

UDC 81'282.3,81'271.12

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONDITIONS OF FUNCTIONING OF THE WELSH VARIETY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (WENGLISH)

N.A. Emelianova

Astrakhan State University (Astrakhan, Russia).  
E-mail: [vemeljanova@mail.ru](mailto:vemeljanova@mail.ru)

**Abstract.** The article considers geographical variations in the use of the Welsh variety of the English language (Wenglish) and its correlation with Standard English. The author analyses two quite different tendencies which add to the changes both in the dialect and in Standard English. Having identified separate territories of Wenglish speakers, territorial differences in Wenglish, depending on the area of Wales, are examined through comparative analysis. Use by speakers of Welsh and Wenglish itself is discussed based on area of residence and the age of a given speaker. It is noted that older speakers of Wenglish tend to use a more conservative variety of the language, whereas younger speakers are turning away from the traditional dialect under pressure of modern society, fashion and globalization. Comparisons are made to other varieties of English from historical, cultural and linguistic points of view. The author comes to the conclusion that Wenglish is a unique linguistic phenomenon and raises the question of which forms may be considered the norm, given the regional variations in Wenglish. It is suggested that all forms are valid, but some are so ingrained that they are used more often than the others and are therefore recommended as 'correct'.

**Keywords:** Wenglish; Welsh English; English language; borrowings; variety.

Wenglish (Welsh English) is a term introduced by John Edwards in 1980s, when he first published his well-known book "Talk Tidy" and gave the particulars of the English dialect spoken in the South Wales Valleys.

Wenglish is described by him as "a unique blend of residual Welsh and the distinctive patterns of spoken English. It is the authentic voice of Anglo-Welshness in large areas of Gwent, Mid and West Glamorgan, and needs to be seen as the oral badge of identity for many who live in these areas and a vital element in their social heritage" [1: 11].

The core areas of Wenglish are the South Wales Valleys (also called the South Wales coalfield) with the population over a million people. These areas are as follows (starting from the West to the East):

1. The Gwendraeth Valleys.
2. Llanelli and Eastern Carmarthenshire.
3. Ammanford and the Amman Valley.
4. The Swansea Valley, including small valleys on the west bank of the river Tawe (Twrch, Llynfell, Llwchwr and Lliw).
5. Swansea.
6. Neath and the Neath Valley.

7. Port Talbot and the Afan Valley.
8. Bridgend and the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys.
9. The Ely Valley.
10. The Rhondda Valleys.
11. The Cynon Valley.
12. Pontypridd, Merthyr Tydfil and the Taff Valley.
13. The Rhymney Valley.
14. The Western Valleys of Monmouthshire (Sirhowy, Ebbw).
15. The Eastern Valley of Monmouthshire [2: 19; 3].

The first eight valleys constitute the Western area of Wenglish. Welsh is mainly spoken in the first four valleys and cities, that's why the influence of Welsh on English is considerable. These four valleys are called the Far Western part of the Wenglish core areas. The Ely and Rhymney Valleys are the Central area of Wenglish. The Western and Eastern Valleys of Monmouthshire comprise the Eastern area of Wenglish.

These differences are relative, but further we will see that they are quite helpful for describing variants of Wenglish, which are a typical feature of the speech of these three geographical areas.

All of these areas have much in common. They are embodied with a long history of industrial development, with the coalmining industry in the core of it. Other heavy industries such as iron and steel production were also a link in these areas. The rapid development of industry in the XIXth century resulted in a large flow of workers from other parts of Wales, the British Isles and the most remote parts of the country.

### **Variations within Wenglish**

Although Wenglish has a definite area of usage, there are some geographical variations.

The Western area (from the Gwendraeth Valley to the Valleys of Bridgend, Llynfi, Garw, Ogmore) retained more Welsh borrowings than the Central and **Eastern**. In general, the further west one goes, the more opportunity he has to hear Welsh borrowings. One should bear in mind that Welsh is still an important and a natural means of communication in East Carmarthenshire, including the Gwendreth Valleys, the cities of Llanelli and Ammanford, the Amman and Swansea Valleys. Thus, it becomes clear why Welsh borrowings prevail in Wenglish, namely in the Far Western part of the main area.

There is a tendency to use many words interchangeably in this area. So, Welsh is still an active source of lexical units to Wenglish, however, it can't be said about Central and Eastern areas of Wenglish. Also, speakers use two languages in their speech: English (i.e. Wenglish) and Welsh (a spoken variant of South Wales). Wenglish has a lot of words and word combi-

nations borrowed from Welsh, while there are many words in Welsh borrowed from English, especially technical terms. Although both languages have common features, nevertheless, syntax and language structure and the frequently used lexis help understand which language is spoken. But the tendency of language alternating makes it hard for foreigners to define the language of the conversation.

Another feature of the Western Area is that the use of the present tense of verbs formed with **to do** (e.g. **I do do, they do say**) is scarce. Again, in the Far Western regions such cases didn't exist.

Thus, Western Wenglish differs from Central and Eastern Wenglish in its frequent use of Welsh borrowings and also the speech rhythms and intonation of the Welsh language. That does not mean the complete lack of these elements in Central and Eastern Wenglish [4].

In these areas the present tense of verbs formed with **to do** (e.g. **I do go, we do play**) is not a rare case.

Proximity to Cardiff, and the fact that many thousands of people commute to Cardiff for work make this area more open to the influence of the speech forms of the capital. As a result there is a tendency to diphthongisation of certain sounds among certain speakers but at the moment we can hardly say about the extensive use of them in the Central area.

The Central Area uses many words and expressions which are unfamiliar to the Western Area. Examples are **craxy** (annoyed, irritable), **wanged out** (exhausted), **moithered** (confused), **bosh** (sink). Generally, these words are derived from English dialects or English colloquialisms and not from Welsh.

The speech of the **Eastern Area** (Western and Eastern Valleys of Monmouthshire) is not rich in Welsh borrowings and there is a tendency to diphthongization of certain vowel sounds by some speakers. However, as with the Central Area, such cases are not frequent. The Eastern Area tends to have more expressions from English dialects (e.g. Gloucestershire, Midlands) because of the previous migration patterns and also the relative proximity of these areas.

It should also be noted that certain words and expressions in Wenglish are peculiar to one particular valley or community and might be completely unfamiliar in the neighbouring area.

There is also an age speech variation of speech. Older speakers tend to be more conservative in their speech and are thus more likely to speak a form of Wenglish which is closer to that of the 'Classical' period.

Younger speakers of any language tend to use a different vocabulary, reflecting their particular interests (e.g. pop music, computers, going out). Other categories of speakers are unlikely to know special vocabulary relating to these areas, as their interests don't coincide.

Younger speakers also tend to be more subject to influence by external factors and to social and peer pressure: if it is considered fashionable to pronounce a word in a certain way, they are more likely to do so. Diphthongization and glottalling may well be connected with this.

Younger people may also consider the speech of older people as unfashionable and thus to be avoided, which is quite typical for other variants of English, for example, cockney [5].

In interview situations, speakers of several dialects may have difficulty as their speech may give out the 'wrong signals'. They may be considered 'stupid' and unable to express themselves properly in Standard English. This is another important factor aimed at not retaining a dialect in Britain as a whole.

There is another variation of Wenglish on **socioeconomic and educational levels**. While Wenglish itself arose out of the everyday speech of ordinary working people, its use today is not limited by any particular socioeconomic group. However, certain peculiarities used by some speakers of modern Wenglish are more prevalent among lower socioeconomic groups. (such as advanced verbal contractions like **I in't goin'** for *I'm not going*, and **'e doh wannw go infor** *he doesn't want to go* and pronunciation of intervocalic as a trilled **r** (e.g. **she gorrrw go**, for colloquial Standard English *she has got to go*).

Also, it should be noted that the use of such features is actually becoming more common, even among speakers from higher socioeconomic groups. These features may not occur on all occasions but their use is likely to be more frequent. This phenomenon is a new one, practically unheard of in Wenglish's 'Classical' period.

Generally speaking, well-educated people tend not to use such features. They are sure to use the correct forms in Standard English, and so carry them over into their Wenglish. Nevertheless, many speakers of Wenglish are University graduates and belong to the higher socioeconomic groups. So, it must be emphasized that the use of Wenglish is not limited by any particular social group.

Historically, the use of non-standard forms of English was taken unfavourably, and often considered less prestigious. The situation may be better today but for prejudices and stereotypes. This proves that British government is focused only on London and establishing political and economic dominance over other states.

However, the use of dialect does not mean ignorance. In Switzerland, for example, the use of Swiss German is part of national identity. Its use is not perceived as contempt and it is used actively at all levels of life. In Norway and Luxembourg too, dialect is accorded a high status in all aspects of national life.

As said above, Wenglish owes its origins to the workers coming from all parts of the British Isles, in search of employment in the industries of the South Wales Valleys. As a result, Wenglish shares a warmth, humour, intimacy and a directness of expression, with other dialects which have arisen among ordinary working people, such as Geordie (a dialect of Northumberland, especially Tyneside and Brummie (a dialect spoken by citizen of Birmingham)).

### Range of Wenglish

It is true that good command of Standard English is necessary for international cooperation in modern world. Nevertheless, it does not mean that regional forms including Wenglish are in the background and exist as they are. In everyday life the range of Wenglish is wider than of Standard English. For example, the expression "Come by 'ere an' 'ave a cwth with Mam" is imbued with emotional connotations and it is very difficult to translate them into Standard English.

Wenglish is a fine source for discussing the significant issues of everyday life, such as family, friends, relationships, home, work, sports, etc.

The vitality of this spoken language is great, as it owes its origin to ordinary workers and this feature gives it openness, warmth and strength - the features that Standard English lacks.

On the other hand, these dialects are far from being precise. Perhaps, this is true, at least it concerns some activities. Robert Lewis doubts that Wenglish can be applicable to technical and scientific literature: it has never been used in these fields in comparison with Standard English.

The vocabulary of Wenglish, as with all dialects, is much smaller than that of Standard English. Because it originated as the everyday language of working people, it has a number of expressions to cover the examples of everyday life. Simple, clear expressions outnumber complex abstractions and, in general, Latin-derived expressions in Wenglish. For example, **flat shot** would be used in preference to the Standard English's *disappointment*, and **feeding** in preference to *nutritious*.

### Relationship between Wenglish and Standard English

It is true that Wenglish is not as different from Standard English as, for example, Swiss German and Bavarian are from Standard German. However, the differences concern grammar, vocabulary, syntax and sound.

One cannot say that Wenglish is a completely separate language from Standard English (as could legitimately be said of Scots - the language that is, not just Standard English spoken with a Scottish accent). However, Wenglish is certainly different enough to be called a dialect of English.

Speakers of Wenglish have no difficulty at all in understanding Standard English and other major varieties of English, such as Cockney, which are heard on television, radio and in films.

Although Wenglish grammar and syntax differ from Standard English, these factors do not present special difficulties of comprehension for speakers of Standard English, compared to such a variant as Chenglish [6]. However, vocabulary and expressions peculiar to Wenglish can cause more problems. For example, a speaker of Standard English is not aware of some Wenglish words like **decs** (gossip), **cwtch** (1. place / spot 2. cuddle / hug), **didoreth** (slovenly in housekeeping, denoting strong disapproval), **ware teg** (fair play), **mitching** (playing truant), and so on.

The relationship between a dialect and a standard language is always interesting. Two opposing tendencies tend to bring changes in the dialect, and sometimes in the standard language itself.

The first tendency is that a dialect copies or borrows certain features from the standard language, often under the influence of Mass Media. As a result, the dialect tends to lose some of its peculiar features. This tendency can be seen in Wenglish in the process of diphthongisation, which has changed certain vowel sounds.

The second tendency is that a dialect generates new language forms. For example, in Wenglish there is a tendency to contract further already contracted verb forms, and / or render negations in a different way, e.g. **I an' seen**, or **I never seen** when Standard English requires / *haven't seen*.

Generally speaking, especially under the influence of Mass Media, Wenglish has borrowed many features of Standard English.

The question of gradation from dialect to standard language is also important. Clearly, language is not homogenous and differs from speaker to speaker. Some speakers tend to use more 'typical' dialect features than others, while at the other end of the scale, some speakers use relatively few dialect features with the same accent and intonation of the dialect. This is certainly about Wenglish.

Of all aspects of language, vocabulary can most easily be transferred from standard language to dialect. There are several reasons for that: first, the word stock of a dialect tends to be smaller and so vocabulary borrowing from the standard language is sometimes necessary for precise meaning in certain activities, such as motor mechanics; secondly, vocabulary is relatively superficial when compared with grammatical structure or idioms, that's why standard vocabulary becomes substandard.

### **Relationship between Wenglish and other South Wales speech forms**

Wenglish is perhaps the most well-known and distinctive form of English spoken in South Wales. It must be pointed out that all the forms of

English spoken in South Wales have common features, and Wenglish. because of the central geographical position of its core area, has common features with all its neighbours.

We have seen that the Wenglish core area corresponds to the South Wales Valleys, from the Gwendraeth Valleys in the west to the Eastern Valley of Monmouthshire in the east.

The speech of three neighbouring areas, Western Carmarthenshire, Gower and the Vale of Glamorgan, shares much in common with Wenglish so can be named the Extended Wenglish area. These areas have a total population of some 200,000. Thus both areas have a combined population of some 1.2 million.

The speech of West Carmarthenshire, including Carmarthen and the Tywi Valley does not differ much from that of the extreme western part of the core area. The Welsh accent is much stronger here and the Welsh borrowings prevail. However, certain of the 'urban expressions' characteristic of the Central and Eastern parts of Wenglish main area may be unknown in this western frontier area.

These 'urban expressions' include expressions relating to industry, especially coal mining, and to everyday life, especially living in the characteristic terraced housing to be found in the Valleys. Examples include *butty* (work-mate, partner), *mandrel* (pick-axe), *dram* (small wagon used to transport coal from the coalface in a mine), *tommy-box* (miner's food container), *gwli* (lane behind terraced houses in Valleys) and *bosh* (kitchen sink).

The speech of **Gower**, at least of natives of the peninsula who do not lay claim to hail from the Home Counties, also differs little from that of the Western core area, though the accent may be slightly lighter; there may be some evidence of diphthongisation, and some of the 'urban expressions' typical of the Central and Eastern parts of the core area are not known to the speakers of other areas.

The speech of the rural **Vale of Glamorgan**, at least of natives of the Vale who do not claim to hail from deepest Surrey, does not differ a lot from that of the neighbouring parts of the core area. However, the accent may be lighter and there is some evidence of diphthongisation of some of Wenglish's pure vowel sounds. Again, some of the 'urban expressions' of the Wenglish Central and Eastern core area are not be used.

The speech of the Vale of Glamorgan's largest town, **Barry**, has some characteristics of the rural area and thus of the Wenglish core area too. The accent and intonation are different, however, and the speech has something of a due familiarity in it. Barry also has some expressions derived from English dialects and colloquialisms of the Central and Eastern core area. Because this area has for many years been highly anglicised, few Welsh borrowings and expressions are to be heard. Also, the speech of Barry and neighbouring Cardiff has much in common. Diphthongisation is fairly advanced

and glottalling of the letter at the end of certain words may be heard in the speech of some Barry residents, especially younger people.

Lewiis' inclusion of Barry along with the rural part of the Vale of Glamorgan in the Extended Wenglish area is rather doubtful. The author explains it by the fact that two of his grandfather's sisters lived there, and they certainly spoke excellent Wenglish!

The other South Wales speech forms, namely Cardiff, Newport, Rural Monmouthshire, Rural Carmarthenshire, North Pembrokeshire, South Pembrokeshire and Breconshire, also have some similarities with Wenglish but not to quite the same extent as the Extended area described above.

The speech of **Cardiff** has traditionally been different from that of the Valleys. Cardiff has long been a cosmopolitan melting pot and numerous influences have shaped the speech of the capital city. Generally speaking, the accent is more anglicised, the vowel sounds differ from those of the Valleys (e.g. the proverbial *Pint of Dairk in Cairdiff Airms Pairk*, in which the vowel sound is repeatedly pronounced as in the first vowel of the word *mare*, where Wenglish had a long a-sound). Cardiff speech today consists not only of diphthongs, but also triphthongs (combinations of three vowel sounds), in positions where Wenglish had pure, simple vowel sounds. Furthermore, the process of glottalling has been firmly entrenched in the speech of many younger people.

Despite all these factors, the speech of Cardiff still has similarities with Wenglish. Some of the expressions from colloquial English are shared. There is a slight but apparent Welsh intonation, and some of Wenglish's (sometimes adapted) borrowings from Welsh can be found in Cardiff too: e.g. *gibbons* (spring onions).

The speech of **Newport**, like that of Cardiff and Barry, has some of the expressions from English dialects and colloquial English with Eastern Wenglish, and some of the background intonation too. However, it also shows a clear tendency towards diphthongisation, and the vowel sounds often differ greatly from those of Wenglish. It also has some of the features of the speech of Rural Monmouthshire.

The speech of **Rural Monmouthshire** has some aspects of Welsh intonation but also some Gloucestershire features in the farther east areas. Diphthongisation is widespread, and the vowel combinations are sometimes quite complex for pronunciation sounds.

In the west, the speech of **Rural Carmarthenshire** has some features with Western Wenglish but not the 'urban expressions'. The area is mostly Welsh-speaking so the intonation resembles Welsh quite closely.

The speech of **North Pembrokeshire** has some common features with Rural Carmarthenshire but has quite a different accent.

Accent is a distinctive feature of **South Pembrokeshire**, as well as the background intonation, vocabulary and expressions. Diphthongisation is



quite common. It should be noted that many of the distinctive speech patterns of South Pembrokeshire derive from the speech of Flemish settlers who went there in the Middle Ages. There are therefore a lot of expressions peculiar to South Pembrokeshire which are unknown in Wenglish.

To the north, the speech of Breconshire has some of the intonation and vocabulary of Wenglish but not the urban expressions. In the east there is a possibility to hear a Herefordshire burr in the accent (pronunciation of r's in the French manner in the north of Enngland).

Wenglish is a unique linguistic phenomenon [2, 7]: there is no Standard Wenglish, however, as one can say about variations within Wenglish, the question arises about the forms which are a norm? Generally speaking, all forms of Wenglish are valid, but some of them have gained a firm foothold in the minds of Welshmen and these forms are used more often than others. These forms are recommended as 'more correct'.

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