

Field Journal: Language in Lampeter

Lampeter, known in Welsh as *Llanbedr Pont Steffan*, is a small yet culturally rich town in Ceredigion, mid-Wales. With a population of just over 3,000 residents, it might appear unassuming at first glance. However, Lampeter is of particular interest to sociolinguists and cultural scholars due to its deeply embedded bilingual environment. It is situated in one of the most Welsh-speaking regions of the country and is home to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, the oldest degree-awarding institutions in Wales. This field journal explores the linguistic landscape of Lampeter, focusing on the role and status of the Welsh language in relation to English, and how local identity, education, media, and generational attitudes shape the use of Welsh in everyday life.

One of the most immediate indicators of language vitality in Lampeter is the town's bilingual signage. Public signs, shop fronts, informational posters, and governmental materials are all presented in both Welsh and English. This visible bilingualism reflects not only legal obligations under the Welsh Language Measure 2011, which requires public bodies to provide services in Welsh, but also a deeper cultural commitment to maintaining the language.

Unlike some parts of Wales where bilingual signage can feel tokenistic, the use of Welsh in Lampeter appears to have functional and symbolic value. Welsh is often presented first or more prominently, suggesting not just equality but sometimes preference. This sets the tone for what follows: a town where Welsh is not only seen but heard, used, and lived.

Lampeter offers a clear case study of active bilingualism. In daily interactions across the town, both Welsh and English are used dynamically and often interchangeably. Residents frequently switch between languages depending on context, interlocutor, and topic. This practice—code-switching—is common and fluid, not marked by hesitation or discomfort.

Many older residents use Welsh as their default language, especially in familial and community settings. Among the middle-aged population, bilingualism is widespread, and switching between the two languages is routine. Younger people, particularly those raised in Welsh-speaking homes or who have attended Welsh-medium schools, are also fluent, although their use of the language may be less consistent outside of formal or family contexts.

This sociolinguistic balance is evidence of what can be termed stable bilingualism—a situation in which both languages are actively maintained across generations and domains of life, although not without underlying tensions and shifts.

One of the strongest pillars supporting the Welsh language in Lampeter is its education system. The town and surrounding areas benefit from Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, which play a critical role in language transmission. Schools such as Ysgol Bro Pedr offer full or partial instruction in Welsh, immersing students not only in the language but also in Welsh cultural content.

Welsh-medium education has been shown across Wales to be one of the most effective tools for language revitalization. In Lampeter, the impact is visible in the ease with which children and teenagers use the language. However, it is important to note that outside of the school environment, the pressure of English—particularly in digital and social media domains—can undermine Welsh usage among youth.

Still, the presence of a university in the town also supports the language. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David offers programs in Welsh Studies and Welsh-medium instruction, helping to

reinforce the academic and cultural status of the language. Staff and students from the university contribute to the linguistic diversity of the town, although the predominance of English in higher education remains a limiting factor for widespread Welsh usage on campus.

For many residents, particularly those born and raised in Lampeter and surrounding rural communities, the Welsh language is inseparable from personal and collective identity. Speaking Welsh is not just a means of communication but a marker of belonging, heritage, and resistance to cultural homogenization.

Among older generations, Welsh was often passed down despite earlier government discouragement in the 20th century, when the language was marginalized in schools and public life. The revival of Welsh in recent decades has thus carried emotional and political weight for many. It represents not only cultural pride but also the restoration of linguistic rights.

Younger residents also recognize this identity link, though their relationship with the language is often more pragmatic. Many see bilingualism as a skill rather than a cause. Still, there is a broad awareness of the symbolic importance of maintaining the language. This awareness is often encouraged through community events, Welsh-language media, and cultural practices such as *Eisteddfodau* (Welsh festivals of literature and performance).

Welsh remains strong in certain domains—most notably family life, religious practice, and community activities. Many families in Lampeter continue to raise their children in Welsh, and the language is commonly spoken in churches, chapels, and local markets. In these settings, Welsh is not only functional but emotionally resonant.

In contrast, English tends to dominate in professional, commercial, and digital domains. Most businesses in Lampeter operate bilingually, but English is often the default when dealing with tourists, students, or non-local residents. Similarly, university administration and most lectures are conducted in English, limiting the institutional footprint of Welsh within higher education.

In the digital realm, particularly among youth, English has an overwhelming presence. Social media, streaming platforms, and online gaming are predominantly English-language spaces. While Welsh-language media such as S4C (television) and Radio Cymru exist, their reach among younger audiences is limited. This domain imbalance poses one of the greatest challenges to sustaining Welsh as a living language.

Overall, attitudes toward Welsh in Lampeter are highly positive. There is a strong sense of local pride in being able to speak the language, and many see it as a key part of what makes the community unique. Welsh is viewed as a cultural asset, not a hindrance.

That said, some younger speakers express a sense of linguistic fatigue or ambivalence. While they value the language, they may not see it as central to their future careers or digital lives. Others feel pressure to "perform" Welshness, especially in front of non-speakers or institutions promoting language use. This can create a tension between authentic language use and institutionalized language promotion.

Interestingly, English is rarely viewed negatively. Rather than being seen as a threat, English is simply part of daily life. The general attitude seems to be that both languages have their place, and that bilingualism is a strength—socially, professionally, and cognitively.

Despite the relative strength of Welsh in Lampeter, several challenges remain. The most pressing include:

1. Digital relevance: As noted, the dominance of English in digital and entertainment spheres means that Welsh can feel outdated or disconnected from contemporary youth culture.
2. Economic pressures: Many young people leave Lampeter for work or education opportunities in more Anglicized parts of Wales or England. This out-migration can weaken the intergenerational transmission of the language.
3. Inconsistent policy enforcement: While language legislation supports bilingual services, enforcement and quality can vary. Some public-facing institutions still fail to provide fully functional Welsh-language options.
4. Limited Welsh in higher education: Although primary and secondary schools support Welsh, universities—including the one in Lampeter—largely operate in English. This can create a break in the continuity of Welsh-language education.

Lampeter stands as a compelling example of a bilingual town where Welsh remains a living, dynamic language. It is a community where bilingualism is not only tolerated but normalized, and where language is deeply tied to identity, history, and place. The visibility of Welsh, the strength of local schools, and positive community attitudes contribute significantly to language vitality.

However, the future of Welsh in Lampeter—and indeed across Wales—depends on its ability to adapt to the modern world. This means ensuring its relevance in digital spaces, maintaining economic opportunities for Welsh speakers, and expanding its use in higher education and professional life.

In conclusion, Lampeter reveals both the possibilities and limitations of language revitalisation in a minority-language context. It is not a utopia, but it offers hope: a model of community-driven bilingualism, sustained by pride, practice, and policy.