**Exploring the social construction of language and its implications for the UN Sustainable Goals.**

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of the social construction of language in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Using the Welsh language as a case study, along with ethos and Bourdieu’s linguistic capital as frameworks, the paper highlights key socially constructed concepts and ideas that should be considered in the application and relevance of the 17 SDGs.

Relevant Background Information

Over the past millennium, Cymraeg has gone from being the essence of Welsh identity, to nearly ceasing to exist, to now being present in nearly every corner you turn in Wales. The fight for the language, and its use, still breaths fire across the country, despite the disappointing result presented in the Census 2021. Recognising how people are socially included into communities or excluded through language use is critical to achieving a ‘sustainable and equitable world’. Although the UN document ‘Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ does not constitute ‘language’ as one of the 17 domains, its role cannot be denied or underestimated.

Ethos refers to the practices and values which distinguish one person, society, or organisation from the other, and is set upon moral beliefs (McLaughlin, 2005). Its significance to understanding minority language in practice is because languages are socially constructed (Laamiri, 2019), and their existences are dependent on the production of linguistic utterances that are embedded in human action (Susen, 2013). Understanding ethos could provide important insights upon the complex nature of speaker influences (McLaughlin, 2005). Sociologically, this is significant through understanding underlying beliefs, customs and practices exhibited by a group, or within society, which may influence the attitudes and behaviours towards using Welsh beyond the school setting. This paper identifies how the concept of ethos can be used to understand implications of the socially constructed nature of language and inclusion within the community and education, and how these impact on the intended and experienced ethos within these contexts.

Research Approach

Using a case study research design, qualitative insights into the experiences of young Welsh speakers living in a non-traditional Welsh speaking area has been collected. Harrison, Melanie, Franklin and Mills(2017) refers to a case study as an effective methodology for understanding complex issues in real world settings, which was deemed appropriate for capturing the multi-faceted landscape of the use of Welsh. The case study, which served as a representative of a non-traditional Welsh speaking area (typically reporting less than 15% of residents being able to speak Welsh), focused primarily on two objectives. Relevant to this paper, the first was to increase understanding into the naturalistic linguistic practices and attitudes of young people, and secondly was to increase understanding of the linguistic ethos of educational and community sport settings. Although results presented from this research cannot be generalised, the theoretical advancement of understanding the social construction of language and its relevance to the UN Sustainable Goals is done so cautiously.

Discussion

Empirical, qualitative data collected as part of a Welsh language focused PhD found that power, legitimacy, and habitus contribute to the social and cultural mechanisms of language use. Our research shows that they are key difficulties associated with changing the linguistic ethos of a community and the ‘power’ of teachers, language legitimacy, availability and ability of Welsh speakers, and language courtesy contribute to the social and cultural mechanisms of language use. We found that intended and/or experienced ethos largely depends on individual and collective ethos within the two social settings (school and community), and that habitus, norms and expectations play a critical role in the legitimacy and capital of language and the inclusion of speakers within society. There is a complex and contradictory picture of the Welsh language in a non-traditional Welsh-speaking area. Related research to this study (Evans *et al*., 2019) found that the Welsh language beliefs are diverse, and that this contributes to exclusion within community sport settings. We found that the linguistic ethos of young people altered between the two ‘fields’ of education and community sport. This was namely a consequence of external influences, for example peers, parents, teachers, and coaches.

Conclusion

In this study we explored the significance of the theoretical connections of capital, habitus and field, and the implications this has had on the ethos, social inclusion, and legitimacy of the Welsh language in the Anglo-dominant area. We conclude that Welsh is not considered a legitimate community sport language in the Anglo-dominant case study area of Wales and accentuate that normalising the language is crucial to achieve the Welsh Government’s goal of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Furthermore, the power differences related to language use and respective positions within society, ultimately impacting on the collective language ethos within the two settings, as well as impacting on the inclusion of participants. This understanding is critical to understanding the underlying importance of language for society and therefore the successful achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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