Introduction

Bilingualism is often about minorities in the majority. It is probably true that the majority of people in the world are to some extent bilingual. Yet where bilingualism is found, the issues that arise often concern minority interests. For example, Spanish in the USA, Frisian in the Netherlands and Gaelic in Scotland give rise to minority political, social and educational issues. Wales is no exception. Where a regional or minority language exists it is usually the small in the face of the large.

Given that bilingualism is a world-wide phenomenon, it is odd that until recently the topic has received little attention. In comparison with the mainstream research in anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, politics and government, bilingualism and biculturalism have been a minority interest. There are examples of sustained and valuable contributions stemming from individual academics, Round Tables and academic centres. However, considering the geographical distribution, the political and social importance and the cultural and educational significance of the topic, the amount of research and literature available is not extensive.

The tide seems to be turning. Recently there has been a renaissance amongst minority language groups. A new interest in maintaining or restoring minority languages and cultures has arisen. Wales is a good example. The rise of the Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru), the Welsh Language Society, the movement for Welsh medium schools and the advent of S4C, (a television channel partly devoted to Welsh language broadcasts), are a few of the symbols of a Welsh language renaissance.

Yet the danger is that the renaissance is in interest and not usage. In the following chapters a number of different analogies are used. Most come from recent sources. A castle crumbling under attack from anglophone culture. A dried-up lake with small and ever decreasing pools of water. Malnutrition and attendant death. Each analogy has the same perilous feeling. Each analogy has the smell of decay rather than the sweet scent of a renaissance.
In the context of increased world-wide interest in minority languages, the book seeks to take the temperature of the Welsh language. Since the book is not a post-mortem it is not historical. But just as a doctor is concerned about the future as well as the present health of a patient, so the book goes further than contemporary history. In examining the survival prospects of the Welsh language, the book involves geography and pedagogy, statistics and semantics, communication studies and curriculum theory, technology and psychology. The issues raised in the book are not only of significance in Wales. The effect of television, other mass media and the micro-electronics revolution are part of the nervous tension in many minority culture and language situations. The nature of minority language education is a central theme in the book. Heritage language education research, curriculum development, educational policy and provision are examined. Each topic is contextualized in Wales but is significant in most minority language situations. All the evidence examined ultimately raises political questions. The appropriate treatment, preventive or restorative, that ultimately needs to be applied is, in the last analysis, a matter of political debate. The book seeks to inform, even stimulate that debate.