

## 'A fire that's burning again': Welsh language resurges thanks to adult learners

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

##### a. Read the quote and discuss the questions.

*"Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going." - Rita Mae Brown*

1. What do you think Brown means by this quote? Do you agree?
2. How much do you think language and culture are connected?
3. Are there any ideas that cannot be directly translated?
4. Do you think it's important to maintain languages that are spoken by few people? Why?

#### 2 Key words

##### a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

established  
considerably  
bilingual  
consistent

dialects  
encountered  
compulsory  
executive

heritage  
influx  
partially  
households

residential  
stable  
vulnerable  
intervention

1. \_\_\_\_\_: using two languages
2. \_\_\_\_\_: the person in charge of running an organisation
3. \_\_\_\_\_: not completely
4. \_\_\_\_\_: staying mostly the same
5. \_\_\_\_\_: continuing in the same steady way
6. \_\_\_\_\_: different regional forms of the same language
7. \_\_\_\_\_: the history, culture, and traditions passed down from the past
8. \_\_\_\_\_: the arrival of a large number of people
9. \_\_\_\_\_: action taken to improve a situation
10. \_\_\_\_\_: more at risk of being harmed or weakened

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11. \_\_\_\_\_: met or came across
12. \_\_\_\_\_: started officially or set up
13. \_\_\_\_\_: involving staying and learning in a place for a period of time
14. \_\_\_\_\_: by a lot
15. \_\_\_\_\_: required; not optional
16. \_\_\_\_\_: homes; the people living together in one home

#### b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Attendance is \_\_\_\_\_ for all first-year students.
2. The number of applicants increased \_\_\_\_\_ after the campaign.
3. I \_\_\_\_\_ several people with similar experiences during the course.
4. The town's decline was \_\_\_\_\_ caused by a lack of jobs.
5. Even native speakers sometimes use different \_\_\_\_\_ depending on where they are from.
6. She grew up in a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ home, so switching between Spanish and English felt natural.
7. Prices have stayed \_\_\_\_\_ over the last few months.
8. Many \_\_\_\_\_ are finding it harder to cover basic costs.
9. The government announced a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ to support struggling schools.
10. The school has shown \_\_\_\_\_ improvement since the new headteacher arrived.
11. The city has seen a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ of new residents in recent years.
12. He went on a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ course in the mountains during the summer.
13. Small rural communities can be \_\_\_\_\_ to economic change.

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14. The chief \_\_\_\_\_ said the programme would expand next year.
15. The organisation was \_\_\_\_\_ to support families in the area.
16. 16. The museum helps young people connect with their cultural \_\_\_\_\_.

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*The number of people on Dysgu Cymraeg courses has risen by 61% since 2017, as people in Wales rediscover the 'poetry' of the language*

**Bethan McKernan**

**29 March, 2026**

- 1 Elinor Staniforth from Cardiff hated Welsh lessons at her English-medium school – after her GCSEs, she said, she “forgot all about it”. Winning a place at Oxford University, however, made Staniforth reassess her identity and relationship with the language.
- 2 “I suddenly became very aware of being Welsh,” the 28-year-old said. “There were only two Welsh people in the whole college. People would ask if I spoke Welsh, and I’d have to say no. It’s like a switch turned on while I was at uni. I was thinking that I’d missed out on something.”
- 3 Staniforth graduated and moved back to Cardiff shortly before the Covid pandemic broke out, so she began learning Welsh in an online class. She was a finalist for the Cymraeg Learner of the Year prize at the 2024 national Eisteddfod, and now teaches the language herself.
- 4 She said: “I found the classes for adults an amazing experience. I made such good friends, I learned about Welsh culture, I discovered new bands and books, a new world. I wanted to give back.”
- 5 New figures from Y Canolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol – the National Centre for Learning Welsh – suggest Staniforth is far from alone: the number of adult learners taking courses with the centre has increased 12% in a year, and has now reached more than 20,000 for the first time.
- 6 The news is welcome after the latest five-year report from the Welsh language commissioner, which found that while the number of Cymraeg speakers has remained more or less stable for decades, it has not risen in line with significant population growth, making the language more vulnerable. The commissioner, Efa Gruffudd Jones, previously said that “bold and transformative” intervention would be needed if the Welsh government was to meet its target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- 7 Dona Lewis, the chief executive of Dysgu Cymraeg, said: “We are really pleased with the numbers; the statistics show consistent growth since we were established. There’s huge demand and we have a big contribution to make to the language in the future.”
- 8 The number of people on Dysgu Cymraeg courses has risen every year since the programme began in 2016, and is up 61% since data was first published for the academic year 2017-18.
- 9 Almost 40% of people come to the classes through the workplace, where uptake is particularly strong in the NHS and the police. There has also been a huge increase in younger people learning Welsh, with the number of learners aged 16 to 24 up 56% in 2024-25 compared with the previous year. The percentage of learners who gave details about their ethnicity and identified as from “diverse ethnicities” was 5%, up 1% on the year before.
- 10 Scott Gutteridge, 29, a London-based actor who grew up in Llanelli, said he believed a language “reclamation” of sorts was under way. He said: “It’s a fantastic time to start learning Welsh because there are so many resources available. It seems like a fire that’s burning again, there’s a lot more young learners. And there’s a lot of inspiring Welsh arts out there, I think people really connect with the poetry of the language.”
- 11 Gutteridge fell in love with Cymraeg while working on Theatr Cymru’s bilingual production of Romeo and Juliet. He started studying in the evenings, and trying out what he’d learned at work the next day.
- 12 He said: “Sometimes it was difficult with dialects, but you just start somewhere. It’s Wenglish in the beginning, people are so happy you’re trying and giving it a go.”
- 13 Like Staniforth, Gutteridge said that the adult learning experience was more enjoyable than compulsory Welsh lessons in school. He described a recent residential course at Nant Gwrtheyrn, the Welsh language heritage centre on Gwynedd’s Llŷn peninsula, as “magical”.
- 14 “I like learning anyway, but Cymraeg has an added element for me. It’s good for the mind, good for the heart, good for the soul,” he said.
- 15 The new influx of learners are not just Welsh people who grew up in English-speaking households, Staniforth said – fellow learners and students she has encountered include English and Scottish people with children or grandchildren in Welsh medium education, those who have moved to Wales for love or work, eastern European, Japanese and Singaporean learners, and people joining online from the US and Australia.

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- 16 Despite the welcome increase in the number of learners, Cymraeg's future is complicated, she said, partially because of what she called a "big divide between school and adult learning".
- 17 Staniforth said: "Considerably more kids go to English than Welsh school, and there's not enough focus on them. If you learn a language you have to want to do it: asking an 11-year-old to do it when they have no interest in it will be challenging.
- 18 "Learning Welsh has to be enjoyable, because finding and creating a community, that's what keeps the language alive."

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#### 3 Comprehension check

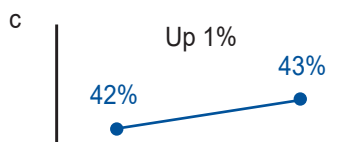
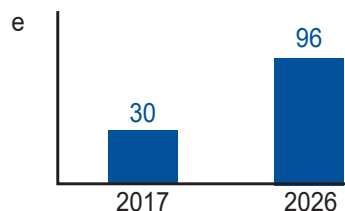
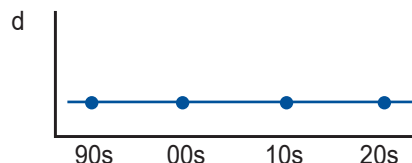
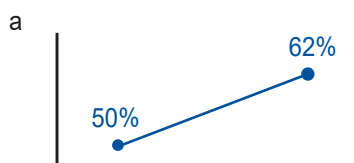
a. Read the sentences and write True or False. Then correct the false sentences.

1. While at university, Elinor felt bad for not speaking Welsh. \_\_\_\_\_
2. After university, she stayed in Oxford. \_\_\_\_\_
3. More people are learning Welsh than before. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Welsh is growing at the same rate as the population. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Most people go to Welsh classes through the workplace. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Gutterage fell in love with the language while acting in a bilingual play. \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the phrases with the visual representations.

1. "more or less stable for decades" \_\_\_\_\_
2. "has risen by 61% since 2017" \_\_\_\_\_
3. Almost 40% of people \_\_\_\_\_
4. up 1% from the year before \_\_\_\_\_
5. "increased 12% in a year" \_\_\_\_\_



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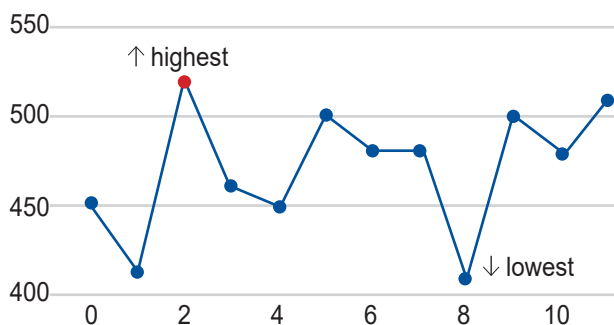
b. Match the phrases from the previous activity with its opposite.

stable	has risen	almost	up	increased
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- exactly \_\_\_\_\_
- fluctuating \_\_\_\_\_
- has fallen \_\_\_\_\_
- decreased \_\_\_\_\_
- down \_\_\_\_\_

c. Invent what this chart is illustrating. Write three sentences describing it.

Simple Line Chart




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### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- You cannot learn a language without learning about the culture(s) it comes from.
- It's more important to learn languages that can help in your career.

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- When a language dies out, important cultural knowledge is lost.
- It is the government's responsibility to keep languages alive.

### 6 In your own words

a. In groups, research an indigenous language you can present to the class. Answer the following questions in your presentation:

- Where is the language indigenous to?
- To what culture(s) is the language important?
- How many speakers are there today?
- How has that number changed over the last year, decade and century?
- What efforts are being made to maintain the language?
- Do you think those efforts are working? What would you do?
- What interests you about this indigenous language and culture?

b. Present your research to the class. Include charts and graphs where appropriate to demonstrate the number of speakers and learners compared to the past.