Not in Front of the Children; Secret Languages in South Wales

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'Secret Languages' are used in many cultures by groups of people wishing to speak to each other confidentially in the presence of others. Parents, for instance, often need to talk about matters which must be kept secret from the children, and conversely children often prefer that adults should not understand what they are saying. To this end the normal form of the message is distorted in some systematic way to give an output which can be easily unscrambled by those in the know, while remaining totally opaque and appearently complete nonsense, to everyone else.

Several different strategies exist, An additional segment or syllable may be inserted at a specific point in each word; a segment or syllable may be shifted to a different position in the word; or some of the original words of the message may be replaced completely according to an agreed system. Examples of all three types are presented by Iona and Peter Opie (1959: 320-322). These are, of course, all based on English, but Otto Jespersen (1922: 149-150) quotes others, based on French, Danish, Dutch and Maori. Clearly then this is a widespread phenomenon.

Recently, in response to an enquiry received at the Welsh Folk Museum, I began to collect information about secret languages of this kind which are based on Welsh. So far I have located five examples - four from the Teifi valley in Dyfed, and one from the Tawe valley in West Glamorgan (see Map 1). A brief account of each of these is presented below, including a description of the method used to distort the basic message, comments on any points of phonological interest, and what is known of the context in which the language was or still is used.

<div align="center">*　*　*　*　*　*　*</div>

Type 1: (a) Llanbedr Pont Steffan

In this case the sequence [eg] is inserted in each syllable of the original message, immediately before the vowel.[1] Compare the basic form of the following exchange (1a) with its form when it has been modified in this way (1b).

> (1a) A. <u>Y mae y tywydd yn braf</u>.
> [ə maj ə 'təwɪð ən braːv]
> 'The weather is fine'.
>
> B. <u>Da iawn nawr</u>.
> [daː jawn nawr]
> 'Very good now'.

(1b)   A.   ['egə 'megaj 'egə 'tɛgə'wɛgɪð 'egən 'bregav]
        B.   ['dega 'jegawn 'negawr]

We can formulate this change as a very simple rule.

Code Formation (Type 1)
Ø -> eg / -- V

This rule takes no account of any consonants which may be present in the syllable.
There may be a preceding consonant, a following consonant, both or neither.

(2)   CVC   [mam]   ->   ['megam]   'mother'
       CV   [da:]   ->   ['dega]   'good'
       VC   [ən]   ->   ['egən]   'in'
       V   [a:]   ->   ['ega]   'and'

Nor is the rule affected by the identity of the vowel in the original syllable. This may
be high, mid or low; front, central or back.[2]

(3)   high front   [tri:]   ->   ['trɛgi]   'three'
       mid front   [be:Ө]   ->   ['begeӨ]   'what?'
       mid central   [ə]   ->   ['egə]   'the'
       mid back   [do:]   ->   ['dego]   'yes (past)'
       low   [mam]   ->   ['megam]   'mother'

The vowel may be long or short, as the examples in (2) and (3) show, and it may be a
simple vowel or a falling diphthong.

(4)   [ɔjd]   ->   ['egɔjd]   'age'
       [nawr]   ->   ['negawr]   'now'

Note that the glide of a rising diphthong behaves like a syllable-initial consonant
rather than as a part of the vocalic core of the syllable.

(5)   [jawn]   ->   ['jegawn]   'very'
                       not *['egjawn]

Turning to polysyllabic words, we find that the sequence [eg] is inserted before each
vowel of the original form.

(6)   ['təwɪð]   ->   ['tɛgə'wɛgɪð]   'weather'
       [mam'gi:]   ->   ['megam'gɛ·gi]   'grandmother'
       ['gɛni]   ->   ['gege'nɛgi]   'to be born'

It is not therefore necessary to specify if the rule is applying to a monosyllable or a
longer form. It is not clear whether in such cases the rule applies directionally, from
left to right or from right to left, or whether it applies simultaneously to every syllable

in the word. What is clear is that the rule may not reiterate; allowing it to apply more than once to a single syllable gives a totally unacceptable output.

(7)   [mam]   ->   ['megam]   ->   [*'mege'gegam]

Where exactly in the derivation this rule applies is also an interesting question. The material available is not varied enough for this problem to be explored in any great detail, but a few points can be made with some confidence. One rule at least, Vowel Epenthesis, must precede Code Formation,[3] the form ['ɛgoχ'eger] 'side' can only be generated on this ordering.

(8)   Underlying Form   oχr
       Vowel Epenthesis   oχor
       Code Formation   egoχegor
                    .   .
                    .   .
       Surface Output   ['ɛgoχ'eger][4]

Code Formation in such forms must clearly operate on the dissyllabic output of Vowel Epenthesis rather than on the monosyllabic underlying form.

Other rules however must follow. Stress Assignment is one. Word stress in Welsh normally falls on the penultimate syllable of polysyllabic forms, as in ['da:vad] 'sheep'. Where Code Formation converts a basic monosyllable into a dissyllabic form, word stress falls regularly on the surface penultimate, the new [e] vowel.

(9)   Underlying Form   mam
       Code Formation   megam
       Stress Assignment   'megam
                    .   .
                    .   .
       Surface Output   ['megam]

Where Code Formation operates on a basic dissyllable or a longer form, we find word stress on the surface penultimate, and a slightly lighter stress on alternate preceding syllables. This corresponds to the normal pattern of Welsh, as we see from examples such as ['əsgri'vɛnɪð] 'secretary (m)' , ['əsgri'vɛnəð'ɛsaj] 'secretaries (f)'. It confirms the rule ordering already suggested.

(10)   Underlying Form   təwɪð
       Code Formation   tegəwegɪð
       Stress Assignment   'tegə'wegɪð
                    .   .
                    .   .
       Surface Output   ['tɛgə'wɛgɪð]

Note that [mam'gi:] 'grandmother', which normally has irregular word stress on the final syllable, is fully regular with regard to Stress Assignment if Code Formation has already applied.

(11)   Underlying Form   mamgi
         Code Formation   megamgegi
         Stress Assignment   'megam'gegi
                                    .   .

         Surface Output   ['megam'gɛ·gi]

The rules which assign predictable vowel length and quality must follow Code Formation and Stress Assignment. Consider for instance cases like ['megam'gɛ·gi] 'grandmother' and ['ɬegam'be·ged][5] 'Llambed'. These display clearly the pattern of vowel alternations typical of south west Wales. Before a voiced stop the vowel of the stressed penultimate syllable is predictably half-long, and its quality in the case of mid vowels is conditioned by the identity of the vowel in the final syllable. If the final syllable contains a high vowel as in ['megam'gɛ·gi], then the half-long mid vowel has an open allophone [ɛ·]; if it contains instead a mid or low vowel as in ['ɬegam'be·ged], then the half-long mid vowel has a close allophone [e·].[6]

(12)   Underlying Form   mamgi   ɬambed
         Code Formation   megamgegi   ɬegambeged
         Stress Assignment   'megam'gegi'   ɬegam'beged
         Vowel Length Marking   'megam'ge·gi   ɬegam'be·ged
         Vowel Quality Marking   'megam'gɛ·gi   'ɬegam'be·ged
                                    .   .   .

         Surface Output   ['megam'gɛ·gi]   ['ɬegam'be·ged]

Those vowels which would, in the same form of the message, occur in monosyllables or the stressed penultimates of longer forms, are after Code Formation has applied, all in unstressed syllables either word-medially or finally. They are all therefore predictably short.

The forms to which Code Formation has applied continue then to observe the normal patterns of the dialect so far as word stress and allophonic variations in vowel length and quality are concerned. They do not however, observe all the phontactic restrictions of Welsh. Specifically, we find some forms where the mid central vowel [ə] now appears in the final syllable.

(13)   [ən]   ->   ['egən]   in
       [ə]   ->   ['egə]   the

This vowel is normally found only in nonfinal syllables, immediately followed by a consonant or cluster, as for instance in ['kənɪg] chance and ['əskɔl] school.[7] In two sets of exceptions it is found in monosyllabic forms. Firstly, throughout most of Wales we find [ə] in a small number of grammatial clitics such as [ə] and [ən]

above; in parts of north Pembrokeshire and south Cardiganshire we fnd [ə]in a rather larger set of lexical monosyllables. Nowhere however in normal Welsh do we find [ə] in the final syllable of a word; this is a pattern found only as a result of Code Formation.

One final phonological point. It appears that the rule of Code Formation described here operates on a rather stiff, formal variety of Welsh. Consider for example the following phrase, already quoted above in (1a,b).

> (14a) [ə maj ə 'təwɪð ən bra:v]
> The weather is fine.

> (14b) ['egə 'megaj 'egə 'tɛgə'wɛgɪð 'egən 'bregav]

The 'secret' version (14b) can be derived very straightfwardly by means of Code Formation from (14a), but there are several points which strike one immediately about this base form. In the first place, the normal southern realisation of the orthographic diphthong <u>ae</u> in a monosyllable is the simple vowel [a:]. Here however we find the formal, standard realisation [aj] giving [maj] rather than [ma:]. It is also a mark of formality to retain the assertive particle [ə] before [maj]. A less formal equivalent of (14a) would be (15).

> (15) [ma: r 'təwɪð ən bra:v]

And this reveals a third oddity. Following a vowel or glide the definite article [ər] normally takes the form [r] as in (15); the form [ə] is found rather following a consonant, and its presence in (14a) gives a very stiff, jerky effect. We may indeed have an indication here that the additional effort required to manipulate the 'artificial' rule of Code Formation interfered with the implementation of other regular processes of the language.

The informants in this case are two sisters in their fifties who, apart from a period of wartime factory work in Birmingham, have always lived in Llanbedr Pont Steffan (Lampeter), a small town in the Teifi valley. The secret language described above was used by their parents and one aunt, also from this area, largely in order to keep the topic of conversation secret from the children, but also occasionally when talking in the presence of strangers. The sisters gradually learned to understand what was being said, and were quite fluent by the time they were twenty. They still use this secret language regularly when they do not wish other people to understand what they are saying. Another sister of theirs is somewhat less fluent, as are two cousins. They have no idea where their parents learned this secret language, being sure only that none of the grandparents used it; it seems to have been an innovation of their parents generation. Interestingly, the sisters say that their parents, who referred to this secret language as <u>King's English</u>, could use it to disguise statements in either English or Welsh, and they too can use it in both languages.

Type 1: (b) Treforus and Llansamlet

This next example appears to be another instance of a Type 1 secret language, identical to the one from Llanbedr Pont Steffan described above.[8] The sequence [eg] is once again inserted into each syllable of the original message, immediately before the vowel. Compare for instance the basic form of the following exchange (16a) with its disguised form (16b) - unfortunately the information about this language derives from a written source, and the examples can be presented only in orthographic form.

(16a)   A.   <u>bore da.</u>
             'Good morning.'

         B.   <u>Ond yw'r tywydd yn ddrwg?</u>
             'Isn't the weather bad?'

(16b)   A.   <u>Begorege dega.</u>

         B.   <u>Egond egyw'r tegywegydd egyn ddregwg</u>?

The same Code Formation rule will hold here, and as before it takes no account of any consonants present in the affected syllable. There may be a preceding consonant, a following consonant, both or neither.

(17)   CVC   <u>sir</u> -> <u>segir</u>   'county'
        CV   <u>bri</u> -> <u>bregi</u>   'fame'
        VC   <u>yn</u> -> <u>egyn</u>   'in'
        V   <u>i</u> -> <u>egi</u>   'to'

Similarly, the vowel of the original syllable may be high, mid or low, front, cental or back.

(18)   high front   <u>sir</u>   -> <u>segir</u>   'county'
        high back   <u>drwg</u> -> <u>dregwg</u>   'bad'
        mid front   <u>fel</u>   -> <u>fegel</u>   'like'
        mid central   <u>y</u>   -> <u>egy</u>   'the'
        mid back   <u>hoff</u>   -> <u>hegoff</u>   'fond'
        low   <u>nant</u>   -> <u>negant</u>   'stream'

The <u>eg</u> sequence may precede a simple vowel, as in the examples given above, or a falling diphthong.

(19)   <u>brwyn</u> ->   <u>bregwyn</u>   'reeds'
        <u>glaw</u>   ->   <u>glegaw</u>   'rain'

And the glide of a rising diphthong behaves once again like a syllable initial consonant rather than as part of the vocalic core of the syllable.

(20)   iaith   ->   iegaith   'language'
               not *egiaith

In polysyllabic words eg is inserted before each vowel of the original form.

(21)   bore   -> begorege   'morning'
             tywydd   -> tegywegydd   'weather'
             prynhawn   -> pregynhegawn 'afternoon'

It is not clear if the rule applies directionally, from left to right or from right to left, or if it applies instead simultaneously to every syllable in the word. It is clear however that the rule may not reiterate; if it applies more than once to a single syllable the output is unacceptable.

(22)   nant   -> negant   -> *negegegant

It is not possible in this case to explore the relative ordering in the derivation of Code Formation and other rules such as Stress Assignment and Vowel Length / Quality Marking. Orthographic examples such as these do not provide the information about word stress, vowel length and vowel quality that would be necessary for a detailed discussion of this kind. Nor, as it happens, are there any obvious examples of other rules, such as Vowel Epenthesis, at work in the examples provided here.[9] This aspect of the discussion cannot therefore be developed any further here.

It is however apparent that the mid central vowel y [ə] may appear in the final syllable of a word in this secret language too, breaking one of the normal phonotactic restrictions of Welsh.

(23)   yn   -> egyn   'in'
           y   -> egy   'the'

The examples undergoing Code Formation here vary considerably in formality. Some are quite informal, as for instance the comment in (24a,b) below.

(24a)   Odi'n wir!
         'It is indeed!'

(24b)   Egodegi'n wegir!

The form odi 'is' belongs to a much more informal, dialectal register than the standard, literary ydyw. On the other hand the author also applies Code Formation to poetry, and even to the national anthem. There is clearly a major difference in register between (24a,b) and (25a,b), which is taken from Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau.

(25a)   Gwlad, gwlad, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad
         'My country, my country, I am faithful to my country'

(25b) <u>Gwlegad, gwlegad, plegeidiegol egwyf egim gwlegad</u>

The author of the article quoted here comes from Y Glais in the lower Tawe valley, and reports that this secret languge was used during his childhood in the 1920s by youngsters from the neighbouring industrial villages of Treforus (Morriston) and Llansamlet. They could speak as freely in this language as they could in normal Welsh, and the object of the exercise was to prevent strangers understanding what was said among friends.[10]

Type 2: Llangeitho

In this second type of secret language the consonant [g] is inserted into each syllable of the basic message, together with an additional vowel identical to the original vowel of the syllable.[11] The basic form (26a) of the following exchange thus corresponds to the disguised version (26b).

(26a) A. <u>Shwd ŷch chi heddi?</u>
            [ʃʊd iːχ χi hɛ·ði?]
            'How are you today?'

       B. <u>Da iawn.</u>
            [daː jawn]
            'Very well.'

(26b) A. [ˈʃʊgʊd ˈɪgɪχ ˈχɪgi ˈhɛgɛˈðɪgi?]

       B. [ˈdaga ˈjagawn]

This change can be formalised in either of two ways. On the first view one can argue that it involves inserting a sequence [V_αg] immediately before the original vowel of each syllable.

<u>Code Formation (Type 2) A.</u>
  ø -> V_αg / - V_α

On this approach it is the sequence [ʊg] that is new in, for example, [ˈʃʊgʊd]. The rule itself is very similar to that employed by the two sisters from Llanbedr Pont Steffan, differing only in that for them the sequence inserted is always [eg] with a mid front vowel, while here the identity of the new vowel varies according to the context. This informant claims in fact to be able to communicate quite well with the two sisters described above, if he uses his secret language and they use theirs. The two are clearly very similar.

An alternative analysis is however equally plausible. It can be argued that the rule of Code Formation inserts rather the sequence [gV$_\alpha$] immediately after the original vowel of each syllable.

    Code Formation (Type 2) B.
     ø -> gV$_\alpha$ / V$_\alpha$ -

If this is correct then it is the sequence [gʊ] that is new in ['ʃʊgʊd]. This second formulation may in turn receive some support from a comment by the informant, who refers to the technique as adding [g] to the end of each syllable. As there does not appear to be any clear motivation for chosing one of these two formulations rather than the other, the issue will be left open.

Once again the rule takes no account of any consonants which may be present in the syllable. There may be a preceding consonant, a following consonant, both or neither.

(27)	CVC	[man] ->	['magan]	'place'
	CV	[da:] ->	['daga]	'good'
	VC	[ən] ->	['əgən]	'in'
	V	[a:] ->	['aga]	'and'

Nor does it matter which vowel appears in the syllable. This may be high, mid or low; front, central or back.

(28)	high front	[hɪn]	->	['hɪgin]	'this'
	high back	[ʃʊd]	->	['ʃʊgʊd]	'how?'
	mid front	[gwe:ɬ]	->	['gwegeɬ]	'better'
	mid central	[ər]	->	['əgər]	'the'
	mid back	[o:]	->	['ogo]	'from'
	low	[man]	>	['magan]	'place'

The vowel may also be long or short, as the examples in (27) and (28) show.

Falling diphthongs behave relative to this rule as sequences consisting of a vowel and a consonantal glide. Only the vocalic core of the diphthong is copied.

(29)	[rʊjð]	->	['rʊgʊjð]	'easy'
		not	*['rʊjgʊjð]	
	[nawr]	->	['nagawr]	'now'
		not	*['nawgawr]	

Similarly the glide of a rising diphthong behaves as a syllable-initial consonant; only the vocalic core of the diphthong is copied.

(30)	[jawn]	->	['jagawn]	'very'
		not	*['jagjawn]	

As expected, the rule of Code Formation applies freely to each syllable of polysyllabic forms.

(31)	['bore]	->	['bogo'rɛgɛ]	'morning'
	['wɛ·di]	->	['wɛgɛ'dɪgi]	'after'
	['hɛ·ði]	->	['hɛgɛ'ðɪgi]	'today'

It is not clear whether the rule applies directionally, from left to right or from right to left, or whether it applies simultaneously to every syllable in the word. What is clear is that here again it may not reiterate; allowing it to apply more than once to a single syllable gives a totally unacceptable output.

(32)	[man]	->	['magan]	->	*['maga'gagan]

There is once again not a great deal of evidence as to where exactly in the derivation the rule of Code Formation applies. No items liable to Vowel Epenthesis occur in the available data, but there is one item which appears to have undergone Centralisation. This converts a high vowel in a monosyllable or the final syllable of a longer form into the mid central vowel [ə] when an inflection is added, as for instance with the pair ['nɛwɪð] 'new (adj.)' and [nɛ'wəðjon] 'news (n.)'.[12] If Centralisation precedes Code Formation then the occurring form ['nɛgɛ'wəgə'ðɪgjon] can easily be accounted for.

(33)	Underlying Form	nɛwɪð + jon
	Centralisation	nɛwəðjon
	Code Formation	nɛgɛwəgəðɪgjon
		. .
		. .
	Surface Output	['nɛgɛ'wəgə'ðɪgjon][13]

On the reverse ordering Code Formation would give [nɛgɛwɪgɪðɪgjon], and we should hve to reformulate Centralisation in a cumbersome and otherwise unnecessary way so as to change two [ɪ] vowels rather than one.

Stress assignment however must undoubtedly follow Code Formation, as word stress is consistently on the surface penultimate, following the normal Welsh pattern.

(34)	Underlying Form	da
	Code Formation	daga
	Stress Assignment	'daga
		. .
		. .
	Surface Output	['daga]

In the case of longer forms we find once again word stress on the surface penultimate, together with a slightly lighter stress on alternate preceding syllables.

(35)   Underlying Form   bore
        Code Formation   bogorege
        Stress Assignment   'bogo'rege
                .   .
                .   .
        Surface Output   ['bogo'rɛgɛ]

Rules assigning predictable vowel length are less easy to place with this informant, as he does not distinguish clearly in the secret language between long and short vowels. He appears in fact to have uniformly rather short vowels rather than any systematic alternation of long and short, possibly as a result of the artificiality of the situation. Certainly where a basic monosyllable would require a long vowel, as with [daː] or [gweːɬ], there is no trace of this at the surface, and it seems likely therefore that vowel length is determined after Code Formation has applied, and most probably after Stress Assignment too.

This secret language, like the one already discussed earlier, allows the mid central vowel [ə] to appear in the final syllable of a word.

(36)   [ən]   ->   ['əgən]   'in'
        [ər]   ->   ['əgər]   'the'

Such forms do not conform to the normal phontactic restrictions on [ə] in Welsh, whose details were outlined earlier.

Code Formation for this informant appears to operate on a reasonably informal variety of Welsh. The normal southern [aː] realisation of the orthographic diphthong <u>ae</u> shows up several times while the formal variant [aj] is not found at all.

(37)   <u>'mae'</u>   [maː]   ->   ['maga]   'is'
        <u>'cael'</u>   [kaːl]   ->   ['kagal]   'to have'

And we find informal ['hɛ·ði] 'today' alongside the more formal ['hɛ·ðɪw], giving both ['hɛgɛ'ðɪgi] and ['hɛgɛ'ðɪgɪw]. There are however some expressions with a rather more formal tone. Take for instance the following example.

(38a)   [nɪd ʊjv 'wɛ·di ...]
        'I have not.'

(38b)   ['nɪgɪd 'ʊgʊjv 'wɛgɛ'dɪgi ...]

Negatives formed with [nɪd] preceding the verb and no negative particle following it are distinctly literary. It would be more natural in the spoken language to find the form shown in (39), where [nɪd] is reduced to [d], and [ðɪm] follows the verb.

(39)   [dʊj(v) i ðɪm 'wɛ·di ...]

It is also more natural in the spoken language to retain the subject pronoun as a clitic following the verb, as in (39). Dropping this pronoun as in (38a) is once again a mark of formal literary Welsh.

The secret language described here was reported by an informant from near Llangeitho, a village in the upper Teifi valley. He had learned the trick from his mother, who was born in the same district and lived there all her life. She used it, almost as a family joke, with him and his sisters, but never mentioned where she had learned it herself. Nor did she have a name for this language. The informant remembers teaching it to some of his friends at the local secondary school in Tregaron, and the group of boys used it among themselves for a while. He has not used it much for many years now, though he remains reasonably fluent, and can carry on a conversation in this secret language when an opportunity arises.

Type 3: Prengwyn

Here a longer sequence is inserted into each syllable of the basic message - the two consonants [ð] and [g], and two vowels, both identical to the original vowel of the syllable.[14] In this way each individual syllable of the original message is expanded into a trisyllabic unit. Compare for instance the basic form of the following message (40a) with the disguised version (40b).

> (40a) Wyt ti'n myn' lawr i Llandisil?
> [ʊjt ti n mɪn lawr i ɬanˈdɪsɪl?]
> 'Are you going down to Llandisil?'

> (40b) [ˈʊðʊgʊjt ˈtiðigi ˈmɪðɪgɪn ˈlaðagawr ˈiðigi ˈɬaðagan
> ˈdɪðɪgi ˈsɪðɪgɪl?]

As with the secret language from Llangeitho, the change described here can be formalised in either of two ways. It may involve inserting the sequence $[V_\alpha ð V_\alpha g]$ immediately before the original vowel of each syllable.

> Code Formation (Type 3) A
> ø -> $V_\alpha ð V_\alpha g$ / - V_α

On this view it is the sequence [ɪðɪg] that is new in [ˈmɪðɪgɪn] for instance. Alternatively it is equally possible to argue that the sequence $[ð V_\alpha g V_\alpha]$ is inserted immediately after the original vowel of each syllable.

> Code Formation (Type 3) B
> ø -> $ð V_\alpha g V_\alpha$ / V_α -

This would mean that it is the sequence [ðɪgɪ] that is new in [ˈmɪðɪgɪn]. There seems to be no motivated way to chose between these two analyses, and the issue will accordingly be left open. Comments made by the informants suggest that they are

aware of inserting the extra consonants, [ð] and [g], but less aware of the accompanying vowels.

As usual the rule takes no account of any consonants which may be present in the syllable. There may be a preceding consonant, a following consonant, both or neither.[15]

(41) CVC [mɪn] -> ['mɪðɪgɪn] 'to go'
CV [ti:] -> ['tiðigi] 'you (sg.)'
V [i:] -> ['iðigi] 'to'

Nor does it matter if the vowel of the syllable is high, middle or low; front or back.

(42) high front [mɪn] -> ['mɪðɪgɪn] 'to go'
high back [ʃʊd] -> ['ʃʊðʊgʊd] 'how?'
mid front [ble:] -> ['bleðege] 'where?'
mid back [so:n] -> ['sɔðɔgɔn] 'to speak'
low [ɬan] -> ['ɬaðagan] 'church'

The vowel may also be long or short, as the examples in (41) and (42) show.

Falling diphthongs here again behave relative to this rule as sequences consisting of a vowel plus consonantal glide. Only the vocalic core of the diphthong is copied.

(43) [ʊjt] -> [ʊðʊgʊjt] 'you (sg.) are'
not *[ʊjðʊjgʊjt]

[lawr] -> ['laðagawr] 'down'
not *['lawðawgawr]

There are no examples of rising diphthongs in the available data; it seems likely that these would be treated similarly, as a syllable-initial consonantal glide followed by a simple vowel.

The rule of Code Formation applies freely to each syllable of polysyllabic forms.

(44) [ɬan'dɪsɪl] -> ['ɬaðagan 'dɪðɪgi 'sɪðɪgɪl] 'Llandisil'

As with the other secret language discussed so far, it is not clear if the rule applies directionally, from right to left or from left to right, or if it applies simultaneously to every syllable in the word. It is quite clear however that the rule may not reiterate; where it has applied more than once to the same basic syllable, the result is completely unacceptable.

(45) [prɛn] -> ['prɛðɛgɛn] -> *['prɛðɛgɛ 'ðɛðɛgɛ 'gɛðɛgɛn]

Turning now to the issue of where in the derivation the rule of Code Formation applies, we face the problem that only a very few examples of this secret language are available for analysis. The forms which might clarify the position over rule ordering are simply not found. There are, for instance, no examples of words which must undergo rules like Vowel Epenthesis or Centralisation. All words must of course undergo Stress Assignment, but here there are some unexpected complications, and the picture is far from clear.

Word stress is, unusually for Welsh, on the antepenultimate syllable of words in this secret language. This might suggest that Stress Assignment applies first, as in (46) below, with Code Formation on the B formulation adding extra material after the existing stressed syllable.

(46)   Underlying Form   prɛn
       Stress Assignment   'prɛn
       Code Formation   'prɛðɛgɛn

              .   .
              .   .
       Surface Output   ['prɛðɛgɛn]

Unfortunately this fails to account for the pattern of stressing poysyllabic forms. We might expect, on the rule ordering suggested here, an output with only one stress, and that on the syllable corresponding to the original penultimate.

(47)   Underlying Form   ɬandɪsɪl
       Stress Assigment   ɬan'dɪsɪl
       Code Formation B   ɬaðagan'dɪðɪgisɪðɪgɪl

              .   .
              .   .
       Surface Output   *[ɬaðagan'dɪðɪgisɪðɪgɪl]

What we actually find is something quite different. There is one stress in the output for each syllable of the basic form, [ˈɬaðaganˈdɪðɪgiˈsɪðɪgɪl]. Rule ordering appears to be inadequate then as an explanation for these forms. Stress Assignment will itself need to be modified, in some ad hoc way, to produce these otherwise unpredictable forms.

The vowels of these initially-stressed trisyllabic forms are all short, this apparently reflecting their position in the surface output rather than the basic monosyllables from which they derive. The rule which marks vowel length must therefore follow Code Formation and the modified Stress Assignment rule.

It is not possible to say definitely if this secret language like the two already discussed, allows the mid central vowel [ə] to appear in the final syllable of a word, thus breaking one of the normal phonotactic restrictions of Welsh. There are simply no relevant items in the available data. It does however seem more than likely that if a form like [ən] 'in' were to undergo Code Formation then the output would be

['əðəgən], where the mid central vowel [ə] does of course appear in the final syllable of the word.

In so far as we can tell, given the small amount of data available, Code Formation appears to be operating here on a reasonably informal variety of Welsh. Consider for example the following phrase.

    (48a)   Shwd wyt ti'n myn' ...?
               [ʃʊd ʊjt ti n mɪn ...?]
               'How are you going ...?'

    (48b)   ['ʃʊðʊgʊd 'ʊðʊgʊjt 'tiðigi 'mɪðgɪn ...?]

The subject pronoun is retained here as a clitic following the verb, and [ʃʊd] is a distinctly less formal, more dialectal form that the standard [sɪt].

This secret language was described by two first cousins, both of them born and brought up at around the turn of the century near Prengwyn, a village in the middle reaches of the Teifi valley. They report that it was used by their parents in order to prevent them, as children, from understanding what was being said. Neither of the two cousins learned to use the secret language productively, each being able only to repeat one or two set phrases, though it appears that other older members of their generation were at one time quite fluent. They had no idea where their parents had picked up this trick, but one of them felt reasonably sure that it was confined to the extended family and not used by other people in the area.

One of the cousins says that her mother used to refer to this secret language as siarad French 'talking French'. Interestingly, the phrase siarad French has survived in the family with the more general meaning 'to talk gibberish' even though the secret language itself was lost for all practical purposes many years ago.[16] This same phrase is also reported from Crug-y-bar in Carmarthenshire, again with the general meaning 'to talk gibberish'.[17]

Elsewhere in South Wales we find related verb forms. In the Aman valley for instance ffrenshan is used with the meaing 'to say something incomprehensible',[18] while in Pont-rhyd-y-fen in the Afan valley it refers more specifically to the babbling of a baby or a toddler who has not yet learned to speak properly.[19] Another variant, ffrenshach, is used in the Rhigos area[20] and the Ely valley[21] for this childish babbling, and in the Llynfi valley we find the expression ffrenshach Sisnag 'to jabber in English', again implying that the speaker's words are incomprehensible and outlandish.[22] See Map 2 for the distribution of these forms.

Type 4: Prengwyn

This last secret language does not involve inserting something into each syllable of the basic message;[23] instead the sequence [əbər][24] is added before each full word, the words themselves retaining their normal shape. Compare for instance the original form of the following question (49a) with the disguised version (49b).

(49a)   Shwt mae heddi?
        [ʃʊt maj hɛ·ði?]
        'How are you today?'

(49b)   [ˌəbər 'ʃʊt ˌəbər 'maj ˌəbər 'hɛ·ði?]

The instrusive [ˌəbər] sequence is stressed, as might be expected, on its penultimate syllable, but this is a very light, secondary stress. Full word stress remains on the original words of the basic message.

The rule of Code Formation needed here can be very simply formulated.

   Code Formation (Type 4)
   ø -> əbər / - #

Very few examples of this particular secret language are available for analysis, and it is therefore not possible to discuss application of this Code Formation rule in much detail. It does appear however that the rule applies to a reasonably informal variety of Welsh, as witness the presence of the dialectal [ʃʊt] and [hɛ·ði] in (49a) above, and the retention of the subject pronoun following the verb in (50b).

(50a)   Shwt wyt ti?
        [ʃʊt ʊjt ti?]
        'How are you?'

(50b)   [ˌəbər 'ʃʊt ˌəbər 'ʊjt ti?]

Note too that [ʊjt ti], which consists of an inflected verb followed by a subject pronoun, seems to be treated as a single word, since no [əbər] sequence precedes the subject pronoun [ti] in (50b).

This secret language was reported by the older of the two cousins who described the Type 3 language discussed in the last section. She refers to this further language only in passing, and says that she and her friends used it as children.

                  *   *   *   *

In all four of the secret languages discussed here additional material is inserted into he original message to disguise it. Three of the languages are in fact quite closely related; not only is the extra material phonetically similar - [eg], [V_αg], [V_αðV_αg] - but it is inserted in each case into every syllable of the original form. The fourth language differs, both in the phonetic form of the insertion [ˌəbər] and in the fact that this is added to the beginning of each full word in the message.

Clearly however, this is only a begining. Further examples of secret languages from other parts of Wales are needed, to establish if these are typical or if there is a wider range of possibilities in Welsh.
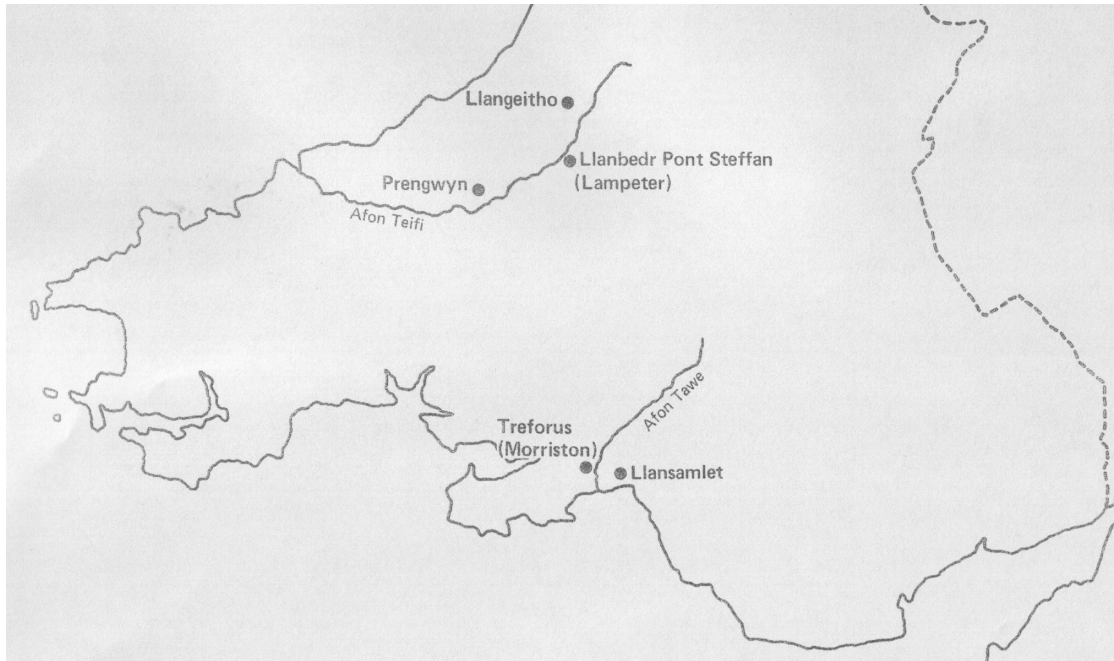
Footnotes

1.   The information and examples on which this section is based derive from tape no. 6773 in the Welsh Folk Museum archive.

2.   There are no forms containing the high back vowel [u]. This appears to be an accidental gap in the data.

3.   For an account of the rule of Vowel Epenthesis, see Awbery (in press: ch, 4 section 1.3) *[now published as Awbery 1986]*.

4.   The vowel of the final syllable in this form is a 'mistake'; the output should probably be ['ɛgoχ'egor]. This is a minor slip of the tongue, which does not affect the argument developed here.

5.   The symbol [*] will not be used in this paper to mark proper names in the phonetic transcription. It will be used only to mark unacceptable forms, as for instance in (5) above.

6.   For an account of allophonic alternation of this type, see Awbery (in press: ch. 1 section 3.1.) *[now published as Awbery 1986]*. This same pattern appears to hold of the Teifi valley as well as Pembrokeshire. Note that not all items in the secret language display these alternations so clearly; at times the informants speak so quickly that length contrasts and the accompanying alternations of quality are blurred.

7.   For an account of the phonotactic restrictions on the mid central vowel, see Awbery (in press: ch. 3) *[now published as Awbery 1986]*.

8.   The information and examples on which this section is based derive from Morgan (1948). I am grateful to V. H. Phillips for drawing this article to my attention.

9.   Two items, <u>rhegyddegid</u> (< <u>rhyddid</u>) 'freedom' and <u>begyddeged</u> (< <u>bydded</u>) 'let it be', have probably undergone the Centralisation rule (se fn 12). The orthography however is ambiguous as between the basic vowels [i] / [ɪ] and the derived central vowel [ə], and it is therefore not possible to pursue this point.

10. He also mentions a couple who used a very similar secret language with each other when they did not their young son to understand the conversation. He does not however give any further information about this other language.

11. The information and examples on which this section is based derive from tape no. 6774 in the Welsh Folk Museum archive.

12. For an account of the rule of Centralisation, see Awbery (in press: ch. 3 section 1.2.) *[now published as Awbery 1986]*.
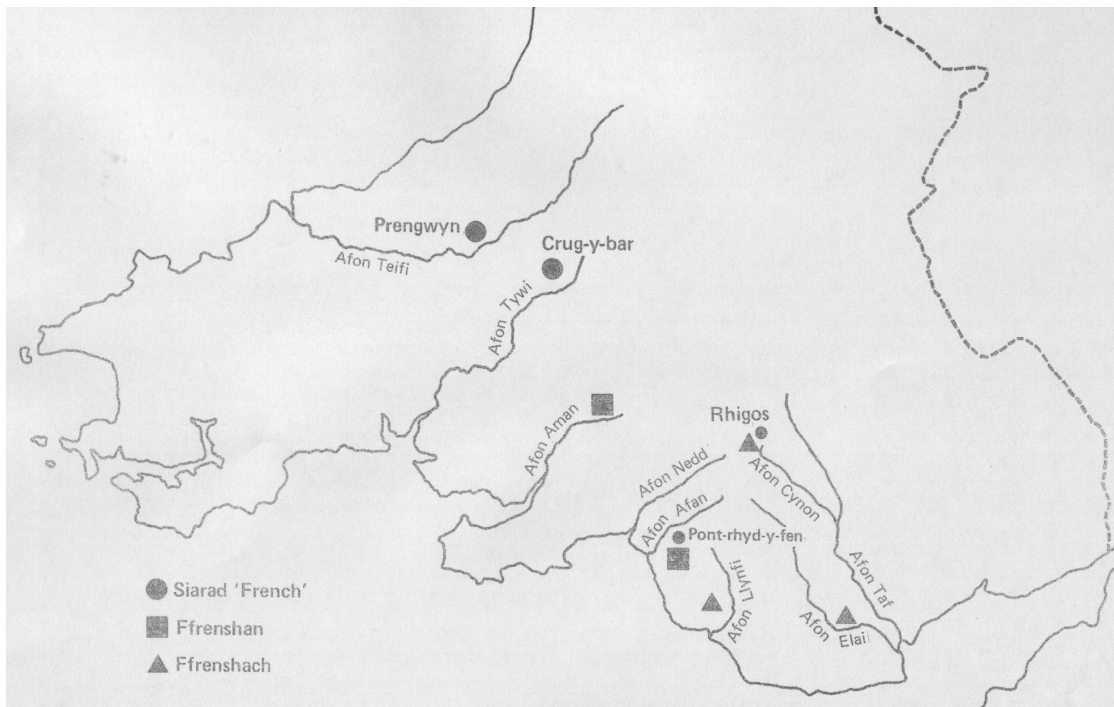
13. This occurring form contains a 'mistake'; the correct output should probably be ['nɛgɛ'wəgə'ðjogon].

14. The information and examples on which this section is based derive from Davies (1970: 24) and from tapes 1191, 3891 and 6775 in the Welsh Folk Museum archive. I am grateful to M. William for drawing Davies (1970) to my attention.

15. VC examples form an accidental gap in the data, as do examples containing the mid central vowel [ə] in (42) below.

16. D. Humfryes (pers. com.)

17. S. M. Tibbott (pers. com.)

18. Rees (1936: 236).

19. Beth Thomas (pers. com.)

20. Samuel (1971: 303).

21. Phillips (1955).

22. Thomas (unpub.)

23. The information and examples on which this section is based derive from tape no. 3891 in the Welsh Folk Museum archive.

24. The informant speaks of inserting [abɛr] in this position, but her pronunciation when actually giving sample phrases is consistently [əbər].

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Map 1:   Secret Languages in South Wales

Map 2:   Siarad 'French', Ffrenshan, and Ffrenshach