Marta Listewnik
Centre for Celtic Studies
Faculty of English
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

A fo bont, bid ben: power and ownership in debates on renaming Second Severn Crossing and the National Assembly for Wales

The presentation will explore two cases of renaming significant places in Wales by analyzing discourse in traditional and social media and relating it to the concept of post-colonial location (Nash 2016). Two different dimensions of linguistic landscape are represented here since in the first case the place name functions mostly as a written sign displayed in public space, while in the second case the name denotes both the actual place and the institution it represents.

The first of the considered discussions was ignited in April 2018 by the UK government's decision to change the name of what had previously been known as the Second Severn Crossing (over the river between Wales and England) to the "Prince of Wales Bridge", in order to celebrate the 70th birthday of Prince Charles. This decision, taken without prior consultation with Welsh citizens, caused a public uproar and disputes among politicians as well as in mainstream, local and social media. The debate over the bridge revolved around issues characteristic of post-colonial discourse, such as relations of power, collective memory and ownership (Nash 2016). As the name of the bridge was eventually changed to this name proposed, discussions ceased for some time, only to reemerge during another debate over a suggestion by the National Assembly for Wales to change its official name to "Senedd". This time, the controversial proposal concerned making the new name bilingual, which was supposed to make the place more inclusive towards non-Welsh speakers. Opponents of this idea, on the other hand, opted for a monolingual Welsh name, which would serve as an identity marker and a symbol strengthening the status of the Welsh language.

This paper will show that, in both cases, attempts to manipulate the linguistic landscape reveal political and social tensions within Welsh society and expose issues concerning Welsh identity, along the lines of "Welsh speaking" vs. "non-Welsh speaking citizens", "royalists" vs. "republicans", etc. Thus the language used to designate a placename and its meaning both have an important symbolic role to play and furthermore are instrumental in shaping a distinct Welsh identity (Hornsby and Vigers 2012).

References:

Hornsby, Michael and Vigers, Dick. 2012. "Minority Semiotic Lanscapes – An Ideological Minefield?", in: Durk Gorter, Heiko F. Marten and Luk van Mensel, (eds.) *Minority Languages in the Linguistic Landscape*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 57-73.

Nash, Catherine. 2016. Irish Place Names: Post-colonial locations, in: Lawrence D. Berg and Jani Vualteenaho (eds*.). Critical Toponymies: The contested politics of place naming*. New York: Routledge, p. 137-152.