

Policy as containment within democracy: the Welsh Language Act¹

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'Discourse' is a term which is used in a variety of ways in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language.² Like 'social class', it assumes different meanings according to the theoretical problematic in which it is found. Yet 'discourse' tends to be used in such an indiscriminate way with reference to theory that inevitably it is the source of no little confusion. On the one hand it is employed in the type of analysis which seeks to highlight the rules and dynamics of speech and conversation in relation to social situation (as in Gumpertz 1982). Perhaps this is the use that is most familiar to sociolinguists. However, the term is also used in work which seeks to relate language to the possible positions of human subjects in language (as in Benveniste 1974).

There are two further uses of the term 'discourse' which are more relevant to the analysis in this paper. There is a sense in which the two uses overlap. First, discourse is treated as ideological production. Sometimes this approach assumes an unashamedly conspiratorial nature, with texts being regarded as the conscious product of agents seeking to reproduce specific interests.³ In more sophisticated theoretical works texts are analyzed as the unrecognized, unconscious product of their authors, that is, any text involves ideological elements which the author is not aware of. Within this perspective we find a disagreement within the Marxist perspective over the relationship between ideology, superstructure, and infrastructure. Some authors persist with the functionalist emphasis which sees ideology as functioning to preserve class interests, whereas others seek to avoid this orientation.⁴

Finally there is that line of inquiry which denies the existence of epistemology by claiming that the subject is not constituted outside of discourse. Discourse becomes the source of the constitution of the human subject. This means that the actor is decentered, that is, this view differs from those theories which see action as the rational production of conscious, preformed actors. Knowledge is no longer treated in terms of 'ideas' in the sense of mental representations tied to the production of thought by a human subject. The individual author is denied. Ideology is no longer seen as a preformed entity constituted before the act but rather becomes the very act itself. Here

discourse is regarded as a sequence of verbal signs, as the first representation of thought. It is different from speech, which tends to be treated as the way any individual uses language to express him/herself. Furthermore, meaning is constituted by the relations between the linguistic elements of a given discursive formation, and one of the objectives of discourse analysis is to establish the manner in which meaning is constituted.

This is the context within which I would like to consider the procedure which led up to the creation of the Welsh Language Act. As others in this volume have implied, this Act was seen as an important step in the struggle over the Welsh language. Yet since its introduction there has been an increasing dissatisfaction with its implementation, and many people in Wales are now calling for a new Act. This preoccupation with the legitimization of language within the legal structure of the state will seem strange to some, and it is in an attempt to unravel the implications of such a practice that the following analysis is undertaken.

The Hughes-Parry report

A consideration of this report involves a consideration of the official discourse which is based on the assumption that concessions to minority groups are possible and even desirable, but only insofar as they do not prejudice the nature of the dominant/minority relationship. However, since concessions are made to the demands of members of the minority, it is inevitable that two discourses are involved and that the report in question is to be found at the intersection of the discourse of the state on the one hand, and of the minority group on the other. As we shall see, it involves other forms of discourse as well.

Following the conventional British format, the state nominates a committee whose brief it is to investigate the question in hand before reporting to the government. It is then the prerogative of the government in power and the House of Lords to consider the evidence and recommendations and subsequently to decide whether or not to proceed toward passing a bill. Clearly there will be an implicit bias in this process in that the selection of the committee is undertaken by the government, although it would appear that this committee is allocated the power to act within what is assumed to be a 'democratic process'.

In this case the committee consisted of Welsh speakers who had reached positions of prominence either in public office or in a professional capacity. Their prominence had been achieved within the formal state structure and without recourse to the Welsh language. Thus while their interests lay in the existing power structure, they had the attributes which conveyed an im-

pression of representing the Welsh minority. It is axiomatic that the consideration of any position which represents a contradiction between the 'Welsh minority' and the 'power of the state' is thus precluded. Conversely the only acceptable position is one where the interests of the two sets overlap.

The committee in turn was responsible for selecting witnesses, and thereby the evidence that was presented. It seems that these witnesses were selected primarily from among representatives of public bodies and institutions within Wales, thereby reducing the issue to one which pertained to 'Wales' rather than the 'United Kingdom'. It also served to convey an image of democratic representation while, in reality, being inexorably linked to the administration of the status quo. Thus it is clear that the witnesses, as a consequence of their means of selection and their function as representatives, constituted a conservative rather than a radical element. Although 'rights' are held to be the prerogative of the individual, the bulk of the evidence offered claimed to represent the views of institutions. Indeed, the entire process involved the explication of what are referred to as language 'rights' within a liberal democracy without recognizing that 'rights' are conferred by, or at least are negotiated with, power holders, and thereby are better conceived of as 'concessions'. Thus the explicit aspect of language planning can be seen as the response necessitated from power holders to the demands of minorities, while the retention of power by the dominant group becomes its implicit aspect. It is perhaps relevant to recognize that, in common with other forms of planning, language planning constitutes control on the part of agencies of the state rather than serving the interests of the people which its ideological referent claims (Williams 1986).

On the basis of the evidence, the committee *subjectively constructed* and considered three positions with regard to the Welsh language:

- a. the principle of necessity, involving no change, with Welsh to be used only when any individual disadvantage could be shown by its refusal;
- b. the principle of equal validity: Welsh to have the same status as English within the law in Wales – which meant that the legal status of English in Wales remained unimpaired;
- c. the principle of bilingualism, advocating that all legal and administrative business should be carried out in both languages side by side.

Two points emerge. First, that a fourth position, which would be the converse of position (a), with English to be used only when any individual disadvantage could be shown by its refusal, was ignored. It is not that I wish to impute any conspiratorial content to such action, merely to maintain that such a consideration would lie outside of the 'common sense' of the established hegemony, which position was represented by the committee. Discourse analysis involves establishing the right the speaker has to speak and thereby to indicate the manipulation of language involved in confirming the

place from which one speaks.⁵ In so doing we begin to reveal the nature of power relationships. In the case in question the text is situated at the place of the anglophone speaker (nonmarked position) relating to the rights of the Welsh speaker (marked position) within Wales (marked position), and with England treated as a nonproblematic geographic location within the United Kingdom (nonmarked position). Evidently social positions are defined here as a discourse relationship. It should be emphasized that the discursive universe of the commission is not the invention of the members of the commission but is the product of a history which constitutes a specific way of relating a series of social places. It consists of the history of the official discourse involving the relationship between the Welsh and the English. In the following statement,

Its [the principle of equal validity] adoption will, we think, satisfy the keen desire of the overwhelming majority of Welsh speaking people to see the legal status of the Welsh language raised to that of English,

'we' designates the commission and exists as the source of the modality 'we think'. However, a broader enunciative condition is proposed with reference to the reader. In order to accept the above conclusion on the part of the committee, the reader must (i) not locate him/herself outside the English speaker location; (ii) accept that the commission has undertaken its work seriously. As a consequence the scenario involves (i) an unbiased commission which was conscientious in its work; (ii) a reader who is reasonable and who is invited to judge the objectivity of the commission and to verify that no mistake has been made; and (iii) the existence of a closed group of Welsh speakers occupying a position which it is difficult to imagine a non-Welsh speaker occupying. The net result is to magnify the contrast between the categories: 'the Welsh language' and 'English'.

The second point involves the manner in which the three positions which were considered represented a continuum. By labeling position (c) as extremist, a conclusion that was inevitable given the selection of evidence, it was likely that the conclusion would consist of a compromise between positions (a) and (c). Labeling a position as extremist presents it as the view of a minority rather than of a majority — who presumably constitute the norm of the status quo. This labeling process is not restricted to this particular committee but has become a common tactic of those who claim to be supporters of the Welsh language, and this served to legitimize the labeling process of the Hughes-Parry committee. Since position (a) constitutes the place of the official discourse, involving as it does the nonmarked position of the dominant language within the equally nonmarked position of the United Kingdom, it is untenable that this position can be represented as 'extreme'.

While the preceding discussion makes it appear that both the witnesses and the evidence were consciously manipulated in order to negotiate the manageable extremes, this perspective is inconsistent with most discourse analysis, which does not view ideology as a conspiratorial process but rather as the product of the 'common sense' associated with a discourse emanating from a particular place in an 'as if' manner. The net result therefore is not an abstract viewpoint but a position constructed into the discussion from a specific place. An impression of democratic process is conveyed by the willingness to consider a range of views, although these views are organized in such a way that they represent the extremes of the acceptable spectrum. Some views are dismissed, while others are presented as nonacceptable – in the sense of their remoteness from a constructed norm emanating from the normmarked position – although the democratic stance is retained by reference to numerism. Thus by a simple process of making position (c) appear extreme, the nonconsidered position (d) becomes bizarre and position (b) totally reasonable. The reasonableness of position (b) is emphasized by the process of counterposing positions (a) and (c). Of course, to the members of the committee and the place from which they speak, or from which their discourse emanates, position (b) is perfectly reasonable and is seen as acceding to the demands for enhanced status for the Welsh language. It does not represent an absolute viewpoint but is constructed into the discourse from a particular place, representing the enunciatory position of the official discourse.

The government of the day readily seized upon the recommendations of the committee, which clearly contained proclamations compatible with its interests – and passed the Welsh Language Act. Minimal concessions were made to improving the status of the Welsh language in Wales, while simultaneously the hegemony of the English language in Wales was retained, and any extension of Welsh language 'rights' into parts of the United Kingdom outside of Wales was denied. It could thus be viewed as similar to a process whereby the minority status of the Welsh language was consolidated and legitimized.

Responses to the Act

Thus far we have merely considered the official discourse, which we have claimed represents the response to a need on the part of the state to recognize the existence of the Welsh language. There is a range of discursive postures which can be adopted insofar as they do not transgress the dominant status of the status quo. Thus the official discourse retains a dynamic quality which allows it to modify its position in response to the demands of any alternative discourse. However, the alternative discourse is constructed from a position

different from that of the official discourse. The relationship between intersecting discourses represents the antagonisms of political relationships and involves the generation of positive and negative configurations which constitute the oppositions. Within the antagonism it is common to generate a negation of the issue which constitutes the basis of the antagonism, often by stressing the converse as a positive element. I will briefly consider alternative discourses taken from newspaper texts responding to the publication of the Hughes-Parry report. In so doing I intend to show that the discursive process involves an expression of what can be said from specific enunciatory places.

The first case represents the reaction of a Member of Parliament to the report. He states,

The recommendations in the report must be judged objectively. Will the extension of the use of Welsh in the corridors of power, and throughout the channels of public administration strengthen the will and power of the Principality in its struggle for survival in a competitive social environment?

In this opening statement the document has been separated from its authors and thereby become depersonalized into a 'report' which 'must be judged'. It is placed in the context of an impersonal bureaucracy which makes authoritative demands rather than being the expression of people who are acting through reason. That the report 'must be judged objectively' refers to the author's own position and indicates that his discourse is located in the position of the status quo, appealing for an impartial critique of the recommendations where 'objective' implies the 'common sense' of the status quo. It involves a subjective view of objectivity – not, of course, that there is any other. While the report claims to extend 'rights' to Welsh speakers, the commentary claims that such an action will deprive non-Welsh speakers of certain 'rights', and it would seem that they constitute the 'énonciataire' of the text. The 'extension of the use of Welsh' is the converse of the status quo which is placed in the context of what is desirable, and the 'extension' thereby is made to constitute a threat. The protagonists in this antagonism are presented as 'the corridors of power' and 'the will and power of the Principality'. Thus the conflict is presented as the clash of two 'powers', involving the state bureaucracy furthering the interests of a minority against the public at large which is not involved in the decision, and hence whose 'will' is not represented. In this respect, although the 'channels of administration' are presented as 'public', the process of administration is simultaneously presented as opposing the 'will' of the public. A 'struggle' is presented, the outcome of which will determine the 'survival' of the 'Principality'. Now 'Principality' is not simply a noun replacement for 'Wales', it is also an adjective which places Wales in a marked position relative to the nonmarked position of the United Kingdom

since the Prince of Wales, the son of the Queen of England, is the symbol of Wales's integration into the United Kingdom and thereby constitutes the converse of its independence from the United Kingdom. In the same sense the Welsh language can be seen as a feature of independence and English as the feature of integration. 'Principality' is also synonymous with 'the people', and the thwarting of their 'will' is presented as a manifestation of their inability to be sufficiently competitive within the system. The 'competitive social environment' is, in turn, presented as the equivalent of 'modern' within the liberal credo, which sees 'progress' in terms of competition. Since this is presented as the converse of the 'the extension of the use of Welsh', it serves to relegate Welsh to the position of 'nonmodern'. It also implies that the disadvantage which is presented as deriving from the extension of the 'use of Welsh' is the fate of the dynamic part of the population, that is, that which has abandoned the Welsh language. This antagonism and counterposition are evident in the following:

These recommendations excite the hopes of those aspirants who look upon this report as a back window that lets mediocrity in to the places of power, while meritocracy is faced with a language bar across the front door.

Welsh speakers are placed in a position of mediocrity while non-Welsh speakers are equated with a meritocracy. Furthermore, there is an evident closed/open contradiction which, within the liberal framework, gives 'meritocracy' an added meaning of 'open to the most deserving'.

The second case derives from the reaction of a second Member of Parliament in the same newspaper:

I think that the committee are recommending what is just, right and fair. Who but the bigot can challenge the right of the Welsh language to equal validity with English in his own native country of Wales?

In contrast with the first case the report is personalized as the work of a committee whose actions are represented in emotional terms involving elements such as 'nation', 'rights', 'fairness', etc. He goes on to present the committee as the converse of 'fanatic devotees of the cult of Welsh' and 'one-track-mind zealots', seeing them as 'three distinguished' people with a 'vast cumulative practical experience of administrative business and Welsh life in all its aspects'. This serves to legitimize the recommendations. It also presents the committee as the converse of the 'bigot'. Not only is the report personalized, but also the author's reaction is presented as personal and subjective by the use of 'I think'. An emotive element is introduced, and the writer seems to be speaking from the position of the reasonable and sensible Welsh person. Not

only is the Welsh language 'zealot' denied but so also is the adversary in the form of the Welsh 'bigot' who opposes the language. That it is a *Welsh* bigot is evident since he challenges the language in 'his own native country of Wales'. That such a bigot exists is clear from the claim that s/he 'can challenge', although it is unclear if 'can', in this context, refers to the 'ability to' or the 'right to'. The depersonalization of 'the Welsh language' plays down the conflict that is implicit between the 'Welsh language speaker' and the 'Welsh bigot'. It serves to emphasize the reasonableness of the position which the writer is occupying, as well as that of the position of the addressed. Furthermore the existence of bigots within Wales who oppose the Welsh language and, by implication, its speakers, places the antagonism as one existing within the closed or marked position of Wales, rather than involving an opposition between Wales and England. This avoids the nationalist position which sees language problems in terms of the relationship between Wales and England. Evidently the writer's position precludes such a view and serves to present the nationalist as a 'zealot'. Yet reference to 'native' and 'Wales' implies the acknowledgement of an element of nationalism, but this is tempered by the insertion of 'country' between 'native' and 'Wales'. Such an insertion would be inconceivable for a nationalist since it would involve a redundancy.

This brief consideration of the places from which the two discourses emanate evidently relates to the adoption of what were positions (a) and (b) in the Hughes-Parry report – the 'principle of necessity' adopted in the first case, and the 'principle of equal validity' adopted in the second case. For a statement which corresponds to support for the third position – the 'principle of bilingualism' – we can turn to a report in a Welsh-language newspaper:

In refusing to accept the principle of equal bilingualism, and in advocating instead the principle of equal validity the work of the Committee on the Legal Status of the Welsh Language created considerable debate in the press and on radio and television.

The Report is welcomed as a step forward towards giving to the Welsh language a status of equality with English in the life of Wales, but some people judge that it does not go far enough; others insist that it goes too far.

Here the committee has been given its full title and is referred to as a committee which has produced 'work', which means that it was created to do a specific job of work. As such its Report cannot be ignored by those who created it, and some action pertaining to the status of the Welsh language must result. The work which was undertaken by the committee is specified and involves a 'refusal' on the part of the committee, whereas the Report merely claims the 'consideration' of a principle. The 'refusal' involved 'refus-

ing to accept' a principle. Such a transformation suggests that unspecified actors were involved – presumably those who gave evidence and with whom the author identifies. Thus we begin to recognize the position of the writer. It was a principle of 'equal bilingualism' which was rejected, although the Report makes no reference to anything other than 'bilingualism'. Presumably since the adopted principle was one of 'equal' validity' its omission as a qualifier for 'bilingualism' would have conveyed an impression of justification in the decision. While 'refusing to accept' one principle the committee 'advocated' the alternative principle. It is unclear whether this advocacy is aimed at the government, in which case the sentence in the text could convey the impression that the battle has not yet been won since the committee only had an advocacy role; or whether it relates to the public which is represented by the government and, by extension, the committee. The advocacy is qualified by the adverb 'instead'; although the alternative to the advocated principle is not made explicit, it does convey the impression that this alternative was preferable. The net result of such an action was the creation of a 'debate' rather than a 'conflict' which is evident in the other two texts. This serves to play down the conflictive aspect of the language issue while still retaining an open posture.

By the second paragraph it is the 'Report' rather than the 'work' of the committee which is referred to. This impersonalization is qualified by the personal nature of the 'welcomed', since it involves action on the part of someone – in this case the author – speaking from a specific place. This position becomes more explicit when we recognize that the 'welcome' is qualified by the preposition 'towards', conveying an impression of insufficiency and the existence of a future objective. The future objective is made explicit in terms of 'giving to the Welsh language a status of equality with English in the life of Wales'. It is addressed to an external power which is able to 'give' this condition, language being seen as external to its speakers. The equality of status is not qualified as it is in the Report, which addressed legal and administrative equality, and therefore the newspaper text goes much further than permitted by the brief of the committee. Furthermore the 'equal status' is not related to 'Welsh life', where 'Welsh' can be equated with the ability to speak Welsh, but rather to the 'life of Wales' which covers every domain of activity and involves the entire populace. Thus it leans in the direction of envisaging a future existence of a 'Wales' where everyone speaks Welsh. Given this objective, there are those who are not satisfied with the pace of the movement toward this objective; such people 'judge that it [the Report] does not go far enough.' The verb 'judge' lends status to this view since it implies evaluation from a point of authority. In contrast, those who think that the Report goes too far are held to 'insist' on such a view, thereby being presented as dogmatic and intransigent. The coupling of 'some' with

'others' appears to suggest that 'everyone' is included, which means that no one can remain remote from the issue, thereby preventing the issue from becoming the domain of the 'minority', which would serve to denigrate it as an issue.

Conclusion

Despite the brevity of the textual statements considered it is evident that the three statements represent three different discursive formations spoken from contrasting places. As such they are constructed around the official discourse and represent formations which the official discourse must respond to. It is here that we encounter the dynamic nature of ideology, with discourses of different status contesting the ideological space. The dominant discourse of the state responds to the demands which are implicit in the minority discourse, but it does so within a broad range of possibilities, the extremes of this range constituting the positions which determine the continuation of the dominant/minority relationship. It is unlikely that any position which would transgress these extremes would even be considered within ideological contestation, but would rather constitute a direct threat to the continuation of the existing power relationship and would have to be handled by repression. While it is useful to recognize the dynamic quality of ideological forces in terms of resistance/response, we should not see this situation in unidimensional terms but as an ongoing process involving numerous discursive positions operating simultaneously. Many of these positions derive from the contradictions of capitalism, but this material level is by no means the only source of such contestation. The value of this approach is that it allows us to escape from the conspiratorial conception of ideology and its associated conception of the rational human subject.

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Notes

1. The analysis of the texts was undertaken with the assistance of Pierre Achard of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, and Catrin Roberts of the Department of Education, Manchester University. I am grateful to them for their assistance and to the British Academy for financing visits to Paris.
2. For a more extensive discussion of the theoretical issues see Williams (1984).
3. See some of the papers in Fowler et al. (1979) and in Monteforte Toledo (1980).
4. See the work of Pecheux (1976).

5. Any statement is influenced by the conditions of its enunciation. Such conditions include economic, institutional, and ideological factors. This is what is referred to as the 'place' of a discourse (see Maingueneau 1976: 139).

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