

The development of local language indicators

Hywel Jones

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg / Welsh Language Board
Market Chambers
5-7 St Mary Street
Cardiff
CF10 1AT
<mailto:hywel.m.jones@bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk>

Abstract

The Welsh Language Board commissioned a project in 2005 to develop a methodology to monitor language use, and change over time, in localities. As part of the project 6 locations were surveyed. There were two focuses: first, on language use by organisations at the interface with customers, whether in face-to-face or telephone contact, or by web or paper-based publicity material; and secondly on social use by individuals in public space, such as cafes and on buses. This paper will deal with the approach, loosely based on that used in Catalonia in the *Ofercat* project, taken with the first. The innovation of this work derives largely from the topic rather than any statistical aspect. The development of its methodology, while simple or even simplistic, necessitated the consideration of issues of the interaction of language legislation (the Welsh Language Act 1993) with current business and social structures and trends, and their effect on the linguistic landscape, using that term in a broad sense. Such considerations have a relevance beyond Wales and Welsh in this era of global migration and cultural change.

Key words: Welsh; language; indicators

Background

Iaith Pawb, the Welsh Assembly Government's National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales, published in February 2003 just before the full results from the 2001 Census became available, places considerable emphasis on the need for data relating to Welsh. The Government undertook to provide resources to the Welsh Language Board

"...to develop, compile and publish a range of statistical indicators about Welsh language ability levels and usage patterns, trends and projections" and aimed

"...to develop language use survey techniques to gather information about levels of fluency in Welsh, visibility of the language and confidence in using Welsh in different situations ..."

It explained that:

“The increased range of data will be used to help inform policy-making and prioritisation and will enable us to target, track, evaluate and review the effect of policies and programmes”.

This paper focuses on one project undertaken by the Welsh Language Board in response to this policy. It also aimed to contribute towards assessing the situation addressed by one specific target included in *Iaith Pawb*, namely that by 2011, “more services, by public, private and voluntary organisations are able to be delivered through the medium of Welsh”.

One weakness with this target was the absence of any baseline assessment of how many services could be (or were) delivered through the medium of Welsh.

The Welsh Language Board has a statutory role given to it when it became a statutory body with the introduction of the Welsh Language Act, 1993. The Board may require public bodies to prepare schemes giving effect “so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable, to the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality”. The contents of bodies schemes vary but commonly include steps to ensure that Welsh is treated equally with English on public signs, and to provide services bilingually, whether orally in face-to-face or telephone communications, or in writing, in the form of printed or web-based material. The figures in Table 1 illustrate the growth in these schemes over the last 5 years.

Table 1 Numbers of language schemes, 2001 to 2006

By sector	Number approved to 31 December 2001	Number approved and in operation on 31 December 2006	Change
Public (including Crown bodies)	162	342	+180
Voluntary sector	33	50	+17
Private sector (services privatised)	5	3	-2

Beyond the existence of these schemes, there is little statistical evidence as to their effectiveness in increasing the opportunities for Welsh-speakers to use the language. Language use by individuals in their dealings with organisations has been termed language consumption. When language is seen on signs, this is a passive use of language by the reader. Even when used in oral transactions, the language used by the customer tends to be consumptional in nature, the customer using the language on offer by the organisation. The ability of a Welsh-speaker to consume the language clearly depends on the extent of the offering of a Welsh-language service. Although bodies with statutory language schemes return reports annually to the Welsh Language Board detailing their progress,

these reports provide no evidence from the perspective of the Welsh-language consumer as to their experience of the resulting provision.

The urban space also provides a setting within which much interpersonal, non-transactional, active use of language occurs as people meet and intermingle while walking, shopping etc. While statistics are available from many sources concerning the ability of people to speak Welsh, their skill levels, and their self-professed use of the language, no attempts have been made in Wales to observe the extent to which Welsh is used in social settings. In the Basque Country, a series of Street Usage Surveys have been held to try to address this issue in their context, and a statistical model has been elaborated to demonstrate the dependence of language use not only on the percentage able to speak the language but also on their social integration or geographic distribution, and their choice of language.

The Welsh Language Board's project reported in this paper had two aspects reflecting these issues. One part of the project attempted to look at the experience of the Welsh-speaking consumer. Another part looked at the actual use of Welsh in some limited social situations, such as in cafes and on buses, where the nature and linguistic ambience of the location may have been of significance. This was an extremely experimental piece of work and is not discussed further in this paper. The next section describes the approach taken to assessing use made of the language by organisations but some relevant sociological theory will be briefly mentioned first.

One concept of diglossia is that people able to speak two languages in a society may differentiate between the functions those two languages are used for. It has certainly been suggested, for example, that historically in Wales, Welsh was the language for religion and English the language for business and industry. Religion formed one domain, business and industry another.

People use language within their own social networks. The composition of those social networks will place practical limitations on the use of a minority language: a language can after all only be used if both interlocutors are able to use it. A priority therefore is to maintain and create opportunities for the establishment of social networks whose members are able to speak Welsh. However, networks and wider society also place limits on behaviour, in this case, the use of language by the tacit if not explicit establishment of social or institutional norms. Such norms can limit the use of language even when all interlocutors are able to speak the language. The task of bodies concerned with the language's revitalisation is that of normalisation whereby normative practices are changed. Monitoring the availability of services in Welsh to Welsh-speaking consumers is an essential step towards monitoring progress towards the normalisation of Welsh.

Project details

A contract was awarded through competitive tendering to the Centre for European Research Wales, headed by Dr Glyn Williams with Dr Delyth Morris of the School of Social Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor as the principal researcher. The contract was to develop a suitable methodology, similar to that used in the Catalan *Ofercat* tool (Romagosa et al., 2003), to monitor the use of Welsh by organisations, and also to monitor the use of Welsh socially. Only the first component of the project is discussed further here. The methodology was to be developed using a pilot survey in one location and then applied in a further 5 locations.

Language contexts and sector coverage

It was determined to follow *Ofercat* in observing the following language use contexts:

- Signage
 - Identification (façade signs)
 - Informative and directional
- Written communications (e.g. leaflets and including web sites)
- Oral
 - introductory (i.e. first contact of a customer with an organisation)
 - in response

However, we made a number of innovations:

- i. whereas *Ofercat* only tested oral communications by means of telephone call, we determined to include face-to-face communications as well.
- ii. as well as recording the language used, we recorded a subjective assessment of the courtesy given to the customer.
- iii. whereas *Ofercat* used a variety of categorisations, depending on the language use context and sector, we used only three throughout: Welsh only, bilingual Welsh and English, and English only.

Ofercat classified organisations into sectors, sub-sectors and domains according to the nature of the organisations. The range of observations made varied slightly according to sector etc. Again we took a broadly similar approach distinguishing the following sectors:

1. Central government
2. Local government
3. Law Courts
4. Socio-economic organisations
 - chain shops/businesses
 - small shops and businesses
5. Voluntary organisations
6. Leisure
 - theatres and cinemas
 - sports
7. Health organisations
8. Public transport

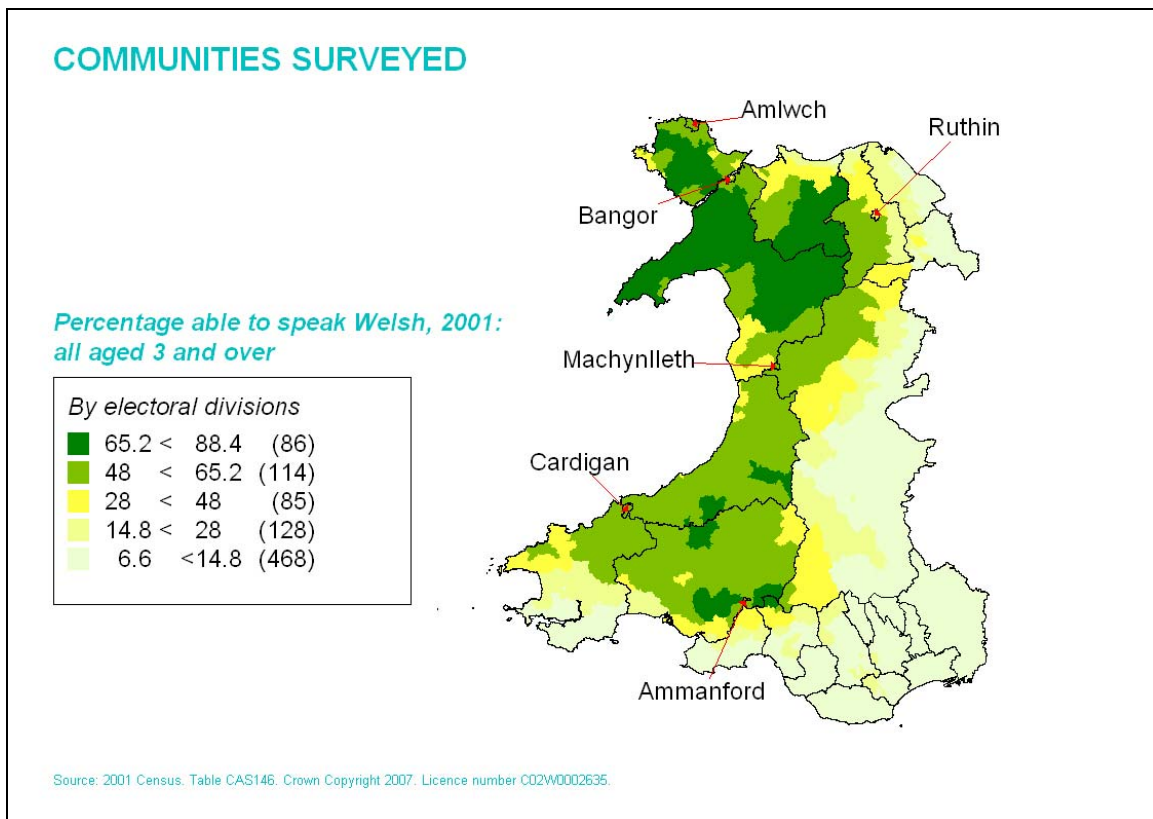
Compared to *Ofercat*, the main exclusions were the education and media sectors. We decided not to monitor the education sector for a few reasons: we have access to a wide range of statistics concerning language use in schools, and as 97% of schools in Wales are in the public sector, being maintained schools, they are covered by local education authorities' language schemes; we also wanted to avoid complications for the survey fieldwork, such as Criminal Records Bureau checking of fieldworkers, which would have to be considered if schools were to be surveyed. We decided not to monitor the media sector as only an extremely small proportion of the media, namely a few small circulation newspapers, would be likely to demonstrate any local variation.

Sample locations

The decision to structure the work around specific locations and to analyse results for individual locations must rest on a hypothesis that the situation varies according to location. We know that the linguistic composition of the population has a very significant geographical variation so this seems to be a reasonable hypothesis. Determining what definition of a location to use as a sampling unit is more problematical. One of the Welsh Language Board's initiatives is the establishment of Language Action Plan areas. The aim of a Language Action Plan for an area is to concentrate language planning efforts on a comparatively confined district, with the aim of co-ordinating various partners in the district and at the same time to empower the local community. Plans have been established in areas where there is a variety of linguistic concerns and where there is evidence of language shift towards English, especially among the younger generation, or where it has been judged that specific action is needed on aspects of language planning. In practice, the central feature of Language Action Plan area is that an individual is employed to work within a particular area with a small budget to act as seed money. Unfortunately from a statistical point of view, the boundaries of the areas within which the schemes operate are only loosely defined. Nevertheless, these loosely defined areas have been used as the basis for a number of other pieces of research commissioned by the Board (Welsh Language Board, 2006 and 2007). One advantage of using them again as the basis for research is that a more complete sociolinguistic description of the areas

would result. At the time the project was commissioned Language Action Plans were in place in 10 locations with another planned. 6 of these areas—Amlwch, Bangor, Ruthin, Machynlleth, Cardigan and Ammanford— were specified to be subject to surveys as part of this project. Figure 1 shows their locations. In terms of population 5 of the Communities with those names ranged from just over 2,000 (aged 3 and over in 2001) (Machynlleth) to over 5,000 (Ammanford). Bangor, with just over 13,000, was the largest Community. The lowest percentage able to speak Welsh was found in Ruthin where 43.2% of those aged 3 and over could speak Welsh according to the 2001 Census. The highest was 62.6%, found in Amlwch.

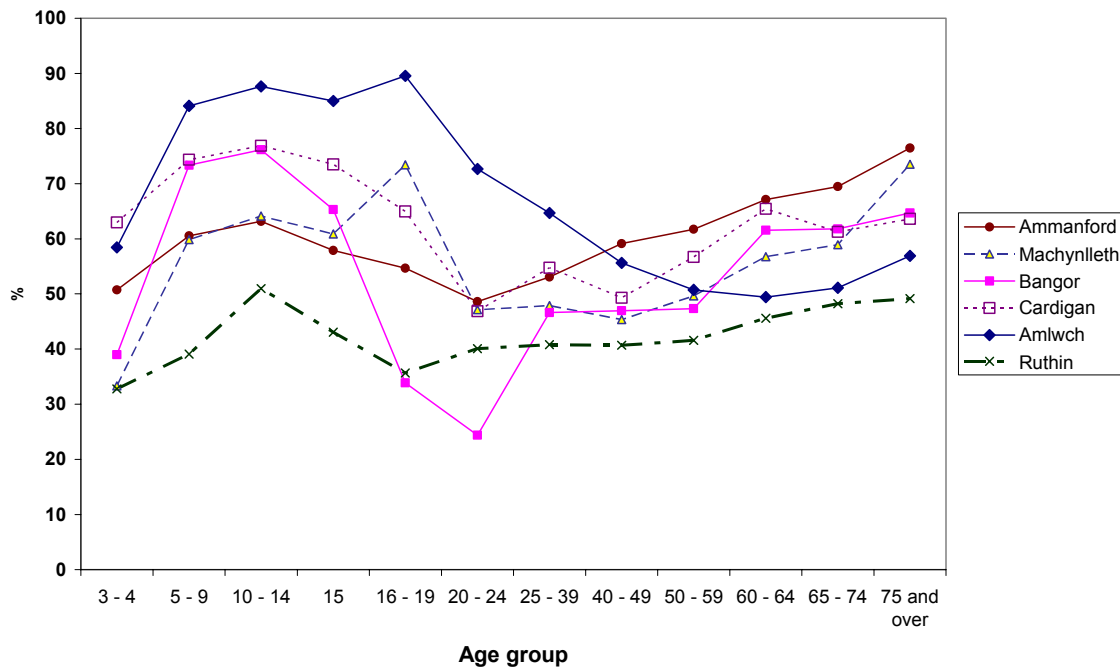
Figure 1 Location of Communities surveyed



In total the 6 Communities contained 2.9% of all Welsh-speakers in Wales aged 3 and over and 3.7% of all Welsh-speakers aged 16-64. All 6 Communities are small towns and are more urban in nature than most Communities (292 in total) where over 40% could speak Welsh. The 6 represent only 2% of such Communities but their Welsh-speaking population represented 6.4% of Welsh-speakers living in those Communities.

The percentages able to speak Welsh within the 6 Communities vary by age as is shown in Figure 2. Bangor is a university town which explains why the percentages able to speak Welsh are so much lower in the 16 to 24 age groups.

Figure 2 Percentage able to speak Welsh in 2001 in the Communities surveyed



The purposive manner of selection of these locations means that clearly they can not be considered to be a random sample, either from the whole population of Communities in Wales or from a stratum of Communities defined as having more than x% able to speak Welsh. However, they do represent a significant proportion of a stratum defined with more than 40% able to speak Welsh and their urban nature means that they represent a much more influential set of Communities in terms of their impact on consumers' experience than the figures above alone suggest.

Despite concentrating on Communities in the preceding discussion, in practice it was decided to extend the boundary of the locations surveyed to include any industrial estates or business parks immediately adjacent to the main Community. This was justified on the grounds that those sites clearly formed part of the actual local economic area.

Sampling sectors within location

Within each location, we aimed for the following in terms of visits:

- a) Complete coverage of central and local government, and courts
 - b) 60-70 small and chain businesses, sampled on a random walk
 - c) at least 10 "others", including the largest health organisation in the locality.
- Up to 3 leaflets were to be collected from each organisation visited, if any leaflets were available.

Similarly for phone calls we aimed for the following:

- a) Complete coverage of central and local government, and courts. Each was to be called *twice*, at different times (e.g. morning/afternoon).

- b) 60 small and chain businesses or shops. These were to be phoned once. They would not necessarily be the same shops and businesses visited.
- c) 20 organisations from other various organisations, including Voluntary organisations, leisure, health and transport. Again, they would not necessarily be the same organisations as those visited.

Web sites of all those organisations phoned were to be visited, if they had web sites.

No suitable register of businesses or organisations was identified for use as a population sampling frame. Yellow Pages and similar listings were used in an ad-hoc fashion to provide lists of telephone numbers. These were satisfactory for that purpose but provided little standard sectoral classification. Given the broad nature of the sectors we desired to distinguish at the sampling stage this was not especially problematic; only when building the results' data base and for analysis did we attempt to distinguish between single and multiple site shops and businesses.

Fieldwork and data issues

The fieldwork was undertaken by just one individual in each location, all supervised by the same principal researcher. This use of just one individual in each location (and in one case, one individual undertook the work of two locations) was the result of budget and operational considerations. Although this removed the need for any co-ordination of operations within a location, it means that the resultant variance of estimates is confounded with the variance between the observers. Training of the fieldworkers aimed to limit this variance but it will not have been removed. Results referring to differences between locations must be interpreted very cautiously as a result. On the other hand, the variance of differences between sectors within locations will have been minimised by the practical removal of observer variation at that level.

Categorisation of the language used on signage was done on the spot by the fieldworkers. Digital photographs were also taken in the towns surveyed but not all signs observed were photographed. One reason for attempting to photograph signage was to provide a means of comparing fieldworkers' records with desk-based categorisation of the same signs in order to get some measure of the degree of consistency in coding. This task has yet to be undertaken.

Another innovation from the *Ofercat* approach was to attempt to link records across locations so that the resultant database provides a means of looking at multiple observations of organisations present in more than one survey location (or, indeed, with multiple addresses within a survey location). A body's Statutory Language Schemes may allow for local variances within an organisation so uniformity of the customer experience may, even in theory, vary across locations. Record linkage across locations would allow us to study the issue. In practice, achieving this was complicated. Fieldworkers' notes did not necessarily give an indication of the controlling organisation and even the name of the organisation

may not have been recorded consistently. Considerable work was involved post fieldwork in attempting to overcome these problems. Another aspect of this was identifying to which sector the controlling organisation should be allocated.

In the pilot survey at Bangor we initially attempted to emulate *Ofercat's* coverage of road signage and of offsite advertising material, such as billboards. Little variation was observed in the use of the language on road signs so that element was dropped from the subsequent surveys. Attempts at monitoring offsite advertisements continued but the observations have not been included in our analyses so far. These elements could not easily be fitted into the organisationally orientated database we developed. *Ofercat's* distinction between signage for identification (e.g. shop names) and information (e.g. opening hours), and advertising, all gave operational difficulties, and the development of clear guidance regarding their treatment proved a challenge.

Although phone calls to most small businesses still clearly involve phoning the location of that small business, that is not always true in the case of bodies in the public sector and larger businesses. Many of them make use of a single telephone number for enquiries which may be handled by a central office or a call centre, or have other arrangements which, whatever they are, break the link between the physical location on the ground and the place where the call is handled. Another approach sometimes taken is the use of different phone numbers for different languages. Where a Welsh language enquiry phone number was found that was the phone number called.

Weighting

Results will initially be presented with no explicit weighting of observations, i.e. observations will simply be added together. Implicitly, this means observations will be weighted equally. For example, if results are presented relating to oral use of language observed for introductions in visits to local government organisations within a particular town, let's say to a unitary authority planning department, a social services department and a community council, there will be 3 observations. If two of them were of bilingual responses, and one in English, we would say that 66.6% of responses were bilingual, and 33.3% in English. No account would be taken of the relative importance of the organisations to the populace. For example, the social services department may have many more visitors from the public than the community council. One could argue therefore that more weight should be given to the observation of the social services department than the community council.

At a higher level of aggregation, results might be presented for the oral use of language observed for introductions in visits to all organisations within a town. Continuing the previous example, in additions to the 3 local government organisations there may be observations at 10 chain shops or businesses and 50 small shops. With no explicit weighting, the observation at the community council may be given the same weight as an observation at a major hypermarket and an observation at a small computer service shop. In terms of numbers of conversations, many more may occur over the check-out at the hypermarket than

at any of the other locations. On the other hand, the conversations at the other locations may involve many fewer people, but they may be longer and for the individuals involved they may represent a significant proportion of the time spent in conversation that day. Explicit weighting could be introduced to weight sectors to try to account for these issues. How one would arrive at appropriate weights is another matter. Again we have not used any explicit weights.

The observations made covered various contexts as well as various sectors, i.e. observations were made of oral use, for introductions and responses, in visits and in phone calls, but also of written use of the language, on signage, and in leaflets and web sites. Simply adding the observations up means that, because of the numbers of various types of observations, we have implicitly given a weight of 26% to observations of oral use in introductions, 25% to observations of oral use in responses, 11% to observations of identification signage, 15% to observations of informative and directional signage, and 23% to observations of written communications. Roughly, therefore, total oral use is given around the same weight as total written use¹.

Results

Two main features emerged:

1. the difference in most contexts between the performance of the public and private sectors;
2. the absence of differences in most contexts between the locations surveyed.

The first finding reflects what one would have expected, given the existence of the Welsh Language Schemes resulting from the 1993 Welsh Language Act. Using terminology used in discussing linguistic landscapes (Ben- Rafael et al, 2006), the differences occur between top-down and bottom-up sectors, i.e. sectors subject to “the control of local or central policies and those with individual, associative or corporative actors who enjoy autonomy of action within legal limits”.

Welsh language services are much more widely available from the public sector than the private but they are not always available, even in the moderately Welsh-speaking areas surveyed. The growth in the number of Welsh Language Schemes reported earlier in the paper would suggest that the situation should have improved. However, without any baseline data with which to draw comparisons of the situation at an earlier date, the survey data can not indicate whether the situation was better in 2005 and 2006 than in previous years.

The second finding suggests that the results may fairly represent the situation in those areas of Wales where around 40% or more of the population can speak Welsh. This is not to say that there are no differences between different areas studied but generally the similarities between the areas are greater than the differences.

¹ *Ofercat* used an extensive system of weights decided upon purposively. In weighting of contexts, oral use and written use were weighted in a ratio of 5:3.

We can say nothing about the situation in towns in less Welsh-speaking areas on the basis of this work but the first of these findings— that Welsh language services are much more widely available from the public sector than the private— almost certainly can be generalised to the whole of Wales, given that central government organisations operate across the country.

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has outlined the methodological approach taken to monitor the availability to consumers of service in Welsh when dealing with organisations. We have described a couple of the main features of the results. Further analysis may provide different insights but at the moment the results seem to have the following implications for the methodology and its implementation:

1. The surveys undertaken so far have been successful in establishing some quantification of the different levels of service availability in Welsh-speaking areas from the public and private sector. These results can be thought of as baseline assessments and obtaining these fulfils one aim of the project. A further aim of the project was to develop a methodology capable of indicating trends over time. Given the relatively high levels of service availability in Welsh from the public sector, reliably measuring further extension of those levels in the future will be difficult. On the other hand, the relatively low levels of service availability in Welsh from the private sector mean that there is clearly plenty of room for improvement. Should that improvement approach the levels currently found in the public sector, the methodology used should be able to produce results that would reflect the improvement. A more moderate improvement would be much more testing. The methodology specifies the grid referencing of organisations visited, noting the telephone numbers called and web sites viewed. Future surveys held in the same locations could, by utilising this information to survey the same sites etc., minimise the variance of estimates of change but the utility of the information recorded will degrade over time as new buildings appear, and phone numbers and URLs change. We do not know how quickly this degradation will occur but if the information can not be utilised, estimates of change can be expected to be less reliable than would otherwise be the case.

2. Another main aim of the project was to provide indicators pertaining to specific localities. Relatively few significant differences were noted amongst the locations surveyed. Again, the difficulty of identifying small differences needs to be borne in mind for future work. One possibility for consideration might be to survey locations outside traditionally Welsh-speaking areas to provide a basis for estimating the national situation.

In conclusion, further analyses and consideration of the results will no doubt lead to the reformulation of certain aspects of the methodology and its implementation in any future work but the project has already produced results which throw new light on the situation of Welsh.

References

Ben-Rafael, E. , Shohamy, E., Amara, M.H., Trumper-Hecht, N. (2006). 'Linguistic Landscape as Symbolic Construction of the Public Space; The Case of Israel' in Gorter, D (ed) (2006). 'Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism'. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, Vol 3: 1, 2006

Ibarz, R and Garriga, E. (2003). The Local application of Ofercat to the city of Tarragona. *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística*. Summer 2003.
http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm03estiu/a_ibarz1_3.htm

Romagosa, M., López, P. and Fabà, A. (2003). Indicators of the availability of Catalan: An instrument at the service of language planning. *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística*. Summer 2003.
http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm03estiu/a_roma1_3.htm

Welsh Language Board (2006). Young people's social networks and language use: final report. Welsh Language Board. Cardiff.

Welsh Language Board (2007). Language transmission in bilingual families in Wales. Welsh Language Board. Cardiff.