

**LANGUAGE POLICY IN MULTI-LEVEL SYSTEMS:
A HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALIST ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

Efforts are underway to develop a stronger political science perspective on the practice of language policy, and thus establish language policy as a distinct field of public policy studies. This article develops a framework, grounded in historical institutionalism, to analyse the multi-level institutional arrangements that condition policy choices with regard to regional or minority languages within multi-level states. Its original contribution is its use of historical institutionalist tools to examine policy-development for regional or minority languages a multi-level systems context. The framework's merits are examined by applying it to analyse language policy decisions regarding the Welsh language, and also by considering its applicability to the analysis of language policy choices in other European cases. Overall, the article advances the case in favour of the framework's adoption and calls for greater investigation of its ability to analyse language policy development in relation to other regional or minority languages across Western Europe.

Introduction

In sociolinguistics, language policy is conceived as a diffuse mechanism guiding language use patterns in varying social contexts (Johnson, 2013). On this basis, language policy is associated with any deliberate attempt to influence linguistic behaviours, broader social attitudes towards particular languages and patterns of linguistic interaction (Spolsky, 2004: 5). Nevertheless, as Grin (2003: 30) posits, language policy can also be viewed in a more limited sense: as a form of *public policy*. This article focuses on this more specific understanding of language policy.

When viewed as a form of public policy, language policy can be understood as any of intervention by government (state, sub-state or local) that seeks to influence a society's linguistic milieu, and thus influence the language practices of individuals. The exact objective of the intervention can vary (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). Yet, given the need to communicate with citizens, every modern government must engage with language policy in some way or another (Patten, 2001), for example decisions regarding which language(s) to use within domains such as public administration, public media, road signs etc. Furthermore, debates regarding the nature of the language policies that should be adopted are increasingly prominent on the political agenda, both domestically and internationally. Trends such as immigration, sub-state nationalism and cultural globalisation underline the extent to which linguistic diversity now characterises most modern societies and this leads to an increased awareness of the political, economic and cultural significance of any language policy decision (Patten and Kymlicka, 2003).

Despite its political salience, political science research that systematically seeks to study language policy as a distinct area of public policy is limited. Indeed, political scientists engaged in policy analysis have paid little attention to the subject of language policy. As Grin argues (2003: 38), it is an area that 'ought to be approached in the same way as health, education, transport or energy policy.' Yet, in contrast to the extensive literatures in these fields, research assessing the political origins of language policies, and analysing how and why particular language policy choices are taken is much more limited. This article contributes to filling this lacuna by bridging between language policy analysis and contemporary political science research. In doing so, it responds to recent literature that established an analytical framework in order to analyse state language policy choices based on the twin concepts of state traditions and language regimes (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015). However, the original theoretical contribution of this article is to develop an analytical framework that can rigorously analyse the multi-level factors conditioning language policy choices in relation to non-state, regional or minority languages (RML). The article's focus on developing a framework for analysing policy in relation to RMLs is particularly important given that policy programmes aimed at recognising and promoting the prospects of such languages are increasingly common in different contexts across the world, particularly regional or minority languages within sub-state nations across Western Europe (for example, Strubell and Boix-Fuster 2011; Urla, 2015; McLeod, 2006). Whilst some revitalisation efforts may be guided by language communities themselves (Hinton, 2011), in an increasing number of cases, sub-state governments

play a leading role in the process (Williams, 2013a). Indeed, in relation to European RMLs such as Catalan, Basque, Gaelic and Welsh policy interventions have gradually become more systematic and far-reaching in scope, encompassing a range of regulatory, distributive and constituent instruments, touching on key social domains, and overseen by sub-state level actors and institutions. This activity reflects the radical expansion in regional autonomy across Western Europe in recent decades (Hooghe et al, 2010), as the establishment of sub-state tiers of government has prompted efforts to promote local or non-state languages (Williams, 2013a). Yet, sub-state initiatives have rarely been conceived and developed in isolation. Patterns of multi-level governance across much of Europe raise the prospect that, reflecting other domains, policy interventions targeting RMLs are influenced by political dynamics at multiple different levels. Consequently, also of potential significance are state-level structures, and continental or global level structures. Therefore, the article draws on historical institutionalism to deepen understanding of the multi-level institutional factors that influence European RMLs language policy choices.

In terms of its structure, the article is organised as follows. First, it outlines the means by which language policies have been analysed and introduces the recent literature on state traditions and language regimes. Second, the article builds on this work by outlining a framework for analysing language policy choices in cases of RMLs in multi-level governance contexts. Third, it applies this analytical framework to evaluate in detail the multi-level factors influencing the nature of language policy in a particular case, that of Welsh in Wales, before expanding the discussion to other European contexts to provide a preliminary evaluation of the framework's broader applicability. The article concludes by highlighting the strengths of the framework: i) in its ability to analyse and explain the process of language policy development in Wales; and ii) in its broader applicability and relevance to the analysis of language policy development in other European regional or minority languages.

Language policy analysis and political science

As indicated above, despite the political salience of language policy in many locations across the world, political scientists have, on the whole, been reluctant to engage with the subject in any detail. Scholarly research on language policy has instead been more associated with other disciplinary contexts and, consequently, less concerned with analysing the political dynamics that underpin different language policies.

To date, a substantial amount of the literature concerning language policy has been associated with the broad field of sociolinguistics. Much of this work has focused on describing the consequences of different language policies. On the one hand, scholars have considered the degree to which language policy choices promote certain linguistic processes, such as language spread, language shift and language death (see for example Fishman, 1991). On the other hand, attention has been given to the degree to which language policy choices promote certain social changes, such as greater/lesser equality or greater/lesser discrimination (see for example Tollefson, 1991). Since the 1970s, research by sociolinguists has also

focused on language planning, understood as any deliberate effort, either by public bodies, corporations, community organisations or, indeed, parents, to influence the linguistic behaviour of others (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). Yet, as Ricento (2006) argues, this work has focused mainly on conceptual and theoretical questions, for instance the relationship between language planning and language policy; or the potential goals of language planning. Meanwhile, 'what has not been much discussed is *the practice of language planning*, that is, the development, implementation, and evaluation of specific language policies' (Ricento, 2006, 18, emphasis added).

Over the years, social scientists working in other fields have drawn on insights from public policy analysis in order to inform research on language policy. This encompasses contributions by scholars working in fields such as economics (Grin, 2003) and geography (Williams, 2013a). Yet, as Sonntag and Cardinal (2015: 12) observe, their emphasis 'has been on implementation and evaluation, not on the political origins of language policies.' More recently, literature in the field of political theory focuses on notions such as language rights, equality and linguistic justice (see for example Kymlicka and Patten, 2003), yet this work inevitably features little detailed examination of the political factors driving different policy decisions (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 12).

In summary, despite the existence of a relatively broad and multi-disciplinary body of literature engaging with language policy, a distinct political science perspective that has the aim of uncovering the political origins of language policies, and of explaining why particular language policy decisions are taken, has been lacking. However, a significant step in this direction is *State Traditions and Language Regimes* (Cardinal and Sonntag, 2015). In this edited volume, political science theories and methods are utilised to develop an explanatory framework, based on the twin concepts of 'state traditions' and 'language regimes', to address: 'How and why are language policy choices made and how do they come about?' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 3).

The framework seeks to examine the historical, institutional and normative contexts influencing state language policy choices. State traditions are understood as the 'institutional and normative baggage' that can 'mark the path that states take in policy making' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 4). It is informed by historical institutionalism and holds that while state institutions react to societal demands and pressures, they also possess a relative degree of autonomy (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 4). The concept of language regime refers to 'language practices as well as conceptions of language and language use as projected through state policies and as acted upon by language users' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 6). The two concepts are considered as inter-related: state traditions frame the assumptions that underpin particular language regimes, in turn, guiding the nature of the language policies introduced and the sociolinguistic practices adopted by language users. Overall, the key strengths of this framework include its flexibility, which allows it to analyse a range of different contexts - ranging from Canada to Taiwan - and its emphasis on

the importance of analysing the institutional arrangements and long-term policy trajectories guiding language policy choices.

However, it is not clear that the framework's emphasis on the concept of 'state tradition' captures the specific political circumstances contextualising policy developments in cases of RMLs. In particular, for such languages, the process is influenced by political structures at multiple levels of governance. Clearly, the editors recognise the significance of linguistic diversity and have sought to ensure that the volume contributes to understanding language policy choices governing 'linguistic diversity locally, nationally, regionally, or globally.' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 14). Certain contributors focus on cases of regional or minority languages (for instance Silesian and Kashubian in Poland) and factors such as decentralisation are taken into account in certain chapters. However, overall, the primary focus on the state level results in a tendency for discussion of the sub-state level to be more limited and generalised. Consequently, sub-state political dynamics that condition language policy choices in relation to RMLs are left under-examined, as is the potential for diversity in language policy regimes within individual states.

A multilevel historical institutionalist framework

This article develops an explanatory framework that takes greater account of the multi-level context affecting language policy choices relating to RMLs. Consequently, the article responds to the manner in which sub-state governments across Western Europe have, over recent decades, often been a catalyst for policy initiatives aimed at recognising and promoting the prospects of non-state RMLs. The question guiding the research is:

What are the key factors that have conditioned language policy choices instituted with regard to European regional or minority languages?

This section outlines the core features of the framework: first, relevant elements from the historical institutionalism literature are highlighted, and second the multi-level framework for analysing levels of governance that may influence policy decisions relating to RMLs is introduced.

As a strand of 'new institutionalism' theory, historical institutionalism is grounded in comparative politics and applied in particular to analyse public policy choices (for example Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth, 1992). Whilst historical institutionalism possesses certain core features, there are also differences in emphases amongst authors. A key element is the theoretical importance of political institutions, to the extent that they can be considered as the key independent variable that affects political outcomes and behaviour (Lecours, 2000: 511). Defining institutions is thus a central issue for historical institutionalists. In contrast to perspectives stressing the informal features of institutions (Hall and Taylor, 1996), an emphasis is placed on their formal aspects, by understanding institutions as 'formal organizations, rules and procedures' (Lecours, 2000: 513), such as constitutions, the structure of party systems, relations among different branches of government, state-

interest group relations and policy networks that structure the political process (Immergut, 1998: 17).

Second, a key feature is historical institutionalism's approach to the relationship between structure and agency, which is a matter of debate (Hay and Wincott, 1998: 953) with some contending that it is a problem for the approach (Peters, 2012: 83). Lecours (2000: 516) recognises the importance of agency and stresses the agency-structure dynamic of historical institutionalism as 'the interactions between actors and institutions, focusing not only on actors, but also on how institutions are shaped and re-shaped by these actors'.

Another feature is the significance attributed to historical context when analysing institutional behaviour and institutional change. A related concept is 'path dependence', which holds that institutionalised commitments in the formative period of an institution or policy cycle can strongly influence subsequent decisions (Peters, 2012: 72-3). 'Path dependence', dynamics establish a trajectory that remains an enduring influence and constrains the scope for diversion from a set policy direction. This can be disrupted by the intervention of a significant force - episodes of 'critical junctures' - understood as crucial moments of institutional change that can spur alternative developmental paths (Thelen, 1999). The theory has subsequently enhanced its ability to explore change in policy through greater recognition of the potential for more gradual change and institutional adaptation as a result of internal and external forces (Peters, 2012: 80-1).

Following discussion of key features within historical institutionalism, the multi-level framework for analysing policy choices relating to RMLs can be introduced. Inspired by other work grounded in historical institutionalism (Lecours, 2002), in order to analyse the institutional factors at multiple levels of governance and the structure-agency dynamics that impact upon language policy choices for various RMLs, the framework focuses on five levels: local, sub-state, state, continental and the global.

Language policy choices may be predominantly shaped by domestic institutional environments at the state, sub-state and local levels. In practice, domestic institutional settings may reinforce and complement one another and generate a basis for wide-ranging policy interventions supporting RMLs. The reverse may also apply, whereby different institutional features and levels within domestic institutional settings may be at odds with one another and constrain interventions. Overall, international level structures play a more limited role in structuring language policy choices. Nevertheless, interventions at these levels may directly affect domestic institutional settings and may influence state-level approaches or the dynamic between the state and sub-state or local levels.

a) *The local and/or sub-state level.* The key institutional configurations that can affect language policy choices at the local and sub-state political levels are similar. Their relative role in language policy choice formation depends on the nature of governmental arrangements and division of powers within a given state. The four

main structural features include formal powers; institutional development of governance arrangements; the nature of the party system; and civil society activism.

The first dimension at the local or sub-state level of analysis is the extent of decentralisation and the nature of formal powers determining the degree of autonomy to adopt distinctive approaches to language policy. This largely relates to the division of powers between different levels of government and the basis for utilising any regulatory, distributive and constituent instruments to support RMLs specifically, or instruments implicated in key social domains relevant to language policy such as the family home, education, media and economy. For instance, policy choices are dependent on the degree to which legislative measures in relation to the language provides it with an official status and the type of language rights afforded to speakers of the language in their engagement with public, private or third sector bodies. The extent of fiscal autonomy may similarly structure decisions regarding financial support to programmes intending to promote the language.

The second dimension is the institutional development of governance arrangements relating to language policy. This is associated with the internal arrangements of governmental institutions for language policy and co-ordination between linguistic policy and other domains that are critical to language policy. Another aspect may be the impact of specific bodies charged with language policy development.

For the third dimension, the party system, a particularly critical aspect is the degree to which the party system is composed of important nationalist or regionalist parties and their relative impact within the party system. The connection between regional or minority languages and nationalist or regionalist parties is often substantial with linguistic distinctiveness a fundamental reason for the party's existence in some cases.

A final dimension is civil society activism. This may relate to the nature of their relationship with governmental institutions, and the extent to which organisations are involved in or can influence language governance. Forms can vary from formal engagement in institutionalised channels, to policy network involvement, to direct action methods in response to a perception of lack of opportunities for direct engagement.

b) The state level. At this level, the two main structural features are the constitutional framework and intergovernmental relations. Constitutional frameworks entail two dimensions. The first is the extent of constitutional/legal recognition of RMLs in the formal constitutional framework. The significant variation between states with and without written constitutions affects the recognition given to individual language rights (Williams, 2013a: 15). The second is the proactivity of a court system within constitutional frameworks and, the extent to which the court system is actively involved in adjudicating on language rights of regional or minority language speakers (Cardinal, 2015).

The impact of the institutional framework for intergovernmental relations on language policy choices may differ substantially. Of significance is the type of state structure within which language policy takes place, which directly affects the extent to which relations between levels of government are formalised and institutionalised. Key issues are the nature of inter-governmental relations in areas relevant to RMLs, and whether any formalised bilateral or multilateral structures exist relating to language policy between and amongst different levels of government.

While domestic institutional contexts may be the prevailing influence shaping policy choices regarding RMLs, the international institutional context can also be significant. The continental and global level distinction clarifies their potential effects.

c) *The continental level.* Continental political and economic structures may have mixed effects on RMLs. Three institutional variables may be conducive to language policy choices. First, the European Union may provide formal recognition, including within its institutional arrangements. Second, the EU may elaborate programmes of activity backed by finance that support language promotion efforts. Third, it may act as a focal point to develop structures and networks associated with RMLs. To the contrary, continental economic regimes may catalyse simplifying and harmonising the services offered in particular languages, thus limiting linguistic diversity. The relative impact on a specific language may depend on the state structures, particularly the extent to which sub-states or local entities have an EU-level presence through indirect routes via state-level channels and direct routes such as sub-state representation in Brussels, and their ability to exert influence in areas relevant to language policy.

d) *The global level.* Finally, at the global system level, three institutional structures can impact on RML policy. The first is international treaties. Clauses recognising RMLs may have some impact, particularly if language communities are in a precarious position. For more secure language communities, such declarations may be little more than symbolic. The greatest institutional effect is possibly if states become signatories to such agreements and therefore act as a benchmark for others with regard to RMLs. Second, RMLs may also benefit from recognition in other states, either through diaspora influence or having official status in some cases, thus providing external legitimacy. Third, international networks associated with RMLs may provide a structure of support for language activists who seek to pressure international or continental organisations.

Finally, the article also incorporates other core concepts of historical institutionalism. As previously outlined, the theory stresses how initial choices and institutionalised commitments in the formative phase of an institution or a policy cycle can strongly influence subsequent decisions, with 'path dependence' able to have an enduring influence on a policy direction. Above, two alternative ways in which different developmental trajectories may come about were also outlined:

either critical junctures that are crucial moments of institutional change, or more gradual change in policy and institutional adaptation.

Language Policy Choices in Wales

In order to evaluate the strengths of this multi-level historical institutionalist framework, the article applies it to analyse in detail language policy choices with regard to the Welsh language in Wales, a prominent European example of minority language revitalisation and the most developed UK-based example of government-led activity in this area. The centuries long primacy of English and the expulsion of Welsh from public life, compounded by the effects of industrialisation, urbanisation and migration, meant that the numbers of speakers declined steadily throughout the twentieth century. According to the 2011 census, Welsh is spoken by 562,00 individuals (aged 3 and over), 19% of Wales' population (ONS, 2016). Efforts to promote the prospects of the language have a long history and the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 was viewed as exemplifying the 'new opportunities' offered to linguistic minorities with the establishment of devolved legislatures (Williams, 2013a: 8).

This investigation differentiates between two periods: the first running from the 1960s to the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999; and the second covering the period of devolved government from 1999 to 2015. This division enables an analysis of whether the establishment of sub-state governance actually served as a catalyst for proactive policy activity. Therefore, in historical institutionalist terms, it is possible to evaluate whether it signified a 'critical juncture' for Welsh language policy choices.

As context, the main institutional features of Welsh governance in the two periods examined are as follows. Distinct arrangements for Wales as a form of administrative devolution developed from the end of the nineteenth century. At their core was recognition of Welsh distinctiveness (Mitchell, 2009). This development initially centred on education but expanded as decentralization of Whitehall departments resulted in establishing Welsh bodies to administer UK government policies in Wales, culminating with a Welsh Office in 1964 as a UK Department of State, led by a cabinet-level Welsh Secretary of State. Amongst its initial responsibilities were areas such as health, education, economic development, local government and agriculture. Building on these developments, in 1999 executive devolution was established based on a 60-member directly elected National Assembly for Wales. Under a conferred powers model, primary legislative powers were reserved to central government with secondary powers devolved in eighteen pre-defined policy areas. However, in 2011, full primary legislative powers were granted to the Assembly in twenty areas. Devolved government also had comparatively low levels of fiscal autonomy as it lacked tax varying or borrowing powers and was dependent on UK Government block grant funding (see Cole and Stafford, 2015).¹

Regarding the most relevant constitutional powers to exploring language policy choices, the Welsh language was included in the initial responsibilities of the Welsh Office, providing it with executive competence and policy implementation functions. Subsequently, Section 32 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 stipulated that the National Assembly 'may do anything it considers appropriate to support the Welsh language' (HMSO, 1998), a wording considered as providing the Assembly with generous powers in this area (Rawlings, 2003: 218).

Welsh administrative devolution and language policy

As regards language policy choices prior to 1999, overall, this period is characterised by limited planning and coordination of language policy that enabled agency-structure dynamics to result in significant developments in some spheres. Key examples include the expansion of Welsh-medium education, the establishment of a Welsh television channel, S4C, and the 1993 Welsh Language Act. The multi-level framework explains policy choices initiated during this period.

The main factors conditioning language policy choices at the local level reflect the framework: the nature of formal powers, the institutional development of governance arrangements and the role of civil society organisations, with the impact of the party system being more variable. Local government structures had sufficient policy and fiscal autonomy, within constraints framed by the UK Treasury, to provide a context for proactive language policy initiatives. Results included the development of Welsh-medium education, examples of pioneering local governments operating internally through the medium of Welsh and the advancement of language promotion policies in a range of domains. As regards the former, in the absence of any explicit national-level planning, local government structures provided the basis for substantial growth in Welsh-medium schools in response to local demands. Parents exerted pressure on these structures and received support from elites at council level.² The impact of the party system can be considered to be less powerful as Labour controlled councils tending to oppose these developments were transcended by consensus-building by local activists in support of establishing Welsh-medium schools (Williams, 2002).

Local government reorganisation in 1974 created an administrative structure that facilitated proactive language policy initiatives, particularly in Gwynedd. Signals of path dependence are evident as internal practices stemming from earlier local governance structures influenced the trajectory, as did a shadow council that established a robust language policy and an organisational structure that facilitated language promotion within the new councils administration as well as externally in the locality. Achieving these aims was also contingent upon interrelationships between the structure of local government, the party system within which Plaid Cymru was strongly represented and the political agency of senior officers with a clear vision of the council's potential to facilitate linguistic change (Carlin, 2013). Despite the attempts of the 1993 language act to create greater consistency in Welsh-medium service provision, council activities continued to be strongly influenced by political agency and party systems.

As regards the sub-state level, the Welsh Office aligned with UK parliamentary supremacy and lacked autonomy in important respects. Nevertheless, three key institutional features directly impacted on language policy choices through quite complex interactions, namely, the institutional development of governance arrangements, the role of civil society and policy communities, and the impact of the party system. First, despite its limitations, the existence and gradual expansion in Welsh Office functions contributed to greater recognition of Welsh distinctiveness and to Welsh institution-building. Consequently, it provided a focal point for Welsh language policy community formation and was a channel for policy elites to influence sub-state and state level initiatives impacting upon the Welsh language. For instance, intellectuals played a critical role in influencing the UK Government's shift from strong opposition to a new language act in the 1980s to enacting legislation in 1993. The Welsh Office also became a central target for protest movements such as *Cymdeithas yr Iaith* with non-violent civil disobedience used in numerous campaigns. Second, there are examples where governance arrangements influenced policy trajectories. For instance, the Welsh Office Minister's establishment of a consultative language committee, the Welsh Language Board, in 1988 to prepare voluntary protocols on Welsh language service provision for different sectors paved the way for new language legislation. That legislation included provisions that placed the Board on a statutory footing and that granted it a significant degree of autonomy. This resulted in more extensive activity on the part of the Board than initially envisaged. Also, as evidenced by the Board's work with statutory language schemes that aimed to institutionalise bilingual working practices, it prompted more systematic and proactive approach to language policy governance, contrasting with the more ad hoc and reactive approach previously. Third, the party system in Wales also contributed to advances in language policy governance as, faced with further electoral loses in Wales, the Conservative Party adopted policies characterised as 'distinctly un-Thatcherite', and considered as 'progressive and interventionist and became the cornerstone of subsequent Welsh language policy' (Edwards et al, 2011: 535).

Turning to the impact of state level structures, central government had a strong influence, characterised by a lack of understanding in Whitehall compounded by strong UK Government opposition throughout the 1980s to steps such as new language legislation. The implication of the constitutional framework is clear in that Westminster passed legislation for Wales. The general characteristics of the legislative process also had an influence. For instance, examples such as the Education Reform Act (1988) that led to compulsory teaching of the language³ and the 1993 Welsh Language Act resulted from civil society's external pressure, leading to more closed joint working between key parliamentarians, policy elites in Wales and Conservative Ministers to achieve a compromise. The process was constrained by scrutiny of linguistic related legislation in an UK parliament unsupportive of language policies of this type. This alludes to the broader impact of constitutional arrangements on the nature of the legislation. Lobbying efforts to include clauses that would make Welsh an 'official language' and establish language rights did not succeed, particularly due to the aversion in the British constitutional framework to

such 'declaratory' statements and to positive rights. Finally, in contrast to the analytical framework, it could be argued that the impact of a nationalist party within the party system was more important at the Westminster level, due to their influence in putting forward private members bills and making the case for policy interventions to support the Welsh language.

With respect to the impact of the continental level on language policy choices, it provided a context for Welsh language initiatives that reflect aspects of the framework. For instance, promoting linguistic diversity and minorities was integrated into the EU's aim of preserving Europe's shared cultural heritage. This was an enabling context, and associated with the way in which Europe influenced the UK Government's approach to the 1993 Act (Edwards et al, 2011: 549). As a backdrop, from the 1980s onwards Welsh organisations engaged in different European programmes emanating from an European Parliament work programme to support linguistic minorities and European Commission funded programme supporting minority languages, in some cases facilitated by senior European Commission staff from Wales (Thomas, 2010: 176). A range of Welsh organisations also engaged in European networks including the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, ties that subsequently facilitated the Welsh Language Board's involvement in European networks.

Given the extent to which institutional structures domestically and at the European level influenced language policy choices regarding the Welsh language, the more limited impact of the global level is not unexpected. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to initiatives such as the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, submitted to UNESCO in 1996 where prominent individuals from Wales contributed to its drafting (Thomas, 2010: 172). In addition, the framework did not account for the impact of the Council of Europe's Charter on Regional or Minority Languages that could be ratified by Member States from 1992 onwards and that was similar in terms of its influence to that of the EU.

Language policy choices in post-devolution Wales

The Welsh Language Board from the late 1980s onwards gradually prompted a more coordinated and planned approach to language policy in Wales and devolved government in 1999 enhanced this process. Key developments 1999-2015 include: passing the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which accorded the language official status in Wales for the first time, led to the abolishment of the Welsh Language Board and the establishment of a Welsh Language Commissioner; the adoption of two national language strategies outlining the Welsh Government's plans to maintain and grow the Welsh language (see Williams, 2013a). Once again, the multi-level institutional framework explains policy choices initiated during this period.

At the local level, the key institutional factors conditioning language policy choices reflect those evident during administrative devolution. Key areas of policy activity include: further development of Welsh-medium education and innovative

efforts to support the prospects of the Welsh language through housing and planning policies. In terms of education, a combination of parent-led campaigns and work by elites within councils persisted as the main drivers of policy decisions. Given the increasing evidence of the impact of inward- and outward-migration trends in parts of Wales on the demolingistic profile of areas traditionally considered to be the language's heartland, a debate emerged regarding the need for local authorities to integrate linguistic considerations into housing and planning. Local authority powers provided scope for some policy innovation while preparing strategic local development plans and local housing strategies. However, evidence of such innovation is most pronounced in areas with active policy elites combined with a high level of Plaid Cymru representation, particularly, once more, in Gwynedd.

At the sub-state level, prominent factors are formal powers, the institutional development of governance arrangements and the nature of the party system. The latter was particularly important in instigating a substantial amount of Welsh language policy activity during the first term of devolution (1999-2003). Labour's minority administration enabled Plaid Cymru to use its political influence to demand a plenary to consider the prospects of the Welsh language. The result was the passing of a motion that committed the Assembly⁴ to the ambitious objective of 'creating a bilingual Wales' and to policy reviews to this effect being conducted by two of its subject committees. In the particular institutional configuration of the Assembly in the early years, the resulting reviews fed into the Welsh Government's first national language strategy, *Iaith Pawb* (2003). Plaid Cymru's intervention during the Assembly's first term thus had a 'path dependent' influence on subsequent language policy choices as early decisions set the main parameters for ensuing discussions (see Dafis, 2005: 261-2). The role of agency also contributes to explaining these developments as, in addition to the party system allowing Plaid Cymru to exert influence over a minority Labour administration, key Plaid members ensured that the Welsh language was treated as a political priority.

The nature of the Assembly's formal powers also acted as an important institutional variable structuring the nature and direction of language policy choices. When the committee reviews were announced, a section of the Welsh language civil society movement perceived an opportunity to push the case for stronger legislation. However, along with the agency of certain key policy elites who at this point did not support new legislation, the Assembly's constrained legislative powers and the cumbersome nature of the process for requesting primary legislation for Wales in Westminster undermined the case for new legislative measures. These conditions explain why new legislation was not a policy priority in the Welsh Government's 2003 language strategy, instead using other available policy levers, in particular the distribution of greater public funding to support language promotion projects. The ability to distribute additional funds was facilitated by another feature of the constitutional arrangements: Welsh Government autonomy to set its own public spending priorities from the UK Treasury annual block grant, in a period of UK-wide public funding increases during the mid-2000s.

By early 2006, calls for new language legislation returned to the political agenda, and in 2011 the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure was passed. The original catalyst was the Welsh Government's decision in 2004 to abolish a series of arm's length public bodies, including the Welsh Language Board, which prompted a renewed public debate regarding Welsh language legislation. This debate was given further impetus by the extension of National Assembly's formal powers in 2007 to include a limited form of primary legislative powers. Consequently, a broad consensus developed regarding the need for a new Welsh language act encompassing the main Welsh language civil society groups, each opposition party, and the Welsh Language Board. Sub-state institutional arrangements combined with the Welsh party system were again key institutional features driving language policy choices. Labour, had consistently opposed the need to substantially revise and strengthen the 1993 act. However on failing to secure a governing majority during the 2007 election, its formal coalition agreement with Plaid Cymru included a commitment to use the Assembly's newly extended powers to introduce a new Welsh language measure.

Turning to the state-level, it is understandable that relevant institutions do not appear to be as influential post-devolution. Nevertheless, certain elements clearly continue to condition language policy in important ways. Of particular significance is the nature of the UK's constitutional arrangements. As previously noted, it influenced the formulation of the 1993 Welsh Language Act, and it emerged as a key institutional factor in relation to the 2011 legislation. Despite the intention of introducing legislation that would accord the Welsh language official status and establish legal language rights, the UK's unwritten constitutional order meant that seeking to realise such objectives proved challenging and contentious. As it is not the norm for individual rights to be declared *de jure* within unwritten systems, the eventual legislation did not specify a list of explicit language rights as expected.

With respect to the impact of institutional structures at the continental and global levels post-devolution, certain factors influenced the direction of policy choices regarding the Welsh language. Building on the work of earlier European regional and minority language networks, the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) was established in 2007, with a secretariat provided via the Welsh Language Board until 2012. Amongst its core functions is the dissemination of good practice in constituent language communities. The role of international organisations along with international charters or declarations are exemplified by the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, which was eventually ratified by the UK Government in 2000. Limited evidence suggests that some of the clauses signed within the Charter in relation to Welsh prompted activity in areas such as media provision by civil society organisations (Thomas, 2010).

Discussion

Applying the multi-level framework grounded in historical institutionalism to the case of the Welsh language in Wales demonstrated its ability to inform a more systematic assessment of the multi-level dimensions influencing language policy

choices in RML contexts. Overall, the analysis highlighted the impact of political devolution in opening up opportunities at the sub-state level for formal powers and the party system in the context of the institutional structure of the Assembly's early period to create different dynamics in language policy trajectories. Nevertheless, 'path dependencies' of language policy governance pre-1999 also had a powerful influence, questioning the extent to which the Assembly's formation created a 'critical juncture'. This account is thus potentially at odds with the expectation of a historical institutionalist approach that devolved government would signify a crucial moment of institutional formation. Rather, the analysis provided a greater appreciation of long-term continuities and of the capacity of language legislation to create language policy governance arrangements that provided a more powerful grounding for critical junctures. In pointing to the need to recognise pre-1999 continuities, the findings underline the importance of understanding the historical background to devolved government in the UK (Mitchell, 2009: 13-5) and the explanatory strengths of 'path dependence' within historical institutionalism.

The Welsh case pointed to two additional structural features that should be incorporated into the analytical framework. The first is the impact of the party system at the state level, as the position of nationalist parties at this level impacted upon language policy choices, particularly in conditions of limited sub-state autonomy. Secondly, the impact of initiatives by the Council of Europe indicates an additional global institutional dimension that needs to be incorporated into the framework.

Building on the comprehensive understanding of language policy choices in the Welsh case established in the previous section by applying the multi-level framework, the article turns to briefly assess its ability to analyse the language policy trajectories of other European RMLs. Through preliminary examination of other RML cases in France and Spain, the article tests the framework's robustness to provide convincing explanations in different institutionalised contexts, where languages vary in terms of their demographic health or levels of public recognition, and where conditions such as transitions to democracy may serve as more convincing 'critical junctures' in their effects on language policy choices.

Engagement with other cases provides further support for the local and sub-state institutional features identified in the framework as influencing language policy choices. At the local level, the division of powers, the degree of fiscal autonomy and the nature of the party system are powerful institutional configurations. For instance, they frame the pioneering activity of some local authorities in Catalonia prior to language legislation being instituted at the sub-state level, and the number of local authorities in the Breton case working to promote the language (particularly education) within legislative constraints (Cole and Williams, 2004). Across cases, the party system plays a determining role in conditioning language policy choices, both in the political complexion of the governing parties and the extent of cross-party support (Carlin, 2013).

At the sub-state level, there are strong commonalities with the framework in the

institutional settings impacting on language policy choices. There is strong evidence of the significant effect of the extent of decentralisation, conditions of asymmetries of power and the nature of the party system at the sub-state level on language policy formation, particularly in comparison of RML policy choices for different languages within the same state and in cases of the same language across the boundaries of states, such as Corsica and Brittany in France, or between Catalonia and Northern Catalonia (Vernet & Pons, 2011). A further example is the contrast between Catalonia and Valencia in the interrelationships between the type of language legislation and the significant impact of the party system: the proactive Catalan Nationalists vis a vis the linguistic 'underplanning' of the socialist government and the 'counterplanning' of the Partido Popular in Valencia (Cardona, 2011). The impact of agency-structure dynamics is also evident, with examples of individual politicians capitalising on political bargaining and coalitions to increase regional funding for the Breton language, or the lack of leadership and senior buy-in to language policy initiatives in the Basque Country (Cole and Williams, 2004; Williams, 2013b).

Furthermore, these cases confirm that regional government creates an institutional focal point for language activism and advocacy in favour of distinctive approaches to language policy and suggests that this stands regardless of the level of sub-state autonomy (for example Cole and Williams, 2004). Examples such as Breton or Euskera in France testify to the importance of civil society organisations, particularly in the absence of meaningful RML policies (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011). Equally, institutional arrangements for language policy governance enable proactive language policy formation. This situation applies both in more advanced cases such as the role played by Directorate-General for Language Policy in Catalonia from 1980, and in Brittany with a 'driver' role played by semi-autonomous agencies such as Ofis ar Brezhonneg from 1999 in the absence of sub-state statutory responsibility for language policy (Óhlfearnáin, 2013). The French Basque indicates the unintended consequences of the 'territorial institutionalization' of the French Basque territory in serving as an institutional basis for developing language policy in the absence of a supportive state language policy, promoted by institutional structures seeking to be open to civil society and consequently empowering 'strategic coalitions' (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011).

Similarly, the cases examined concur with the structural features identified within the framework at the state level and underline their significance in determining RML policy trajectories, alongside the implications of historical contexts. The tight constraints on RML policies in the French case is deeply entwined with the formal constitutional framework where the long-standing positioning of the French language as fundamental to sovereignty and nation-building has perpetuated the long-term process of legislation serving as an institutional dimension that, in the main, negatively impacts upon RMLs. In Spain, the formal constitutional framework of the 1978 Constitution similarly reinforces the position of Castilian (Mayans, 2011). Beyond this, with respect to the party system, some concessions in the Catalan case have been attributed to the importance of the Catalan nationalist *Convergència i Unió* at the state level for the statewide government. Such examples affirm the

potentially important role that can be played within the multi-level framework by the party system at the state level as an institutional feature influencing language policy choices.

The Spanish case highlights the complex and multi-layered dimensions to understanding the role of historical development to institutional change. Affording six autonomous communities with the opportunity of two official languages responded to the political context of systematic repression of regional languages in the context of democratisation. It can be understood as a critical juncture, albeit with varying consequences due to the determining impact of complex interactions between institutional structures at the sub-state level discussed above. Even in these circumstances, historical trajectories can permeate language policy directions, evident in examples such as the impact of the 1927-36 revitalization period on Basque language normalisation initiatives nearly a century later (Williams, 2013b).

With respect to the continental regime level, the institutional dimensions conditioning RMLs in France and Spain strongly resonate with the institutional features outlined in the framework. Amongst EU institutions, in its recognition of minority languages and minority rights, the European Parliament is posited as supporting 'minority languages and minorities' rights at the state and regional levels (Stolfo, 2009: 41). The literature also reinforces the importance of networks in bolstering the voice of RML languages within the EU and in the important consequences for language policy development as:

'many of those who now run or influence language planning agencies and regional/national government departments of language and culture received much of their international exposure and political training in language policy affairs within these informal networks' (Williams, 2013a:19).

Moreover, another structural feature to complement the framework that was not as evident in the Welsh case, is the impact of language policies advocated by other sub-states. In the Breton case in particular there is ample evidence of citing examples of best practice elsewhere in Europe as an institutional backdrop to policies advocated, serving both symbolic and policy informing functions (Cole and Williams, 2004: 569; Óhlfearnáin, 2013).

Illustrative of the interrelationships between institutional dimensions at the state and global level is French state level unwillingness to ratify UNESCO related conventions nor the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. Indeed, Cole and Harguindéguy (2013: 36) argue that 'non-recognition of international regulation for promoting regional languages strongly limits the efficiency of local arrangements.' The Council of Europe Charter nevertheless serves as a context for agencies within Brittany in the promotion of bilingualism (Óhlfearnáin, 2013: 124) and illustrates its importance in cases of challenges to proactive language policy trajectories, as previously suggested.

Conclusion

The article's focus was on elaborating a historical institutionalist framework capable of analysing the institutional factors that condition language policy choices with respect to European RMLs. In doing so, it sought to contribute to efforts to apply political science perspectives to language policy analysis, particularly by extending the range of frameworks to analyse the political origins of language policies to be more attuned to the multi-level context that influences language policy choices in relation to RMLs.

This article has demonstrated that applying a multi-level framework can provide a comprehensive understanding of language policy choices with respect to RMLs. The multi-level approach provides a rigorous and systematic basis to analyse the institutional dimensions and agency-structure interactions framing language policy decisions within multi-level states. In evaluating the framework itself and the extent to which it identified the key institutional configurations that affect language policy choices at different levels, the detailed analysis of the Welsh case and more preliminary examination of other RMLs in Spain and France confirmed the assertion that domestic institutional environments at the state, sub-state and local levels had a greater influence than international level structures on language policy choices. Its conclusions thus confirm that 'central state' as opposed to European or global norms have a more powerful effect on the 'linguistic opportunity structure' (Cole and Harguindéguy, 2013). It nevertheless pointed to ways in which continental and global level structures create a broader context for institutional dimensions and agency-structure dynamics at the domestic level. Its findings therefore support other accounts that emphasise taking into account both endogenous and exogenous factors in understanding the institutionalisation of language policy (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011). In a Western European context, this underlines the contribution of legislative initiatives at the EU and global levels that operate as institutional dimensions that influence other levels of governance (Williams, 2013b).

Additionally, the empirical analyses drew attention to the way in which agency served important functions for specific policy developments and that structure-agency dynamics had important effects, particularly in the interaction of policy elites and elected politicians with institutional configurations. In line with Lecours' agency-structure approach, 'Institutions shape the behaviour of political actors and 'institutions are shaped and re-shaped by these actors.' (Lecours, 2000: 516).

Table 1: Framework of multi-level institutional dimensions that influence European regional and minority language policy choices

I N S T I T U T I O N A L V A R I A B L E S	Local Political system	Sub-state Political System	State structures	Continental Regimes	Global Systems level
	Formal powers	Formal powers	Formal constitutional framework -written/ unwritten constitution -role of court system	European Union- -Formal recognition of languages -EU programmes and funding	International Treaties, e.g. UNESCO, Council of Europe
	Institutional development of language policy governance	Institutional development of language policy governance	Intergovernmental relations		Recognition and support from another state
	Local party system	Regional party system	Representation of the sub-state parties in state party system	-Bilateral relations between sub-state governments -Sub-state networks	Regional government cooperation > -Bilateral relations between sub-state governments -Language networks
	Civil society activism	Civil society activism	NGOs		

On this basis, the article offers the multi-level framework informed by historical institutionalism illustrated in Table 1 as a platform for further analysis of how language policy choices relating to RMLs are conditioned in multi-level states. More extensive research would be extremely valuable to assess its ability to explain specific episodes of language policy formation in particular cases and to further evaluate the broader applicability of this approach across different contexts. With regard to the latter, consideration should be given to other European cases that offer a diverse range of political and institutional settings, including federal systems, and to cases from further afield that feature different continental political and economic regimes. Such endeavours can serve to further develop a political science approach to the study of contemporary language policy programmes and through this further establish language policy as a recognised field of public policy research.

¹ Some limited borrowing and tax-varying powers were granted in the Wales Act 2014.

² Parents drew on a UK 1944 Education Act provision that: 'Children shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents'.

³ The Education Reform Act 1988 symbolised the first statutory enforcement for Welsh in education by making teaching Welsh a requirement in all schools in Wales between 5-16, and Welsh becoming a core curriculum subject.

⁴ During the early years of devolution, there was no formal legal distinction between the legislature and executive in the internal architecture of the Assembly. As a result, motions and policy committed the Assembly as a whole, as opposed to the government to particular policy objectives. The separation between the Assembly as a legislature and the Welsh Government as the executive was recognised in the Government of Wales Act (2006).

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