The use of Welsh on Social Networking Sites

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The advent of the Internet and Social Network Sites can be seen by those interested in minority languages as both a threat and an opportunity to languages maintenance. Krauss (1992) famously described electronic media, and especially television, as what he called *"cultural nerve gas"*, due to its deadly effect on language mortality. However, others (e.g. Crystal, 2000, Cunliffe, 2009) see the possibility of using the Internet and electronic technology as a tool to strengthen linguistic communities and revive weakened languages by providing networks of support for fluent speakers and learners alike.

One important aspect of Internet usage is the prevalence of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, Bebo and Myspace which have become increasingly popular amongst the public, and especially with the younger generation (Ofcom, 2008). Considering that language use among young people is seen as an area of particular importance (Morris, 2010) for minority language maintenance, the prevalence of these Social Networking Sites as a means of communication become significant. As a result, the use of minority languages on the Internet by young people is an important area of research.

This paper will concentrate on recent research conducted by Cunliffe, Morris and Prys (forthcoming) into the online use of Welsh and English on Social Networking Sites by pupils in 4 Welsh medium secondary schools in Wales. Findings of the research project will be discussed in the broader context of their implications for other minority languages.