

Where does Welsh begin and end? Ideological boundary disputes in the revitalisation of a minority language

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The linguistic demarcation of Welsh and English and the geopolitical demarcation of Wales and England might both seem to be pretty straightforward, but neither actually is straightforward. There are long-running disputes about, for example, the Welshness of English and the anglicisation of Welsh. However contentiously, Wales has been claimed to have 'English' or 'British' territorial and cultural components, transitional borderlands contrasting with Y Fro Gymraeg, the supposed 'Welsh heartland'. Today, however, we see significant moves in post-devolution Wales to erase these internal divisions in public discourse; two key phrases are 'One Wales' (the slogan of the incumbent political coalition) and 'Everone's Language', Iaith Pawb (the title of the principal language policy document). In this paper I comment on these centripetal ideological moves but also on the centrifugal stances that they oppose. I shall do this in relation to two sorts of data. The first is the corpus of ideology-rich language planning texts emerging from the Welsh Assembly Government, counterposed with texts disseminated by activist groups. The second is the corpus of 'linguistic landscape' texts that iconise a specific understanding of a bilingual Wales, one that many sociolinguists would find untenable. The underlying issue is whether the ethnolinguistic revitalisation of Wales will be better served by a homogenising discourse or by fronting up to a more complex, pluricentric Wales.

References

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