

Giving the wrong message: An example of erroneous Welsh signage from the private sector

Mr Siôn Rees Williams (John Paul II Catholic University, Lublin)

Since the passing of the *Welsh Language Act 1993*, there has been a growth in the visibility of public, corporate Welsh. Part of the newly available literature in that language includes company signage, hitherto monolingual English. The translation industry in Wales therefore has been booming. However, owing to the low number of professionals with the necessary language expertise available, many of these signs contain grammatical, lexical, phonological, morphological and other errors. Whilst these do not always correspond to well-established English mistakes as made by foreign users of that language such as, “taking advantage of hotel chambermaids by ringing the appropriate bell,” they are often just as absurd. Indeed, examples of complete unintelligibility or those offering potentially misleading or even dangerous information are often encountered in Welsh versions of such signs. They often display insufficient understanding of basic and key notions of Welsh grammar and/or the inability of translators in using dictionaries and other reference material correctly. This paper, related to a comprehensive case study of erroneous company literature, for instance in the forms of railway timetables and supermarket signs, highlights the communication process involved in the production of bilingual corporate signs in Wales. An appraisal of the individuals concerned in the supply chain of such written communication: *communicators* (those who decide on the message required to enable them to market their goods and services), *encryptors* (providers of the form the communicators’ message will take, and in a multilingual situation, amount to translators, *sign writers* (those who print the version of the message encrypted by the encryptor) and *consumers* (those for whom the message was initially intended and the information provided in order to make their purchase or make use of the service supplied). The effects of ‘noise’ or outside interference which has the capacity to distort the initial message at all stages in the signage production process are also considered. In addition, a detailed linguistic analysis of one such sign is conducted.