

Rapporteur Group on Bilingualism

Paper 2: 25 March 2010

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The SSiW course was developed out of a desire to make recent improvements in language learning available to Welsh learners - something which the free market, of course, does not tend to provide. We also believe that we have combined differing elements of learning theory in ways that have not, as far as we are aware, been done previously.
- 1.2 Since an announcement on Facebook at the beginning of April last year, over 8000 people have accessed the course. This growth has been almost exclusively as a result of word of mouth, coupled with a small amount of media coverage. We currently attract approximately 1000 new learners per month. To put this in context, the Cardiff Welsh for Adults centre says they have worked with 1,700 learners, and Nant Gwrtheyrn expects about 300 learners per year.
- 1.3 The course was written by Aran Jones, and the southern version prepared by Iestyn ap Dafydd. Both have experience of learning a number of other languages (including Arabic, Thai, French, Spanish, Shona and Breton) and have detailed knowledge of a wide range of language learning methodologies. Aran Jones taught English as a first and second language in Zimbabwe and Dubai, and learnt Welsh fluently as an adult. Iestyn ap Dafydd is a first language Welsh speaker and has worked as a Welsh tutor for adult learners.
- 1.4 The extremely low distribution costs for material provided online made it possible for us to offer the introductory course for free. We hope that we will be able to develop the course further if we receive grant support or reach a point where the course has enough subscribers to fund further development on a professional basis.

2. Course structure

- 2.1 The SSiW course currently consists of:
 - an introductory course of 25 half-hour lessons in mp3 format
 - a weekly listening practice for the first 6 lessons
 - a weekly speaking practice for the first 6 lessons

- daily listening practices for the first 6 lessons and the entire introductory course
 - daily speaking practices for the first 6 lessons and the entire introductory course
 - the first 10 lessons of an intended 25 lesson intermediate course
- 2.2 Learners hear a word or phrase explained to them. They then hear English sentences which they have to say in Welsh BEFORE they hear the correct Welsh repeated twice, once in a female voice and once in a male voice.
- 2.3 All materials are available in northern and southern forms of Welsh.
- 2.4 The introductory course (approximately 13 hours of instruction) and the weekly listening and speaking practices for the first 6 lessons are being distributed at no cost. The daily practices and the intermediate course are being offered to subscribers for £2.95 per month (with the option to pay £3.95, £4.95 or £9.95 per month for subscribers who are keen to support our work – this is an entirely voluntary extra payment, and no extra materials are available for those who choose to pay more).
- 2.5 All the course content has been developed thus far on an entirely voluntary basis. We now have approximately 150 subscribers whose payments are covering our server costs, covered the costs of our launch event in the Senedd building in November 2009, and are allowing us to start planning some minor advertising.

3. **Course methodology**

- 3.1 Understanding of language learning has advanced considerably in the last 10 years alone, with an increasing emphasis on spoken language, and with other branches of learning theory contributing important refining elements to language learning.
- 3.2 These developments have fed through (to differing extents) in the teaching of major languages, with companies such as Pimsleur and Michel Thomas offering courses that are more effective than traditional courses, but also more expensive. They have not tended to be available for lesser-used languages, however.
- 3.3. The key points of the SSiW methodology are as follows:
- Learners begin with core functions of the language. There is no need, for example, for an early stage learner to deal with 'They' and 'We' – they get further, faster if they focus on 'I' and 'You', leaving them free to gain early confidence with a larger number of regular verbs.
 - Learners are given access to key language multipliers at an earlier stage than is traditional – for example, they are shown how to use conjunctions to build

multi-phrasal sentences, rather than (as is the case with most introductory courses) working only with simple, short sentences. Learners who have completed two or three *hours* with SSiW are capable of producing sentences such as 'I want to speak Welsh because I like speaking Welsh and because I can, but I don't speak Welsh well now.' This allows them to feel that they are speaking like adults rather than three year olds.

- Learners speak in Welsh immediately and extremely often – more often than is possible in any other format. As soon as a new word or phrase is explained, our learners are then required to say it in Welsh in a number of different ways, each time after hearing the English, and before hearing the Welsh – using a pause button if necessary. This uses elements of muscle memory learning to increase the speed with which they can process and use the Welsh they know.
- Learners are not expected to revise. Instead, words and structures are revisited on a regular pattern, so that each lesson contains approximately half of all material covered previously. This moves words and phrases from short term to long term memory, and has a significant impact on the learner's ability to retain their Welsh. It also means that learners do not have to be capable of organising their own learning (something which can be extremely challenging for any learner who does not have experience as a teacher of second languages) – they simply follow the course, repeating each lesson until they are comfortable with it, and then proceeding to the next lesson.
- Learners are given practice sessions which present material they have already learnt in a different order every time. This avoids the common flaw where multiple revision of the same material allows the brain to memorise the lesson (partially or in some cases entirely), rather than being forced to process the language. If you know (however subconsciously) that after saying 'I'm going to do it now' you will have to say 'I want to do it later', your brain does not have to do the same work as when it must provide the Welsh without advance warning.
- Learners hear the Welsh they have learnt over and over again, in practice sessions and as they proceed through the course. This considerably improves their ability to understand spoken Welsh, which is of course a vital element of conversational confidence.
- Learners do not have to find time to attend lessons which may be at inconvenient times or inconvenient locations – they simply fit the work around their existing schedules. Many have told us that as a result of this, they spend far more time learning Welsh.

3.4 More details on how to accelerate the learning of Welsh can be found in our paper SaySomethinginWelsh.com/pdf/crossing.pdf

- 4.1 Feedback has been outstanding. Students claim to have learnt more useful Welsh in one week with us than in years of attending night classes. We believe that the truth here is that they have been exposed to less Welsh with us, but that they have been required to learn it in a way which leaves them capable of using it, and using it confidently – which feels to them like a much greater level of success.
- 4.2 We have seen learners start to arrange group meetings to practise Welsh in the Cardiff area, and are aware of similar interest developing in Pembrokeshire, the north of Wales, several different locations along the Atlantic coast of America, in Germany and in Australia. Over 400 learners have requested to be added to the map at www.SaySomethinginWelsh.com/map which now shows a very encouraging international distribution of the course, including paying subscribers in China, Afghanistan, Australia, New Zealand, America, Ireland, England, and Scotland.
- 4.3 The course is being used in class situations both in adult education (in Wales, England and America) and in secondary education. For example, we have had extremely positive feedback from a group of second language learners in Ysgol Botwnnog in Gwynedd, who since being introduced to the course have asked their teacher to be allowed to do some work on it in every lesson. This is a direct result of the greater sense of success that is available to learners with this approach, which in turn creates a greater sense of motivation, and a confidence that the language can be learnt and used successfully.

5. What we aim to do

- 5.1 We are currently publishing intermediate lessons (available to subscribers only) at the rate of approximately one per week. This work is being done on an unpaid basis.
- 5.2 We aim to complete the intermediate course (which will be 25 lessons), prepare and record an advanced course (also at 25 lessons) and produce a range of vocabulary units which will combine our existing approach with specific audio-visual theories to create what we believe will be the fastest and most effective way for learners to acquire (and be able to USE) new vocabulary.
- 5.3 We aim to make the full course (including the currently paid-for-only material) available to every child in Wales. This has significant cost risk to us in terms of our hosting and in terms of support, but we believe that we will be able to do it at a far lower cost, and with far greater benefits, than would be the case with any alternative.

- 5.4 We have received interest and support from people who work to improve literacy skills. They believe that our material is ideal for young people with low literacy skills and low self-confidence, and we aim to run a pilot project in the Heads of the Valleys before expanding this across similar areas
- 5.5 We aim to make the full range of materials available for people learning Welsh in the workplace. We also aim to produce tailored lessons for specific work situations, which we believe would help create the confidence necessary for people to use the Welsh they have learnt at a far earlier stage than is currently the case. Because of the nature of the course, it would be comparatively easy for employers to purchase a small number of low-cost mp3 players and allow employees to spend a set amount of time working through the course each day. This would replicate to a large extent the successful support given to Welsh learners in Gwynedd council, for example, but at a very significantly reduced cost.
- 5.6 We also aim to make the course available through the medium of different languages, such as Polish, Urdu, Spanish, Chinese, German and so on. Thanks to programming work done pro bono by an English learner, we can do this at comparatively low cost, and we believe that it would help make learning Welsh a more socially inclusive process.

6. Funding issues

- 6.1 We have not yet presented a bid for funding to the Assembly or other sources. This is largely because we do not have the necessary time or expertise. We are also unclear as to the appropriate channels.
- 6.2 We contacted the Welsh Language Board, and were told that they could only offer funding for projects to increase opportunities for learners to use Welsh in social settings. We believe that our course is having a positive impact in that field, but it is clearly not inherent in the course itself.
- 6.3 We requested advice from the Assembly, and were told that all funds for learning Welsh had been ring-fenced for the six centres of Welsh education, and that we should talk to them. The Assembly officer asked if we would be willing to give a presentation to the six centres, but we have heard nothing further on this. We had a meeting with a publicity officer for the Cardiff Welsh for Adults Centre, who expressed a willingness to co-promote, but there was also a belief that no funding would be available.
- 6.4 Despite the value of funding six specific centres, the ring-fencing of funding has made it difficult for independent projects to gain funding even if they are shown to be practically successful.
- 6.5 We have been advised that European funding may be available for work with young people with low literacy skills, and are seeking further advice.

7. Outcome

- 7.1 We would be grateful to the rapporteur group for any advice or feedback on how to move SSiW forward so that we can make learning Welsh more accessible. We believe sincerely that if our course were available in full to every child in Wales, and to every employee, levels of enthusiasm and success in the learning of Welsh would be transformed.
- 7.2 We would to thank you for inviting us to submit written details of the work we are doing, and we hope that this paper is helpful to you in the course of your inquiry into bilingualism in Wales.