Gwent English: A comparative investigation of lexical items

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Abstract

Due to Gwent's position on the border between Wales and England, the historic region shares a hybrid identity of both Welshness and Englishness. During the age of traditional dialectology (i.e. nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century), Gwent's Anglo-Welsh dialect was investigated twice, first by the *SED* (Survey of English Dialects, circa 1951-1960) and then the *SAWD* (Survey of Anglo-Welsh dialects, circa 1971) – a testament to its ambiguous cultural/ political identity. These studies provided substantial lexical information on the region. A decade ago, collections of dialectal material by *BBC Voices*, an internet project conducted between 2004 and 2005, provided not only new frameworks for dialect surveying (internet-based), but also additional material for Gwent English.

This paper summarises some of the findings of a further internet-based dialect survey constructed in 2013 that elicited the speech of 44 young people in Gwent and assessed their regional lexis and their linguistic identity. The material was then compared with the historic dialect records to determine whether there had been changes in Gwent English between the 1970s and 2013. Results indicated that the region still contained lexis obtained by the *SAWD* and *Voices*, but new lexis was also recorded, some of which was of Welsh origin, whilst other sources stemmed from American English and internet slang. Their linguistic identity/ perception was also, understandably, complex.

History of Gwent speech communities

Straddling both Wales and England, the preserved border county of Gwent (an area that now encompasses the counties of Monmouthshire, Newport, Blaenau Gwent, and Torfaen) has a complex administrative and linguistic history. With the abolition of the Welsh Marches and Wales's annexation into England in 1536, the English county of "Monmouthshire" was born, a county that until the 1800s remained predominately Welsh-speaking (Gladwell, 1973, p. 5). During the Industrial Revolution, Monmouthshire's coalmines attracted migrants from England, Scotland, Spain, and Italy – bringing great change to Monmouthshire's linguistic character (Gladwell, 1973, pp. 5-7). Despite English being a lingua franca, for a time migrants from West Wales prevented early anglicisation of Monmouthshire (and Wales proper): the region acted as a "buffer-zone" between Anglic and Cymric linguistic and cultural forces (Pryce, 1990, pp. 57, 79). However, the zone eventually succumbed to English-speaking supremacy; from the 1750s, East Monmouthshire saw significant declines in Welsh-speakers, followed by Western Monmouthshire in the 1800s (Parry, 1977, p. 9). By 1981, just 2.5% of the population were Welsh-speaking (Pryce, 1990, p. 75); despite this, the residual effects from the old language had endowed an ethnic Welsh identity upon Monmouthshire's population (Pryce, p. 49). In fact, the region at the time (between 1974-1994) was known as Gwent – named after the old Welsh kingdom. For the purpose of this

paper, Gwent English refers to the English variety/varieties spoken within the modern Gwent boundaries.

Collection of dialectal material and sociolinguistics

Gwent's ambiguous politico-geographic status led to the county being targeted twice by early English language dialectologists. When Harold Orton conducted his Survey of English Dialects (*SED*) between 1951 and 1960 (Orton, 1962), Gwent featured as a region. Then, inspired by the aforementioned study, David Parry developed the Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects (*SAWD*) in 1968 (Parry, 2008, p. 1); again, Gwent was featured. The question as to whether Monmouthshire spoke a Welsh English (WE) or an English English was certainly debateable. However, unlike Orton, Parry went on to examine survey responses in the brief analyses (*Notes on the Dialects of Gwent* [1978] and "The English of Gwent" [1985]). He noted lexical items such as *cwtsh* ("an understairs storage-space; to hide; to hug") derived from French, but notably associated with WE speakers (Parry, 1978, p. 4) as well as several Welsh loanwords such as: *ach-y-fi* ("expression of disgust"), *tollet* ("loft"), and *rhiw* ("slope"). The unique noun *lumper* ("boy") was noted, and shares usage not only with Gwent but with neighbouring counties: Breconshire (Welsh) and Shropshire (English). Parry concluded that Gwent's speech owed much to both Wales and England (Parry, 1978, p. 25), though the Welsh influence on Gwent English was more prominent in its pronunciation rather than lexis and grammar (Parry, 1985, 90).

The collection and publication of dialect surveys (like *SED*/*SAWD*) came under criticism in the mid-latter twentieth century, largely because they advocated the collection and publication of linguistic material, but failed to investigate how dialectal/language-variety change occurred (see Labov, 1972, p. 268). A large basis of the succeeding research investigated "dialect contact". Terms such as *dialect levelling* (see Kerswill, 2001, 7, 8) and *dialect accommodation* (see Trudgill, 1986, p. 39) best explained the processes involved when large groups of migrants meet in new locales (e.g. a metropolis) and, if attitudinal factors are favourable, naturally standardise their regional speech or converge its features into a new variety, both in the interest of betterment of discourse.

Criticism towards traditional studies was also methodological. Traditional dialectologists often sought informants who were non-mobile, elderly, rural males (NORMs) – as they represented the most static speech of an area; with the increases in occupational and social mobility in the twentieth century, Chambers argued the methods to be outdated (Chambers, 1992, 673-674). For example, Chambers (1992) combated previous methods with a study on the features of the mobile and young (six Canadian youths who had moved to southern England) and their dialect acquisition process.

Innovations in electronic technologies redefined what "non-mobility" meant to sociolinguists. Mass media in the form of television and film (and eventually the internet) revolutionised how social groups' varieties came into contact with one another, with American English loanwords occurring in British English and vice versa (Trudgill, 1986, p. 40). Placing Welsh English into the context of these sociolinguistic concepts, Thomas (1984)

hypothesised that southern Welsh English would in time shed Welsh influence (lexically and phonologically) to take on West Midlands English features due to speakers' proximity to England (p. 178). It is currently debateable whether this has come to fruition, as there have been changes to Wales's cultural sphere. The rapid decline of the Welsh language was halted in 1988 due to intervention through language policies. It became a core subject in the Welsh National Curriculum, had become a viable language for business and legal matters, and gained a televisual platform – S4C (Walters, 2003, 63-64). Irrespective of Welsh fluency, with the prominent exposure to Welsh lexis coupled with anglicised areas of South-East Wales now showing "growing" support for cultural "Welshness" (Walters, 2003, 66), there is the potential that a Welsh quality is being cemented within the English speech of Gwent.

Garrett et al.'s (1999) perceptual dialectological study of young Anglo-Welsh speakers indicated that WE speakers from around the country identified the South-East Welsh English speakers (including Gwent) as being highly "Welsh" (Garrett et al, 1999, 330). Furthermore, they noted that English speaking participants showed "ethnic allegiance" to their symbolic Welshness, yet had a "complex set of structured perceptions of themselves and their peers" (Garrett et al., 1999, 344-345). The authors conclude that future research on Welsh ethnic identity should address these language attitudes. Ethnic allegiances throughout Gwent are questioned even today. A recent political debate saw the contemporary county of Monmouthshire (the most easterly region which corresponds with the historic Gwent) vote in opposition to further devolved lawmaking powers being given to Wales (the only Welsh county to do so) (BBC, 2011).

A decade ago, *BBC Voices*, an experimental dialect-based project, was undertaken. It gathered substantial lexical material from informants through two methods: radio journalist interviews and, a more contemporary method – internet surveying (via "Language Lab" online surveys, with results displayed via a WordMap on the site). This allowed any British resident to submit lexical information to the study directly (*BBC Voices*, 2008).

By analysing previous *SAWD* material, Penhallurick (2013) established that potential existed for a comparative study between English dialects of 1971 and 2005, reporting that 50% of lexical notions targeted in the *Voices* questionnaire had *SAWD* counterparts; that there are "fruitful avenues to follow in comparing the lexical reserves of *SAWD* and *Voices*" (Penhallurick, 2013, p. 11). Leeds University's preliminary examination of *Voices* data also asserted: "despite increased mobility and […] exposure [to] television and radio", "the English language is as diverse as ever" (Upton, 2007).

Aims

Claims such as these warranted further investigation, and there existed motivation to analyse a small area of Britain to view dialectal changes (of a lexical nature) within the last several decades. Gwent, with its unique regional identity formed from past cultural diversity, was an intriguing locale for analysis. Inspired by methodology that utilised a novel means of dialectal surveying – internet-based – as well as insights from sociolinguistics, ensuring informants were mobile, young, and of all genders (rather than NORMs), the following

investigation was constructed. Had adjacent geographic varieties influenced Gwent English lexis via dialect levelling? Had mass media (television, internet) brought opportunities for international varieties of English to impact upon Gwent English? And finally, had the Welsh lexical characteristics typically associated with Welsh Englishes (like Gwent English) been eradicated as Thomas (1984) predicted?

Methodology

Materials

Drawing inspiration from the oldest dialect surveys, such as Wenker's in 1876 (Davis, 1971, 27), the study used *indirect methodology* by utilising an electronic postal questionnaire and working through intermediaries. Indirect methods are often described as being an economical means of investigation (McDavid, 1985, 310; Cassidy, 1948, 191), and were favourable, considering the little time allocated.[1]

The questionnaire was based on *BBC Voices*, and aimed to elicit lexical forms from a range of everyday topics (see Cassidy, 1948, 188). These included: *states*, *clothing*, *activities*, *people* and *items*, *personal topics* and *environment*. Six notions were added to the questionnaire; the aim was to elicit items that were prominent in Gwent when last investigated by Parry (1979). These included: *cwtch* ("hug"), *lumper* ("boy"), *sprag* ("to catch"), *ach-y-fi* ("an expression of disgust"), *rhiw* ("slope/hill") and *tollet* ("loft"). Omitted notions included one concerning toolkits, and another concerning the *chav* phenomenon of the mid-2000s. Duckert (1971, 71) advises that alterations should be taken into account when resurveying an area, due to potential social changes. Parry carried out similar additions and alterations upon adapting the *SED*'s Dieth-Orton questionnaire for the *SAWD* (Parry, 1977, pp. 277-278).

Map 1. Position of Gwent in Wales

To encourage genuine dialectal responses, instead of using direct questioning (which asks informants to "translate" standard notions into regional variants [Davis, 1971, 28]), the notions were disguised through eliciting sentences; this was in line with *SAWD*'s original methodology, rather than that of *BBC Voices*. Preliminary eliciting sentences were kindly provided by Dr. Robert Penhallurick and were refined accordingly. For example, Penhallurick's suggestion: "word for how you feel when it's getting late or you've worked hard all day" for *tired* was kept. However, "using this hand rather than this (must gesture)" for *left-handed* was replaced with "if someone uses the hand which is not the right, they are ...", for the former would not have been applicable in distribution of an indirect survey.

To a small extent, direct questioning was used. Pratt (1983, 151) argues that this is highly favourable when attempting to elicit low frequency dialectal forms, asserting that people are less likely to think of dialectal forms when beginning a question, providing forms once their semantic field has been accessed. Although the questionnaire at no point asked whether informants used a certain item in their area, a section following the variant-gathering part was included for informants to add unique dialectal items they believed were used in their area, under the premise that such items may have been activated during participation. Similar to the *SAWD*, this provides an extra resource of "incidental-material". Toward the end of the questionnaire were sections for informants to include written perceptions regarding their dialect. Biographic information sought included informants' home town/village, length of residence (LOR) in Gwent, as well as details regarding skills in languages other than English. Ultimately, these measures were put in place to get an idea of how well informants "represented" their region (Cassidy, 1948, 190).

A series of pilot-tests tested whether the eliciting sentences would attract items of notion synonymy. Three participants of the required age group from Brecon, Powys, Wales; Jersey, Channel Islands; and Annandale, Virginia, USA, took part. The notions sought were largely obtained. Two amendments to the original questionnaire included assuring that profanities were acceptable and that accurate spelling was not essential.

Localities

The idea of contemporary Gwent is difficult to define, and was of considerable difficulty when mapping out areas of investigation to parallel Parry's *SAWD*. Originally the historic Celtic kingdom of Gwent covered just two thirds of the succeeding county of Monmouthshire, created in 1536. In 1974 historic Monmouthshire was retitled "Gwent" due to popular Welsh sympathy, before finally being broken up into four constituencies in 1996 (Morgan, 2005, p. 6). To confuse further, at the present time two of these counties (Monmouthshire and Blaenau-Gwent) harbour former names for their region. The maps situate Gwent's position within Wales (Map 1); its modern day constituencies which comprise historic Gwent (Map 2); and these constituencies' largest urban centres (Map 3).[2]

Map 2. Constituent counties of Gwent

Informants

A demographic range of 16-25 years

old was chosen, for it was the youth of Gwent who were of interest, especially those born around or after the passing of the Welsh Language Act of 1993. Interestingly, shortly before the act was passed, Pryce (1990) noted surveys were beginning to indicate a slightly higher proportion (2.7%) of bilingual Welsh speaking children in Gwent's pre-school age group than in the population of Gwent as a whole (2.3%).

The first stage of informant-seeking involved the co-operation of educational institutions, a well-established technique for collecting dialectal data of the young (see Cassidy (1948, 91). Sixth-form colleges throughout Gwent that utilised an English Language A-level course were contacted. Participatory invitations were sent to five colleges in Newport, four in Monmouthshire, four in Torfaen and three in Blaenau-Gwent. The primary reason for choosing A-level English Language classes was because teachers would, it was hoped, be familiar with sociolinguistic surveying; secondly, pupil participation could help introduce, reaffirm or demonstrate the value of sociolinguistics within their A-level curriculum. As there was a positive public response to participation in *BBC Voices* (Upton, 2007), participation would allow pupils to express their linguistic identity. Of course, there was the caveat that there was bias in the form that students were in some capacity linguistically aware of dialect questionnaires, as students were already being trained in linguistics.

Map 3. Gwent's urban centres

Unfortunately, few schools expressed interest in participation. Just one Torfaen school, Fairwater Comprehensive, expressed interest and provided 17 informants. Therefore, a second sampling method was chosen, in the form of non-randomised quota sampling (Linn, 1983, 239) which largely involved the sole fieldworker (myself) choosing informants through the internet social networking website Facebook. First, a Facebook "status" was used to prompt Gwent-based contacts of the fieldworker to partake in the dialect questionnaire; then, a secondary phase utilised a personalised message to each contact. Out of 37 Gwent-based contacts, 12 informants complied. The format of the questionnaire for the schools and Facebook informants was a Microsoft Word document, whilst the method of delivery for the schools and Facebook informants was postal and e-postal, respectively. A later stage of informant collection involved adding the questionnaire to a surveying website.[3] The efficiency of a direct hyperlink demanded less work on behalf of the informant. IP address confirmation also ensured there were no duplicate responses. However, the caveat here was that there was no method of checking both informant age and whether they were from/living in Gwent.

To reduce a bias towards the informant group from further education (16-18) within the 16-25 range, additional informants were sought from both youth organisations and county-based pages and groups on Facebook. Groups were selected if the page had large numbers of members, the reason being that the larger the group, the more likely it was that it was currently being used. Interest pages/groups ranged from libraries, official county and educational websites, to sports clubs, faith groups, community voice groups, and volunteering organisations. Public posts encouraged participation via incentive statements highlighting upholding a positive community spirit. Contact with a page/group's administrator was also sought; this proved beneficial, as the pages representing Torfaen County Borough Council, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Torfaen Young People's Forum, and Blaenau-Gwent Intercultural and Spiritual Group publicised the survey and/or forwarded details on to potential respondents.

This methodology could be defined as a quasi-random sample (Linn, 1983, 229); although there was no direct human interference by the fieldworker, not everyone within the speech community could partake, just those within particular internet groups. That being said, it proved to be an effective means of administrating a dialect survey from an external location (Swansea University). Although there is no record of how respondents reached the online survey, the remaining 15 informants came from utilising this third method. For purposes of discussion, all informants have been anonymised and randomly assigned a county code and number, for example: Mon#1, Bg#2, Tor#3, Np#4, Cp#5.

Results (Turnout)

A total of 44 informants took part in the survey: 17 informants were obtained from schools (38.6%), 15 from online sources (34.1%) and 12 were acquired through personal communication (27.3%). 39 informants (88.6%) were born within Gwent, whilst five were born elsewhere (11.4%). Altogether 43 informants (97.7%) had been living in Gwent for more than 10 years, with just one informant having a length of residence of 5-10 years (2.3%). There were no informants with LOR of one to four years or less than a year. Informants who had been born outside of Gwent claimed origins from Bristol, England; Switzerland; Ottawa, Canada; and Maidstone, England. 31 informants identified as the female gender (70.5%), 12 informants identified as male (27.3%), and one informant identified as Other (2.3%). The age range was divided into three groups: 21 informants (47.3%) were aged between 16-18 years, 12 were between 22-25 years (27.3%) and 11 were aged 19-21 (25%).

The majority of informants came from Torfaen (21 informants: 47.2%), followed by Monmouthshire (13 informants: 29.5%), Blaenau-Gwent (five informants: 11.4%), and Newport (four informants: 9.0%). Despite not actively seeking informants from Caerphilly county, one informant (2.3%) was reported from Rhymney (an area which was in fact part of historic Gwent).

The questionnaire also elicited informants' L2 language skills to address possible lexical interference with other languages, notably the means in which Welsh loanwords might

play a part in English speech. Measures such as this were of less importance in older dialect surveys, but could easily influence vocabulary of a "globalised" Gwent in 2013. 29 informants professed knowledge of an L2 (65.9%), whilst 15 informants stated they had no skills (34.1%). Of the total informants, precisely half (22 informants) stated they had knowledge of Welsh language skills, whilst half did not. Of the L2s which were not Welsh, informants stated they were users of the following languages: French (10 users), German (eight users), Spanish (two users), Swiss German (one user), Japanese (one user), Taiwanese (one user) and Italian (one user).

Discussion

The *Voices* model proved to be very productive in eliciting lexical information, both regional and "standard". Unfortunately we cannot assess the degree to which standard forms have increased in comparison to non-standard, as the *SAWD* only published non-standardised speech. That being said, in some cases standard forms were far more frequent than non-standard forms. For example, *left-handed* and derivative *lefty* received 36 usages, outperforming the former regional favourite: *cack(y)-handed* (two usages).

Several informants used adverb intensifiers to create new compounded forms from standard vocabulary. Intensifiers included standard usages: "unbelievably" in *unbelievably tired*, as well as non-standard or less formal intensifiers: e.g. *bloody freezing*, *well pleased*, and *proper annoyed* and *major tired* (notice omission of adverb suffix –ly). Several non-standard forms did outperform the standard notion. *Knackered* ("tired") outnumbered its notion by 26 usages to 23, whilst *skiving* ("truanting") outnumbered the standard by 20 usages to 11. *Cwtch* ("hug"), one of the WE items introduced to the questionnaire from previous *SAWD* incidental-material, outnumbered its notion by 33 usages to 28 usages.

Prevalent *SAWD* items

Parry presented 146 dialectal words in *Notes on the Dialects of Gwent* (1978), made up of both *SAWD* responses and incidental-material (IM); these are therefore non-correlatable with current data due not only to the IM but the fact that around only 50% of notions within this questionnaire parallel *SAWD* items. *Notes*' topics "nature" (30 words), "animals" (14), "farming" (38) and "mining" (nine) were not sought for the present study; therefore it is not surprising that variants for these notions were not recorded.

However, similar to Widdowson's (2010) methodology which detailed the extent of lexical erosion of Sheffield's regional forms since the *SED*, a small comparison can be made of Gwent's changes by examining items detailed in *Notes* and *SAWD*, and those in this study. From 146 items in *Notes*, 10 dialectal words surfaced in this survey. From Parry's "general words" category there were eight words recorded, whilst one was recorded from the "human body" and one from "nature" categories. Collated with additional *SAWD*/*SED* material, a further 17 items were noted in usage. These include the following: *ach-y-fi* ("expression of disgust"), *barmy* ("crazy"), *bushed* ("tired"), *butty* ("friend"), *chopsy* ("chatty"), *caggy-handed* ("left-handed"), *cwtch* ("hug"), *cwtch* ("storage place"), *daps* ("PE shoes"), *learn* ("to

teach"), *mutching* ("truanting"), *mun* (term of address), *nab* ("to catch"), *rank* ("rancid"), *tamping* ("raging", and "expression of disgust"), *tidy* ("good-natured") and *tump* ("hill").

Both *ach-y-fi* and *cwtch* were included as test items in the questionnaire and were still in use, whilst *lumper*, *sprag*, *rhiw*, and *tollet* were not. Three further items from surrounding Anglo-Welsh locales that were not recorded in Gwent during the 1970s were in use circa 2013, raising the total WE forms to 20. These further items include: *bamper* ("grandfather"), *tŷ bach* ("toilet") and *mutching* ("truanting").

Interestingly, two dialectal words recorded in *SAWD* (*tutty* and *pissy-bed*) may be the predecessors to new forms recorded at the present time. *Tutty* was originally recorded meaning "lovely" from the Welsh "neat" or "snug" (*The English Dialect Dictionary* [Wright, 1898-1905] claims etymology from the nearby English county – Shropshire). Its contemporary usage *twtty* or *dwtty*, according to Tor#5, is an adjective used for "small": e.g. *she's only dwtty*. Similarly, *little-dwt* was a word used by Np#1 for "baby". These new usages preserve, to some extent, the semantic quality of "loveliness", "snugness" or "neatness", denoting almost a kind of sympathy or "adorable" quality. Recorded previously in westerly South Glamorgan, *pissy-bed* (from *pissamire*, for "ants"), could be the etymological root for Mon#8's *piss-infant* (baby); possibly deriving from qualities of "smallness". Many of these usages may indeed be new, or, alternatively, simply unrecorded by the *SAWD*.

Prevalent *Voices* items

Using the *BBC Voices'* WordMap application, a similar, although incomplete, comparison (as the website does not include every notion, let alone every lexical variant) can provide a glance into changes within the last eight years. On the map, Gwent represents three squares corresponding to the Valleys, rural Monmouthshire and the Newport-Cardiff conurbation. Several variants are still present in Gwent. *Bunking off* ("truanting"), (in Voices this variant had high usage in all metropolitan areas of the UK, including Newport) was frequently used by informants throughout Gwent. *Drizzling* ("light raining"), formerly recorded in central England and Gwent's valleys, had widespread usage throughout Gwent in this survey, and was the highest tallied variant, totalling 24 usages. For the same notion, *spotting*, though sparsely recorded throughout Britain by Voices, was of use in Monmouthshire and Newport. Meanwhile, *wang* ("to throw"), recorded previously in the north-West English metropolises and present in Newport c2005, was recorded this time in Monmouthshire.

Noted were a few variants which, although unrecorded by Voices, have now gained currency in Gwent. The variant *chuffed* (pleased) entered speech from military slang in 1957 (*OED*). It had sparse distribution throughout the UK in 2005, with scatterings throughout England, West Wales and Scotland, although was not recorded in Gwent. This survey obtained ten usages throughout Gwent, and it was both the second most frequent variant, and the highest non-standard variant. Similar items that followed this pattern were *hard-up* ("poor"), and *trickle* ("stream"). Several *Voices* variants of low frequency were not plotted on WordMap, and therefore there exists uncertainty surrounding their exact locational usage. Some of these variants were recorded in Gwent c2013. These include: *welly* ("to throw"),

broke ("poor"), and *a-bit-of-alright* ("attractive"), as well as two Welsh items: *glaw man* ("light rain") and *nant* ("stream"). It is possible that some of these features from distant UK metropolises have arrived in Gwent through population movement along major communication routes, resulting in dialect levelling (North, 1985, p. 89).

New Gwent lexis

The hypothesis that there would be continued Welsh lexical borrowing was confirmed. Alongside *cwtch*, *ach-y-fi*, and *tŷ bach*, which were previously noted in *SAWD* (see above), there were further borrowings into WE. Bg#1, a Welsh speaker, contributed a mixture of Welsh and English variants. Although his responses at first seemed formulaic, as if misunderstanding the task and therefore translating English notions into Welsh variants, he did not give Welsh responses for every notion. Speculatively, we might argue that the Welsh lexis is used intentionally in the English speech of the informant; the claim is strengthened by the informant's considerable number of cognate forms: *trwsers* ("trousers"), *lolfa* ("lounge") and *gyli* ("gully"). Intriguingly, a notion sought for its previous Welsh usage of "attic": *tollet*, from Welsh *taflod*, has been replaced by a Welsh cognate of English origin: *atig*. The informant used *bwrw* (Welsh for "to cast") for the notion "to hit hard", and a Welshified English idiomatic phrase was used for "annoyed": *mynd ar fy nerfau* ("getting on my nerves").

Tor#3 contributed the endearment term *cariad* (Welsh for "love") for "girlfriend", whilst Tor#5 used *chwarae teg* as an alternative form for the English colloquialism "fair play". Np#2 used *taid* for grandfather. Bg#5 added *pwp* for "unwell"; although not a Welsh word in itself, it was submitted alongside *poop*, suggesting adoption of Welsh orthography regarding *poop*'s long vowel sound (/uː/) and its equivalent Welsh grapheme: <ŵ> in English borrowed words like *pool/pwl*.

Borrowings from other English varieties

Since the *SAWD*, several new British slang words have entered Gwent English. *Gnat's piss*, first recorded in 1959 meaning a "weak beverage" has taken the additional meaning of "light rain".[4] *Minging*, Scottish lexis (*OED*, first recorded 1970) meaning "unpleasant", was recorded for "unattractive" "unwell", and "expression of disgust"; whilst *stonking*, a colloquialism for "excellent" c1980, was used for "attractive". Similarly *banging*, a colloquialism for "excellent" from the 1990s dance-music scene, was used for "pleased". One item, *calves*, used by four Torfaen informants to define "trousers" has possibly made a recurrence as it was once used as a term for "stockings" (c1781). However, it is more likely to be a recoinage by young speakers.

American English items were plentiful. Unfortunately, identifying when these were imitated and transferred into Gwent English is difficult. However, we can divide the loanwords into diachronic groups. The earliest (nineteenth century) American English words now used in Gwent English are: *pants*, c1835 ("trousers"), *southpaw*, c1870 ("left-handed") and *bughouse*, c1891 ("crazy"). Twentieth century lexis includes: *kicks*, c1904 ("PE shoes");

doodad and *doohickey*, c1905-1914 ("thing"); and the spousal words *ball and chain*, c1921 ("romantic partner") and *boo*, c1988 ("girlfriend/boyfriend", or, a term of address), originating from African-American usage. Interestingly, the notion "pregnant", provided borrowings from several global English varieties: from British slang c1942: *preggers*, to American *knocked up*, c1813 and Australian *up the duff*, c1941. Conditionally, it appears that exposure to American (and global) culture, possibly via mass media, has affected Gwent's vocabulary, confirming the aforementioned hypothesis.

"Gwentisms"

Several variants remain of uncertain origin, and therefore we can only tentatively surmise etymological origins. Of particular interest are three terms for "alley". The first variant for "alley" is *gully*, used by Bg#1 and Cp#1. The OED records usages of *gully* as first "a worn channel in the earth" (c1657), and later a "groove" (c1803). The *SAWD* notes that in Mid-Glamorgan the variant had also been used for "dry-stone enclosures for sheep". Bearing previous definitions in mind, its contemporary usage for "a narrow walkway between/ alongside buildings" seems quite fitting. The other two terms for "alley", *incline* (Tor#19) and *squeeze* (Tor#21), were once used as mining terminology for a "sloped passageway" and "a narrow passageway", respectively. For this survey, informants supplied these terms to denote concepts of narrowness and enclosure for "alley". Hypothetically, we might surmise that with the closure of South Wales' mines since the *SAWD* project (see Jones, 1992, 348), there may have been a lexical transition from a dying sociolect used by miners to the regional speech of their offspring. Finally *cleck* ("to hit") could be a regional phonological form of *to clock*, c1959 ("to hit in the face") with its phonological structure altered from /ɒ/ to /e/.

Internet lexis

Trudgill (1986) believed that although mass media (television, film) was a factor in lexical borrowing, the process was a one-way system of dialectal imitation. However, an argument could be made that the "new" mass medium of the twenty first century – the internet – enables language users not only to imitate but also accommodate linguistic features into their own speech with others around the globe via text-based or free call services (e.g. Microsoft Skype, online video-gaming). The internet can act as a space where linguistic contact occurs and has occasionally been described, quite aptly regarding regional dialect studies, as a "global village" (Crystal, 2001, p. 5). Given time, unique sociolectal traits can form (Rainie and Anderson, 2008, p. 60). It seems possible that Gwent informants' interactions online may encompass their lexical reality offline. This survey produced several internet forms. For example *LMAO*, an internet initialism for "laughing my ass off", often used to interject, was noted in Torfaen's incidental-material. Similarly, *WTF* (initialism for "what the fuck"), was used for the notion "expression of disgust" (the *OED* defines it as "language of electronic communication", c1985, used to express incredulity.)

Although such forms derive from text-based instant-messaging, informants left little indication regarding whether forms are used solely in internet discourse, or whether they had

transferred into spoken discourse. To better illustrate this, take for example a similar internet abbreviation that takes on two phonological forms: *LOL* ("laugh-out-loud") (Crystal, 2001, p. 85). Outside of text-based communication, it can be pronounced as an initialism (/elǝʊˈel/) or acronymised as (/lɒl/) (*OED*). Taking this blueprint, *LMAO* may be pronounced: /elˌemˌeɪˈǝʊ/ or /lǝˈmaʊ/ by Gwent speakers. Ultimately, items such as these make a strong case for follow-up phonological investigation in Gwent or further afield.

Self-perceptual commentaries

In following with Garrett et al.'s (1999) suggestion that future research on Welsh ethnic identity should address language attitudes, the questionnaire also gathered material on informants' perceptions of their speech and speech community. Evidence of accommodation was present. A recurring theme was awareness that their speech was somehow continually influenced by often "stronger" accents, depending upon location. Bg#3 stated that her Welsh accent alters when in the Valleys, and Mon#11's alters when in Cardiff, whilst Np#4 believed her urban accent occasionally borrows "sing-song" intonations she associates with the Valleys. Np#2 cannot help "tuning in" and using traits of other varieties. Interestingly, several informants were more conscious of the part language has in their communities and accommodate strategically. Mon#3 supposedly alters her speech to take on Welsh English features in her workplace. Mon#6 believes her dialect to slip into "Welsh twangs" depending on who she is talking to. Tor#6 and Tor#7 report that, although they use Welsh English lexis around friends, they manage a more "English" speech around strangers. Six informants (Bg#2, Mon#7, Mon#9/10, Mon#12/13) did not consider their accent to be Welsh, but were aware of, or claimed to occasionally use, Welsh English vocabulary. Evidently, informants recognise distinct characteristics amongst several closely related South-Welsh dialectal areas.

Ethnic Welshness was the focus of certain responses. Tor#2 held views that English speech had "overtaken" the Welsh culture, prompting her to emphasise her Welsh English accent. Contrarily, one commentary (Tor#13) highlighted the "normality" of an English dialect by saying that although she uses WE lexis, most of her vocabulary is "normal". Bg#5 claims to be well-spoken and her WE to be "posh-sounding", heralding in what *she* perceives to be a unique variety of WE. Similarly, a kind of "dialectal neutrality", claimed by Tor#6, Mon#1 and Mon#5, asserted neither English English nor Welsh English influenced their Gwent English. Ostensibly, within this border region, young Welsh English speakers have a complex set of structured perceptions about themselves and others.

Conclusion

As expected, there has been lexical change in Gwent since the 1970s. Many standard forms were in use, suggesting a degree of dialect levelling. However, nonstandard forms prevalent in *SAWD* are still in use; therefore regional speech has not been subsumed entirely. As hypothesised, Welsh's re-emergence may have possibly impacted upon Gwent English, although so had influences from global varieties as well as internet slang. The study also discovered unique items which were either new or had gone undetected within Parry's

previous *SAWD* study. Finally, Gwent speakers recognised several dialects surrounding their region, yet were generally unaffiliated with any specific Welsh or English dialectal identity.

Methodologically speaking, the survey had room for improvement. First, there is sample bias stemming from the 17 respondents from the Torfaen college and second, better coverage of Gwent would have been favourable (especially in southern Monmouthshire and Newport). Follow-up research could test low-frequency lexis with larger informant samples, but it is Gwent's phonological and grammatical data that should ideally be sought hereafter. Perhaps apparent-time methodology (see Trudgill, 1988, 34) could gather information from larger age ranges, to examine whether lexical changes have occurred in tandem with younger generations. Overall, Gwent is still a dialectally diverse region. Gwent English still contains distinct Welsh language transference properties at the lexical level, and exhibits many nonstandard speech forms and unique borderland language identities. It will be of continued interest to investigate this border county's speech periodically throughout the coming decades.

Notes

1. This project was conducted as part of a short BA dissertation, where material was collected over several months.

2. Maps were retrieved from Wikimedia Commons and contain no licensing. All maps have been edited accordingly by myself.

3. The surveying website (esurvey) can be found at this website: <http://www.esurveyspro.com>

4. Definitions in this section are obtained from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) unless stated otherwise (e.g. *EDD*, *SED* or *SAWD*).

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