

Pupil Voice, Individual Learning and Social Space: Conversations and Stories with Bilingual and Monolingual Pupils in Several Primary and Secondary Schools in South East Wales

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1. Introduction

This paper arises from a theoretical basis in sociolinguistics. It has a particular interest in context and language, and in issues of the individual nature of experience. Data are discussed relative to a two-year project on bilingualism in the school setting in Wales; partial data are discussed here, since final data collection for this project will be completed in July 2003. The main research aim was to interview bilingual pupils from both Welsh medium and multi-ethnic schools in Wales in order to discover more than is currently known about these pupils' experience of and opinions about languages. Pupils came from two age groups. These were Y 5 (9 and 10 years old) and Y8 (12 and 13 years old).



The geographical context for this work is that of South East Wales: Cardiff the capital city of Wales and the surrounding valleys. The images above are part of the ethnographic nature of this project where language, society, people and place are closely linked and influence each other. The docks area and a city centre Methodist church now used for concerts and meetings can be seen above. Other places relevant to the research are shown later in the paper in order to facilitate an understanding of language and context.

1.1 Languages in Wales

In Wales the main focus of attention has been on the fate of the Welsh language, since until very recently it appeared to be on a steady path towards extinction, (Aitchison and Carter, 1994; Welsh

Language Board,2001). As well as Welsh there are many other established languages represented in Wales, such as Somali, Bengali and Cantonese, as well as a more recent groups, particularly asylum seekers. The international student community in the university towns is another, elite and mobile, form of bilingualism represented in Wales. There were three language groups in the project. These were:

- English / Welsh bilingual pupils in Welsh medium schools.
(English/ Welsh bilingual= E/W)
- Minority ethnic bilingual pupils in English medium schools.
(English/ other language(s) bilingual= E/B)
- Monolingual pupils in multilingual English medium schools.
(English monolingual= M)

Welsh medium schools are a growth point in Welsh speakers in South East Wales and they have been praised for their generally good academic success, (Estyn, 2001; Reynold, Bellin and Ab Ieuan, 1998). However, there are little data on the ground to report about how pupils view their own and others' bilingualism and progress. Around 25% of the school population in Wales is educated wholly through the medium of Welsh. Many of these pupils come from English speaking homes. Equally very little is known about the other language groups represented in Wales. Here there is the phenomenon of the inner city multilingual school, which is a familiar urban setting in the UK. But there are also small numbers of bilingual speakers in rural and small town areas in Wales, a less usual setting for minority ethnic bilingual speakers. Although this project is about bilingualism, it is interesting to talk to monolingual pupils in multilingual schools about bilingualism, given that many of these pupils' friends can speak more than one language. This is the third, smaller group in the study.

There are of course numerous differences between the bilinguals speakers above (E/W and E/B), as I will illustrate in the following figure:

Figure 1 Stereotypical Welsh and Somali Family Group

Welsh	Somali
• Middle Class	• Lower class
• Literate parents	• Uneducated parents
• Affluent	• Poor
• Small family group	• Large family group
• Home resources to support learning	• Few resources to support learning
• Home/school culture similar	• Home/ school culture different
• Invisible racially	• Visible racially

The figure here is it must be stressed a stereotype. But there are broad issues, which are important to acknowledge as part of the context to the research being reported here. The influences of poverty and racism have a major impact on individuals and their experience of languages. It is also important to recognise that there are many exceptions to this stereotype above. For instance, there are a number of ethnic minority children whose parents have chosen to send them to Welsh medium school.

There are similarities, too, as can be seen in the next figure.

Figure 2: Similarities for bilingual children in the two main minority language groups

- Bilingual ability in two or more languages
- Home language is not that of school
- English is a strong influence
- Youth culture is shared, for instance pop groups, videos and computer games.

A very interesting feature of the study of bilingualism in Wales is the ability to work within a country, which is by policy, if not wholly in practice, a bilingual country. Issues around the Welsh language are important to examine and there is little qualitative data on pupils in Welsh medium schools in general. Equally, though, combating racism and aiming for equality of opportunity are pressing agendas in society and in education in Wales as elsewhere in the world. To ignore other bilingual groups in Wales might be to risk Charlotte Williams' comment about the 'racial amnesia' she saw as a Welsh Ghanaian in Wales. She says 'the claim of tolerance and mutuality are countered by the often overt hostility along the Welsh English divide and to outsider status when it is perceived as a threat to Welsh language and culture' (1999, p 280).

2. Methodology

Over a two-year period data are being gathered from Primary and Secondary age pupils. The pupils were chosen in Y5 and in Y8 since these two years are interesting points in the UK education system, just before the end of a key stage assessment.

The whole dataset when complete will consist of 160 pupils across the two age phases. This consists of all Y5 pupils in one Welsh medium and one multi-ethnic primary school in South East Wales (total number approximately 65 pupils) and sets of 25 pupils of average to above average ability in two Welsh medium and two multi-ethnic secondary schools in South East Wales (total number approximately 100 pupils). A point to be noted is that the data set discussed in this paper is for Y5 and Y 8 pupils, that is 9-10 and 12-13 years old, but there are proportionally more Welsh bilingual child data discussed than other language bilingual or monolingual pupils. These data are made up of 33 Y5 pupils from two classes in one multi-ethnic inner city primary school in Cardiff and 29 Y5 pupils from one Welsh medium inner city Cardiff school. These Y5 groups consisted of every Y 5 child in the school, irrespective of academic ability. There were 16 Y 8 pupils from one valleys Welsh medium secondary school. The school selected the latter as pupils of average and above average ability from amongst 8 sets of Y 8 classes.

As this is work in progress the complete data set is not yet complete and transcribed. There are 36 interviews from Welsh medium Secondary schools to be inserted into the data set and the final sets of interviews in two multilingual Secondary schools will be carried out during the summer of 2003. There are, however, already a substantial number of interviews of considerable interest to examine regarding pupils' experiences and understanding of languages.

2.1 Language choice for interview and interview procedure

When a situation offers bilingual communication there are sometimes language options and one consideration was of the language of the interviews to be used in collecting the data. As a Welsh speaker I was able to follow the languages of the school, so that I used Welsh in Welsh medium schools for most of the data collection there and English in multilingual schools since English was the main school language.

I carried out the same semi structured interview with both Y5 and Y 8 pupils and in Welsh and English, depending on the context.

The semi-structured interview was divided into three parts. The first asked the pupil their views on languages including Welsh, the second asked them to choose a story to tell about language and the third section gave the pupils an opportunity to ask me, the researcher, any questions about the project. It is some of the data from the second section, telling a story about language that is discussed in this paper.

2.2 Schools

Data from three schools are discussed in this paper. These are two Primary 3-11 schools and one Secondary 11-18 school. The two primary schools were Welsh medium and multilingual respectively. The Secondary school was Welsh medium. All three schools were situated in South East Wales, either in Cardiff or in the nearby valleys.

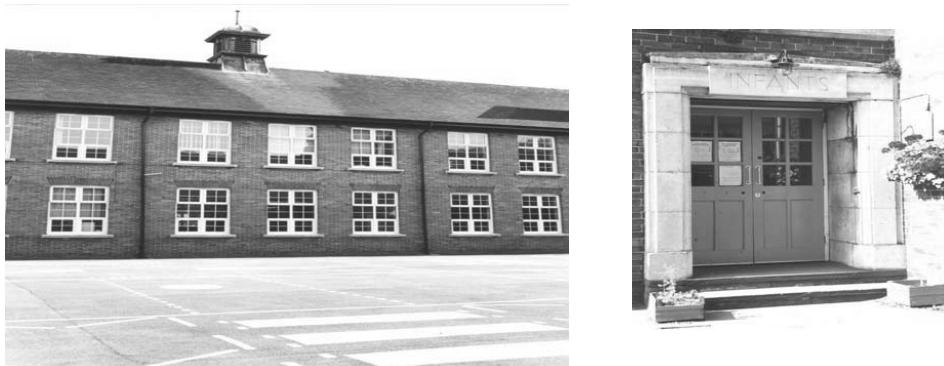
2.2.1 School One- YNP

This set of pictures illustrates the context of the multilingual primary school from which the Y5 data were collected. The first is a visitor's sign, perhaps slightly unusual in that it has Welsh as well as other languages. The second is view of the building and the third shows the park and nursery with the millennium centre in the distance. Over 80% of the pupils are bilingual in at least one other language apart from English.



2.2.1 School Two- YMB

The second school can be seen in the following pictures. It is an inner city Primary school for ages 3-11 and is Welsh medium. Around 88% of its pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes.



2.2.1 School Three- YRW



The third school is a Welsh medium secondary school. Over 90% of its pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes. They are mainly bussed in from the surrounding area through a fairly tough council estate. The South East Wales valleys community can be sensed in the typical rows of houses on the side of the valley and in the large towns placed at points in them. The school is quite new, has a sixth form and the grounds are still being developed.

3. Story types, story topics and main character choices

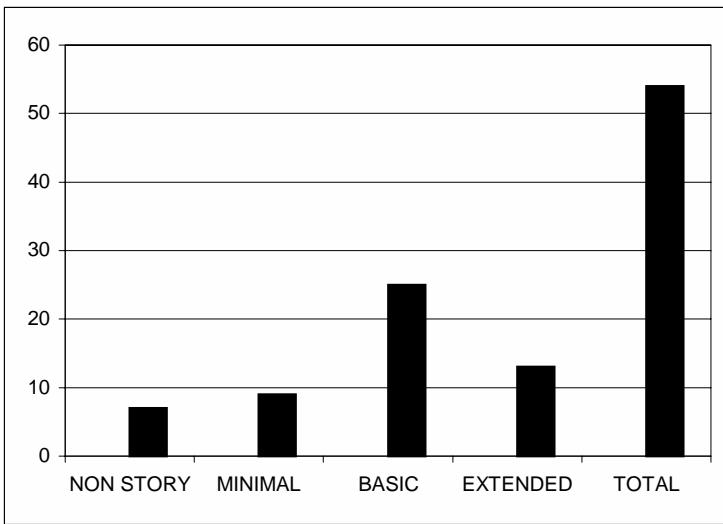
I will now move onto a set of three tables showing some overall aspects of the pupils' narratives before discussing some examples in detail. Before I do it is important to point out firstly that this is work in progress and only 60, less than half, of the stories have been transcribed and examined. Secondly, the stories occur within the semi structured interview schedule and are very much a co construction between the researcher and the pupil in conversation. They do not have the gloss of rehearsal or polished performance. Neither are they generated by the pupils in conversation with their friends in a spontaneous and natural way. In some ways, therefore, the stories suffer in their quality as a result. What they do contain, though, are numerous, fascinating insights into the experiences regarding bilingualism of both Welsh medium and other languages bilingual pupils, as well as some monolingual pupils.

3.1 Story types

A rough measure of the stories was conducted to have an idea about proportions of types of stories. Four categories were set up. These were non-story, minimal story, basic story and extended story. Non-story and extended story represented the two extremes of outcome. 'Non story' was categorised as those utterances which were either irrelevant in content or misunderstandings of the idea of telling a story. 'Minimal' story and 'basic' story were both utterances that contained the bare framework of a story, with some idea of a tale to tell and of a beginning middle and end. They were different in scope, so that a minimal story might be one brief sentence while a basic story would be more elaborated but might not be very coherent or well structured. The final category was of 'extended' story which was counted as stories which had both the basic shape of a beginning, middle and end, but which went beyond this to other elements such as description, reported speech or deliberate uses of code switching between languages for effect. This set of categories is fluid and is informed in a general way by key theories on narrative, for example the classic work of Labov and Waletzky, (1967), Hymes, (1996) and others on story.

Figure 3 shows the result of this examination. It can be seen that there were more basic stories than any other category but that there were also more extended stories than minimal or non-stories. The chart above indicates the overall picture across the three schools analysed to date. Broken into individual schools aspects of age were seen to make a difference. For instance, Y8 pupils in YRW gave more extended stories as compared to the younger pupils in both Welsh medium and multilingual schools. The category of non-story was most found in the Y5 multilingual pupils.

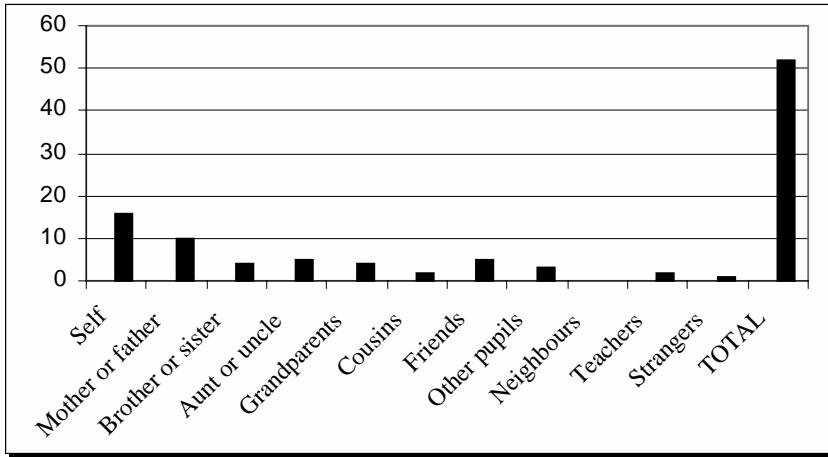
Figure 3 Story types across the three schools



3.2 Main character choices across the three schools

Another dimension was to set up categories of main character in the pupil narratives. The purpose of this was to see the range of choices made by the pupils. These categories were ones created by me as a basic set in expectation of responses. As can be seen above the two most often chosen characters overall in all three schools was the pupil themselves and then mother or father. My assumption that there might be a story about neighbours is not corroborated by the data so far. Other categories will be added if necessary as analysis of the remainder of the stories is carried out.

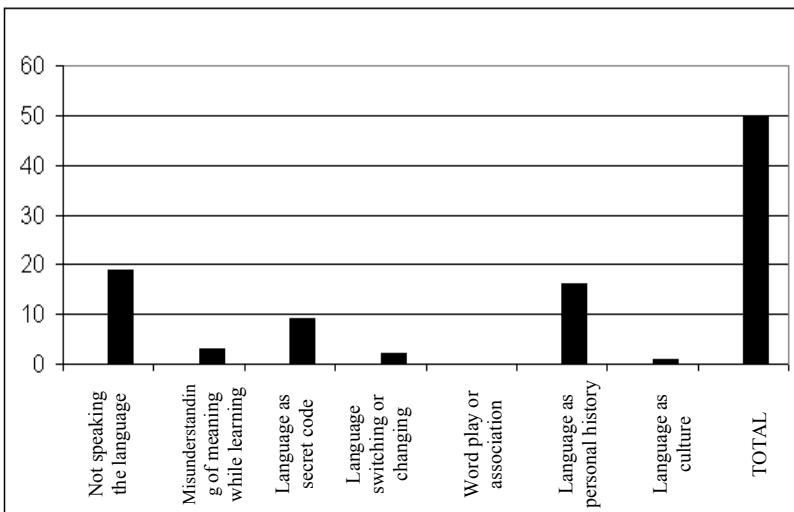
Figure 4 Main Character choices across the three schools



3.3 Story topics

A third broad dimension was to categorise the story topics. Again, I set up the categories prior to analysis and after having listened to the recordings of the interviews I had made and read the transcripts. These categories are fluid and open to further change as the research progresses and the complete data set is available for analysis.

Figure 5 Story topics across the three schools



The categories are focused on language and clearly overlap. In deciding which category to put a story in I used proportionality as a guide so that a story which might be both about not speaking the language and personal history went as a single entry depending on the relative content of the story in one category or the other. This will need refining at a later stage. I know that elsewhere in the data there are stories about word play and word association, but in this set there are none. The most frequent categories were:

- Family history Language as a Secret Code
- Not speaking/ Learning a Language.

4. Discussion of examples on three themes: Family history, language as a secret code and not speaking a language.

I would like to focus next on several examples from my data which represent the three themes above.

4.1 Languages in family history

The first example (1) is from an Y8 boy called Owain in the Welsh medium Secondary school.

Example (1)- OWAIN

1. My father, well, because my father speaks fluent Welsh and my mother hardly speaks Welsh at all. She really only can understand, so really if my father and I are trying to talk and we can't speak in Welsh because she wouldn't know obviously and it could be quite awkward. But when my father was growing up he went to an English school because at the time that's what the majority were. So he spent most of his time in Porth Grammar where I suppose it was pointless learning Latin, even though he did. So my father knows all the Latin numbers for absolutely no apparent reason. My father couldn't speak a word of Welsh until six years ago when he was looking at a school for me he began to become interested in it because he has always been quite passionate.
2. JL: About the Welsh identity and things?
3. Yes. He still is now even though he can speak Welsh but he learnt Welsh in something like three years.
4. JL: That's very good.
5. He just recently did a GCSE so...
6. JL: That's very good isn't it? I'm sure he is very proud of that GCSE.
7. Yes but I'm sure my mother gets quite wound up sometimes, even a bit envious because I think she would like to speak Welsh but it's a lot of effort to put into learning a language, so that's one good reason why you should learn Welsh at an early age.
8. JL: Yes, you don't have that effort then, its natural. It's much, much easier when you're younger.

The factor of choice is evident, with the father looking for a school for his son and then learning the language to support him. Owain talks about his mother getting 'wound up' because she can't speak Welsh. The effort invested in learning the language and the emotions are characterised by 'he's always been quite passionate' and 'it's a lot of effort to put into learning a language'. All in all the commitment to language learning for the son and clear choices about languages are very evident. This contrasts with the story from Shugri about her father.

Example (2)- SHUGRI

1. I've got one about my dad.
2. JL: Good, good.
3. My dad, my dad used to live in Somalia and his dad died and so he lived with his sister. After that his sister died and he went to ??? and then he came to England and stowed away and had to go to prison for 15 days before he was set free.
4. JL: And that was in England was it? Which country did he go to when ...?
5. To Spain.
6. JL: Because that wasn't very far in the boat to cross maybe?
7. Then he went on a boat to England and he didn't know how to speak a lot of English. And every single time people used to go past him, he used to hear them say things, like, he used to keep them in his mind and say them over and over again.
8. JL: Right. What to learn English? It was a special way of learning English? So he would hear people saying things then he would practice them himself and that's how he learnt?
9. Yes. Sounds and...
10. JL: That's a very good way of doing it, isn't it? You're learning the language and then a bit later on you can start speaking it a bit once you've learnt it.

11. That was a very exciting story. Has he told you that about being in a boat as a stowaway? That's a real adventure isn't it? He must be very brave to do that I think.
12. When your dad tells you stories about his learning English, his travelling and things does he tell you how he came to live in Wales? Has he told you that?
13. Yes. He went to work when he learnt English, he worked in a paper factory and became??? And he had a family and had a divorce and went back to our country again and then came back here.

This story about languages and family history is much more action packed than Owain's story and includes movement from one country to another and an episode of stowing away and being put in jail. The choice of language learning is not evident at all, a factor that has been noted by other researchers such as (Skuttnab-Kangas, 1981; Collier 2001) about those who are economically poor and who might have to migrate from one country to another for pressing reasons of making a living and survival. There is no reference here to the daughter's education or to choosing to learn a language and to do a 'GCSE' in it. The language learning here is driven by necessity and by an absence of formal education. Turn 7 highlights this very clearly: 'and he didn't know how to speak a lot of English. And every single time people used to go past him, he used to hear them say things, like, he used to keep them in his mind and say them over and over again'.

To link this to figure 1 discussed earlier in the paper is to realise that talking about languages in family history can illustrate the stereotypes of relative advantage or disadvantage in a direct and lived way.

4.2 Languages as a secret code

This theme created a lot of fun and centred on the possibilities offered when two people can talk about someone else and they will not understand. Or will they? It can be risky as these two examples show. Emily (3) and Aled (4) both speak about this. Emily is in Y8 and Aled in Y5. They are both in Welsh medium schools.

Example (3)- EMILY

1. Me and my mother were on holiday, we were going to book a trip on a boat or something, I can't really remember, and there's this man in front of me who was wearing like women's trousers, big flares. Me and my mother turned to Welsh and started saying 'oh gosh, look at his trousers' and we got to like the check in and we, me and my mother, and the man started talking and said 'oh you are from Wales are you?' I said, we said 'yes' and he said 'can you speak Welsh?' and we said 'yes' and he said 'so can I' and he started saying all these phrases in Welsh but luckily he didn't understand us.
2. JL: So luckily he didn't understand enough? That was a near escape that one wasn't it?
3. Yes.
4. JL: Because it would have been awful if he said 'so do I' and then said something really fluent in Welsh?
5. Yes, and we were really worried about that, we just looked at each other and started laughing.

The timing in Emily's story is very good, as in turn 1. 'And the man started talking and said 'oh you are from Wales are you?' I said, we said 'yes' and he said 'can you speak Welsh?' and we said 'yes' and he said 'so can I' and he started saying all these phrases in Welsh but luckily he didn't understand us. A particular strength, too, is the way she uses direct speech. This lends vividness to the story and draws the listener in to feel what the main characters were feeling at the time. Aled, less dexterously, tells a similar story, but with a different ending, since the people spoken about do understand the language

Example (4) ALED

1. Well un waith- ma hwn wedi digwydd i mam pan oedd cefnder o'r enw Bedwyn wedi dod lawr gyda'i mam a dad jyst i cael jyst i cael gweld a o nhw 'di mynd i'r dref i neud siopa a oedd o ni wedi gweld rhai pobl yn wel cusanu a o nhw odd mam wedi dweud o gobeithio byddwch chi ddim yn neud hwnna pan y chi'n oedran yna a o nhw'n gallu siarad Cymraeg felly o nhw wedi edrych arno ni yn grac a wedyn mynd rhywle arall.

2. JL ie y thing yw pan i ti'n meddwl bod pobl ddim yn deall chi'n siarad yn uchel iawn a chi ddim yn .. na dim byd ti'n gwybod beth fi'n meddwl os o ti'n meddwl bod nhw'n deall byddet ti wedi siarad yn distaw yn llais bach bach bach.
1. [TRANSLATION Well one time this happened to my mum when a cousin called Bedwyn came down with his mum and dad just to just to see them and they went to the town to do some shopping and they saw some people, well, kissing- and they - and mum said ' oh I hope you wont do that when you're that age and they could speak Welsh so they looked angrily at us and then went somewhere else.
2. JL Yes the thing is when you think people don't understand you speak very loudly and you don't whisper or anything you know what I mean. If you think they understand you would speak quietly in a very low voice.]

An amusing aspect of this story is the mother's disapproval of the couple kissing in the street. Her audible expression of that disapproval was based on the expectation that the couple wouldn't understand her and perhaps a cultural idea of what a respectable Welsh speaking young couple would and wouldn't do in a public place.

4.3 Not understanding the language, getting confused

The next and final set of examples comes from the theme of not understanding the language or getting confused. Both come from pupils in Welsh medium school s in the data set. Sophie is in Y5 and Cerys is in Y8. One story is about Norwegian and the other about learning Welsh.

Example (5) - SOPHIE

1. hwn yw stori fi te.
2. un waith pan o fi heb cael fy geni hwn yw beth odd mam wedi dweud wrthai odd mam a dad a ffrind gorau mam o nhw'n eistedd ar y sofa a odd dad yn siarad Norwegian a odd e'n dweud a odd Mel wedi dweud whats blue then a odd fe wedi dweud bleu odd mam yn meddwl bod e ddim yn iawn so wedodd hi and I think snow is sneu is it a odd e wedi dweud yes it is a odd pawb yn chwervthin.
3. JLmae'n od ti'n dyfalu a ti'n iawn.
4. ie so nhw'n swno fel geiriau wir.
5. JL na achos ti'n gwybod pam achos mae'n debyg i Saesneg os odd e ddim mor debyg i'r Saesneg bydden ni ddim yn ffeindio fe'n doniol.
6. ond mae fe'n agos i Cymraeg mae ddim yn meddwl yr un peth ond ambell waith mae'n swno tipyn bach fel Cymraeg.

[TRANSLATION

1. Well this is my story.
2. One time before I was born, this is what mum said to me, dad and me and mum and dad's best friend were sitting on the sofa and dad was speaking Norwegian and he said.and Mel said 'what's blue then?' and he said ' bleu' and mum thought that wasn't right so she said ' and I think snow is sneu is it?' and he said yes and everybody laughed
3. JL it's odd when you guess and you are right.
4. Yes so, they sound like real words.
5. JL No because you know why because it's similar to English. If it weren't so similar to English we wouldn't find it funny.
6. But it's close to Welsh. It doesn't mean the same thing but sometimes it sounds a little bit like Welsh.]

Here this is clearly a family story told about a time before Sophie was born. The fact of her father being Norwegian and the similarity of some word in English and Norwegian is the reason for the story. Interestingly, whereas I, as the researcher, was following the English/ Norwegian line, Sophie comments in turn 6 about Welsh.

In the next example (6) Cerys talks about her aunt and how she mistakes one Welsh word for another.

Example (6) - CERYS

1. One day, I can't remember when it was, it was in the summer holiday and one day all my friends came down my house and my aunty was there but my aunty who doesn't speak Welsh. But because a lot of members of my family do speak Welsh and because my sisters and me go to a Welsh school, she picks up little bits. One day she had a bad stomach and we were altogether and she said, in front of all my friends, "Oh my train station is hurting!" She said it in Welsh and she was holding her stomach so everybody guessed what she meant and all my friends were laughing and my aunty was just standing there wondering what they were laughing at.
2. JL: So she was trying to say "stomach" and said "XXX"?
3. Yes, she said "XXX". We eventually told her in the end.
4. JL: That's terrible though isn't it because she's suffering really and suddenly everyone is laughing?
5. She was quite embarrassed.

The confusion that can occur when one word is mistaken for another as someone learns a language is a frequent experience and it can lead to very strange expressions such as the 'train station' for 'stomach' in the sentence above in turn 1. There is actually very little resemblance in sounds between the Welsh word 'stumog' (stomach) and 'gorsaf' (station). This makes the story above even more odd since the confusion does not seem to have arisen from mixing two similar sounding words.

5. Conclusion

I would like to conclude by returning to my title. As has been seen these data represent the voices of pupils talking about their experiences of language and languages. All these data were collected in the school setting and as such what they say has to do with education and individual learning. One might ask, so what? Two aspects are important to stress about pupil voice, individual learning and social space. Firstly these data are deliberately emphasising the individual voice and in the striving toward improvement in standards in education these voices are vital to be heard. What they are saying is that individual learning is variable and complex. Education at its best works with diversity, not against it.

Secondly, this paper aims to show that pupil voice can be plural and dynamic. The norm of language learning in school is not monolingualism; that is an impoverished model. Bhatt and Martin Jones, (1999), Zentella (1997) and others have shown that for pupils to learn at their best this multifaceted nature of pupil voice and social space needs to be recognised. They say that people can have a range of overlapping identities and also that these can change with time. Being a bilingual speaker is not a monolithic, fixed item and part of the fascination is to discuss flux and change. This is where the individual voice in the social space is vital in order to grasp the point made by Zentella that 'in each group of speakers there are many ways of being bilingual' Here is Tanisha, then, a Gujarati/ English speaker making her comment about language learning from section one of the interview schedule. She is in Y5 in a multilingual school.

Example (8) Tanisha

1. JL: If you're going to learn another language, like a new language, one that you don't know, which one would you chose?
2. Well I don't really know, 'cause, like there's not just a thousand, there's like a million languages in Europe like and if I chose one it will be like I only, I always using the other language and its not fair on the other languages, this person is using just this language not the others so...
3. JL: That's true.
4. I just stick to my Gujarati.



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