

WELSH AND DIVERSITY: WELSH DRAG QUEENS AND THEIR PERSPECTIVE ON THE ALL-WELSH RULE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the perspectives of Welsh-speaking drag performers regarding the National Eisteddfod and the All-Welsh Rule. We collected data from the participants using qualitative research methods by asking the performers about their opinion on strategies employed for linguistic revitalisation of Welsh, i.e. the National Eisteddfod of Wales and the All-Welsh Rule. The results of this study reveal that while the Eisteddfod is recognized for its role in preserving the Welsh language and culture, the All-Welsh Rule is viewed with more complexity. The participants acknowledge the Rule's protective function, but also consider it to be too restrictive and point to a need for its re-evaluation, thus providing the option for more artists to express their Welsh identity and perspectives within the Eisteddfod. This reveals a tension between preserving linguistic purity and fostering cultural diversity, particularly from the perspective of a minority within a minority. We show that the aforementioned opinions are to some extent parallel to the views of post-war period Welsh performers. We also argue that the notions of contemporary diversity and flexible bilingualism, as reflected in the opinions of modern drag performers, are at odds with the preserving function of the All-Welsh Rule. The results suggest a need for re-evaluation of the All-Welsh Rule to better accommodate diverse Welsh identities and encourage broader engagement with the language.

Keywords: linguistic revitalisation, linguistic obsolescence, bilingual, Welsh, drag, drag performer, Eisteddfod, All-Welsh Rule

1. Introduction

The National Eisteddfod is Wales's annual festival which focuses on the performing, literary and visual arts and the Welsh language. The event has its roots in ancient Celtic traditions, referencing past customs (Rhodes 2021: 558). The first known Eisteddfod dates back to 1176, when a musical and poetry competition was recorded in the court of Lord Rhys, with the winner receiving gifts from the lord. While the first Eisteddfod demonstrated the magnificence of Lord Rhys' court, the function of the subsequent events of this kind was to uphold the societal bardic order as well as artistic and linguistic standards (Davies 2016: 68). The Eisteddfod faced a decline in the 16th century due to Anglicisation but was revived by literati such as Iolo Morganwg, who at the end of the 18th century established the ceremonies of the event, alongside the Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain (today's Gorsedd Cymru). The historical legitimacy of the rites was fabricated by Morganwg, but their implementation was nonetheless effective in maintaining the Eisteddfod (Peate 1951:14). This led to the emergence of the modern National Eisteddfod in 1861. Nowadays it can be described as an annual festival that is held alternately in North and South Wales, hosting numerous Welsh language competitions and ceremonies.

Apart from its historical value, a defining element of the National Eisteddfod is that the festival is considered a bastion of Welsh culture. This is largely due to the so-called All-Welsh Rule, which prohibits the use of other languages in competitions and performances (Bernard 2004: 33). While the rule is effective in curbing the influence of English on Welsh within the festival's space, it has also been a source of controversy, notably in 2023 concerning the bilingual rapper Sage Todz, who withdrew from his performance after being asked to perform in Welsh only (BBC 2023). Sage is a member of an ethnic minority and much of the controversy revolved around this aspect. Although the artist's resignation was not a protest against the All-Welsh Rule, nor was the Rule a personal attack against him, the situation is interesting when considering the Rule's effects on minoritarian subjects within the Welsh-speaking community.

A minority group that could not only present the effect of the Rule, but also the relationship between diversity and Welsh culture, is the LGBTQ+ community. The opinions of this group are especially pertinent to this discussion, due to the perceived lack of inclusivity in Welsh rural areas, which affects the intersection of Welsh and queer identities (Morris and Parker 2025: 20). That is why the study focuses on queer performers specifically - while other performers such as bilingual musicians (e.g., Sage Todz) could also illustrate tensions with the All-Welsh Rule, an LGBTQ+ perspective allows one to investigate the ideas of inclusivity, cultural diversity, and representation within a minority-language community.

Keeping the Sage Todd controversy in mind, one might wonder how the expression of Welsh culture in regard to Welsh cultural festivals functions in the contemporary context, and whether the All-Welsh Rule agrees with the reality of a diverse culture. To offer a fresh perspective on the topic, the present study focuses on a group of Welsh-speaking drag queens, members of a minority group within a linguistic minority, and performers that preserve the language through their art. The term ‘drag queen’ refers to a performer who often exaggerates femininity and embodies various aspects of female gender identity. The definition of drag has evolved beyond simply crossing into the “opposite” of one’s “true” identity and instead embraces a broader spectrum of gender identities and expressions. In essence, a drag queen is part of the larger drag and gender performance community that challenges and critiques traditional gender norms and binaries (Rycenga et al. 2006: 30).

What is also necessary to establish are the ideas of separate and flexible bilingualism, which will be pertinent to the following discussion. In essence, separate bilingualism places focus on distinguishing and separating languages in bilingual contexts, while flexible bilingualism instead focuses on their synthesis (Creese 2011). The latter places the speaker at the centre of discussion, focusing on the transmission of ideas and maintaining linguistic purity as secondary. These concepts are prudent to the later analysis of the drag performers’ opinions.

All in all, the present article discusses the results of an ethnographic study on the opinions of Welsh-speaking drag performers regarding the National Eisteddfod and the All-Welsh Rule. Having experienced the Eisteddfod and Welsh culture first-hand, the participants provide interesting insights that showcase a conflicted relationship between tradition and diversity. Thus, this study explores how the contemporary idea of diversity intersects with the Welsh language and the strategies employed for its preservation. We argue that the notions of contemporary diversity and flexible bilingualism, as reflected in the opinions of modern drag performers, are at odds with the preserving function of the All-Welsh Rule.

The article addresses the following research questions:

- In what ways do the Welsh-speaking drag performers express their Welshness in their performances?
- What is their perspective on the National Eisteddfod and its impact on Welsh?
- What is their opinion on the impact of All-Welsh Rule on linguistic revitalisation?

2. The National Eisteddfod and the All-Welsh Rule

The 19th-century National Eisteddfod was originally more oriented towards the English-speaking audience than it is today. Due to the festival being an inherently Welsh tradition, the English influence faced natural opposition from Welsh nationalists. Many saw the Welsh language as necessary for an “authentic” sense of Welshness. The language was considered to distinguish Welsh speakers from other nations (Bernard 2004: 37), and so its integrity needed to be protected. The resulting pushback led to the implementation of the All-Welsh Rule in 1950. The Rule states that all competitions and ceremonies within the National Eisteddfod must be held exclusively in Welsh.

The main reason for the implementation of the All-Welsh Rule was protection. “This split of Welsh and English speakers was a conscious act on the part of the Eisteddfod Council in their attempt to secure a future for the Welsh language and culture; a difficult, and arguably patronizing, decision made to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number” (Bernard 2003). According to Welsh language commissioner Efa Gruffudd Jones (Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2024), the National Eisteddfod is the only place where Welsh can be spoken exclusively. In today’s bilingual Wales, which underwent a language shift in the past, and with the vulnerable position of Welsh the urge to protect the language is understandable.

After the introduction of the Rule, much discussion was sparked regarding the role of the National Eisteddfod. According to Bernard (2004: 34), the Rule was a marker of transition between an Anglicised Wales, and one that upholds its cultural and national independence. The main aim was to unite post-war Wales and safeguard the Welsh language (Bernard 2004). Despite this, arguments against the All-Welsh Rule were put forward as well. These voices feared that the Eisteddfod was becoming increasingly insular in nature and claimed that the language was not a central part of Welsh identity.

This fear of alienation and division of Welsh society is based on the idea that what happens within the National Eisteddfod reflects Wales as a whole. Davies (1997: 153) argued to the contrary, that “the National Eisteddfod is used for performances not of a single homogeneous and hegemonic Welshness but rather of alternative and often competing Welshnesses”. According to her, the festival performs a heterogeneous culture that cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the wider community of Wales. It is a performative space which is based on an ancient tradition but still has the potential to provide a unique culture, alternative to the mainstream. An analysis of this alternative culture is prudent to the discussion of language, since, as Jacqueline Urla writes in “Reclaiming Basque: Language, Nation and Cultural Activism”: “The cultivation of an expressive culture and popular registers happens in artistic and cultural creations. It happens in everyday life in the ferment of oppositional social currents within a richly

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varied civil society (Urla 2012: 236). She writes this in the context of Basque independent radios, but this can be extrapolated to a wider cultural discussion about diversity. These “oppositional currents” and artistic creations are vital to the development of a culture and a language, and thus are relevant to the context of Wales.

During the 1960s a number of Welsh pop bands began to appear. They were representatives of a youth culture providing a new perspective. Youth-based movements combined modern and traditional elements, like *penillion* singing and rock’n’roll (Herbert et al., 2022). An important marker of this development was the band Y Blew, who performed in 1967 at the National Eisteddfod, criticising more traditional, patriotic-oriented musicians. These pop-based performances and counterculture marked a shift within the cultural and performative sphere of the Eisteddfod. The tradition was reinterpreted by the youth, who originally saw Welsh as ‘uncool’ and wanted to give it a new, more approachable dimension. The performers referenced English culture but still appreciated their Welshness (Johnes 2012: 108). The All-Welsh Rule was introduced in order to unite Wales and preserve the language, which resulted in a shift towards a performative counterculture.

Currently, the Eisteddfod diversifies its space with initiatives such as the Learners’ categories for new speakers of Welsh, or *Mas ar y Maes* (“Out on the field”) programme for members of the LGBTQ+ community. This performative space is opened to many new potential experiences and voices representing alternative culture, such as Welsh-speaking drag performers. While not necessarily a youth-based movement like the ones in the 1960s, it is nonetheless a performance straying from the mainstream, this time with a queer aspect. These contemporary queer artists support Welsh culture, but as minoritarian subjects they also focus on its diversification. As such, they echo concerns regarding the All-Welsh rule from post-war times.

This queer perspective of drag performers provides a unique area of analysing Welsh culture. According to Jonathan Morris and Samuel Parker (2025: 20), rural areas of Wales are often perceived as more traditional. This, in addition with the dominance of English in LGBTQ+ culture, implies a perceived difficulty in synthesising Welsh and queer identities. Morris and Parker argue further, however, that this perception is “symptomatic of a feeling that LGBTQ+ speakers have not been adequately represented in Welsh-speaking culture, and that it is this lack of representation which impedes increased cohesion between these aspects of identity”. That is why the queer perspective will be utilised to analyse the Eisteddfod and Welsh used during it - a look at this perspective may reveal a clearer relationship between tradition and diversity.

3. Methodology

The current study uses qualitative analysis to examine the collected data. The method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to provide a deeper insight into the participants' perspectives and achieve more nuanced results. The interviews were conducted in English with six participants recruited online through snowball sampling (Gordon and Milroy 2003). To maintain a coherent research sample, all of the subjects were Welsh-speaking drag performers.

The data was collected through a short online questionnaire, filled out by the six participants. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the following aspects: demographic details, potential occupations outside of drag, and linguistic proficiency. The latter was self-assessed by the participants and transposed into the CEFR scale. The interviews were held online through MS Teams and Zoom and each took between 30 to 60 minutes. The questions asked during the interviews focused on the participants' relationship to Welsh, their upbringing, their awareness of language revitalisation, and their opinions on the National Eisteddfod and the All-Welsh rule. The interviews were transcribed into conversational turn and analysed to identify common themes and patterns through the methodology of content-based thematic analysis and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Thematic analysis was used to extract themes of diversity and queer perspective from the participants' answers, while grounded theory was implemented to form a probable conclusion regarding these themes through inductive reasoning. To maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a number.

It is worth acknowledging that the researchers are non-native Welsh speakers engaged in sociolinguistic research. This outsider status needs to be acknowledged as potentially affecting data analysis and interactions with the participants.

3.1. Demographic data

Table 1 presents information about the participants' age, place of origin, and self-perceived proficiency in Welsh and English based on the questionnaires.

Table 1. Demographic data

	Gender	Year of birth	Country of birth
Participant 1	Male	1997	Wales
Participant 2	Male	1997	Wales
Participant 3	Non-binary	1996	England
Participant 4	Male	2000	Wales
Participant 5	Queer	2002	Wales
Participant 6	Male	1980	Wales

The participants' age ranged from 22 to 44.

Table 2. Place of Welsh acquisition

	At school	At home
Participant 1	Yes	No
Participant 2	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	Yes	No
Participant 4	Yes	No
Participant 5	Yes	Yes
Participant 6	Yes	Yes

Table 2 illustrates where the participants acquired Welsh. Based on the interview data, three participants learned the language exclusively at school, and two were raised speaking it at home. All participants attended Welsh-medium schools. Additionally, one of the participants moved from England to Wales at the age of 5 and attended a Welsh-speaking primary school until the age of 11. The participant later completed their GCSEs with Welsh as their first language.

4. Study results

4.1. Expressing Welsh identity through drag

The initial open-ended questions were concerned with how the drag performers express their Welshness in their performances. The participants were asked to describe what elements they incorporate into their art, and how it relates to their identity as a Welsh person.

Participant 5 uses a Welsh name for their drag queen persona; the name is meant to represent chaos and disorganisation. The performer incorporates a provocative element into their performance, referencing “the Welsh language and

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the Welsh people having a long history of rebelling against people trying to diminish the language”. They express their own identity through the lens of historical Welsh rebellion, using elements related to the Rebecca Riots to express their own non-conforming self:

So whenever I get on stage, there’s a little bit of Welsh in there anyway. But, I think because my drag is rooted in, like, Welsh-Welsh, MY Welshness...(Participant 5)

Another example of Welsh culture represented within the drag performances is the so-called “Welsh Mam,” described by several of the interviewed drag queens. Participant 1 summarises the characteristics of this archetypal mother:

Growing up in the valleys. Like, we have that stereotypical “Welsh Mam” who’s like everyone’s mother. Like, she doesn’t have to be related. She’ll look after everyone. She’s got this type of humour. She’s that sort of one that, you know, wants to look after you type of vibe...(Participant 1)

Participant 6 also adopts this archetype. He is older than most other performances, and as such he quite naturally takes on the role of a “mother figure”.

I’m totally at peace with that [being the oldest in the group and being seen as a mother figure], because when we’re discussing the performance, I’m very much in touch with everyone to say, “Are we all comfortable? Are we all happy? Anybody got any questions? If you’re worried about anything, let me know, because I’d rather you get in touch with me and share your worries rather than get to the day and drop out, cause you’re too worried”. (Participant 6)

Drag queens often have “drag mothers”, which can be defined as more experienced members of the community, mentoring younger performers (Rupp 2003). The “Welsh Mam” is a traditional element, which manifests in a more modern, redefined form. Through the performers, their personas and non-discriminating mentorship, the Mam intertwines with the archetypal parts of drag culture, providing it with a revitalised, expanded dimension.

Aside from such character-related concepts, the participants said they also express their stances through the language used in their art. They all implement the Welsh language to some extent, be it single words or whole performances. Participant 2 mentions dancing to traditional Welsh songs:

I always like to bring in... How would you call it? The old talk, like Celtic Welsh songs that everyone knows? Do you know what I mean?

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And I think, yeah, that's how I sort of tie my drag in with the Welsh theme as well. [...] I'm gonna get more confident, I'm gonna get more songs, tracks and just try and bring in a lot of the culture that's what I want to do more of. (Participant 2)

Participant 6 also performs English pop songs, translating them “usually quite badly on purpose” into Welsh. He takes the position of a liminal, bilingual person, connecting three fields – Welsh, English, and drag. This time a Welsh-language performance is somewhat alternated by an addition of global pop-culture elements, yet still maintains its core Welsh identity (the participant gives the example of using names of Welsh celebrities in his translations):

So I perform Madonna's *Vogue*, but with a rap in the middle I use all the names of, like, Welsh language celebrities. Which is really stupid. But people love it, and it's really fun. And it's all about finding what's, what's unique about Welsh culture that I can laugh at, celebrate, popularise, share. [...] I like to celebrate that, laugh at the differences between English-speaking culture, and Welsh-speaking culture. Just make it fun and silly. (Participant 6)

While the performances described stem from an appreciation of the culture, they all have an inherent rebellious aspect that manifests through the participants' unique blend of tradition and queerness. The traditional elements of Welsh culture are juxtaposed with the perspectives of a modern audience. Participant 4 even claimed that “the Welsh drag is kind of a protest against Welshness in its way as well, even though we are celebrating Welsh culture.”

This perspective seems to be a contemporary reflection of the attitudes of the youth and Welsh pop bands in the 1960s. The counterculture was originally a way of protesting the traditional and shifting the Eisteddfod to a more appealing form. A similar sentiment can be observed in the findings of this study, although this time it is additionally seen through the queer, minoritarian lens of the drag performers.

All of the participants can be considered to take part in the process of disidentification. This term can be broadly defined as performances that minoritarian subjects engage in to survive within inhospitable spaces – spaces often shaped by the forces of white, heterosexual supremacy, while nevertheless working to subvert them (Muñoz 1999). Such disidentification is based on reinterpreting previous traditional concepts in order to empower them in a new context, such as the Welsh Mam being intertwined with the archetypal drag mother.

Such disidentification and rebellion of queer culture are used to express a complex, liminal identity as both a drag performer and a bilingual Welsh speaker. Such complexity maps onto the idea of perceived traditionality of rural Wales,

and the emerging tension with a queer perspective. This dual, minoritarian perspective (of a queer minority within a Welsh minority) not only provides a unique, diverse outlook on traditional culture, but also affects the performers' opinions on the Eisteddfod and the rules governing it.

4.2. Attitudes towards the Eisteddfod and Welsh revitalisation

As an introduction to the drag performers' opinions regarding the National Eisteddfod, they were asked to point to any other language revitalisation tactics. Three of the participants (1, 4, and 6) mentioned the Cymraeg 2050 scheme. With the exception of Participant 3, the performers referenced mostly cultural elements such as the Eisteddfod but did not focus on the role of governmental initiatives, such as school environments. Overall, school as a revitalising effort was considered a less exciting part of a Welsh upbringing, often met with resistance during the teenage years.

So, growing up in the valleys, because there wasn't a lot of Welsh being used or spoken outside of school, a lot of us just decided not to speak it because we were just, we just saw it as a language we only had to speak in school, if that makes sense. Like, there weren't many opportunities for us to use it outside of school. (Participant 1)

But I think when you're a teenager you want to rebel a bit and a lot of teenagers have friends outside of Welsh language education that speak English. So in high school, it's very regimented that you speak Welsh at all times and I think a lot of people don't want to do that because it seems a bit uncool. So I remember in high school, there'd be a lot of people who purposely would not speak Welsh because it's a burden or they feel that they have to. I don't think, and they didn't really relate to that. I think sometimes it's the way that it is taught. Is a bit like you have to do it and you have to get it right. Which it's not the right approach in my opinion. (Participant 5)

These views reflect a common experience among people going through Welsh education, who may be successfully taught the language, but often lack the incentives to use it among their bilingual or English-speaking peers. As observed by Owen (2018: 34), Welsh-medium education "produces twice as many speakers as the family. However, the apparent success of the system in creating more Welsh speakers has not been matched by an increase in social use by young people outside the classroom".

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When asked whether they viewed their art as contributing to language revitalisation, many of the participants expressed an awareness of their own impact on Welsh.

I'd really, really like to think that it [his work in the world of drag] does. It is one of my intentions to make people feel empowered that they can use Welsh, that the Welsh language can belong to them. (Participant 6)

100%. I think drag in any form is activism, and then especially to do it in Welsh. (Participant 4)

I'd never thought of it, but absolutely! Like, it's giving is giving the Welsh language another platform, like, it's it's getting out there to a community that wouldn't have necessarily have thought about it like that, like, and you know and it is, it's giving a very probably a very niche group of people somewhere like another, another community, another safe space. (Participant 3)

As to the participants' opinion on the National Eisteddfod itself, they all recognised its impact on cultural and linguistic maintenance. Five participants had a positive outlook on the event. Participant 5 had an Eisteddfod-centric upbringing, and their opinion reflects that:

I think it's brilliant. I mean, I'm, I'm always in awe that it's still going because I think it's, like, one of the oldest culture festivals in Europe. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 highlights it as an important part of being Welsh. Since their job involves working with young children, they also notice a dimension of revitalisation connected with the younger generations, with the Eisteddfod providing entertainment for them:

The National Eisteddfod, well, you know, it brings everyone together. [...] it is wonderful to see everything so celebrated. And a lot of our kids, a lot of the kids, I work in the nursery. We'll go to the Eisteddfod for a few days, like, it doesn't matter where it is in the country [...] we're going for a few days. There's a lot put on for the younger generation. You know, for younger kids, because they, you know, they have those characters and stuff now, um, S4C and those kinds of things have done very, very well cultivating these Welsh language characters and, and getting it, getting it strong, getting out there. [...] Yeah, I think it's, it's a very important part of, of Welsh at this point, and of being Welsh. (Participant 3)

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Participant 2 recognizes the Eisteddfod as a necessary element of Welsh culture but believes that the environment there is not catered towards learners and needs a change:

Yeah, I think it's a tough one really because it's nice to bring everyone together and speak Welsh but also I've noticed in the past that they can somewhat... Slightly be judgmental towards people who don't know Welsh and don't quite understand it. So it's almost like, you know, have these people who want to come in and learn Welsh but it's like, they don't want really want them... do you know what I mean? So you've got these people who want to know Welsh but it's like, because you don't know Welsh you can't join in and do what we're doing. So I think they need to meet halfway, if that makes sense. (Participant 2)

This point is slightly counterbalanced by a fact brought up by Participant 3, who believes that the implementation of learners' categories is a concept certainly designed to include rather than exclude:

But then that's, I think that's why they've brought in, what is it, they, they brought in the learners categories and that does make it a lot more accessible but then, yeah, they haven't changed anything else. But you know, for some people it will be encouraging them to improve in order to get to that level. But then you do also see, like the same people, winning the same things year after year. But you can see that in all competitions with that, you know, like yearly competitions and no one complains about that. Like you, you appreciate the work that they put in, or you know how hard it is to achieve that like, it's not necessarily supposed to be easy. (Participant 3)

As to the other participants, Participant 1 moved away from the strictly language-related aspects of the Eisteddfod, and highlighted its cultural aspect, drawing a connection between Welshness and queerness:

I mean, growing up with the Eisteddfod, the Eisteddfod was like the biggest cultural thing ever and it's like culture is very much important when it comes to stuff, like, being Welsh and being queer because with me [gesturing] being Welsh and being queer those are my big two like cultural things. (Participant 1)

He claims that he would see himself "represented as a Welsh person in the Eisteddfod" but he would never see himself "represented in a queer aspect" but that this "has changed in recent years" (Participant 1). Both Participant 1 and Participant 6 consider the Eisteddfod as currently connecting queer and Welsh cultures. They

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mention *Mas ar y Maes*, an innovative collaboration between the LGBTQ+ community, Stonewall Cymru, and the Eisteddfod with a diverse range of events. These initiatives demonstrate the direct LGBTQ+ presence at the National Eisteddfod, since the events take place “on the [main] field” (Participant 6).

So I love the National Eisteddfod. It's something I've been going to for many years. There are elements of it which are very traditional. [...] I can see the, the conflict between wanting to hold onto tradition, but also the needs to bring things into modern times. So at the National Eisteddfod you've now got scheme or group, or I'm not sure how to describe it... Really, it's called *Mas ar y Maes*, which means out on the field or out on the, on yeah, on the field, really. And it means that there's an LGBTQ presence at the National Eisteddfod. They organise events on the main field. So it's, it's not a, it's not really as a fringe scheme hidden away. It's happening there on the field unashamedly. (Participant 6)

Participant 4 had a more critical outlook. They do appreciate the Eisteddfod, and recognise its importance, but point to the traditionality affecting the culture at the festival.

I appreciate it for all its traditions, and how it is such a celebration of Wales and its culture and the language, and I like how they are very pure about it, but then, again. They have a two-sided coin where they are so traditional that they don't always allow space for new generations to come up with their interests and stuff, and they have got better in the past couple of years, like in the past five years, they have really tried to be very inclusive but as an event it's more so the people that go rather than the organisers. (Participant 4)

The findings showcase that the participants broadly consider the Eisteddfod as having a noticeable revitalising impact. They underline the importance of appealing to the younger generations and new speakers. They also point to the LGBTQ+ community being present at the festival, e.g. thanks to the *Mas ar y Maes*. These findings map onto claims of Jonathan Morris and Samuel Parker, who find that “LGBTQ+ speakers of Welsh are more visible than in the past, and that this was a positive development which reduces feelings of being ‘alone’.” (2025: 20) The introduction of these queer drag artists can be considered to be a marker of diversity and a contemporary development of the Eisteddfod's traditional culture. This is valuable, because a greater sense of belonging among the queer speakers can increase “the vibrancy of Welsh-language communities and culture in the context of language revitalisation.” (Morris and Parker, 2025: 20)

4.3. Attitudes towards the All-Welsh Rule

While the participants expressed views ranging from positive to conflicted about the Eisteddfod, their opinions on the All-Welsh Rule were more varied. As with the event itself, the impact of the rule was recognised but also met with critique.

The most positive outlook on the Rule was provided by Participant 3. They seemed to give the Rule credit for its strictness and described the Eisteddfod as an ultimate “test of Welsh language”. They mention a situation where they worked at the Eisteddfod after not having spoken Welsh for a year and the environment at the event pushed them to get back into practice, which they appreciate:

I feel like my Welsh has gotten better this week, because it's had to. All the all have been speaking Welsh to me, and you know and that's the thing. Just because I said like, Oh, my God, my Welsh isn't doing very well they didn't stop, they didn't stop speaking Welsh to me. They're like “We are at the Eisteddfod we are speaking Welsh. Catch up.” (Participant 3)

Participant 3 is still somewhat conflicted about the Rule, describing it as “old-school” but they still consider it as part of a tradition. They even compare the National Eisteddfod to the Kardashians reality show, saying that it's “not supposed to be real life,” but rather a higher, almost unattainable standard.

So maybe it could be changed to be a bit more welcoming. But [...] I get it as a tradition. I get it as it's [...] supposed to be holding up a standard, you know, almost like keeping up traditions. [...] I think I have like very conflicted feelings about it, is what I'm really saying? (Participant 3)

Participants 5 and 6 also expressed an understanding of the Rule's implementation and acknowledged its role in linguistic preservation.

It's the whole point of the festival is it originated as an All-Welsh thing and it's very precious and it's an old tradition. (Participant 5)

There's a part of me which completely understands, and which thinks well. Yes, we have one week of the year, one week of the, one festival which celebrates in a really joyous way everything the language has to offer, all that Welsh language culture encompasses, which is the music, which is the dance, which is the comedy, the poetry. All the things which come quite uniquely with Welsh language culture, and so that All-Welsh, Welsh only rule I completely understand and appreciate. (Participant 6)

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The participants also provided opinions relating to contemporary complications. Participant 6 claims that “Saying that everything has to be purely in Welsh can present problems when we try to deal with the modern world. The modern world around us is very bilingual.” This bilingualism is faced with rejection in the performance setting of the Eisteddfod, due to the All-Welsh rule and the event’s historical context. As Participant 6 further puts it, “[the Welsh language] has been put down so much (...) that we’re very, very protective of it. And then, when people see us being very protective they think that we’re being snobbish and, and exclusionary. But it, it’s much deeper than that.”

Participant 1 had a personal connection to the topic, since he revealed that he is a friend of Sage Todz, the rapper disallowed from performing since he had English lyrics in his songs, which was a source of heated discussion surrounding the All-Welsh rule.

[...] how I see it is that... I guess it’s always been like that, and I guess if they tweak it for someone, they’ll have to tweak it for everyone. But how I sort of see it is that, you know, Sage Todz is one of the biggest Welsh language artists in Wales at the moment, and for them to not allow him to perform in the biggest Welsh cultural festival in Wales... I did think it was a bit wrong. Like, yeah, the stuff that he has done for the Welsh language is so much more than what other people have done. So I think that we should celebrate him in the Eisteddfod. (Participant 1)

Additionally, Participant 1 brings up the stance that “although the Eisteddfod is all about Welsh language, it is about Welsh culture as well”:

[...] this is not Welsh culture because it’s not in Welsh. Does that make sense? I think, yeah, that’s my point. Like, we can’t gatekeep when it comes to the Welsh language. If we want more people to speak Welsh, we need to be more inclusive to people who are interested in the Welsh language, instead [gesturing] of pushing them and scaring them away (Participant 1)

Participant 1 values the overall expression of Welsh culture over any form of linguistic purity imposed by the All-Welsh rule. He points out that the Eisteddfod is supposed to encompass many aspects of Wales, and with the festival having a rule that excludes such influential artists as Sage Todz, it contradicts that idea. Participant 1 does not discredit Welsh as being important, saying he would like to see it spoken more, but he focuses on the concept of comfort while speaking, being more inclusive and not gatekeeping. In their opinion, the All-Welsh Rule, through an overbearing need to maintain the Welsh language, inhibits other forms of culture.

Participant 5 had a similar outlook on the situation, providing another example of non-inclusivity. They also recognise the prevalence of the Rule at the Eisteddfod, but they provide a negative opinion since they also know people who were wronged by its strictness.

I've also had this experience so I was there, mmm... it was two years ago performing in the show and then this group from Cardiff. Do you know the Welsh Ballroom Community? [...] It's like people who are marginalised and who are predominantly not white, but there are white people in the scene obviously. That kind of originated as a way for underrepresented people who are discriminated against. So LGBT people, people of colour, trans people to feel lifted and to win awards for it. [...] It's very, it's a big part of queer culture and history. But, the Welsh Ballroom Community were invited to do an event at the National Eisteddfod two years ago and none of them speak Welsh and they did speak English on the stage and they were thrashed for it. And it was, it was awful. I remember because the actual event was a hit, everyone loved it, but I believe organisers of the Eisteddfod and some other arseholes who attended the Eisteddfod were like thrashing them saying how dare they bring this English to the stages is disgusting- [...] They're so talented and they've done so they've contributed so much to Welsh culture as it is today. In the queer sense and the POC people, like it's insane the contributions they've made and it blows my mind that just because they can't speak Welsh they can't perform in a Welsh culture festival. There needs to be some sort of evaluation of their morals, I think, or beliefs in the sense of inclusivity, because if you don't include these people it makes Wales look like an all-white very gatekeepy, protective place, which in a sense it is, which is a shame because it should be open to everyone. Yeah, it's difficult. But I believe there should be some different choices made on their part. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 is also of the opinion that Welsh culture is not only the language and that its uniqueness and diversity shouldn't be restricted by the All-Welsh rule. According to the performer, the presence of the Ballroom Community at the Eisteddfod could be considered a mark of agreement between the traditional and the modern.

Participant 4 restates Participant 3's point by saying that the All-Welsh Rule makes the Eisteddfod "the utmost celebration of Welsh language" but it is too strict and exclusive. According to this participant, this creates a contradictory and counterproductive nature of the event, which forms an atmosphere of being inviting and friendly to new speakers, while at the same time pushing them away.

I understand why it's there, and I almost like it to a certain extent, because that's what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be the utmost

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celebration of the Welsh language. But when it's such a strict rule to a point when it's making the event not inclusive. Then I just think it's counterproductive because you're not making a space for people to want to learn Welsh, or even be able to, because if you are saying, then it's a pure Welsh language rule. So the way that I kind of look at it. Is that anything that the Eisteddfod put out that has to be in the Welsh language. But the Eisteddfod is a place for all, like please come, learn, talk to me in not the best Welsh, because I will still have a chat with you, and it you and opportunity to practise, and you never know who you could inspire with it, you know. So yeah, it's tricky, like, if you want to value tradition, I suppose. But if it's not inclusive, then you're kind of being counterproductive. (Participant 4)

Participant 6 provided another example of exclusion diminishing a form of artistic expression.

I heard of a writer, I know, who'd written a play which hadn't been read by the staff of the National Eisteddfod until the day it was being performed, at which point staff told the company, you're not allowed to perform this because there's too much English. And so they were left with a dilemma. I think what they had to do is take the audience out of the established field and perform it just outside. (Participant 6)

These results indicate that the Welsh-speaking drag performers value being inclusive and showcasing Welsh culture over maintaining linguistic integrity. Once again a similarity can be found between these arguments and those made after the All-Welsh Rule was first introduced (Bernard 2004). However, it can be inferred that the opinions cited above are also influenced by the queer perspective of the artists. Many members of the LGBTQ+ community have undoubtedly experienced rejection by mainstream culture. One example was provided by Participant 5 talking about reactions to their performance:

I did a Welsh language story time, drag story time two years ago. I think I was the first drag act to do it in Welsh and I was very proud of it, but then I got slated online because I was an attack on the Welsh culture. I was called a paedophile. I was called all sorts of things. It was, yeah, it was grim. I think the Eisteddfod is great for what it stands for and its history. It's a big part of Welsh history, but there need to be steps made and doors opened to let – and attitudes changed as well – for everyone to be a part of it, whether you speak Welsh or not. (Participant 5)

This story illustrates the exclusion and hostility often experienced by queer people in a more general context. It is worth noting that such hostility is not noticeably present at the Eisteddfod itself (considering e.g. *Mas ar y Maes*), and

the All-Welsh Rule is not at all targeted against specific groups. However, it is still understandable why the drag performers are sceptical towards the rule. Their perspective is most likely motivated by an inclusive mindset, viewing most forms of exclusion – including the inherently exclusive rule – as something harmful.

The opinions of the drag performers seem to map onto the idea of flexible bilingualism as well. The focus on inclusion and a disregard for language purity “stresses individual agency” and “captures the heteroglossic nature of [bilingual] communication (Creese 2011). In essence, language becomes secondary to the individual using it, relating flexible bilingualism to an LGBTQ+ perspective. English terms are often more readily accessible for expressing queer experiences (Morris and Parker 2025: 20) - making Welsh not to be perceived as wholly adequate for a queer bilingual speaker.

As noted before, the drag performers acknowledge the protective function of the All-Welsh Rule, but they also speak from the experience of a minority within a minority. Welsh speakers, as a minority, had to protect their one strictly Welsh-speaking space through a radical method, which protects the language but excludes the bilingual elements of the culture – a fact that the drag performers would prefer to avoid. Our findings suggest that the general exclusion experienced by members of the queer community might motivate them to cautiously approach intrinsically limiting concepts like the All-Welsh Rule. The results also point to the fact that the participants focus less on the linguistic function of the Eisteddfod and value cultural diversity more.

The interviewed drag performers embody a multitude of conflicting identities – being bilingual, a Welsh speaker, and a queer person. They wish to appreciate Wales and its culture through the Eisteddfod and their performances. A rule that inhibits expression and diversity warrants a critical reaction from these artists. Like Y Blew and similar bands in the 1960s, modern drag queens wish to enrich their culture, even if it compromises linguistic unity and brings back bilingual environments. Linguistic revitalisation also requires new speakers to be effective and out-reaching; showing diversity within a strictly Welsh-speaking landscape might be a way to influence younger generations and new speakers, presenting the language as not wholly traditional and “old-school.”

While the discussion surrounding the All-Welsh Rule has been going on for decades, the voices of these drag performers need to be considered within the larger context of Welsh revitalisation. The discussion seems to still revolve around culture vs language, and how one can inhibit the other. The participants point to a more inclusive solution, calling for the Rule to at least be reevaluated, either through a referendum or direct discussions with the National Eisteddfod organisers, thus providing the option for more artists to express their Welsh identity and perspectives within the Eisteddfod.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the study set out to analyse the perspectives of Welsh-speaking drag performers regarding the National Eisteddfod and the All-Welsh Rule. We argued that these perspectives point to a conflict between the modern context of Welsh and the initiatives used to maintain the language. The study does not provide an exhaustive account of perspectives and opinions of a larger populace. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary landscape, the questions raised in this article should be revisited in relation to other contemporary Welsh-speaking performers. Notwithstanding the limited sample, this work still adds valuable insight into the topic.

The results of this study suggest that the opinions of modern drag performers are to some extent parallel to the views of post-war period Welsh performers. This shows that the discourse has been continuing for the past decades, or at least that it has resurfaced in the contemporary context. The answers provided by the participants support the idea of the National Eisteddfod being used to preserve the Welsh language. The All-Welsh Rule is similarly acknowledged but also critiqued for its strictness and cultural inhibition. While the opinions regarding the National Eisteddfod mirror those of the counterculture era, the perspective of the drag performers adds a new dimension to the discussion. The nature of 1960s pop bands can be considered to be motivated by youth rebellion, or fighting off a stagnant, “un-cool” culture. The drag performers enhance this sentiment with their queer perspective, pointing to the idea of inclusivity which they associate with bilingualism. They express their perspective through disidentifying performances, both appreciating the tradition of Wales and invigorating it with contemporary, bilingual elements.

The analysis of the drag performers’ opinions shows that the All-Welsh Rule still evokes controversy. The participants highlight the bilingualism of the contemporary world and provide examples of the Rule excluding due to its protective function. The queer perspective references the theme of flexible bilingualism, prioritising the speaker over linguistic purity. The contrived nature of the event is apparent, where attempts to appeal to more diverse audiences is in conflict with the Rule. There is, therefore, a need for the re-evaluation of the National Eisteddfod’s priorities. The festival is considered by many to be the only space where Welsh can be spoken exclusively. It is worth considering, however, whether the All-Welsh Rule in its current form is beneficial not only to the preservation of the Welsh language, but to the development of Welsh culture as well.

As mentioned before, Davies (1997: 153) claimed that the National Eisteddfod, as an alternative performative space, does not necessarily represent the cultural and linguistic landscape of Wales as a whole. The drag performers already perform an alternative Welshness, one that calls back to traditional

roots, and often includes bilingual elements. As such, reconsidering the strictness of the All-Welsh Rule might once again expose the National Eisteddfod to the influence of English, but might also widen the appeal of the Welsh language. This approach could contribute significantly to linguistic revitalization by encouraging Welsh speakers from marginalized groups and younger generations to engage more actively in the language usage and Welsh language media, while it would also give voice to a wider array of Welsh perspectives. However, this comes with the potential drawback of compromising the linguistic integrity of the festival.

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