

North or South - which one should I choose?

A selection of relevant comments/quotes from across the old thread:

"Seriously, the whole dialect thing is vastly over-played. We provided two versions because there **are** differences, but they do NOT prevent anyone from understanding each other - as ought to be clear from the fact that Iestyn and I have done this course together! We do *not* speak English to each other..." (Aran)

"In fact the difference between the two is not that great. The problem for the beginner is that some of the basic words that you use all the time are different. As you progress through the course, you will soon start to pick up things that are different around you to what you are learning, and incorporate them into your Welsh. The best thing to do is to make sure that you are confident with the SSiW material, and just to go with the flow. That might sound quite intimidating if you have very little Welsh at the moment, but you will soon find that it starts to become exciting that find out a different local word, because that's when you know that you are really speaking natural Welsh for your area..." (Iestyn)

"Basically, don't worry - it will all work out, and any misunderstandings will be of the minor, possibly amusing variety..." (Iestyn)

"As for which one to learn - I think that if you're outside Wales and don't have a particular affiliation with a particular part, it doesn't really matter. Whichever you learn, they are both close enough that you will be understood, as lots of people on here have vouched for." (Aran)

"To be honest, I've been really surprised by just how many learners, even quite advanced ones, honestly seem to believe that there is some huge, difficult difference between the various regional usages of Welsh..." (Aran)

"Probably the biggest hurdle to get over is the "wrong" bit. In Welsh there are regional variations, but all are correct Welsh. As a learner, there is a temptation to hang on to what you learn as right and see others using different forms as wrong. In reality, any Welsh speaker will be exposed to the other dialects to some extent through radio or TV, and though they might find it difficult to tune into, it is not a foreign language. Also, I think that in conversation, people rapidly adapt to what is being said around them, much as in English you might turn on and off using casual phrases depending on company. It is not that different from going to Newcastle for the first time. I pick Newcastle because the strong regional dialect still remains in general use - distinctly different words and phrases used in everyday speech, to the extent that it actually does take a bit of tuning into to understand, even though you suspect that they are speaking English! After a about a day, you find that you have tuned in, and after a week or so, I found that I was happily responding in dialect (though I am a bit of a sponge for that." (Spenny)

"There are more people, numerically speaking, who speak southern of some form, but the concentration of Welsh speakers is higher in the north, which means that it's easier to find communities where Welsh is still the ordinary language in the north. (Aran)

What should I choose if I live in...

West Wales: "That's the Llechryd down near Aberteifi, right? The southern version will definitely be the closest we've got here - and you'll fine tune further just by using it..." (Aran)

Just over the border in England between Oswestry and Welshpool: "It would probably make most sense for you to go with the northern course - there's not all that much difference, but if that's what you've learnt previously, it should flow a little more easily - as you say, there'll be a bit of a combination of the two in that particular area, but you'll be understood fine using what you'll learn on the northern course..." (Aran)

Machynlleth: "I've always considered Machynlleth to be north. I think that the northern course is closer to Machynlleth Welsh than the southern, but I'm also fairly sure that the only difficulty you would get with doing the "wrong" course is that in the initial stages, not understanding or worse, not being understood because you'd used an unfamiliar word, would knock your confidence and slow your learning down." (Iestyn)

Aberystwyth: "Either will do... Aberystwyth is blessed by it's centrality, and the local dialect benefits from both north and south influences. Choose whichever you prefer, and the people of Aberystwyth will use some words that are different and some the same. However, they will generally understand everything you say." (Iestyn)

North/South division: "As a rule of thumb, I think S4C series *Ar Lafar* discovered recently that the 'North' starts/ends at Talybont, just south of Mach." (RobertBruce)

Brecon: "For Brecon, the south course is perfect..." (RobertBruce)

What about doing both North and South at the same time?

"Unless you're really linguistically talented, I have a feeling that actually doing both at the same time could inhibit the speed of your responses. You want to have your Welsh flowing out naturally without stopping to think "Am I doing the northern/southern course now? What word do I want?" On the other hand, it's useful to know and recognise different words in speech, so I found it worked well to concentrate on one version for practising speaking, but to do the listening practice for the other. Sometimes I even do the speaking practice for the other, but I reply with what I'm used to and I just listen to what the Gog version sounds like. That works for me anyway." (Dee)

"For me it would have been a bad idea to try to mix learning northern and southern. The differences aren't massive, but they do include some very basic sentence structures and words (including 'he' and 'is'). Once you really learn one form, you'll naturally pick up the ability to hear & understand the other." (Tahl)

"I think you'd be best advised not to mix them, for the reasons given already. If you do one

course then spend a while listening to the practice sessions for the other course, you'll end up pretty comfortable with recognising both versions, where there *are* differences. Mind you, I think we've had a few people do one course and *then* the other, which I would imagine would also work..." (Aran)

"I have done both the North and South intro course and it wasn't ideal. But the occasional word differences aren't such an issue - *dihuno* vs *deffro*, for example, *laeth* vs *llefrith*. These occur in English all the time. In different parts of Australia a swimming costume is called a *cossie*, *swimmers*, or *bathers*. We all know what each other means. The more insurmountable differences are in the contraction of the verb to be - *yw* vs *ydy*, *yn i* vs *dan i*, the possession pattern, *gen i* vs *gyda fi*, and the masculine personal pronoun, *o* vs *e/fe*. The words *eisiau/angen/moyn* are also problematic - but I hear all of them used on *pigion highlights* (though the *eisiau i fi* pattern seems to be less popular)..." (Elizabeth Jane)

Regarding radio and TV:

"...I'm interested in how Welsh radio and tv channels are pitched if there is a difference between the North & South Walian dialects? ...But how does S4C work for example, or does it vary from programme to programme?" (Cathifach)

"Radio/TV tends to have a mixture of individual contributions - much as is true of English radio/TV, where you can hear accents from London, Birmingham, the West Country, Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire, Australia, etc. etc. etc. Welsh speakers do not have any significantly greater problems understanding each other than someone speaking a very heavy northern English accent has with someone speaking pure farm Devon..." (Aran)

"Although *Pobol y Cwm* is set in Carmarthenshire, and that is therefore the main "background" version of the language you will hear there, nevertheless many of the soap's principal characters are very distinctly "Gogs" (northerners): in fact, there are probably far more incomers from the north than you would ever realistically encounter in a small village in the south-west. Yet there are, of course, no more failures of mutual comprehension than there are, for example, with Cockneys in Yorkshire (*Emmerdale*). Character A can invite Gog character B in for a "dishgled" (a cuppa, southern version), and B will, on leaving, say "diolch am y panad" (cuppa, northern) -- no-one bats an eyelid." (Cefin Gwlad)

"Taro'r post (12-1) is great to hear a whole load of different people's accents and dialects (It's a phone in show). Two of today's subjects were Badger culls and men taking an hour and a half to get ready to leave the house in the morning, so the subjects are fairly wide ranging. With the lack of clues about what you're listening to, and the wide range (geographically and in age) of speakers, it will be a huge challenge to understand anything, but also a huge achievement when you actually do." (Aran)

"I listen quite a lot to [Radio Ceredigion](#) (a bilingual station, though most of the output through the day is in Welsh), because there you hear lots of the accent and the language forms I am familiar with from the (south-western) Welsh for Adults course I'm following -- especially, of

course, from locals on the phone-ins. That doesn't mean, though, that all of Radio Ceredigion's Welsh-language output is "mono-dialectal"... BBC Radio Cymru, as you would expect, has voices from all over, and it's not uncommon to pair up a Hwntw (southerner) and a Gog in "two-hander" radio programmes." (Cefin Gwlad)

Switching from one to the other:

"I have been doing the NW course because I will be in Criccieth for two weeks...I have been doing BBC Catchphrase for some time which is predominantly South Walian. My teacher is from Ceredigion and as most of us who learn at the Melbourne Celtic Club are from South Walian backgrounds, we tend to learn the SW construction...Deep down, I want to speak South Walian...What I am trying to work...is whether I can finish the introductory course in North Walian and switch to the intermediate course in South Walian - or whether I'd be best to go back to the beginning?" (Elizabeth Jane)

"Just jump straight into the South Walian cwrs, and become a Hwntw...That aside I don't think you will find a huge difference at this stage of your learning, and you can always go back over the south Walian intro lessons at your leisure." (Wil-ab-Eynon)

"I think, seeing as you're planning to visit North Wales, you should probably stick with the Northern course for now so that you are as comfortable as possible with what you've been learning and ready to use your Welsh "in the wild" so to speak. Then when you go home again you can think about swapping. The way SSiW designs the lessons to build on the previous ones, you would probably only have to go back a few lessons in the Southern course to pick up and practise the differences, then go on from there. I've found that once you are fairly confident with one version, it's not too hard to listen to the other one and just learn the differences...I did the South Walian course up to the end of Course 2 and then did the Course 1 in Gog for some balance and because my partner was starting the Gog course at the same time. I think it's probably best to push to the end in the same dialect before trying rhywbeth newydd. I now find that I switch between some Northern expressions and southern expressions depending on who I'm talking to." (Dee)