

Use of the census of population to discern trends in the Welsh language: an aggregate analysis

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Revised manuscript received 8 January 2004

The aim of this paper is to present a preliminary analysis of unitary authority level data from the 2001 census of population on the spatial (and, where available, temporal) patterns in proportions of Welsh speakers in Wales. In so doing we draw attention to the advantages (and limitations) of the census as a source of information on the state of the Welsh language. Although a 2 per cent increase in the percentage of Welsh speakers between 1991 and 2001 has been welcomed, several commentators have drawn attention to the change in the nature of the question asked at the 2001 census which may account for some of this increase. In this paper, we assess what is, and is not, possible to discern from the census, draw attention to other potential sources of information on the language and make some preliminary recommendations for those agencies concerned with monitoring trends in the future, both with regard to the need for more detailed language use surveys and the nature of the question included in subsequent censuses that would permit a more useful comparison of spatial and temporal trends.

Key words: 2001 census, spatial and temporal trends in the Welsh language, potential and limitations, aggregate analysis, factors influencing trends, future of Welsh language monitoring

Introduction

Following an overall decline during the twentieth century, the 2001 UK census of population recorded a 2 per cent increase in Welsh speakers since 1991. During a Plenary debate of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) on 3 March 2003, the First Minister Rhodri Morgan, when asked to comment on these preliminary results from the 2001 census, answered that although he broadly welcomed the perceived trend,

we should perhaps draw everyone's attention to one small change in definition in the 2001 census. The question that was asked about the Welsh language

was changed. A question was asked about ability in the language in the 2001 census, rather than about speaking the language. Perhaps the change in definition has had some effect on the figures; it is difficult to say. However, I am in favour of keeping to the same questions so that we can make a comparison. If you change the question, sometimes you cannot say that the comparison shows that an increase has occurred. However, I believe that everyone accepts that the figures are fairly encouraging considering the change in definition. (Welsh Assembly Government, Official Record 3 March 2003)

Despite such cautionary comments, the initial media response to the census figures for Welsh was generally positive and optimistic, as in the *Western*

Mail lead article which concluded that the 'rumours about the death of the Welsh language have been greatly exaggerated' (*Western Mail* 2003a, 10). The Welsh Language Board also welcomed the figures (WLB 2003) as a reflection of intense revitalization efforts and planning, but pressure groups such as Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg and Cymuned (2003) cautioned against the optimistic interpretation of the trends: a view vindicated in part when the more detailed statistics, published in June 2003, revealed a continuing decline in the number of wards where the majority of the population speaks Welsh.

The aim of this paper is to analyse such changes in detail and assess whether the change in definitions limits the ability of researchers to draw any meaningful conclusions from the census figures. Is any degree of optimism warranted given the fact that the question on the Welsh language was worded differently in the 2001 census? How do these results compare to those of other sources of information on the Welsh language?

One of the prime justifications of the devolution agenda was the promotion of a distinct Welsh national identity, of which an important constituent was the unique culture and language of Wales. Unsurprisingly therefore, the Welsh Assembly, during its first term, 1999–2003, undertook a major review of the state of the Welsh language and recommended far-reaching proposals for its promotion. The Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) national action plan on the Welsh language, *Iaith Pawb* was published in February 2003 (Welsh Assembly Government 2003a). This set forward policy initiatives on promoting bilingualism and strengthening the Welsh language, building on the commitments made in the Assembly Governments' *Plan for Wales 2001* (National Assembly for Wales 2001). The broad aim is to create a bilingual Wales and amongst the targets there is a commitment to increase the percentage of people in Wales able to speak Welsh by 5 percentage points from 2001 levels (as gauged from the census) by 2011 and to arrest the decline in the number of communities where Welsh is spoken by over 70 per cent of the population. As part of the monitoring process, the WAG is committed in *Iaith Pawb* to develop and compile a wider range of statistical indicators on ability levels and usage of the Welsh language. A major WAG proposal is to undertake language use surveys, which it is argued 'are more detailed in their level of interrogation than the censuses or other official surveys currently undertaken' (Welsh Assembly Government 2003a, 11).

The prime language planning agency to achieve these aims is the statutory Welsh Language Board (WLB), established in 1993 under the Welsh Language Act and funded by the WAG. The WLB's duty is to promote and encourage the use of Welsh in public and voluntary sector organizations and to ensure equal status for the language in society. Recently it has been encouraging bilingualism within the private sector through its promotional and marketing campaigns. It has a central role in analysing socio-linguistic and educational trends and in implementing the Assembly Government initiatives. But academic members of the Board have consistently called for far more comprehensive data together with evidence-based policy formulation of a holistic nature (Williams 1991 2000). *Iaith Pawb* recognizes that the 2001 census can only provide a broad, historical perspective and that more pertinent and regular surveys need to be undertaken to gauge Welsh language ability levels and usage. The Welsh Language Board in their strategy document for the language for 2000–2005 (WLB 1999, 32) also draw attention to the fact that the census provides 'an inexact but irreplaceable measure of language trends', before highlighting their future plans to monitor patterns in more geographical and thematic detail through, for example, specially commissioned surveys of language use which will supplement the continued use of census findings.

Following the census, scepticism was expressed by some pressure groups over both the meaning of the census results and how they might be interpreted by 'the great and the good':

The 2001 Census figures show that more people can speak Welsh than before (but do they?), an excuse for complacency to set in among the great and the good. The language itself will almost certainly survive, but only as a classroom subject or a second language. It will have become sterile. (Llywelyn 2003, 52)

In this paper, we seek to provide an objective assessment of the use of the census in examining spatial and temporal patterns in the use of the language by drawing on what the 2001 census did, and perhaps more importantly, did not tell policy-makers. We are concerned with comparing trends as revealed from a preliminary aggregate analysis of the responses to the Welsh language question with those ascertained from other sources, principally the Welsh Local Labour Force Survey conducted around the same time as the 2001 census. Finally, we make preliminary recommendations on what would be

required from the census to provide a more useful measure of the state of the Welsh language in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Trends in the Welsh language: previous research

Aggregate data from censuses conducted since 1901 have informed studies describing the spatial and temporal patterns and changes in the Welsh language (e.g. Williams 1980 1987; Williams SW 1981; Carter and Aitchison 1986; Pryce and Williams 1988; Aitchison and Carter 1994 1998 1999a 2000; Jones 1999). For the period 1901–1991, these reveal that there was a decrease in the percentage of the population able to speak Welsh, although rates of decline have slowed down since 1961 (1961–71, fall of 17.3%; 1971–81, 6.3% and 1981–91, 1.4%; Aitchison and Carter 1999b). This has been attributed to a significant increase in the percentage of young people (age 3–15) able to speak Welsh, especially in the South-East of Wales which contrasts with the fall in the proportions of those over 15 who can speak Welsh (Aitchison and Carter 1997). Previous analysis has drawn attention to the contraction and fragmentation of the areas within which the language is dominant (Aitchison and Carter 1999b). Maps derived from the 1981 census used by Aitchison and Carter (1985) identify pockets of wards where over 70 per cent of the population could speak Welsh. These were seen to be largely confined to areas of North and West Wales. In another paper, Aitchison and Carter (1986) used the census to compare changes between 1961 and 1981 and found a significant decline in the number of communities with 80 per cent of their respective populations who were Welsh speakers (279 in 1961, 191 in 1971 and 66 in 1981). They also draw attention to the importance of age – until recently Welsh was perceived to be a language of the elderly – and key differences in the trends concerning the ability to speak the language vis-à-vis being able to read and write in Welsh. The increase in the numbers of younger people speaking the language in recent years has been attributed to parents perceiving wider educational benefits for pupils being taught through the medium of Welsh, and also the proliferation of jobs in the service sector (especially the media and education sectors) that require knowledge of the language. Such analyses have to be seen in the light of concerns in some quarters that the continued inward migration of English-

speaking people is having a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the language through impacts on, for example, employment, housing and education opportunities in Welsh-speaking areas in the North and West (Cymuned 2002 2003).

The linkages between the use of the language and economic trends, in-migration of non-Welsh-speaking populations and local job markets in heartland areas have formed the focus of studies using statistics from the 1981 and 1991 censuses to support a cultural division of labour interpretation (e.g. Williams 1987; Aitchison and Carter 1997 1999b; Drinkwater and O’Leary 1997; Williams and Morris 2000). Many of these concerns were expressed by those surveyed as part of the *Lifestyles in rural Wales* project, which drew on semi-structured interviews to examine perceived pressures on the Welsh language from in-migration in four study areas (Cloke *et al.* 1998). Aitchison and Carter (2000) have also demonstrated the impacts of non-Welsh-speaking migrants from other Welsh regions on the trends in Welsh speakers in traditional heartland areas. This study highlighted important linkages between such trends and economic circumstances and in particular drew attention to the continued out-migration of Welsh speakers from the old counties of Dyfed and Gwynedd to, for example, Cardiff associated with increasing job opportunities for these groups in the capital. Drinkwater and O’Leary (1997), in a study comparing the relationship between the ability to speak Welsh and unemployment using data from the Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) from the 1991 census, suggest that a higher percentage of Welsh speakers had higher qualifications compared to non-Welsh speakers but that there were regional variations. They also found that individuals with some degree of proficiency in Welsh have a lower chance of unemployment than non-Welsh speakers. However, the analysis presented by Giggs and Pattie (1992) suggests that patterns across Wales are by no means uniform; with, for example, Welsh speakers in South Wales being over-represented in high-status professions as compared to non-Welsh-speaking groups born in Wales (the opposite being the case in North Wales). Aitchison and Carter (1997) also draw attention to important social class variations in the language between different counties in Wales, which they suggest confirm the importance of employment opportunities in South East Wales in particular for those who are bilingual. But they also demonstrate that Welsh speakers in heartland areas are less represented in professional or managerial

positions than non-Welsh speakers born outside Wales. The most vociferous protests are in regard to the declining numbers of Welsh speakers within the heartland areas and their acute perception that they are losing control of the local economy and community life, to become marginalized in areas becoming dominated by affluent English-born immigrants. It is from such sources that acute scepticism arises regarding the health of the language and the inadequacy of remedial policies employed by different levels of government (Williams 2004).

The latest statistics appear to suggest that the number of Welsh speakers is increasing. Very heartening, but how many of these speak Welsh every day on a community basis, and how does this square with the ever-decreasing number of Welsh speakers in the heartlands? (Jenkins 2003, 17)

A number of studies have drawn attention to the weaknesses of the census as a source with which to monitor detailed trends in the proficiency in, and use of, the Welsh language. These relate to the ways in which the census has been conducted (and, in particular, changes in the nature of the question asked and populations enumerated), the changing geographical boundaries between censuses (which make temporal analysis difficult) and changes in the methods by which census data have been tabulated. In addition, researchers such as Williams (1987) and Williams and Morris (2000) have also suggested that more fundamentally the census questions ask respondents for a subjective interpretation of their own competence in the language which does not show how Welsh is being used in the home, workplace and community. The lack of data on the usage of Welsh was recognized in the recently published consultation draft of *The Wales spatial plan* (Welsh Assembly Government 2003b). Many of these concerns have been echoed by the Welsh Language Board and more widely (see Jenkins 2003). The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to providing a more useful set of data on the language with which to monitor the initiatives outlined in *Iaith Pawb*. There have also been a number of attempts to use other sources, for example the Welsh Office Social Survey, undertaken between September and December 1992 (Welsh Office 1995) for a sample of approximately 13 000 households (27 720 individuals), which involved more in-depth questions on the use of the language. The survey revealed a higher incidence of Welsh speakers compared to the 1991 census (21.5% against 18.6%), but its

main advantage over the census was its attempt to gauge ability (albeit still based on self-assessment) and provide a measure of competence in the language. Williams and Morris (2000, 42) provide a detailed comparison of the results from the survey and 1991 census results, while Jones and Williams (2000) compare such data with current educational and socio-economic data. With such caveats in mind, let us focus on the preliminary results from the 2001 census of population regarding the state of the language.

Trends in the Welsh language

Preliminary aggregate analysis – 2001 census

Unitary authority level As with previous census investigations, respondents were asked for a subjective interpretation of their linguistic competence and those of members of their household. Any analysis carried out using census data has to be interpreted in the light of the nature of the question posed. Table 1 shows the nature of the question asked in each of the censuses of population as well as other sources of information on the Welsh language. For example, in the 2001 census respondents could tick all the boxes that apply: Understand spoken Welsh, Speak Welsh, Read Welsh, Write Welsh, None of the Above. Respondents could tick one or more of the five boxes in any combination. However, the format of the question was different to that asked in the previous census – the question in the 2001 census was ‘Can you . . . ?’ compared to ‘Do you . . . ?’ used in previous censuses. Carter (1991) highlighted the problems relating to the format of the question included in pre-2001 censuses. In their atlas based on the 1991 census, Aitchison and Carter (1994, 20) speculate on the implications of the quality of the response to the use of the latter for the 1991 census question, suggesting that the ‘question could be interpreted as a request concerning usage rather than fluency’, although they suggest that was unlikely given the profile of the language issue. Nevertheless, it is feasible that the format of the question could have led to a more positive response in 2001 (and, by the same token, could have led to underestimates of use of the language as gauged from the 1991 census). For the first time, the 2001 census also asked people whether they ‘understood’ Welsh. Aitchison and Carter (1994) suggested, in their analysis of the 1991 census which did not have this question, that if it was to be included then numbers would be higher than those who said they spoke

Table 1 Format of the question on the Welsh language (census and other sources)

Format of question

1981 census

For all persons aged 3 or over (born before 6 April 1978)

Does the person speak Welsh?

If the person speaks Welsh, does he or she also:

- Speak English?
- Read Welsh?
- Write Welsh?

1991 census

For all persons aged 3 or over (born before 22 April 1988)

Does the person speak, read or write Welsh?

- Speaks Welsh
- Reads Welsh
- Writes Welsh
- Does not speak, read or write Welsh

Welsh Social Survey (1992)

- Cannot speak Welsh and never have
- Cannot speak Welsh but could once
- Speak only a little Welsh
- Speak a fair amount of Welsh
- Fluent but never/hardly ever speak it
- Fluent but speak only occasionally
- Fluent and speak it half the time
- Fluent and speak it most of the time

2001 census

Can you understand, speak, read or write Welsh?

- Understand spoken Welsh
- Speak Welsh
- Read Welsh
- Write Welsh
- None of the Above

Welsh Labour Force Survey (2002)

Percentage of all persons (aged 3 and over)

- Who can understand spoken Welsh
- Who can speak Welsh
- Who can read Welsh
- Who can write Welsh

Percentage of all persons (aged 3 and over) born in Wales

- Who can understand spoken Welsh
- Who can speak Welsh
- Who can read Welsh
- Who can write Welsh

suggests that the trends should increase in the order write–read–speak–understand. How much of the 2 per cent increase between 1991 and 2001 in the percentage speaking Welsh could be attributed to the change in the format of the question, however, would be difficult to gauge. Another problem is that the Welsh language question is not included in census forms distributed outside Wales and thus the overall figures for Welsh speakers in the UK as a whole are likely to be an under-estimate.

In the absence of detailed census data available when this paper was written (August 2003), our analysis is confined to examining trends at the unitary authority level; we intend following up some of these questions in more detail in our future research. The first results on the Welsh language were reported in March 2003 (National Statistics 2003). The census found that there were 576 000 Welsh speakers aged 3 and over (or 21% of the population), which represented a 2 per cent increase since 1991. The proportion of people in Wales (aged 3 and over) who can speak, read and write Welsh increased from 13.6 per cent to 16.3 per cent (1991–2001). A further 138 000 (5%) said they understood Welsh but did not speak it. In addition, 84 000 gave a combination of positive responses that was imprecise, making it difficult to work out whether they could understand, speak, read or write Welsh. Encouragingly, the highest percentage of Welsh speakers was among children in the 5–15 years age group (although of more concern, figures included in the Wales Spatial Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2003b) estimate that only 6 per cent of primary school children speak Welsh at home).

Figure 1 shows the percentages of people aged 3 and over who, based on the census results, can speak Welsh. The overall patterns from previous censuses of 1981 and 1991 are retained with only Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire having over 50 per cent of their populations who can speak Welsh, although in terms of absolute numbers, Carmarthenshire had the largest numbers of Welsh speakers. As seen from Table 2, however, the relationship with percentage of populations born in Wales is a weak, but important, one. Again, population change could account for such trends; Ceredigion, for example, has experienced a 7 per cent decline in the numbers of Welsh speakers and almost a 20 per cent increase in population, suggesting non-Welsh speakers are making up the bulk of such migrants. Also for the first time college students were enumerated at their term-time university address

Welsh. However, many people who have learnt Welsh in later life can speak it, albeit haltingly, but find it very hard to understand when spoken by a native Welsh speaker. Despite this, Carter (1991)

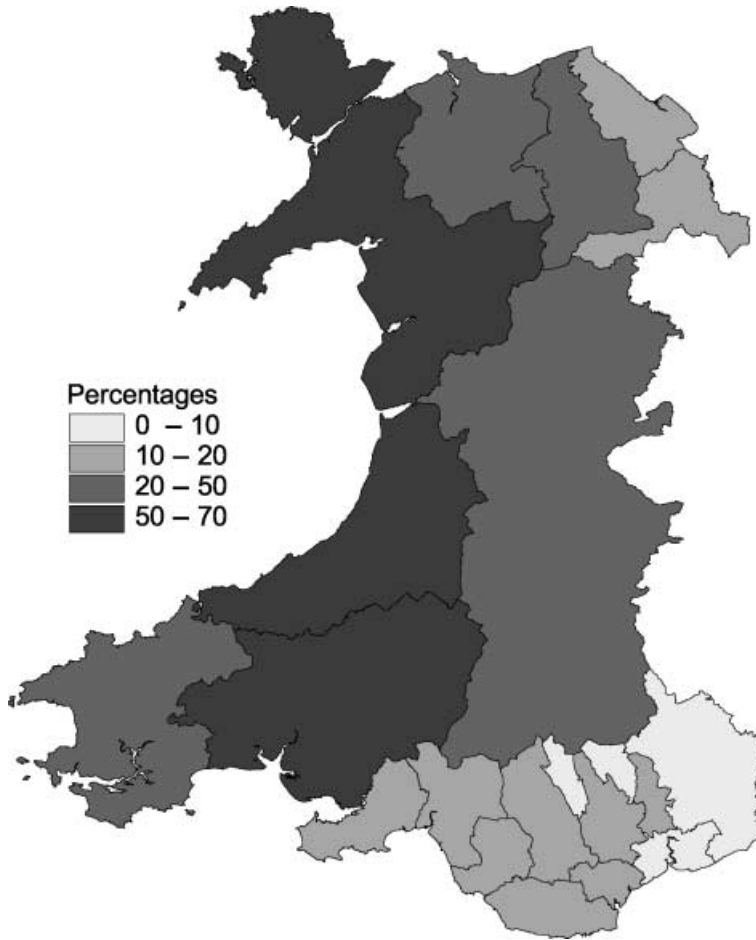


Figure 1 Percentage of people aged 3 and over who can speak Welsh (2001 census)
 Source: Office for National Statistics (2003)

rather than at their permanent, home address and this undoubtedly attributed to the decline in Welsh speakers witnessed in and around Bangor, Aberystwyth and Lampeter, each of which have a predominance of monoglot English-speaking students. The relatively low population turnaround (as compared to the 1980s) in the unitary authorities of South Wales, in traditional mining areas which experienced significant in-migration at the turn of the century, accounts for the large percentages of Welsh-born populations there. Interestingly, these are also the areas, along with the traditional Welsh-speaking heartland areas, where people were likely to identify themselves as Welsh, suggesting a low tie-in with the Welsh language question, although only 14 per

cent of people in Wales wrote in Welsh for their ethnicity. In addition, it is estimated that 662 000 (or 24%) of the population reported one or more skills in the Welsh language, with high figures for the unitary authorities of Gwynedd (76%), Anglesey (70%), Carmarthenshire (64%) and Ceredigion (61%).

Electoral division level Although there has been an overall increase in the population speaking Welsh within Wales, the picture is not entirely promising; Figure 2 shows the proportion of Welsh speakers for electoral divisions. At the time of the 1961 census, there were 279 out of 993 communities in Wales where at least 80 per cent of the population could speak Welsh; by the 1991 census only 32 of these

Table 2 Results from 2001 census (by unitary authority)

Unitary authority	2001 Population	Population change (1991–2001) %	Percentage born in Wales	Number and proportion of people aged 3 and over who can speak Welsh	1 or more skills in Welsh language (numbers/ percentages)	Percentage of people aged 3 and over with no knowledge of Welsh	Identified self as Welsh (numbers/ percentages)
Anglesey	66 829	–2.9	67.6	38 678 (59.8)	45 534 (70.4)	29.6	12 975 (19.4)
Blaenau Gwent	70 064	–1.8	92.1	6 169 (9.1)	9 026 (13.3)	86.7	8 417 (12)
Bridgend	128 645	0.7	84.7	13 174 (10.6)	24 763 (19.9)	80.1	20 275 (15.8)
Caerphilly	169 519	1.5	89.9	17 799 (10.9)	27 228 (16.7)	83.3	26 276 (15.5)
Cardiff	305 353	8.0	74.9	32 069 (10.9)	47 998 (16.3)	83.7	40 220 (13.2)
Carmarthen	172 842	2.9	80.1	83 854 (50.1)	106 440 (63.6)	36.4	40 471 (23.4)
Ceredigion	74 941	19.8	58.6	37 754 (51.8)	44 635 (61.2)	38.8	16 307 (21.8)
Conwy	109 596	3.7	53.9	31 044 (29.2)	42 174 (39.7)	60.3	13 289 (12.1)
Denbighshire	93 065	5.1	57.9	23 512 (26.1)	32 469 (36)	63.9	9 829 (10.6)
Flintshire	148 594	5.5	51.1	20 217 (14.1)	30 660 (21.4)	78.6	8 662 (5.8)
Gwynedd	116 843	3.5	69.8	77 494 (68.7)	85 847 (76.1)	23.9	31 356 (26.8)
Merthyr Tydfil	55 981	–4.2	91.9	5 412 (10.0)	9 602 (17.7)	82.3	9 065 (16.2)
Monmouthshire	84 885	5.3	61.3	7 412 (9.0)	10 590 (12.9)	87.1	5 871 (6.9)
Neath Port Talbot	134 468	–0.8	89.5	23 194 (17.8)	37 551 (28.8)	71.2	22 872 (17)
Newport	137 011	3.2	81.1	12 655 (9.6)	17 622 (13.4)	86.6	12 326 (9)
Pembrokeshire	114 131	2.4	68.7	23 689 (21.5)	32 340 (29.4)	70.6	14 912 (13.1)
Powys	126 354	6.5	55.6	25 474 (20.8)	36 847 (30.1)	69.9	15 927 (12.6)
Rhondda Cynon Taff	231 946	0.5	89.9	27 543 (12.3)	47 213 (21.1)	78.9	38 384 (16.5)
Swansea	223 301	0.1	82.1	28 542 (13.2)	48 582 (22.5)	77.5	34 135 (15.3)
Torfaen	90 949	1.6	85.5	9 423 (10.7)	12 742 (14.5)	85.5	8 934 (9.8)
Vale of Glamorgan	119 292	2.1	75.7	12 778 (11.1)	19 453 (16.9)	83.1	15 252 (12.8)
Wrexham	128 476	5.6	71.9	17 859 (14.4)	28 401 (22.9)	77.1	12 065 (9.4)
Total	2 903 085		75.4	575 744 (20.5)	661 526 (23.6)	71.6	14.39

Source: Office for National Statistics (2003)

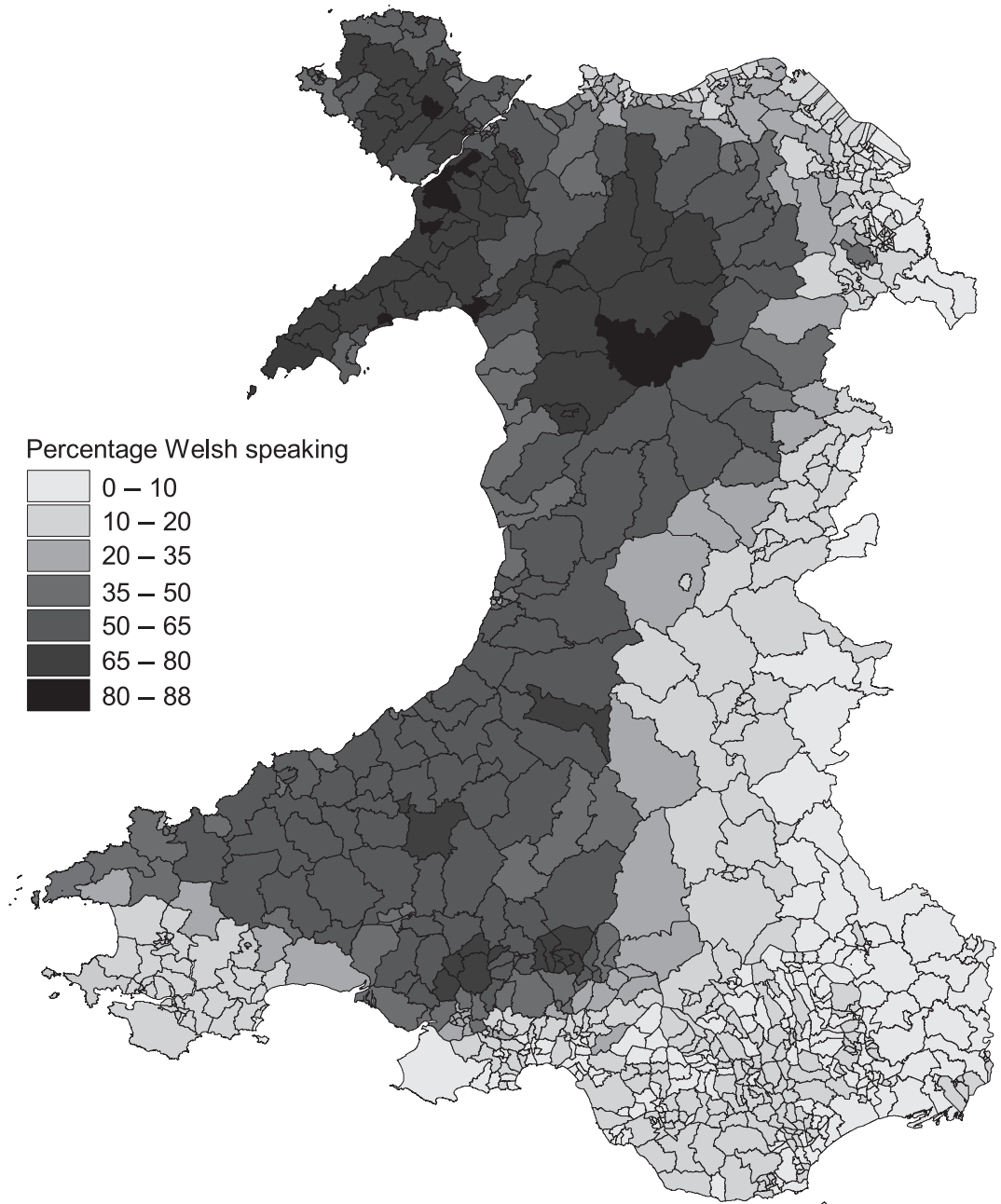


Figure 2 Percentage Welsh speakers for electoral divisions (2001 census)
Source: Office for National Statistics (2003)

communities remained (National Assembly for Wales Culture and Education Committee 2002). This has led commentators such as Williams to argue that 'instead of talking of a "Welsh-speaking community",

it is more appropriate to talk of "Welsh speakers in the community", even within many parts of the heartland areas' (1989, 44). More recently Osmond suggested that the

Table 3 Change in Welsh language speakers (1981–2001), using most comparable census data for 1991 and 1981

Unitary authority	2001 (%)	1991 (%)	1981 (%)	Change 1991–2001 (percentage points)	Change 1981–2001 (percentage points)
Anglesey	59.8	61.9	61.6	-2.1	-1.8
Blaenau Gwent	9.1	2.2	2.2	6.8	6.8
Bridgend	10.6	8.3	8.2	2.3	2.3
Caerphilly	10.9	6.0	5.2	4.9	5.7
Cardiff	10.9	6.7	5.8	4.2	5.1
Carmarthen	50.1	54.8	59.2	-4.7	-9.2
Ceredigion	51.8	59.2	65.1	-7.4	-13.2
Conwy	29.2	30.7	32.7	-1.5	-3.5
Denbighshire	26.1	26.8	28.5	-0.7	-2.3
Flintshire	14.1	13.6	12.7	0.5	1.4
Gwynedd	68.7	72.1	76.2	-3.4	-7.5
Merthyr Tydfil	10.0	7.4	8.3	2.6	1.7
Monmouthshire	9.0	2.2	2.7	6.8	6.3
Neath Port Talbot	17.8	17.5	19.1	0.3	-1.3
Newport	9.6	2.3	2.3	7.3	7.3
Pembrokeshire	21.5	18.3	18.4	3.2	3.1
Powys	20.8	20.6	21.0	0.2	-0.2
Rhondda Cynon Taff	12.3	9.0	9.1	3.3	3.2
Swansea	13.2	13.6	14.7	-0.4	-1.5
Torfaen	10.7	2.5	2.5	8.2	8.2
Vale of Glamorgan	11.1	6.8	5.9	4.3	5.2
Wrexham	14.4	13.8	14.6	0.6	-0.2
Total	21	19		2	

Source: Office for National Statistics (2003)

notion of a Welsh-speaking Wales, in the sense of a geographical domain where Welsh is the dominant mode of discourse for a large majority of the population, no longer exists. Instead, we have a pattern of diverse bilingual societies within what used to be known as the Welsh speaking heartlands. At the same time, southern and eastern Wales can no longer simply be described as 'anglicised' but are also becoming bilingual, though again according to widely varying patterns. (Osmond 2002, 2)

The number of wards where 60–70 per cent of the population speak Welsh has declined from 82 in 1991 to 54 in 2001; and from 55 to 41 where 70–80 per cent spoke Welsh and from 32 to 17 where over 80 per cent spoke Welsh (all, in 2001, within Gwynedd and Anglesey), leading to media concerns 'that the Welsh Language Act of 1993 and the policies of the National Assembly have failed to halt the decline of Welsh as a living community language' (*Western Mail* 2003b). At the other end of the scale, there was a significant increase in those wards where 10–20 per cent of the population could speak Welsh (up from 156 in 1991 to 367 in

2001). These trends therefore represent a continuation of those found by Aitchison and Carter (1994) and have been variously attributed to the out-migration of Welsh-speaking populations as a result of poor employment or housing opportunities, the in-migration of predominantly monoglot English speakers and a decline in traditional industries which employed a disproportionate percentage of Welsh speakers (Aitchison and Carter 1994).

Changes since 1991

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the changes in the percentages of Welsh speakers by unitary authorities. Cardiff has had the largest absolute increase in numbers (up over 14 000), while Torfaen had the largest percentage increase (over 8%). For details of how census data can be compared over time see Martin *et al.* 2002 (and Dorling 1995a 1995b). Although the trends are not consistent at an aggregate level, there is weak evidence of a link with population change between 1991 and 2001. More analysis is needed to identify those communities that have experienced increases/declines in non-Welsh speakers/

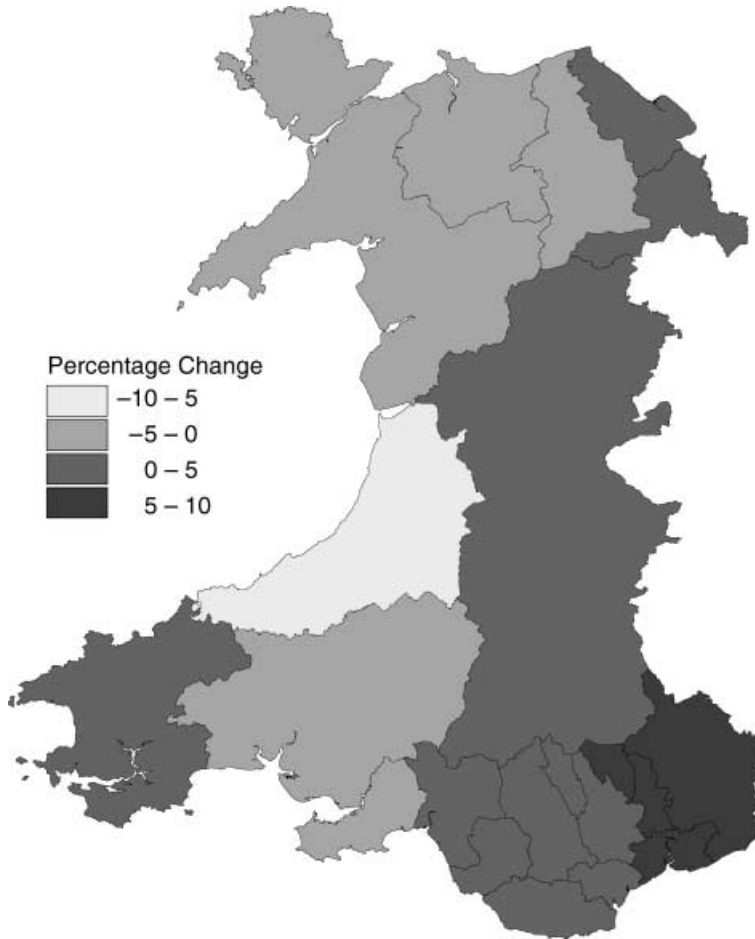


Figure 3 Change in Welsh language speakers 1991–2001
Source: Office for National Statistics (2003)

Welsh speakers and further research is needed to compare such trends with population change in order to examine the reasons for such changes. At this scale, the unitary authorities that have experienced a decline in the percentage of people speaking Welsh are also those that have experienced significant in-migration since the last census (Figure 4). At the time of the 2001 census, 11 per cent of the total population able to speak Welsh were born outside Wales (but whereas 24.7% of the population born in Wales could speak Welsh, only 9.0% of those born outside Wales could speak Welsh). An extension of this research would be to identify where such population groups live and to examine their age structure. Clearly questions of national origin, self-identification,

language affiliation and group tensions are complex. The larger question to be examined requires an assessment of the strident claims that beneath the simplistic interpretation of census results what is really occurring is the demise of an indigenous ethnic identity. It is a slow death caused by a new and far more effective form of internal colonialism, a re-settlement of the heartland communities by the in-migration of relatively wealthy, generally conservative and unreceptive, English retirement and 'new-age' settlers. Although 'new-age' in England is not traditionally linked with concepts of conservatism and intolerance, it is enlightening to see that what can appear radical and anti-establishment one side of a national border can appear as colonialism the

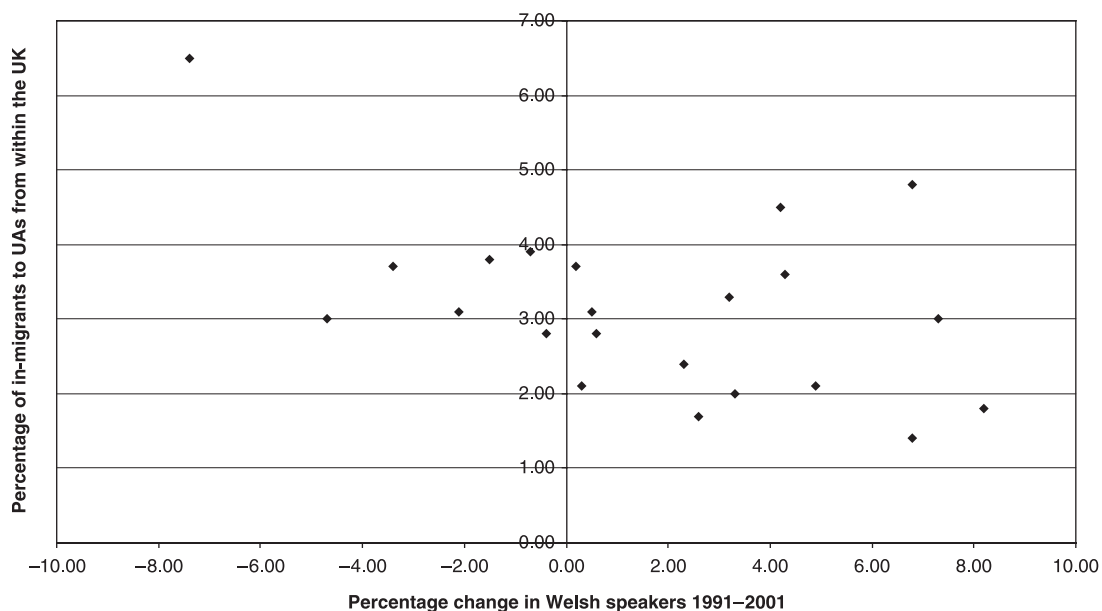


Figure 4 Changes in the percentage of Welsh speakers in relation to in-migration from within the UK

other! Emyr Llywelyn, leader of Adfer, phrased it thus in 1971, 'Our territory is being plundered in our presence: we are being disinherited before our very eyes' (Williams 1994, 130). Such concerns have also been echoed by Cymuned:

If the traditional Bröydd Cymraeg and Welsh-speaking communities cease to be the 'domains' of the language, Cymraeg will cease to be a living language because individuals and families cannot maintain a language in a vacuum, without an adequate broader social context. Cymry Cymraeg (Welsh-speakers) as a people and ethnic group will cease to exist. (Cymuned 2003, 5)

Welsh Local Labour Force Survey Balsom (2003) suggests that the Welsh identity question from the census is fundamentally flawed and draws attention to the potential of using results from a labour force survey conducted around the time of the census (Office for National Statistics 2002). The aim of this section is to compare the results from the 2001 census of population with those of the Welsh Local Labour Force Survey (WLLFS) which, as well as asking if those surveyed in Wales could understand, speak, read or write Welsh, also included questions regarding national identity. The WLLFS was conducted in 2001–02 (and preliminary results published in

November 2002 for the period March 2001–February 2002). Table 4 shows the variations between unitary authorities for those who speak Welsh (just under 30% of the population of Wales said they spoke Welsh) and those who gave their nationality as Welsh. The ONS guide to the use of this survey as a comparison to the census draws attention to the possibility that rates of Welsh speakers, readers and writers are higher in the former because respondents are more likely to respond positively if they have given their national identity as Welsh. While the census respondents could have ticked the 'Other' box and given Welsh as their identity,¹ in the WLLFS a question on national identity immediately preceded the Welsh language question. There are other differences in the nature of the sampling techniques and questions asked which may account for the differences (e.g. 21 000 households were sampled in the WLLFS, the mode of interview may have influenced numbers who said they could speak, read and write Welsh).

Results from the WLLFS suggest that just under 30 per cent of the Welsh population (aged 3 and over) reported they could speak Welsh (35% of residents said they could understand spoken Welsh), with the trends in unitary authorities mirroring those in the census (r -squared = 0.97); with Gwynedd, Anglesey,

Table 4 Welsh Local Labour Force Survey 2001/2002 (by unitary authority)

Unitary authority	Population (LFS estimate)	Percentage who gave national identity as Welsh – LFS pop. est.	% born in Wales who gave their nationality as Welsh	Number aged 3 and over (%) who can speak Welsh – LFS pop. est.	% of all persons (3 and over) born in Wales who can speak Welsh
Anglesey	63 000	60.1	85.3	41 000 (67.2)	87.8
Blaenau Gwent	69 000	85.2	89	13 000 (19)	19.7
Bridgend	130 000	79.1	89.6	23 000 (18.3)	19.7
Caerphilly	170 000	82.5	88.3	34 000 (21)	22.1
Cardiff	325 000	66.5	84.5	70 000 (22.3)	25.9
Carmarthen	166 000	76.0	92.3	87 000 (54.5)	63.9
Ceredigion	72 000	62.2	91.2	43 000 (61)	83.7
Conwy	111 000	49.5	82.7	45 000 (42.2)	63.5
Denbighshire	92 000	50.3	85.4	34 000 (38.3)	57.2
Flintshire	147 000	43.3	79.6	38 000 (26.7)	36.7
Gwynedd	113 000	71.3	92.9	87 000 (79.1)	93.9
Merthyr Tydfil	54 000	87.0	92	13 000 (25.5)	26.8
Monmouthshire	87 000	54.3	80.7	14 000 (16.4)	20.2
Neath Port Talbot	135 000	82.7	90.7	33 000 (25)	26.6
Newport	135 000	69.6	81.8	24 000 (18)	20.1
Pembrokeshire	114 000	60.5	83.9	28 000 (25.7)	32.6
Powys	125 000	56.2	85.6	34 000 (28.3)	39.2
Rhondda Cynon Taff	236 000	84.3	89.7	56 000 (24.7)	26.3
Swansea	228 000	73.0	85.7	45 000 (20.4)	22.7
Torfaen	88 000	75.8	85.4	15 000 (17.8)	19.2
Vale of Glamorgan	124 000	69.9	87	25 000 (20.8)	22.8
Wrexham	125 000	67.1	86.7	29 000 (23.8)	29.5
Total	2 910 000	69.2	87	833 000 (29.6)	34.3

Source: Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/llfs/wales.asp> (Accessed December 2003)

Carmarthen and Ceredigion having over 50 per cent of respondents who said they spoke Welsh again contrasting with those unitary authorities bordering England which had the lowest proportions. Findings from the WLLFS also suggest that just over 69 per cent of residents claimed Welsh as their national identity – again the mode of the interview/survey could account for differences between it and the census – but there is a general spatial correspondence between the census and the WLLFS regarding ideas of national identity. Again, results mirror the census in that people in the South Wales Valleys unitary authorities in particular were more likely to identify themselves as Welsh (e.g. Merthyr Tydfil, 86.3%; Blaenau Gwent, 85.2%; Rhondda Cynon Taff, 84.3%). In contrast, Anglesey and Ceredigion, with one of the highest rates of Welsh speakers had some of the lowest rates of respondents who identified themselves as Welsh (along with those unitary

authorities that border England). When non-Welsh born are omitted from the analysis of the national identity question, however, the relationship with the percentage of Welsh speakers is stronger. Thus, although the overall estimates of the percentages able to speak Welsh as gauged from the WLLFS are higher than those of the census, the spatial trends mirror those of the census both for speakers and the relationship with the national identity 'question'. Clearly, a more disaggregate analysis is needed to examine such trends in more detail.

Discussion

In the conclusions to their 1991 atlas of the Welsh language, Aitchison and Carter (1994, 111) drew attention to the difficulties of predicting future patterns given the relative paucity of information and suggested that such problems are 'made more

so by the poverty of the population census in terms of language information'. Concerns over the lack of a sound statistical base with which to monitor changes over time have been expressed elsewhere (Jones and Williams 2000). Consequently, Hywel Jones, a senior statistician from the Welsh Assembly, has been seconded to the Welsh Language Board to establish a comprehensive database and to interrogate a suite of current data sets to tease out socio-linguistic trends and implications. Others have suggested alternatives to the use of the census; both Williams (1989 2000) and Williams and Morris (2000, 50) demonstrate the potential advantages that may accrue from conducting language use surveys which show how the Welsh language is actually being used in the home, workplace and community in order to gauge 'what people actually do with the Welsh which they can speak'. Currently the Welsh Language Board is awaiting the results of surveys it has commissioned on a range of issues such as language reproduction within the family, the socio-linguistic behaviour of young people, the potential for an increased use of Welsh within the economy and the effect of marketing campaigns on the decision of young parents to send their children to Welsh-medium schools.

This paper has been concerned with addressing two principal research questions. Firstly, within the limitations of the 2001 census of population, in monitoring the Welsh language, we have been concerned with demonstrating the trends that can be gauged from an analysis of aggregate data at the unitary authority level and with comparing such trends with those from other sources such as the Welsh Local Labour Force Survey and with results from previous censuses. Secondly, we have highlighted current gaps in knowledge where the census is less useful to policymakers charged with investigating such trends. A number of research questions arise from the aggregate analysis conducted to date, for example:

- What effect has the changes in the nature of the question had on the overall findings? For example, changes in the way the question was phrased (from 'Can you?' to 'Do you?') or the fact that respondents in the 2001 census were asked if they understood the language? This led commentators such as Balsom to state: 'At last, it appears as if our official statisticians are taking some account of the complexity of the language situation in Wales. This involves recognizing that, in a bilingual community, the apparently straightforward question "Do you speak Welsh" cannot be fully answered with a simple Yes or No' (2003, 33).
 - What effect did the Welsh tick box controversy alluded to above have on the response to the question? Were those who put their ethnic identity as Welsh also Welsh speakers or more inclined to say they understood and spoke Welsh when they didn't?
 - If there are future censuses, what additional questions could be asked to provide more diagnostic measures of the evolving nature of the Welsh language?
 - If additional questions are rejected, how could ancillary surveys be used in conjunction with the basic census analysis to provide a more complete picture?
 - Does devolution necessarily imply that Wales needs its own national statistical office? If so how might language-related questions be imbedded in mainstream socio-economic investigations, so that the reality of usage in all domains, rather than the potential contained within self-ascribed replies, informs policy decisions.
- One policy area which is key to the trends noted from our aggregate analysis is education. It is the single most important factor determining the total numbers of young people capable of speaking Welsh. Critically, since the Education Reform Act of 1988, Welsh has become a core subject in the national curriculum of Wales for all children up until the age of 16. This has two broad implications. First it offers the opportunity to acquire a range of bilingual skills for all Welsh school children wherever they are on the linguistic continuum. Secondly it helps to mainstream the bilingual policies of the WAG, because now there is a tacit understanding that the language (in theory) belongs to all, not just to a declining minority within the country. The challenge facing language planners is to ensure that those taught Welsh to age 16 continue to have the opportunities to continue speaking the language outside the school environment. A second issue is the significant number of Adult Welsh learners who acquire skills in Welsh but who face difficulties integrating within Welsh-speaking networks, especially within anglicized areas. This, in turn, points to the need for a more disaggregate analysis as and when the detailed data from the census and the data sets being collected by the WLB become available.

Conclusion

The systematic collection of language-related data not only informs socio-linguistic analyses of various communities and social networks, it is essential if the aims of successive government initiatives are to be realized. For far too long policy formulation in Wales has treated the Welsh language as an add-on to other routine socio-economic programmes and has assumed that national programmes do not necessarily require localized, contextualized applications. Now that the government has declared itself determined to create a bilingual nation, the very least it requires is an adequate set of data to chart its own progress to that end. New and radical initiatives are being realized in the field of Welsh language planning. We may cite the work of the 23 *Mentrau Iaith* (community enterprise initiatives), Local Area Language Action Plans, the Twf project (bilingual family promotion), the statutory Local Authority and Public Institution Language Plans, the extension of Welsh-medium educational provision, the increased bilingual character of the professions in Wales, and the marketing of Welsh within the private sector. Hitherto most of these initiatives have been launched in the absence of detailed socio-linguistic investigations. The monitoring of such progress is ad hoc, fragmented and episodic. There is, in short, no adequate national information database within which such initiatives can be calibrated and contextualized vis-à-vis other trends in society. The census has provided an essential service in determining the aggregate trends. But in times of significant investment and political determination to create a bilingual society, the inadequacies of the current census format and its resultant data should not be glossed over, but remedied as part of prudent planning.

Acknowledgements

The source for much of the data analysed in this paper is the ONS (Key Statistics for Local Authorities 2001 Census). The census data are Crown Copyright. We would also like to thank Hywel Jones for his advice on an earlier draft of the paper. However, the interpretations of the data, and the views expressed in the paper, are those of the authors alone.

Note

1 Prior to the census, there was controversy over the lack of a Welsh 'tick-box' which allowed Scots and Irish to state

their perception of nationality. To much consternation, this was not included in the forms administered in Wales 'denying the Welsh the opportunity to assert their sense of separate identity' (Balsom 2003, 33). Statisticians suggested that Welsh could be written in under the category 'Other'.

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