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Language policy in multi-level systems
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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 regarding the practice of language policy to establish language policy as a distinct field of public policy studies. The article's original theoretical contribution is to develop a framework, grounded in historical institutionalism, to analyse the multi-level institutional factors that influence language policy choices relating to regional or minority languages within European multi-level states. The framework is tested by applying it to analyse the multi-level factors that condition language policy decisions regarding the Welsh language, and through further investigating the framework's significance and robustness to analyse language policy trajectories in two contrasting European cases. Overall, the article makes the case for the strengths and adaptability of the framework in producing convincing explanations of the multi-level dimensions of language policy development in different institutionalised contexts and calls for greater investigation of its ability to analyse other regional and minority languages in Europe.

In sociolinguistics, language policy is conceived as a diffuse mechanism guiding language use patterns in varying social contexts (Johnson, 2013). From this perspective, language policy can encompass any deliberate attempt to influence linguistic behaviours, general social attitudes regarding different languages and patterns of linguistic interaction (Splosky, 2004: 5). Nevertheless, as Grin (2003: 30) posits, language policy can also be viewed 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 intervention by government (state, sub-state or local) seeking to influence a society's

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linguistic milieu, and thus influence the language practices of individuals. The exact objective 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 (Patten, 2001), including decisions regarding which language(s) to use in public administration, education and on road signs. Furthermore, over recent years, a series of trends, including immigration, sub-state nationalism and cultural globalisation, have underlined the extent that linguistic diversity characterises most modern societies. These circumstances have increased awareness of the political, economic and cultural significance of governmental language policy decisions.

Despite its growing political salience, political science efforts to study language policy as a distinct area of public policy have been limited. Grin (2003: 38) argues that language policy 'ought to be approached in the same way as health, education, transport or energy policy'. Yet, in contrast to extensive literatures in these policy fields, political scientists specialising in policy analysis have paid little attention to the subject of language policy.

This article responds to this research gap by seeking to advance a distinctive political science approach to the study of language policy. More specifically, it seeks to deepen understanding of the political origins of distinctive language policies by identifying the types of factors that drive particular language policy choices. The article's key theoretical contribution draws on historical institutionalist ideas to develop an original analytical framework to demonstrate its usage to rigorously analyse the multi-level institutional factors that influence language policy choices in relation to European regional and minority languages (RMLs).

In terms of its structure, the article is organised as follows. First, it reviews the current literature focusing on language policy and highlights the little attention to date to the specific task of explaining the political factors that underpin language policy choices – in other words, the *how* and *why* of language policy. Second, the article develops a framework to analyse language policy choices taken in relation to RMLs. Third, it tests the framework's ability to identify the multi-level factors that influence language policy choices in a particular case, the Welsh language in Wales. Fourth, in order to enhance its contribution to the literature, the article tests the framework's broader applicability by briefly investigating its explanatory ability in two other European contexts. Finally, the article concludes by highlighting the framework's strengths and adaptability in producing convincing explanations of the multi-level dimensions of language policy development in different institutionalised contexts. The framework captures the main impact of institutional and agency interactions at the state, sub-state and local levels that drive language policy choices, influenced by the broader context of continental and global level structures and the impact of historical development on institutional change.

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 largely been reluctant to engage in detail with the subject. A substantial amount of the published literature concerning language policy is 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 examined the degree to which language policy choices promote certain linguistic processes, such as language spread, language shift and language death (in particular

Fishman, 1991). On the other hand, the degree to which language policy choices promote certain social changes, such as greater/lesser equality or greater/lesser discrimination has gained attention (see May, 2001; Tollefson, 1991). Since the 1970s, sociolinguists have also focused on language planning, understood as any deliberate effort by public bodies, corporations, community organisations or, indeed, parents, to influence linguistic behaviours (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). Yet, as Ricento (2006) argues, the main focus has been 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 polices' (Ricento, 2006: 18, emphasis added).

Social scientists working in other fields have drawn on insights from public policy analysis to inform research on language policy, including fields such as economics (Grin, 2003; Grin and Vaillancourt, 1999), communications (Gazzola, 2014) and geography (Williams, 2007, 2013a). Nevertheless, much of this work compares institutional features of different language policy regimes or evaluates the implementation of certain language policy interventions. More recently, a body of literature in political theory focuses on notions such as language rights, language equality and linguistic justice (see, for instance, De Schutter, 2008; Patten, 2001, 2003, Van Parijs, 2011; also edited collections Kymlicka and Patten, 2003; Léger and Lewis, 2017; Ricento et al., 2015). Yet, given the focus on issues including the moral basis of language rights claims and the ethical merits of various language policy regimes, the primary concern is evaluating the normative implications of language policies.

In summary, despite the existence of a relatively broad and multi-disciplinary literature engaging with language policy, a distinct political science perspective aiming to uncover the political origins of language policies, and explaining why particular language policy decisions are taken, has been lacking. Consequently, Cardinal and Sonntag's (2015) edited volume was significant. Political science theories and methods are utilised to develop an explanatory framework to consider, 'how and why are language policy choices made and how do they come about?' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 3). Within this work, a key role is played by 'state traditions', understood as the 'institutional and normative baggage' that can 'mark the path that states take in policy making' (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 4). The concept, informed by historical institutionalism, holds that while state institutions react to the demands and pressures of society, they also possess a relative degree of autonomy (Sonntag and Cardinal, 2015: 4).

Overall, the framework's key strengths include its flexibility, enabling it to analyse different contexts – ranging from Canada to Taiwan – and its emphasis on the importance of analysing institutional arrangements and long-term policy trajectories guiding language policy choices. However, it is not clear that the framework's emphasis on 'state tradition' captures the political circumstances that contextualise policy development associated with RMLs. Clearly, the editors 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 contributions focus on cases of regional or minority languages and factors such as decentralisation are taken into account. However, overall, the primary 'state' focus creates a tendency for more limited and generalised discussion of the sub-state level. Consequently, sub-state political dynamics that condition policy choices for RMLs are left under-examined, as is the potential for diversity within individual states.

Yet, the question of what drives policy decisions regarding RMLs is clearly increasing in prominence. Over recent years, public policy programmes aimed at recognising and promoting such languages are increasingly common globally, particularly across Western Europe (Williams, 2013a). Indeed, for 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 domains, including education, media, economy and public administration (see, for instance, McLeod, 2006; Strubell and Boix-Fuster, 2011; Urla, 2015). Sub-state level actors and institutions have overseen much of this activity, reflecting the radical expansion in regional autonomy across Western Europe in the past few decades (Hooghe et al., 2010). Establishing sub-state tiers of government has often been a catalyst for local or non-state language promotion efforts (Williams, 2013a). Yet, sub-state initiatives are rarely conceived and developed in isolation. Patterns of multi-level governance raise the prospect that, as in other domains, policy interventions targeting RMLs are influenced by political dynamics at multiple levels. Consequently, state-level structures, and continental or global level structures are also potentially significant.

A multi-level historical institutionalist framework

The central goal of this article is to develop an analytical framework to analyse policy decisions taken in relation to RMLs – giving due consideration to the multi-level institutional factors that influence such decisions. The framework thus responds to recent tendencies that European sub-state governments are catalysts for policy initiatives to recognise and promote the prospects of non-state RMLs in a context where policy decisions are increasingly influenced by political structures at multiple levels of governance. 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 framework's core features: first, key features from the historical institutionalism literature, and second the multi-level framework for analysing the levels of governance that may influence policy decisions relating to RMLs.

As a strand of 'new institutionalism', historical institutionalism is grounded in comparative politics and applied in particular to analyse public policy choices (see Steinmo et al., 1992). While historical institutionalism possesses certain main features, there are differences in emphases among 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). In terms of defining institutions, in contrast to perspectives stressing the informal features of institutions (Hall and Taylor, 1996), this framework emphasises their formal aspects. It understands 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). Within this perspective, institutions can condition both the likelihood of agency activity,

and the nature, forms and intensity of their activity. 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 of historical context when analysing institutional behaviour and institutional change. The concept of 'path dependence' holds that institutionalised commitments in the formative period of an institution or policy cycle can strongly influence subsequent decisions (Peters, 2012: 72–73). 'Path dependence' dynamics establish a trajectory that remains an enduring influence and constrains the scope for diversion from a set policy direction. This path 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 developed to give greater recognition to the potential for more gradual policy and institutional adaptation as a result of internal and external forces (Peters, 2012: 80–81).

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), to analyse the multi-level institutional factors and the structure-agency dynamics that impact upon language policy choices for RMLs, the framework focuses on five levels – local, sub-state, state, continental and the global.

The local and/or sub-state level

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.

At the local or sub-state level of analysis, the degree of decentralisation and the nature of formal powers determine the level of autonomy to adopt distinctive approaches to language policy. Of key importance is the division of powers between 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 and economy. For instance, policy choices are dependent on the degree to which legislative measures in relation to a language provide official status, and the type of language rights afforded to language speakers in their engagement with public, private or third sector bodies. The extent of fiscal autonomy may similarly structure decisions regarding financial support to programmes to promote a language.

The second dimension is the institutional development of governance arrangements relating to language policy. Associated aspects include the internal arrangements of governmental institutions for language policy, and coordination between linguistic policy and other domains that affect language policy. Another facet 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, organisational capacity and/or opportunity to 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 engagement.

The state level

At this level, the two main structural features are the constitutional framework and inter-governmental 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 inter-governmental relations on language policy choices may differ substantially. Of significance is the degree to which language policy decisions are taken within a context of formalised and institutionalised inter-governmental relations. Key issues are the nature of inter-governmental relations in areas relevant to RMLs, and prevalence of formalised bilateral or multilateral structures relating to language policy between different levels of government.

While domestic institutional contexts may be the prevailing influence shaping policy choices regarding RMLs, the international institutional context, distinguishing between continental and global levels, can also be significant.

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 (EU) may provide formal recognition, including within its institutional arrangements. Second, the EU may elaborate programmes of activity backed by finance that supports language promotion efforts. Third, it may act as a focal point for networks associated with RMLs. To the contrary, continental economic regimes may prompt the simplification and harmonisation of services offered in particular languages, thus limiting linguistic diversity. The relative impact on a specific language may depend on state structures. Contributing factors include 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.

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 precarious. For more secure language communities, such declarations may be little more than symbolic. The greatest institutional effect

is likely to be felt if states become signatories to agreements, with institutionalised commitments acting as a benchmark for both the state itself and for other RMLs. Second, RMLs may also benefit from recognition and external legitimacy in other states, either through the influence of diaspora or having official status in some cases. 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 explained above, the theory stresses how choices and institutionalised commitments in the formative phase of an institution or a policy cycle can strongly influence subsequent decisions, with 'path dependence' having the propensity to have an enduring influence on a policy direction. Two alternatives for different developmental trajectories were also outlined above: either critical junctures that are crucial moments of institutional change, or more gradual change in policy and institutional adaptation.

In applying the framework to analyse language policy choices regarding RMLs, domestic institutional environments at the state, sub-state and local levels are expected to be the predominant influences. Domestic institutional settings may reinforce and complement one another and generate a basis for wide-ranging policy interventions to support RMLs. The reverse may also apply, whereby different domestic institutional features and levels may be at odds with one another and constrain interventions. Overall, international level structures are expected to play a more limited role in structuring language policy choices. Nevertheless, interventions at these levels may provide an overarching framework that directly affects domestic institutional settings and influences state-level approaches, or the dynamic between the state and sub-state or local levels.

Language policy choices in Wales

The article now evaluates the strengths of this multi-level historical institutionalist framework by utilising it to analyse in detail language policy choices with regard to the Welsh language in Wales. The focus, therefore, is less on providing a rich empirical discussion of language policy in Wales and more on analysing the Welsh case in order to test the merits of the analytical framework. Wales is a valuable case as one of the most prominent European examples 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 19th century. According to the 2011 census, Welsh is spoken by 562,000 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' to linguistic minorities offered by the establishment of devolved legislatures (Williams, 2013a: 8).

The investigation differentiates between two periods: the first running from the 1960s to the National Assembly's establishment in 1999; and the second covering devolved government from 1999 to 2017. This division enables an analysis of whether the establishment of sub-state governance actually served, in historical institutionalist terms, as a 'critical juncture' in proactive Welsh language policy decisions. The empirical data on which the analysis is based was gathered as part of an ongoing programme of research by the authors focusing on the evolution of language policy governance in Wales (Jones and Lewis, 2019; Lewis and Royles, 2018; Royles, 2007). Primary methods employed include over 30

semi-structured interviews; analysis of key policy documents published by the UK Government, devolved Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities; analysis of primary materials by Welsh language civil society organisations, autobiographies and memoirs.

As context, the main institutional features of Welsh governance in the two periods examined are as follows. Distinct administrative devolution arrangements for Wales developed from the end of the 19th century. At their core was recognition of Welsh distinctiveness (Mitchell, 2009). This development expanded as decentralisation 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. Subsequently, 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 18 pre-defined policy areas. However, in 2011, the Assembly was granted full primary legislative powers in 20 areas. Levels of fiscal autonomy were comparatively low given the lack of tax-varying or borrowing powers and dependence 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 formed part of the initial responsibilities of the Welsh Office, providing 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' (Government of Wales Act, 1998), a wording considered as providing the Assembly with generous powers (Rawlings, 2003: 218).

Welsh administrative devolution and language policy

With respect to 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 developments 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 these policy choices.

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 language promotion policies in a range of domains. As regards the former, in the absence of explicit national-level planning, local government structures provided the basis for substantial growth in Welsh-medium schools in response to local demands. In this context, structure-agency interactions are apparent as parents exerted pressure on these structures and received support from elites at council level.[2] The impact of the party system in these circumstances was often less powerful, as Labour-controlled councils that tended to oppose these developments were transcended by consensus-building among 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 both within the new council's administration and externally in the locality. Signals of path dependence are evident. Internal practices stemming from earlier local governance structures influenced the trajectory, as did the work of a shadow council that facilitated language promotion. Achieving these aims was also contingent upon interrelationships between local government structures, the party system within which Plaid Cymru was strongly represented, and the agency of senior officers with a clear vision of the council's potential to facilitate linguistic change (Carlin, 2013). Despite the 1993 language act's attempts to create greater consistency in Welsh-medium service provision, council activity 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 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 decision to establish a consultative language committee, the Welsh Language Board, in 1988 to prepare voluntary protocols on Welsh language service provision paved the way for new language legislation. Later, the board created by the 1993 Act was granted a significant degree of autonomy and resulted in more extensive activity than initially envisaged. Also, it prompted a more systematic and proactive approach to language policy governance, contrasting with the more ad hoc and reactive approach that existed previously, evidenced by the board's work with statutory language schemes that aimed to institutionalise bilingual working practices. 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 'progressive and interventionist and became the cornerstone of subsequent Welsh language policy' (Edwards et al., 2011: 535).

Turning to state level structures, central government had a strong influence, characterised by a lack of understanding in Whitehall compounded by UK Government opposition throughout the 1980s to steps such as new language legislation. The implication of the constitutional framework is that Westminster passed legislation for Wales and the characteristics of the legislative process influenced the nature of the legislation. For instance, examples such as the Education Reform Act (1988) that led to compulsory teaching of Welsh[3] and the 1993 Welsh Language Act point to agency-structure interactions as they resulted from civil society external pressure and led to more closed joint working to achieve a compromise between key parliamentarians, policy elites in Wales and Conservative Ministers. The process was constrained by scrutiny of linguistic related legislation in an UK parliament unsupportive of language policies of this type. Lobbying

efforts advocating clauses to make Welsh an 'official language' and establish language rights did not succeed, particularly due to British constitutional framework aversion to such 'declaratory' statements. Finally, the impact of a nationalist party within the Westminster party system was more important than anticipated by the analytical framework, 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 reflects 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, reflected in Europe's influence on 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 programmes 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, similar in terms of its influence to that of the EU.

Language policy choices in post-devolution Wales

While the Welsh Language Board from the late 1980s onwards gradually prompted a more coordinated and planned approach to language policy in Wales, devolved government in 1999 enhanced this process. Key developments 1999–2015 are two-fold. First, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 accorded the language official status in Wales for the first time, led to the abolition of the Welsh Language Board and the establishment of the post of Welsh Language Commissioner. Second, three national language strategies established the Welsh Government's plans to maintain and grow the Welsh language (see Williams, 2013a). Once again, the multi-level institutional framework explains policy decisions initiated during this period.

At the local level, the main institutional factors conditioning language policy choices are 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, the main drivers of policy choices are the interactions between local government structures and the combined agency of local parent-led campaigns, some national coordination through organisations such as *Rhieni dros* Addysg *Gymraeg* and work by elites within councils. In terms of housing and planning, the increasing evidence of the impact of inward- and outward migration trends in parts of Wales heightened debate regarding the need for local authorities to integrate linguistic considerations into these policies.

Replicating education initiatives, the formal powers available to local authorities provided scope for some policy innovation during the process of preparing strategic local development plans and local housing strategies. However, evidence of innovation is most pronounced when structure-agency interactions build upon a precedent of innovation and high levels of Plaid Cymru representation supports active policy elites, particularly, once more, in Gwynedd.

At the sub-state level, of greater prominence post-devolution is the effect of the party system, alongside the influence of formal powers and the institutional development of governance arrangements. The party system was important in instigating a substantial amount of Welsh language policy activity, particularly during devolution's first term (1999–2003). Labour's minority administration enabled Plaid Cymru to use its political influence to ensure plenary debate on the prospects of the Welsh language. The outcome was passing a motion that committed the Assembly[4] to the ambitious objective of 'creating a bilingual Wales' and to committee-led policy reviews. The resulting reviews fed into the government's first national 2003 language strategy. Plaid Cymru's intervention during the Assembly's first term had a 'path dependent' influence on the direction of language policy choices. Early decisions set the main parameters for ensuing discussions (see Dafis, 2005: 261–262). The importance of agency also explains these developments. In addition to the party system allowing Plaid Cymru to exert influence over a minority Labour administration, key elected Plaid members such as Cynog Dafis held central party and Assembly committee roles and contributed to ensuring that the language was 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. When the committee reviews were announced, a section of the Welsh language civil society movement perceived an opportunity to push for stronger legislation. The call for a new Welsh language act featured in evidence submitted to the review by a number of prominent civil society actors, supported by key Plaid Cymru representatives serving on committees. However, such structure-agency interactions were initially countered by another structure-agency dynamic: the agency of key policy elites who did not support new legislation, the Assembly's constrained legislative powers and the cumbersome process of requesting primary legislation for Wales in Westminster. Combined, these undermined the case for new legislative measures and explain why new legislation was not a policy priority in the 2003 language strategy. Instead, other available policy levers within the devolved powers were preferred, particularly distributing greater public funding to support language promotion projects. Indeed, 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.

During the process that led to enacting the 2011 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, sub-state institutional arrangements combined with the Welsh party system emerge again as key institutional features driving language policy developments. By early 2006, calls for new language legislation had returned to the political agenda, with the original catalyst being a Welsh Government decision to abolish a series of arm's length public bodies, including the Welsh Language Board. This context prompted renewed public debate regarding Welsh language legislation. Furthermore, impetus was provided by extending the National Assembly's formal powers in 2007 to include limited primary legislative powers. Consequently, a broad consensus mobilised regarding the need for a new Welsh language act encompassing the main Welsh language civil society groups, each

opposition party, and significantly given its previous opposition, the Welsh Language Board. Labour had consistently opposed the need to substantially revise and strengthen the 1993 act. However, the party system's impact comes to the fore as on failing to secure a governing majority during the 2007 election under the semi-proportional electoral system, Labour's formal coalition agreement with Plaid included a commitment to use the Assembly's newly extended powers to introduce a new Welsh language measure. Such developments highlight the significance of coalition agreements as an institutional structure, alongside the party system as an institutional driver.

Turning to the state-level, understandably, relevant institutions do not appear as influential post-devolution, though state-level institutional dimensions continue to be apparent in conditioning 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 emerged as a key institutional factor with the 2011 legislation. Despite the declared intention of introducing legislation to 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.

Institutional structures at the continental and global levels also influence the direction of policy choices regarding the Welsh language post-devolution, particularly by informing Welsh Government civil servants approaches to language policy. For instance, building on earlier European RML networks, the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) was established in 2007, with its secretariat at the Welsh Language Board until 2012. The network provides a broader institutional context for, and informs, policy-making in Wales. Network engagement facilitates sub-state level officials to increase their personal links and awareness of policy interventions in support of RMLs in other locations (Jones and Lewis, 2019).

The role of international organisations and international charters or declarations are exemplified by the Council of Europe's Charter for RMLs, which was eventually ratified by the UK Government in 2000. Limited evidence suggests that some of the Charter clauses signed in relation to Welsh prompted civil society activity in areas such as media provision (Thomas, 2010).

Discussion

Applying the multi-level framework grounded in historical institutionalism to analyse the case of the Welsh language in Wales demonstrated its ability to inform a systematic assessment of the multi-level dimensions influencing policy choices in relation to RMLs. Analysis of the pre and post-1999 period confirmed that language policy decisions are influenced by structure-agency interactions at multiple levels of governance. The relative impact of each level is not static, and the configuration of institutional and agency interactions at particular levels that drive language policy choices also varies. Overall, the analysis highlighted that configurations of institutional-agency interactions are key to language policy decisions, with the party system often playing a pivotal role in facilitating these processes. Political devolution reduced the influence of state-level structures and opened up sub-state level opportunities for the party system, particularly in the context of the institutional structure of the Assembly's early period, to become more significant.

Alongside the agency of key individuals, these institutional structures prompted important developments in Welsh language policy post-devolution. Nevertheless, the Welsh case also illustrated 'path dependencies' in language policy from the pre-devolution period that continued to influence after 1999. As a result, despite the expectation that the formation of sub-state government would signify a crucial moment of institutional formation, the extent to which the Assembly's creation represented a 'critical juncture' can be questioned. Rather, the analysis stresses the impact of long-term continuities and asserts that language legislation may create language policy governance arrangements that act as 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 UK devolved government (Mitchell, 2009: 13–15) and the explanatory strengths of 'path dependence' within historical institutionalism.

The Welsh case pointed to two additional structural features to be afforded greater importance in the analytical framework. The first is the impact of the party system at the state level, as nationalist parties impacted upon language policy choices, particularly under conditions of limited sub-state autonomy. Second, the impact of Council of Europe initiatives is an additional institutional dimension that needs to be incorporated into the framework at the continental level.

In order to further test the significance and robustness of the framework, the article briefly investigates its ability to analyse language policy trajectories in other European cases. The aim is to assess the extent to which analysing these other cases affirms key features of the framework, its explanatory ability and adaptability in contrasting contexts. Consequently, we provide a preliminary examination of RML cases in France and Spain, based on a review of current literature. In these cases, RMLs vary in demographic health and levels of public recognition; and conditions such as transitions to democracy would be expected to serve as more convincing 'critical junctures' that influence language policy choices. Overall, the evidence points to the framework's ability to develop convincing explanations in different institutionalised contexts.

Examining RMLs in France and Spain confirms the impact of local and sub-state institutional features highlighted in the framework on language policy choices. At the local level, the division of powers, degree of fiscal autonomy and 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 Brittany involved in language promotion (particularly through education) within legislative constraints (Cole and Williams, 2004). Across cases, party systems play 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, strong commonalities can be observed in how institutional settings determine language policy choices. The extent of decentralisation, asymmetries of power and the nature of the party system at the sub-state level have a significant effect on language policy formation. Such features are evident when comparing RML policy choices for different languages within the same state (such as Corsica and Brittany in France), and in cases of the same language across state boundaries (between Catalonia and Northern Catalonia; Vernet and Pons, 2011). Catalonia and Valencia provide further evidence that points to the important interrelationship between the party system and the type of language legislation adopted. There is a clear contrast between the proactive language planning favoured by nationalists in Catalonia, and in Valencia the linguistic

'underplanning' of the socialist government, or the 'counterplanning' of the Partido Popular (Cardona, 2011). The crucial impact of agency-structure dynamics is also confirmed. Examples include individual politicians in Brittany capitalising on political bargaining and coalitions to increase regional funding for the Breton language, or the lack of leadership and senior buy-in for language policy initiatives in the Basque Country (Cole and Williams, 2004; Williams, 2013b: 109).

More broadly, these cases confirm regional government as an institutional focal point for language activism and advocacy in favour of distinctive approaches to language policy. Indeed, this situation appears relevant regardless of the degree of sub-state autonomy (for example, Cole and Williams, 2004). Breton or Euskera in France stress the importance of civil society organisations, particularly in the absence of meaningful RML policies (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011). Equally, the nature of sub-state institutional arrangements for language policy governance can be central to proactive language policy formation. This applies both in more advanced cases, such as the Directorate-General for Language Policy in Catalonia, and in less advanced cases. In Brittany, in the absence of sub-state statutory responsibility for language policy, semi-autonomous agencies such as Ofis ar Brezhonneg have acted as a key 'driver' for policy development (Óhlfearnáin, 2013). Similarly, in the absence of a supportive state language policy, in the French Basque territory, 'territorial institutionalization' unintendedly served as an institutional basis for developing language policy. Such processes have been promoted by institutional structures seeking to be open to civil society, thus empowering 'strategic coalitions' (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011).

Similarly, cases in France and Spain concur with the framework's state level structural features and underline their significance in determining RML policy trajectories, alongside the implications of historical contexts. In France, tight constraints on RML policies are deeply entwined with the formal constitutional framework. The long-standing positioning of the French language as fundamental to sovereignty and nation-building is perpetuated through legislation serving as an institutional dimension that, in the main, negatively impacts upon RMLs. In Spain, the formal constitutional framework, the 1978 Constitution, similarly reinforces Castilian (Mayans, 2011). Beyond this, some examples further affirm the potential importance of the party system at the state level as an institutional factor influencing language policy choices. For instance, some concessions in the Catalan case have been attributed to the importance of the Catalan nationalist Convergència i Unió to state government balance of power.

The Spanish case highlights the complex and multi-layered dimensions to understanding the role of historical development to institutional change. In the context of democratisation, affording six autonomous communities with scope for two official languages responded to historical systematic repression of regional languages. Such conditions can be understood as a critical juncture, albeit with varying consequences due to the impact of complex sub-state level interactions between institutional structures and agency, as discussed above. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances, historical trajectories can permeate language policy directions. Examples include the impact of the 1927–1936 revitalisation 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 framework. Among EU institutions, in its recognition of minority languages and minority rights, the European Parliament is posited as supporting minority languages and minority rights at the state and regional

levels (Stolfo, 2009: 41). The literature also reinforces the importance of networks in bolstering RML languages within the EU, with 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 that was less prominent in the Welsh case that complements the framework is the impact of language policies advocated by other sub-states. In the Breton case in particular there is ample evidence of citing best practice examples elsewhere in Europe as an institutional backdrop to policies advocated. Such examples serve 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 levels is French state level unwillingness to ratify UNESCO related conventions nor the European Charter on RMLs. Indeed, Cole and Harguindéguy (2013: 36) argue that 'non-recognition of international regulation for promoting regional languages strongly limits the efficiency of local arrangements'. Despite this, the Council of Europe Charter serves as a context for agencies within Brittany promoting bilingualism (Óhlfearnáin, 2013: 124), affirming its importance in cases of challenges to proactive language policy trajectories.

Conclusion

The article's focus was on elaborating a multi-level framework informed by historical institutionalism capable of analysing the institutional factors that condition the language policy choices of European RMLs. In doing so, it sought to contribute to efforts to apply political science perspectives to language policy analysis, particularly by contributing a framework to analyse the political origins of language policies that reflects the multi-level context that increasingly influences RMLs.

This article has demonstrated that applying a multi-level framework can provide a comprehensive understanding of language policy choices with respect to RMLs. Its 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 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 preliminary examination of RMLs in Spain and France confirmed the assertion that domestic institutional environments at the state, sub-state and local levels has 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 has a more powerful effect on the 'linguistic opportunity structure' (Cole and Harguindéguy, 2013).

Nevertheless, the article highlights that continental and global level structures create a broader context for domestic institutional dimensions and agency-structure dynamics. Its findings therefore support other accounts that emphasise the need to take into account both endogenous and exogenous factors in understanding the institutionalisation of language

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

Local political system	Sub-state political system	State structures	Continental regimes	Global systems level
Institutional variables				
Formal powers	Formal powers	Formal constitutional framework: - Written/ unwritten constitution - Role of court system	European Union: - Formal recognition of languages - European Union programmes and funding	International Treaties (e.g. UNESCO)
Institutional development of language policy governance	Institutional development of language policy governance	Intergovernmental relations	Continental Treaties: Council of Europe	Recognition and support from another state
Local party system	Regional party system	Representation of the sub-state parties in state party system	Regional government cooperation: - 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		

NGO: non-governmental organisations.

policy (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2011). In a Western European context, the analysis 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).

In addition, the empirical analyses drew attention to the way in which agency served important functions for specific policy developments, with structure-agency interactions having important effects, particularly the contribution of policy elites and elected politicians within specific 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).

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 issue, 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 further develop a distinctive political science approach to the study of contemporary language policy programmes and, through this, to establish language policy as a recognised field of public policy research.

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Notes

1. The Wales Act 2014 granted some limited borrowing and tax-varying powers.
2. Parents drew on the UK 1944 Education Act provision: 'Children shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents'.
3. The Education Reform Act 1988 symbolised the first statutory enforcement of Welsh in education by making Welsh a core curriculum subject and requiring its teaching in all schools in Wales between the ages 5 and 16.
4. During the early years of devolution, there was no formal legal distinction between the Assembly's legislature and executive. As a result, motions and policy committed the Assembly as a whole, as opposed to the government, to particular policy objectives. The Government of Wales Act (2006) confirmed the separation between the Assembly and the Welsh Government.

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