

# ***Preface***

I grew up in South Wales in what had once been a Norman town and long before that a Roman settlement. Like so many of the world's habitations it had never been completely taken over, always the place of walls, built by the conqueror and inhabited by those the conqueror left behind, never fully native and, as such, always a place attracting anger and envy, contempt as well as imitation. Such places can lose out entirely to the locals who come to settle, first around and then within. But some, it is surprising how many, remain still as symbols and traditions of the faded past they once had. Dublin is still to some extent an Imperial city, Vienna still the centre of the Hapsburg empire and in Granada the Moorish past remains.

My South Wales had been part of what in Ireland was called the Pale. It included most of Southern Glamorgan and southern Pembroke and had been settled by Normans, later by Flemings and Huguenots and always by English speakers. The place names from Milford Haven through Gower to Newport still show this and the local language has always been English. These English speakers lived in the fertile vales and later in the industrial valleys. Above them on the hills and in the mountains were the old Britons, the Welsh speakers.

Over time the Welsh learnt English, very rarely the other way round. The Welsh and English speaking groups intermarried and Welsh declined as all languages have in the path of a juggernaut like English. It is sometimes claimed that this was deliberate, a policy of language genocide or linguicism (Skutnab Kangas & Phillipson, 1994). But there is another view. In schools where Welsh was marginalized in favour of English, it is possible to interpret this promotion of English as a way of providing access for the minority children to the majority culture, language and society. The argument would have been that since these children already had Welsh what they needed was exposure to English, and the only setting for that was, in Welsh-speaking areas, the classroom. It is, of course, the same argument that is everywhere used in the English, French (and so on) medium schools, the argument too that is used in support of language immersion schemes in Canada and elsewhere. True there is

criticism of such policies on the grounds of the restriction on personal and cognitive development which, it is argued, may well need the channel of the first language for full development. But even if such arguments about cognitive development through the first language are correct, they were not in vogue in the 19th century when Welsh children were first being taught entirely through the medium of English.

The native English of the non-Welsh-speaking South Walians was a stigmatised variety, stigmatised by themselves as much as by others. They were not Welsh speakers (therefore *di-Cymraeg*) neither were they speakers of a prestige English. This led some to hyper-correct in English and others to attempt to learn Welsh as a second language. In both cases, what was at issue was a feeling of uneasy identity.

In my own case, as a non-Welsh-speaking South Walian, after many years living outside Wales, I decided when already in my forties that I had to test my Welshness by learning Welsh. Over the years I had made some desultory attempts and, of course, when I was at school, in Wales we had Welsh language lessons on the timetable every day: Welsh taught as if a foreign language. My mother was a Welsh speaker but since my father did not speak Welsh, the language of our home had always been English. But that is itself too glib an explanation. Even if he had been a Welsh speaker, I guess that we would still have made English our home language since English for my parents' generation (whether Welsh speakers or not) represented modernity, openness, new ideas and emancipation. Welsh for them was marked for the tightness of the closed communities of the valleys and the isolated farms, the chapel and the past.

So in the mid-1970s I spent a summer in Aberystwyth where I found that learning Welsh in the right context and with the right mental set was easy and quick. In 12 weeks I had gone far beyond all those years of primary and secondary school Welsh classes where like most of my classmates I had found Welsh boring and old-fashioned. Welsh has not stuck. Easy come, easy go, last in first out. But that doesn't matter because I now have the satisfaction of having learnt it easily and the knowledge that I could do so again. Proof of Welshness? Perhaps. More important for our present purposes is the appeal to the common human experience of feeling and asserting identity through language. We all want to belong, we all want to be native speakers, we all choose groups to which we aspire even though we may change our minds and leave, as I left, quite promptly, my adult Welsh-speaking group because I found its nationalism and exclusiveness oppressive and proselytising.

As a proselyte I was expected to choose my identity. I had always vaguely assumed that, like masks, identities could be added on. It seemed

possible in the USA to be black and American, so why not Welsh and British (even indeed Welsh and English)? But among the teachers and learners of Welsh as a second language such dual identity was not acceptable to those who were *gryf yn yr achos* (strong in the cause). You had to be either Welsh or English, either Welsh or British. Not both. Such a choice I found meaningless. My wife was English, our children had never lived in Wales. It was of course a no-win situation since for those activists among whom I had learnt my Welsh my refusal to choose was in itself a choice, a choice against Welsh. If to be Welsh meant making such a choice then I decided that was a Welsh identity I did not wish to have. Was that what being a native speaker of Welsh really meant?

The native speaker is for a start one who can lay claim to being a speaker of a language by virtue of place or country of birth. But birth place alone as a defining characteristic seems too restricting since children can be moved very quickly after birth from one country to another. We need to add the notion of adoption as an alternative; the definition then becomes: by place or country of birth or adoption. There is the further sense of ascription – a person does not choose to be, can't help being a native speaker.

The cognate of *native* is *naïf* (both through Old French) meaning natural, with the sense of not being able to help it. Together they comfortably cover the sociolinguistic (country of birth or adoption) and the psycholinguistic (not being able to help oneself) attributes of the native speaker. But the native and the natural can be in conflict when one wishes to change identity, to adopt a new group, because what one then has to demonstrate both to the old and the new groups is that the natural and the naïf are in harmony, that as well as consciously adopting the new group, at the same time one can't help it, that the adoption is without apparent effort.

What I try to show in this book is that being a native speaker is only partly about naïve naturalness, that is about not being able to help what you are. It is also, and in my view more importantly, about groups and identity: the point is that while we do not choose where we come from we do have some measure of choice of where we go to. Difficult as it is, we can change identities (even the most basic ethnicity, that of gender), we can join new groups.

In my years teaching English, first (and briefly as a mother tongue), then as a foreign language and then the long period teaching applied linguistics in Edinburgh, I have always been interested in the social aspects of language learning and language use. In my teaching of sociolinguistics I have increasingly found the native speaker to be a kind of icon to which

discussions about language teaching and learning return. The native-speaker concept appears to be both the process and the product to which we appeal. Process because native-speaker-like behaviours are used in the preparation and investigations of learners, product because it is the native-speaker criterion that is appealed to as a measure of success in learning, teaching and research. As such it is useful but it is also useless in that by being both process and product it provides only its own circular definition.

I have found myself speculating that the native speaker is like the healthy person in medicine (or indeed any such state of assumed perfection) where the only definition seems to be negative, a lack of malfunction: thus the native speaker would be someone who is not a learner (etc.) rather than someone who is something positive. Why is it that such an apparently fundamental idea should be so elusive? Why is it that as a notion it appears to have come into prominence so recently? When was the first use of the term? I cannot find anything earlier than Bloomfield's *Language* (1933).

Hence this book. What it turns out to be is a kind of introduction to aspects of sociolinguistics using the concept of the native speaker as a focal point. No harm in that, since what I think I manage to do (certainly what I have tried to do) is to tackle some of the recurring issues and problems as they may appear to a beginner interested in applied linguistics. I hope that readers will also see the book in this way. Not for any answers it may have, not even for catching up with the native speaker, but for the issues it addresses and the questions it asks.

The book is dedicated to the memory of my father, a very Welsh (non-Welsh-speaking) Welshman. I want to thank Mary Ann Julian for patient critiques of successive drafts as well as for helping me understand why the native and the naïf do not have to be in conflict. I would also like to mention the encouragement I had in completing the book from Terry Quinn, Tim McNamara, Cathie Elder and other friends in Australia as well as the detailed comments by a number of anonymous reviewers. I have tried to take both the encouragements and the critiques into account in revising my manuscript.

## Preface to Second Edition

The *Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* was published in 1991. Ten years later the topic continues to excite and to tantalise. In at least two areas, that of second language acquisition research and post-colonialism, interest in the topic has grown, showing the robustness of the concept as both

myth and reality. For this edition I have made small adjustments to the original text. The main changes are the title which takes account of this double role of native speaker, and the addition of two new chapters: one (Chapter 8) on the challenge to the native speaker by World Englishes, post-modernism and post-colonialism; and the other on the connection between second language acquisition research (SLA research) and assessment (Chapter 9).

My thanks to Mike Grover of Multilingual Matters for recognising the need for this update and for his patience in waiting for it, to John Maher for his insightful comments, to my four children Ben, Sara, Megan and Hester for their love and confidence and to my students in Edinburgh, Melbourne and elsewhere for allowing me to pursue the snark.

I dedicate this volume to the memory of my Welsh parents, my mother, Anne Jane Lewis, a native speaker of Welsh (*Cymraes Cymreig*) and my father. Wiliam Irfonwy Davies, a native speaker of English (*Cymro di-Cymreig*). The mismatch of their given names reveals the ambiguity of the Welsh English identity.