

Transcript of BBC Radio Wales *Dros Ginio* Interview: “*Sut mae pobl ifanc yn dysgu iaith? / How do young people learn languages?*”

Lois Parri (interviewee): The project as a whole has a few different parts to it, but the overall aim is to look at how young people learn a new language, in addition to their native language, and see whether it might be possible to make that learning process more tailored to the individual. There are lots of different ways of learning a language, there are apps, classes, and so on, but they all tend to be “one size fits all”, and don’t consider the individual differences between learners.

So, that’s the aim, and then the reason I am interested in this work, and why I think it is important, is that during adolescence there is a lot of development, cognitively, socially, educationally, and it is a common time to be learning a new language, so it is a period where learners could do with additional support. Also, of course, there can be many benefits to learning an additional language.

And, being Welsh myself, I have a particular interest in language attainment and in supporting efforts to keep the Welsh language alive and thriving. So, thinking about how to make language learning an easier, more supportive process for young people feels valuable to me, and hopefully to others as well.

Gwenllian Grigg (presenter): Yes, and I understand you have a psychology degree, yes?

Lois Parri (interviewee): Yes, I studied psychology for both my bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Bangor University, and those degrees were quite broad and looked at psychology generally. I then worked at King’s College London for around four years on different research projects, mainly related to mental health.

So, this topic is a bit of a different direction, but because I have always had a personal interest in language learning, and I think back to my own experiences at school of friends who moved to Wales and went through the process of learning a new language, it is something I am interested in helping others with.

Gwenllian Grigg (presenter): Yes, and I mentioned your psychology background and the other work you have done because it is relevant, isn’t it? Are you looking at what is going on in the mind and how all these different individuals are wired differently when learning a new language?

Lois Parri (interviewee): Yes, exactly, and that really is the core of the project.

So, the part I am working on at the moment is looking at the existing literature about the different factors that contribute to learning an additional language, and it is a very broad

field, with a lot of research. But the issue is that this research is spread out across different areas, such as education, psychology, neuroscience, and things like that.

So far, no work brings all of this together to examine how these different factors - cognitive, affective, social, socioeconomic, and these things - how they all contribute to young people's ability to learn a language and which areas require more support. So that's what I'm doing at the moment, synthesising all of that. Because, people are different, people have different experiences and different aptitudes for learning, and that's why we need to understand which areas individuals need support in.