any of the case schools. However, group work is seen as a more prominent feature in the primary schools than the secondary case schools, particularly in the Cardiff primary case school (C2) which allocated a total of 10.2 per cent of the time to group work. The field notes recorded how the primary school tables were organised in groups and the secondary schools in rows. As a result, it is fair to claim that the primary class seating plan facilitated interaction between the pupils and a more pupil-centred pedagogy compared to the secondary schools.

Case school and positive lesson pupils spent 2.9 per cent of the time on average interacting with the teacher as well as a combination with some other characteristic of the category. This refers to periods when the pupils were working under the teacher's guidance and undertaking some form of

Table 4. Overall average of the interaction category of the COLT scheme.

Key: T = Teacher P = Pupil C = Class	Class			Other			
	T ↔ P/C	P ↔ P/C	Joint	Pair	Group	Individual	Combinations
Rhondda Cynon Taf 1 (RhCT1) <i>10 lessons</i>	53.6	6	2.3	14.9	2.6	19.8	0.8
Rhondda Cynon Taf 2 (RhCT2) <i>10 lessons</i>	40.7	7.1	6.2	11.2	4.3	30.5	0
Cardiff 1 (C1) <i>10 lessons</i>	50.2	5.3	0	7.1	4.3	29.1	4
Cardiff 2 (C2) <i>10 lessons</i>	35.2	4.6	1.4	6.6	10.2	32	10
Supplementary Schools <i>10 gwrs</i>	43	8.6	3.5	11.4	16	17.5	0
Overall average	44.5	6.3	2.7	10.2	7.5	25.8	3

individual, pair or class exercise. For example, during one lesson observed in C1, the teacher wrote the sentence ‘Dw i’n hoffi hanes’ on the white board. Small whiteboards were given to the pupils and the teacher asked them to expand on that sentence. During this activity pupils worked under the guidance of the teacher as well as individually.

On average, pupils spent 44.5 per cent of the time interacting as a whole class, 2.8 per cent of the time in teacher-led joint interaction (in a drill exercise for example) and 2.9 per cent of the time interacting with the teacher as well as a combination with some other characteristic of the category. As a result, by combining those sub-categories, it could be argued that the pupils actually spent a total of 50.2 per cent of the time interacting as a teacher-led class, which is a much higher percentage than other features of the interaction category.

It is worth noting that the categories refer to what the *majority* of pupils do: that is, listening only at those times when a few individuals are interacting with the teacher. Typically, a teacher-led interaction is a small number of pupils who interact by answering questions in order to assess

their understanding or for language modelling. As a result, the majority of pupils spend that time in a passive role.

It is acknowledged in the interviews that factors such as discipline management, pupils' propensity to turn to their mother tongue, noise level, lack of contribution and lack of space in the classroom can be barriers to group work. It must also be acknowledged that the results of the interviews showed that large classes were a barrier in the Welsh language provision of secondary schools, particularly when managing oral tasks. However, the results of this research do not testify either to pedagogy which aims to develop pupils' communicative proficiency by providing them with adequate opportunities for interaction and communication. The purpose of this category is to distinguish between teacher-centred pedagogy and pupil-centred pedagogy which encourages a high level of interaction and communication through group/ pair work. It was teacher-centred pedagogy that was observed mostly across schools, a feature that has implications for other areas of pedagogy. This led to discussing the language during the lessons observed.

Linguistic content

The extent of pupils' contact with the Welsh language was limited input based on the introduction and use of a narrow range of language structures. The results of the interviews, supported by the field notes, highlighted that, above all, the schools used a language-orientated syllabus based on themes/topics to teach Welsh. One of the interviewees from a supplementary secondary school in Monmouthshire stated that 'It's a thematic syllabus, but it is led by the language. We decide on the language patterns to be introduced and then decide on suitable themes to introduce the patterns.' A similar situation was described by an interviewee from a supplementary secondary school in Carmarthenshire who claimed that:

Two years ago, we started to teach Year 7 through grammar alone. So, we cover the present and past tenses very thoroughly, but we are no longer doing that through themes in Year 7. We leave the themes until year 8 and 9. [Interviewee in a supplementary secondary school in Carmarthenshire]

An interviewee in RhCT1 confirmed:

In Year 7 children only learn the present tense. They learn the past tense and idioms in Year 8, then start on the conditional tense and learn more idioms in Year

9. Having said that, they learn the language through specific topics in order to promote their ability to use the language in real situations. [Interviewee RhCT1]

Language-orientated syllabuses are arranged around the language. The attention given to the context used to introduce that language becomes a secondary consideration. The purpose of the themes is to set a context. However, although the themes offer a discussion topic for introducing and practising language, they do not necessarily place language in a meaningful context. For example, a theme such as ‘the school’ would stimulate exchanges based on expressing a preference for school subjects rather than discussing aspects of school life that were relevant to pupils. This point highlights the mechanical and transactional nature of the pedagogy. Consequently, it is argued that the language introduced during Welsh lessons, to a great extent, misrepresents the nature of the target language; that is, that it is irrelevant to the communicative needs of the pupils beyond the classroom.

The content of the materials used during the lessons further confirms this point. The materials reflect the limited nature of the input presented to the pupils as they are vocabulary-based and a narrow range of language structures. The use of materials with minimal text (limited input in terms of vocabulary and a narrow range of independent language structures) was a very prominent feature of the lessons observed. Such materials were used for over 50 per cent of the time across the four case schools and the supplementary schools. As a result, attention to culture and the natural use of the target language through meaningful and extended materials was generally absent, along with the use of published Welsh materials. In only five of 50 lessons observed were teachers making use of original materials, namely books from the series *Babs a Benja* in KS2, the Urdd’s *bore da* magazine and L2 Welsh books for KS2 published by Aberystwyth University’s Centre for Education Studies. Instead, materials were presented with simple, manipulated and controlled input to include familiar language structures and associated vocabulary to ensure pupils understand the text verbatim. Those language materials used can also be described as culturally neutral.

Based on the evidence of this research, it is argued that the syllabus provides sufficient understanding to enable pupils to use familiar language structures in class circumstances, and to discuss a specific theme and offer accurate responses in assessments. However, doubt arises about the extent to which this can develop pupils’ communicative skills. This point

highlights further obvious considerations regarding the impact of assessment practices on pedagogy.

Language management

Naturally, the teacher-centred nature of the lessons discussed above, and the language-orientated syllabus highlight the teacher's control over the pupils' language use. The teachers managed pupils' language use for 59 per cent of the time during observation on average. An example of this was seen when a teacher asked RhCT2 pupils to practice the syntax 'Es i i ...' with a partner changing the country's name each time and using a list of countries provided by the teacher. In another example C2 pupils were seen changing verb tenses to the past: from the 1st person present, for example, from 'Dw i'n mynd' to 'Es i'. In RhCT1, pupils were given a worksheet to complete with partners. The pupils read a piece written in the 3rd person based on their area. They were asked to read the piece verbally with a partner and fill in the gaps by selecting the appropriate word from a list of vocabulary. The examples above show that the teacher or text was responsible for managing the language that the pupils used to complete the activities.

For the rest of the time, the pupils themselves had little control themselves to offer limited personal responses to questions set by the teacher. There were very few opportunities for pupils to take ownership of the language through activities that demanded unforeseeable and spontaneous language use. The teacher's control over pupils' language use has been a prominent feature of the lessons observed due to the structural and transactional nature of the pedagogy based on a language-orientated syllabus.

Classroom activities

The results also showed that the class activities of the participating schools were based primarily on traditional methods including: drill exercises; pronunciation exercises; reviewing vocabulary; grammatical instruction; translation and replacement exercises and controlled language structures practice activities.

Over 50 per cent of activities across all schools belong to grade 1 of the Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004): that is, activities that were non-communicative.

Figure 2. The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) grade 1 activity.

Case school RhCT2

Replacement of a language pattern

Pupils were asked to work with a partner to practise the following pattern:

'Mae hi'n ... heddiw ond roedd hi'n ... ddoe' and replacing the vocabulary each time.

The pupils had a copy of the vocabulary to assist with the exercise.

Figure 2 shows an example of activity in C2 that belongs to grade 1 of the continuum. This is an example of a non-communicative exercise. The aim of the activity was to review language structure and master vocabulary. The pupils did not need to understand the meaning of the language structure to carry out that exercise.

Oral activities ranged from practising language structures in a vacuum (grade 2) to activities focused on transactional conversations through asking and answering set personal questions (grade 3). Moreover, those oral activities tended to be mechanical and transactional with an emphasis on the formation of correct structures rather than conveying meaningful information.

Figure 3 shows an example of an activity in the supplementary secondary school in Powys that belongs to grade 2 of the continuum, a pre-communicative exercise. This is an example of a pre-communicative exercise based on a practising a structure exercise with limited attention to meaning. In this example, pupils had to understand the meaning of the question to answer it. However, the aim of the activity was to practise a specific pattern. The exercise highlights what has already been discussed with regard to the use of the themes as topics for discussion. However, they do not place the language in any authentic context. In addition to this, it should be noted that the language misrepresented the nature of the target language: that is, it does not contribute to the development of pupils' communicative proficiency beyond the classroom.

In Figure 4 there is an example of an activity in C2 which belongs to grade 3 of the continuum, a communicative exercise. This activity belongs to grade 3 of the continuum because there is a knowledge gap and an unforeseeable element to the task as the pupils go about formulating personal answers. However, again, there was a transactional and mechanical nature to this oral activity.

The questions did not follow naturally from one to the other in order to emulate an authentic conversation. Again, the activity highlights the

Figure 3. The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) grade 2 activity.

Supplementary secondary school in Powys

Whole-class question and answer

There was a Q & A session to review the question 'Pa sbortiau wyt ti'n hoffi?'. Pupils were encouraged to create positive and negative sentences as well as giving reasons by adding 'achos mae'n ...' at the end of their answers. For example, 'Dw i'n hoffi rygbi achos mae'n gyffrous.'

teacher's control over the pupils' language use as they respond to set questions.

Those activities which could be regarded as 'communicative' (grade 3 of the continuum) can, therefore, be described as mechanical. The 'communication' tended to be transactional, based on a set of closed questions set by the teacher: that is, the extent of the 'communication' was opportunities to offer limited responses to set questions through the use of foreseeable language only'.

Another notable feature of the lessons observed was the use of oral exercises via language games. The interviewees' descriptions of the language games they liked to set, as an example of the development of oral skills, highlighted that they were essentially structured exercises. But they were introduced through games to keep pupils interested.

Less mechanical and transactional oral exercises with an emphasis on practising vocabulary and the formation of a narrow range of correct

Figure 4. The Littlewood Communicative Continuum (2004) grade 3 activity.

Case school C2

Asking and answering set personal questions

The pupils were asked to work with partners to ask and answer the following set questions when discussing their lunch hour:

Beth fwytaist ti?

Beth yfaist ti?

Beth wyliaist ti?

Beth wisgaist ti?

Beth chwaraeaist ti?

Ble est ti?

structures were a prominent feature of the lessons. In discussing methods of fostering fluency during Welsh lessons, teachers referred to those oral activities.

There are no activities across all schools that belong to grade 5 of the continuum (authentic communicative practice), namely activities that demand a high level of unforeseeable language in order to foster fluency and achieve a non-linguistic goal. It was only in C2 that a small percentage (7 per cent) of exercises relating to grade 4 of the continuum (structured communicative exercise) were observed. Grade 4 is based on activities that are directed towards practising familiar language with an element of spontaneous and unforeseeable language. During this activity, the pupils were asked to think of a famous person as a group and attempt to describe that person. In turn, the groups described the famous person to the rest of the class. This activity provided the pupils with an opportunity to use a fairly wide range of language structures with an element of spontaneity.

Results from the COLT scheme and the qualitative field notes show that any emphasis on meaningful communication by interacting and using language structures in an integrated and spontaneous manner is generally absent in the lessons observed. Activities that were focused on meaning tended to be activities with a low level of interaction and communication between the pupils, such as reading and comprehension activities. Overall, it is fair to claim that a narrow communicative nature was observed across the four case schools and supplementary schools. Activities focused on mastering a very narrow range of language and vocabulary structures by adopting transactional pedagogy within a narrow context.

Conclusions

This study provides an insight into the pedagogy adopted to teach Welsh in English-medium schools. The evidence strongly suggests that the Welsh language pedagogy in the English-medium schools that participated tipped the scales on the side of traditional approaches. Certainly, the characteristics of the lessons were typical of the traditional structural-oral-situational approach with its strong emphasis on the oral and introducing language structures through utilitarian topics, a method that according to Richards and Rodgers (2001: 47) to this day is 'widely used, though not necessarily widely acknowledged'.

In April 2019, the first draft of the new curriculum for Wales was published. There is no doubt that there is a major focus in that document

on ‘providing meaningful contexts’ (WG, 2019: 5) in order to produce effective communicators in accordance with the recommendations of *Successful Futures* (WG, 2015: 60) of ‘a renewed focus on learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication, particularly oral communication and understanding’. What, therefore, are the practical implications of learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication?

No doubt that answering this question is key to making positive changes to Welsh education in English-medium schools and is going to remain central to the discussion for some time. One of the pedagogical principles of *Successful Futures* (WG, 2015: 67) is that ‘good teaching and learning creates authentic contexts for learning’, as well as the importance ‘that children and young people see the relevance in their learning to the world beyond the school gates and that opportunities are taken to forge links to that world.’ (WG, 2015: 67). It is recommended that opportunities are extended for pupils to use the language in an authentic context and to achieve a non-linguistic aim, opportunities that provision such as task-based language learning facilitates. Developing a continuum of language tasks, such as the model used for this research, can provide guidance on how to approach the setting of exercises that elicit authentic and meaningful communication. In developing pupils’ fluency, it must be realised that there is more at the heart of communication than verbal expression only.

Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers (WG, 2017: 38) refers to developing ‘a single continuum for the teaching of Welsh as a language’. It is recommended that such a continuum should aim to present linguistic input that is socially relevant, meaningful, purposeful, interesting and wide-ranging. The research in this article suggests that it will be important to consider how it can be ensured that the relevant experiences of learners in the new curriculum drive the process of language acquisition without merely practising the language patterns driving the choice of content or experience. Further reference is made (WG, 2017: 38) to ‘transforming’ the way in which the Welsh language is presented to pupils in English-medium schools. In accordance with this principle, it is recommended that a content-orientated provision is investigated with the long-term aim of replacing the current language-orientated Welsh language provision.

Both the Welsh Government and Estyn have extensively criticised current Welsh language provision in English-medium schools. The Welsh Government has also referred to the benefits of learning elements of other subjects through the medium of Welsh. As already mentioned, the evidence, to date, bodes well as to the competence of medium-orientated

programmes to develop communicative skills (Harris and Ó Duibhir, 2011; Puerto and Lacabex, 2013; Pérez Cañado and Lancaster, 2017; P Érez-Cañado, 2018). A general consensus in the area of language learning and teaching supports pedagogy that sets language in a context and uses it for appropriate purposes. This type of provision is based on the philosophy that language learning is more successful when used to communicate authentically and for a meaningful purpose.

If the development of communicative competence is to be the aim of the new Welsh language curriculum in English-medium schools, it will be essential that the principles of that provision replicate what it aims to achieve, as well as clear guidance and training as to exactly how to implement them. Furthermore, efforts to make any changes to the provision in English-medium schools will be meaningless without intensifying and increasing the number of contact hours with the Welsh language.

It is important to recognise that, ultimately, a large number of psychological, social and contextual factors affect the linguistic outcomes of any curricular programme. It is recognised that other factors, such as language contact hours, progression between key stages, class numbers, the number of teachers able to speak Welsh and opportunities to learn Welsh across the curriculum are all factors that were not discussed in detail in this article. In addition, the implementation of content-orientated provision has wide-ranging training implications. It has already been mentioned that Estyn and the Welsh Government have criticised the Welsh language programme in English-medium schools for years. However, the results of this research show that, to a large extent, circumstances prevent teachers from developing pupils' communicative skills, circumstances such as the use of traditional methodology and a lack of sufficient contact hours.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the greatest challenge facing the education system is how to realise and implement the recommendations of *Successful Futures* (WG, 2015) to ensure that the Welsh language provision in English-medium schools is suitable for the development of pupils' communicative skills. It can be argued, therefore, that the future of the Welsh language depends on the will and ability of the Welsh Government, as well as consortia, local authorities and schools in Wales, to actively promote Welsh language provision in English-medium schools and to make it competent to produce speakers of the language.

In order to achieve the WG's vision of reaching a million speakers by 2050, there will be a need to completely reform existing Welsh language

provision in English-medium schools. This is the only feasible means by which the Welsh language can be transferred to the majority of the children of Wales, who are currently still receiving their education through the medium of English.

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