

Children's Services in the Digital Future

A response by the Mercator Research Centre to the S4C Authority's Consultation Document

1. Do you agree with our view that a dedicated service for Children will enhance the public service offering in the Welsh language for Children?

Introduction

Since 1988, the Mercator Centre in The University of Wales, Aberystwyth has been co-operating with people and institutions all over Europe in order to promote the study of lesser used languages and the awareness of them. One of the Mercator Centre's areas of expertise here in Aberystwyth is the media of lesser used languages within the European Union. Since 1988 it has been collecting and analysing information regarding the state of the media in those communities in which a lesser used language is spoken.

Broadcasting and interactive services within a lesser used language community

In comparing the provision of television in the Welsh language on S4C with what is available to lesser used language communities across Europe, it is seen as being among the best and reference is often made in publications and conferences on lesser used languages throughout the world to the Welsh situation as an example of success. Of course, it must be noted that only 8 out of the 60 lesser used language communities in the European Union have a specific television channel for the speakers of that language and the citizens of the land where it is spoken.

There is no reason to believe that the viewing habits of audiences that speak a lesser used language are significantly different to the viewing habits of other audiences or the viewing habits of channels in other languages. However, due to the size of the audience, the media of lesser used languages very often have a close relationship with their viewers. One of the characteristics of this relationship is that the gap between the 'channel' and the 'audience' is less than exists in the channels of the majority languages, especially in the analogue age, and that lesser used language audiences (and those of small states) are familiar with seeing themselves on television and taking part in programmes. Of course, one of the traits of the multi-channel and interactive age is that the gap between the 'producer' and the 'audience' is narrowing and that the role of the audience is changing from one of passively 'receiving' programmes only, to being part of creating the content.

The close relationship between the media and the audience should be exploited within the context of lesser used languages for the purpose of interaction.

It is very difficult to prove a totally unmistakable direct link that developing the media in a lesser used language leads to specific linguistic growth or the prevention of linguistic decline. Despite this, it can be noted that those lesser used language communities which do possess their own significant broadcasting service in the language succeed in performing better in terms of linguistic sustainability indicators (language transference; growth in numbers / percentage of speakers etc) than those communities without. Traditional broadcasting can be considered to be an indicator of the commitment of the state - or the level of government responsible for broadcasting - towards the minority language (due to the cost in technical and human resources) and government support in providing resources, status and opportunities to use the language as one of the most important factors which makes the difference between its decline and its sustainability.

Public service broadcasting was of key importance to broadcasting in lesser used languages and this continues to be true to this day. Only two private television channels broadcast to a lesser used language community: Telesudtirol to German speakers in that part of northern Italy, which produces approximately 25 hours a week of its own programmes and uses the output of other German channels for the remainder of the week, and TV Breizh in Brittany which broadcasts a very small number of hours in Breton a year by now. There are constant complaints regarding the lack of Breton on TV Breizh and as was noted in Agence Bretagne Presse 'the only word of Breton in this channel anymore is in its name'. [Breizh = Brittany].

Case Study: Television in the Catalan Language

Catalan is the only lesser used language in Europe which has a television channel for children and young people. It is of no surprise that Catalan has the broadest media provision amongst the lesser used languages: not only are there 6-10 million people speakers of the language (even though numbers in themselves are not enough to sustain a language as is evident with the case of Occitane which has millions of speakers in southern France²), but since the restoration of democracy in Spain at the end of the 1970's a massive growth has been

witnessed— a revolution in truth— in the area of the Catalan media, as in several other sectors of public life in light of the adoption of proactive, radical and pioneering policies in attempting to normalise the language in its traditional heartland.

As well as developing a printing press in the language, a television corporation (Corporació catalana de radio i televisió) was created in 1982 and the first Catalan Television Channel (TV3) started to broadcast in 1983. A number of radio stations were also created. Then in 1989, the new channel, canal 33 was added to the Catalan television service. TV3 continued to be a general channel with wide appeal and Canal 33's (which was later renamed '33') objective was to provide programmes of specialist interest and be a stage to produce experimental or *niche* output.

The satellite channel TVC Internacional (TVCi) was created in 1997 to give a Catalan television service to the population of speakers who live outside the traditional heartland, in other parts of Spain and Europe and by now it is also available to service the Catalan diaspora in North, Central and South America.

In 2003 another television channel was established by the corporation, 3/24 to broadcast a 24 hour news service. The corporation has provided its own news service since the beginning for its own television and radio services and now also for the web and interactive services.

In 2005, channel 300 was established (digital only) which broadcasts drama series and soap operas non-stop from 9.30pm until 7.00am, which is the period when the children's and young people's channel does not broadcast.

K3: A Television Channel for Children and Young People in Catalan

The significant addition to the portfolio of television broadcasting in the Catalan language in the context of this consultation was the establishment of a television channel for children and young people in 2001.

Digital Platform

K3 broadcasts 14.5 hours a day, 7 days a week, and on the digital platform it broadcasts between 7am and 9.30pm (with the other channel, 300, see above, broadcasting between 9.30pm and 7am).

Simulcast on the analogue platform

On the analogue platform, K3 shares the space with 33, and during the working week the simulcast with K3 (for children) between 7am and 3.30pm and then from 5pm to 9.30pm, which makes a total of 13 hours a day (with 33 broadcasting from 9.30pm until 7am and between 3.30pm and 5pm). On the weekend, the priority changes with 12-3pm becoming children's hours on analogue with the remaining hours belonging to 33.

Audience – 'children' and 'young people'

Though K3 by now is one television channel, two distinct target groups can be identified, 'children' and 'young people'. K3 began as a television channel for children, and it established a website in connection with one of its programmes in 2001, **Super3** (www.super3.cat). A specific service for young people has been launched since April 2007, **3xl.net** (www.3xl.cat). Even though there are two audiences, and two separate websites, there is only the one television channel.

On examination of these websites – see Appendix 1 – the target audience for **Super3** could be considered to be about 6+ years. Though the K3 television channel also includes programmes which appeal to a younger audience (e.g. Pingu, Noddy) basic literacy skills are needed to use the website. This would place it closer to the Planed Plant age group, as opposed to Planed Plant Bach. It does not appear that K3 has a website for the nursery age group – Planed Plant Bach / Cbeebies.

On looking at the website, **3xl.net** is an interactive service which is aimed at young people – see Appendix 2. It considers itself to be a 'meeting place through the medium of a TV screen and computer screen for everyone who wishes to be a part of one of the most lively virtual youth communities in Catalonia'. The young people take part in the television programme Codi 3xl as well as in blogs, message boards etc on the site. Programmes can be viewed from the site as well.

Without studying both of the websites in great detail, it appears that there is a striking difference in the kind of communication on offer to the young people through 3xl.net and what is offered to children through Super3.cat. The young people's website gives its users the opportunity to get to know each other and create

content while the website for children concentrates on the relationship of the individual child with the channel/website/programme/character.

Grading programmes for a specific age

There are no obvious references in the websites to a specific age for the target audiences for the children's and young people's services. However, Catalan television has a system of grading programmes in order to give the audience a guide as to what it considers to be the youngest appropriate age for the programme. With most programmes, no age is noted (News and so on). This system is very similar to cinema or games certificates since its main function is to differentiate between programmes for very small children, children, young people, and adult content. Here are the age divisions: age 7, age 10, age 13, age 16 and age 18. An example of this can be seen in Appendix 3. Programmes for young audiences, such as Pingu and Noddy, have no age note.

To summarise, the Catalan broadcasting corporation (www.ccrtv.cat) has six television channels which broadcast in the language;

- TV3: general, wide appeal
- 33: specialist, and niche audiences
- K3: children and young people
- 3/24: non-stop news
- 300: broadcasting drama from 9pm till 7am
- TVCi: international

The Welsh context

Our opinion is that a service for children and young people is certain to improve the public service offered by the S4C Authority. Considering the television viewing habits of children along with their use of websites and the increasing possibilities through the medium of mobile phones, it's obvious that a strong interactive service in Welsh can be a way for children and young people find new communication spaces in which they can use their language. In using the above case study, we have tried to draw attention to the only example that exists of creating specific services for children and young people in a lesser used language, and though the situations of both languages (Welsh and Catalan) are very different, we believe that it would be beneficial to consider some of the pathways and decisions that were made there.

One of the disadvantages of the current situation in Welsh is that neither children's programmes (Planed Plant and Planed Plant Bach) appear in the Electronic Programme Guide (EPG) when a search is made under **Kids**. This is a great disadvantage as children move on increasingly to specific services and channels instead of 'waiting their turn' on general channels.

Rightly or wrongly, children look at a lot of television and use the interactive media heavily. If Welsh is not going to be a part of this world, it will become increasingly difficult for children and young people to create the link between their language and the modern world around them.

2. Do you have any comments / what are your views about the proposed hours of broadcast and our target audiences?

One of the problems which has characterised television broadcasting in a number of lesser used languages at different periods during the last 40 years is that broadcasting slots for programmes in the language have been inconsistent and intermittent. This is still seen today in the case of broadcasting Gaelic in Scotland and in the case of a number much weaker languages throughout the length and breadth of Europe where there is an ongoing battle due to the relocation of programmes to inconvenient hours.

Offering a consistent and fixed timetable is one of the most important elements in attempting to nurture fixed viewing patterns. Generally, viewers carry a fairly correct idea of the kind of programme they would expect to see on the television channel at specific times of the day or night. Forecasts show that the concept of the watershed continues to be a familiar one to television viewers. This is part of the relationship between the broadcaster and the audience – and is part of the trust between both parties.

There is no reason to suggest that this is less true in the case of children: it may be more, rather than less true, since a child's daily timetable is often very fixed and generally forms a pattern between the child's age and the time that he/she is allowed to watch/will watch television or interact on the web, in terms of time of day, day of the week and weeks of the year.

It would therefore be sensible to create packages or branding that targets age groups so that a child or young person 'carries an idea of the timetable' which enables them to make faster decisions to watch a Welsh programme, without having to pause, think and search for what's on. Research into linguistic loyalty and to the use of language suggest that one of the factors which prevents the speakers of lesser used languages from using the language is the fear or the reality that the choice is not equal. For example, if a Welsh speaker has no faith that the Welsh version of the website will contain the correct, reliable and current information, he/she will use the English version instead. In the same way, if there is no consistency in the timetable, it's very likely that young viewers will lose patience with the Welsh service and will favour the consistency of services available in English. Some of course will persevere, but they will be in the minority.

Therefore, in preparing services for children, any hurdle (e.g. failing to get consistency) is going to hinder the ease of the speaker to choose that language, and as a result, it is possible that fewer people will use those services.

In the case of the three suggested age groups, one could assume that more significant changes occur in children's lives (principally through the education system) at 4 years of age and age 11 as opposed to ages 5 and 10. Again, the document contains indicative terms and crosscutting along with the 'aspirational' element of identifying with slightly older characters rather than those of the same age, which are very prominent within the viewing patterns of children and young people. In referring to the age groups within the marketing material, perhaps problems can arise due to this aspirational reason. It's unlikely that young person of 12/13 years of age would wish to identify with something for children of 10 years of age since that would represent a 'step backwards' towards the primary school instead of a step forwards towards being a young adult.

In considering programme and service content, it's possible to note the target audience of 10-15 years old restricting the type of treatment that can be given to discuss matters such as sex, drugs and relationships. These are general observations as opposed to an expert opinion.

Reference is made in the world of marketing and advertising, towards the 'Tweens' group (8-12/13 years). These are the children who are not yet in their teens but have different tastes to younger children.

We would wish to question the Authority's standpoint as noted in paragraph 3.2.6 'Since parents generally choose what nursery age children will watch, ... perhaps there will be no need to market a direct service for that audience'. Very young children from 2-3 years of age can recognise brands easily and recognise screen icons such as Cbeebies, Planed Plant Bach as well as characters in the programmes. They can express an opinion on which one they wish to watch (even if not permitted to by their parents). It should not be thought necessarily that there is no potential to target this audience directly as well as through their parents. Significant numbers of pre-school age children are also very social – attending nurseries and cylch meithrin and are aware of the branding their peers have on their clothes, food boxes etc.

3. What would you consider to be the most important key characteristics for television services for Children provided by S4C?

The service should be multi platform, Welsh language, consistent in terms of timetable, broad in terms of interests and specific in terms of its target audience. A definite link ought to be made with the media habits of children and young people by using websites. One obvious weakness in the present interactive provision for children is that there are no chat rooms for primary school children through the medium of Welsh (similar to Club Penguin www.clubpenguin.com). As children develop the ability to create their own sites through Bebo, they can communicate with their real friends as well as 'meeting' virtual friends through that interface, but insofar as we know there is no ready site for children who are too young to create Bebo on their own to communicate with other children in Welsh. Perhaps this should be considered, within the guidelines recommended by the Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre www.ceop.gov.uk that was launched in April 2006.

This service should offer opportunities to children and young people to increase their awareness and their skills in media literacy. This could take the form of investing in production skills for children and young people as well as showing how programmes are made, how to behave on-line etc.

In terms of balance between produce created in Wales and produce which has been adapted into Welsh, one should aim for balance which continues to sustain and develop the full Welsh medium creative sector of

original ideas to finished product side by side with showing adaptations of produce that exists in other languages (English mainly). There is an obvious value to original output; but adaptations are also a way of enriching the viewer's and the consumer's experience. Hearing characters in the field of animation and puppetry etc speaking Welsh is important as small children make connections between their imaginary play and toys with the programmes they watch (or, briefly, can Spiderman speak Welsh). This can contribute towards the strengthening of a small child's linguistic identity, or at least allow both worlds to meet: the world of branded goods which is all around them and the Welsh language world.

It can be seen that strength lies in the current balance between creating Welsh characters (e.g. Pentre Bach), success in turning original Welsh characters into international ones (e.g. Sam Tân) and adapting international/English produce (e.g. Bob y Bildar). However, in the face of a scarcity in supplementary brand goods (e.g. pyjamas etc) which strengthen the presence of Wash characters – with the exception of reading books – one wonders whether there is a need to strengthen the relationship between the publishing industry and the broadcasting industry in order to work on a more co-ordinated strategy. For example, the number of books and cd roms available for nursery age which are based on Rala Rwdins are strikingly numerous but the existence of these characters on television is scarce.

4. Do you have any comments on the options set out at paragraph 4 and in particular the option 1 and 2? Do you have any other comments you would like us to consider on this issue?

The pattern proposed in Option 1 is confusing. For the reasons noted above regarding the importance of consistency, in our opinion, option 2 would be the one that would give the best service to children and young people in Welsh.

In terms of the disadvantage that option holds for broadcasts from the National Assembly, it appears to us that – on the basis of personal habits as opposed to any other source – it would be more convenient to access those broadcasts on the web rather than through the current linear broadcasts. Even though Sky+, Freeview boxes that record and other VCR appliances are becoming ever more popular (see the Ofcom reports to the communications market), and as result of that it will become easier to record and create a personal viewing timetable (so that people who work can watch programmes that are broadcast during the working day), the provision of broad band through the web offers additional and very relevant advantages to this sort of viewing material of a programme. Amidst the advantages of on-line broadcasting against linear broadcasting are:

- the ability to decide to watch a programme retrospectively, or *after* it has been 'broadcast' instead of beforehand, perhaps after having heard a report on the programme or through another medium;
- the ability to search with greater ease for the exact programme that you wish to see;
- the ability to combine technologies, e.g. the written record with the broadcast.

The same research by Ofcom shows that broadband is by now available to a large and increasing percentage of the population, and in our opinion, moving from S4C2 to broadband would improve accessibility to the Assembly's service rather than make it worse.

Therefore this could be considered to be a positive step for this service. At the same time, perhaps, the number of programmes on S4C digital and S4C for children and young people which discuss the work of the Assembly and increase the awareness of the entire population (including the young) in politics and citizenship could be increased.

5. Do you believe that a third party provider would be willing to provide a Welsh language television service for Children of a similar nature to that outlined above on a commercial basis?

As noted above, broadcasting in lesser used languages owes a lot to the concept and practice of public broadcasting across Europe. Indeed, a number of television services in lesser used languages – and specifically the ones in Spain – have been based on the Language Normalisation Acts as part of a wide range of policies to develop the language across different sectors such as education, administration etc. The attempt to provide a Breton service through the private channel TV Breizh was a failure. It is very unlikely that the income through advertising or subscription would be sufficient to sustain services in Welsh for children and young people to the standard that ought to be expected.

6. Can you identify any other stakeholders we should be contacting not included at Annex A?

Broadcasters in other lesser used languages.

Universities and Research Centres which have an expertise in Childhood Studies, Sociolinguistic Studies and Media Studies, Marketing and Advertising. Other sectors which publish creative content for children and young people (Publishing houses, authors, drama companies ...)

7. Do you have any other comments you would like us to consider in relation to this Consultation on a new Welsh language television channel for Children?

No.

² No official census exists for any lesser used language in France but surveys and other evidence are consistent in their findings that some millions of people currently speak Occitane across Southern France in a territory which stretches from the Pyrenees to the Alps, and from the Massif Central to the Mediterranean. However, the presence, use and transference of the language is very low and it is forecast that these millions will become tens of thousands within the next twenty years.