Performing Bilingualism at the Meso Level: An Example from a Bilingual School in Mid-Wales

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Overview
- Background
- Meso Level
- Performativity
- Data
- Prominent Discourses
- An Example: Ecology-of-Language Discourse

A Bilingual Wales
“[In a truly bilingual Wales both Welsh and English will flourish and will be treated as equal.”
(National Assembly for Wales 2002)

Cymru Ddwyieithog
“Mewn Cymru wirioneddol ddwyieithog fe fydd y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg yn ffynnu ac yn cael eu trin yn gyfartal.”
(Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru 2002)

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Devolved National Assembly for Wales

1999 – first elections for the National Assembly for Wales with devolved powers for education and language policy

Iaith Pawb (Everyone’s Language)

A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales

“Our vision is a bold one […] a truly bilingual Wales, by which we mean a country where people can choose to live their lives through the medium of either or both Welsh or English and where the presence of the two languages is a source of pride and strength to us all.”
(WAG 2003: 1)

Percentage of Welsh Speakers 2001
(National Census Figures)

Maintained primary-school pupils, aged 5 years and over, by ability to speak Welsh
(based on the annual Schools’ Census).

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In the context of Spanish education, Martín Rojo (2004: 247) has highlighted the mediating role of the institutional meso level between the macro and micro levels of society. For the analyst, this meso level of society is important to ascertain the reception and reproduction of & resistance to legitimated discourses.

The meso level is where the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) is to be implemented to “encourage individuals to learn Welsh and empower them to use the language.” (WAG 2003: §4.1)

Thus meso-level institutions – such as bilingual schools – have been charged to carry out the Assembly Government’s action plan to revitalise Welsh.

Bilingual schools are an important site for recontextualising macro-level discourses
- where macro- and micro-level discourses meet,
- where one can examine the recontextualisation of identifiable discourses enshrined in such LPP documents.

Within a poststructuralist paradigm, performativity has become a key concept in understanding the role of language in the dynamic constitution of social categories and their linked identities in terms of repeated and ongoing “performances”. (Musk 2006: 19)

Judith Butler: “A performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names.” (Butler 1990: 33)

Thus bilingualism, like gender, can be claimed to be a category that does not predate the concept; it is produced by means of repeated discursive acts, “which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural type of being.” (Butler 1990: 33)
Performativity Theory 3

Thus bilingualism is to be seen as dynamic bilingualisms-in-practice, which are continually being reshaped, revalued and reconstituted, both through discourses which recontextualise the notion, and through the everyday language practices of bilinguals. (Musk 2006: 113)

Iterability – One Key Performative Discursive Process

Iterability (citationality) — the force of the performative emanates from its repetition or iterability, which necessarily involves discursive decontextualisation and recontextualisation.

Iterability 2

The force and meaning of an utterance are not exclusively determined by prior contexts or “positions”; an utterance may gain its force precisely by virtue of the break with context that it performs. Such breaks with prior context or, indeed, with ordinary usage, are crucial to the political operation of the performative. Language takes on a non-ordinary meaning in order precisely to contest what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary. (Butler 1997: 147)

Discourse & Discourse Analysis

A discourse — “a way of talking about and acting upon the world which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices.” (Candlin & Maley 1997: 202)

Discourse analysis — identifying such discourses, both spoken in writing, i.e. aggregates of associated discursive features in circulation across different contexts, constituted by particular words, collocations or phrases.

For example, a ‘national(ist) discourse’ with reference to territorial, political, administrative, institutional and cultural (including linguistic) separateness or separation, with associated aspirations for political (or cultural) self-determination.

Data

LPP documents
- at an all-Wales, county & school level

Institutional discourse
- video-recorded open evening for parents & prospective pupils of a bilingual school

Focus-group discussions
- 4 video-recorded focus groups (4-6 participants in each)

Three Prominent Discourses

1. National discourse
2. Commodification discourse
3. Ecology-of-language discourse
3. Ecology-of-language discourse

(i) pays homage to linguistic human rights, and

(ii) promotes linguistic diversity through efforts to ensure the maintenance and revitalisation of Welsh.

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School Open Evening: Head Teacher

1. your means of succeeding in school depends, (.3) on: the pupil's commitment, (.3) to develop the Welsh further, (.3)
2. Everybody be they Welsh, (.3) or English: (.3) speaking Welsh is important.
3. Many of the pupils in that effort: (...)
4. so that they are able to take full advantage of the education that we offer, (<.3) at this school, (.3) and I don't want to bend any false pretense: (.3) that is what we offer, (.3) but it is a commitment to be had from pupils, (.4) and parents to that ideal.

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Focus Group Discussion (pupils at the same bilingual school)

64. Amy: gwell ni siarad Gymraeg > a os ma' nw'n teimlo fel 'a pam
65. saesneg.> a os ma' nw'n teimlo fel 'a pam
66. Louise: Lie | J
67. Llinos: Lie | J
68. Amy: ie a ym (.) beth sy y yw annoying yw (.) ei'n yeah and uhm, what is annoying is,
69. Amy: gwbod dy le'nôn siarad Gymraeg > a ma'n bwysig know we should speak Welsh and it's important
70. for us to speak Welsh, but people who don't
71. siarad Gymraeg o nghwel (.4) jyst er mwyn rebelo speak Welsh at all, just to rebel
72. yn ei siarad Gymraeg by ddym on'n meddwl > na ma' nw'n against teachers thinking no they
73. Louise: mm
74. Llinos: ie
75. Louise: Lie | J
76. Amy: we'd better speak Welsh (but we're) gonna speak
77. English and if they feel like that why didn't they just go to the English-medium school in the first place?
78. Amy: nwy'w n' gyntynn > i [ysgol 2] yn y lle gyntynn didn't they just go to [the English-medium school] in the first place?

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References


