

INCIDENCE AND NATURE OF ACCULTURATION WITHIN THE  
WELSH COLONY OF CHUBUT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE\*

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INTRODUCTION

A group of 153 Welsh pioneers landed on the shores of Patagonia in 1865 with the intention of colonizing this barren area in the hope of being free to pursue the nationalistic and religious policies denied them in their homeland. The next twenty years saw the numerical and territorial expansion of the colony, and the exploration of the hinterland. The two main areas of colonization were the original area of settlement, the Lower Chubut Valley, and the Andean area of 16 de Octubre (Map 1).

A contemporary rural land use survey of the Lower Chubut Valley reveals a distinct differentiation between intensive and extensive systems of cultivation. This pattern is culturally orientated.

When a society with intensive exploitative demands enters an area in which its population pursues what may be regarded as somewhat less promising modes of production, certain categories of events and socio-cultural relationships may be expected (Fried 1952). The theme of this paper is the variation in the nature of these socio-cultural relationships, and the factors that have influenced the nature of this relationship during the one hundred year history of the Welsh colony.

Historical evidence is here employed to reveal factors that may have been conducive or resistant to the process of acculturation amongst the Welsh. It will be possible to outline the process of conflict, accommodation or assimilation; to underline the relative importance of the forces underlying the tendency toward interaction; and to determine the nature and strength of factors affecting the nature and rate of adjustment. Demographic, sociological, and geographical evidence is considered within the historical continuum.

Within all societies there exists a multiplicity of conflicting forces, some which promote change, and others which maintain the "status quo." Some forces actually promote or resist change. The relative importance of forces creating change is not often, and perhaps is never, a constant, for the rate of culture change varies with time. Forces of change predominate for a considerable period of time, and rapid alterations in the nature and the structure of the society occur. Then may follow a period of relative quiescence, a state of relative equilibrium created, for example, by social and economic contentment which may be indicative of cultural adjustment to the demands of the external world (Ponsioen 1965:52). Thus, at a particular moment in time, the relative stability of a culture, or its tendency towards change, reflects the extent of balance between opposing forces.

#### ESTABLISHING THE COLONY

Factors affecting the type and rate of culture adjustment can be divided into those which pertain to predisposition on the part of the immigrant group, and to the attitude of the receiving community. While during the early years of colonization the Welsh held a minimum of direct contact with any receiving community other than the indigenous Tehuelche Indians, factors such as circumstances and motives for immigration must be kept in mind, and considered from the point of view of both the Welsh and the Argentine government. Thus a distinction must be drawn between two classes of immigrants. In the first place there are those who emigrate in order to maintain a certain set of values. This is achieved by transplanting away from the homeland where they are threatened the institutions in which these values are enshrined. The second class of immigrants are those who relocate, usually as individuals, in the hope of economic betterment. Continuance of the old institutions among this second group will depend upon the number who happen to reach the same locality and, especially, their willingness to regroup. The first group is most likely to resist change.

The "push" driving the 19th century emigrants from Wales derived from unsatisfactory social and economic conditions which prevailed in the homeland. The attraction of Patagonia, on the other hand, was its geographical isolation, sparsity of population, and dubious political affiliation. Influential Welshmen, aware of the rapid assimilation of the Welsh in the United States, advocated establishment of a colony where self-government and cultural isolation would be guaranteed. Thus members of the colony would belong to the first class of immigrants outlined above. With their value system orientated as it was by religious, political and cultural motivations, immigrants would tend to reveal a strong inclination towards in-grouping.

The motivation behind the support given to the colony by the Argentine government is also an important factor in consideration of the nature and rate of acculturation. Disagreement existed between Chile and Argentina over possession of the territory to the south of the Rio Negro, and Argentinian support of the Welsh colony in Chubut was motivated by the intent to lay legal claim to the whole of Patagonia. A political goal-conflict thus existed. The Argentine government was claiming authority over the area, and the Welsh colonists were attempting to establish independence.

#### THE EARLY YEARS

For the Welsh pioneers the early years were extremely difficult. Lack of familiarity with the environment caused much suffering. The way in which these people thought their community should function was a reflection of how it had functioned in the past. The Welsh went to Patagonia with a set of cultural values nurtured in Wales and based upon language, religion and community spirit. They viewed their function in society as that of passing on to their children their cultural heritage.

Although the colony was forced to turn to the Argentine government in times of need, this was held to a minimum through the formation of coalitions to overcome pressures which threatened the

existence of the whole community. The two major coalitions were the Irrigation Society and the Cooperative Society. The Irrigation Society developed in 1871 to organize an efficient labor force for construction of the irrigation network and to assure fair distribution of resources. The Cooperative Society was developed in 1885 to eliminate the middleman who marketed Welsh agricultural produce in Buenos Aires. The Welsh settlers distrusted these commercial campaigners whose values and language differed from their own, and felt exploited by them. This Cooperative Society was the first such organization in Argentina.

Until 1875 the colony was completely self-administering by the principles of a constitution drawn up prior to departure of the initial group from Wales. This constitution guaranteed suffrage to males and females over the age of 18. In 1875 an Argentinian representative was sent to the Valley.

By 1880 institutional factors and degree of economic and political security suggested a positive predisposition to change. Attitude, on the other hand, depending as it does on degree of cultural affinity, political goal conflict, and agencies of social control, suggested a resistance by the Welsh to future assimilation.

#### INCIDENCE OF EARLY CHANGE

During the last twenty years of the 19th century a continuous flow of Welsh immigrants to the colony resulted in a population increase from eight hundred in 1879 to about four thousand at the turn of the century. By 1885 agricultural land within the Lower Chubut Valley was completely occupied, and many settlers turned their sights to the Andean foothills, the most favorable ecological zone of all the territory they had explored so intensively. An offshoot of the colony was established at 16 de Octubre in 1886. Each of the original settlers was allotted a league of land.

After 1900 Welsh immigration failed to keep pace with the influx of population from other parts of the Argentine and from Southern

Europe, and finally ceased in 1911. The Welsh became a minority in the Lower Chubut Valley by 1916 when its settlement totalled about nine thousand. At this time the Lower Chubut Valley population consisted of two distinct culture groups. One was the Welsh group, agricultural landowners in a rural environment; and the other, Latins, who were mainly urban dwellers. Further distinctions between the two groups such as language, religion and values, scarcely need enumeration. In these distinctions acculturation manifests itself.

The incidence of change can now be treated historically, so that it will be in effect an indication of institutional changes over a period of time, not of a recurring change affecting succeeding generations and varying for groups and for individuals within groups. The evidence is recorded evidence. A considerable body of written material is available, especially from individual observations made this century and last. Such evidence is valuable but tends to be highly subjective and particularistic. Of greater value is an analysis of the language of a representative body of written work over a long period of time. "Content analysis" is a method which will measure quantitatively the incidence of change. The prime interest here is in one cultural element--language.

The written work analyzed is a newspaper, Y Drafod (The Discussion), which provides a continuous record for over seventy-five years. Most Welsh newspapers, i.e., those written expressly for Welsh immigrants, have been short lived.<sup>1</sup> Certain assumptions are explicit in this analytic method. The first is that cultural changes are reflected in the content of a newspaper. However, it is a cultural newspaper, and is neither the organ of any political body nor the expression of the opinions of one class. One of its main functions was that of an outlet for Welsh literary expression. Many of the colony's poets were regular contributors. Editorial changes have had a great effect as will become obvious when the evidence is considered.

Most of the editions of the newspaper are available at the National Library of Wales. These were read and the "column inches" for

each issue recorded. A preliminary survey revealed that there was no significant change in total space between 1891 and 1920, but that change did occur between 1920 and 1935. My first hypothesis was that if immigration ceased in 1911 one would expect the greatest change to occur two or three decades later, when the first generation immigrant group was disappearing. The evidence supports this hypothesis. Figure 1 reveals the percentages in graphical form. A substantial portion of the paper consists of advertising. Obviously it is the other printed matter which expresses cultural change more clearly.

A word of explanation for the unexpected change in favor of the Welsh language after 1935 is now in place. Ownership of the paper changed in 1930 and the new owner initiated a Spanish language section. In 1935, he published a separate Spanish language newspaper Jornada, making Y Drafod almost exclusively Welsh again. Those Welsh people unable to read Welsh thus were able to obtain their news from Jornada. Until the death of this edition in 1952 Y Drafod had been a weekly publication. Subsequently no publications appeared for some time until a new editor was found to publish it fortnightly. By today it appears only about two or three times annually, circulation being no more than five hundred.

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Apart from advertising, Y Drafod until 1915 was practically monoglot. Occasionally some news would appear in Spanish or English. However, the nature of the material published in Spanish reveals evidence as to the institutions which were subject to change within the colony.

In 1891 the financial report of the Department of Gaiman was published in Welsh with a Spanish translation. However, the advertisements and the annual reports of both the Irrigation and Cooperative Societies were in Welsh only. It was not until 1896 that any Spanish was associated with either of these two institutions when an announcement appeared in that language about the general meeting of the Irrigation

Society of the eastern valley. It is significant that the non-Welsh population was concentrated in this section of the valley. By 1903 advertisements concerning the Cooperative Society appeared in both Welsh and Spanish, and by 1909 the annual report was published in both languages. By 1915 the Irrigation Society followed the same policies. In one edition of the newspaper a Spanish report was published by the Irrigation Society with a Welsh translation.

In 1897 an article about the public schools appeared in Spanish, and in the following year an article was published in Welsh suggesting that the children should be taught three languages, Welsh, Spanish and English. Education was indeed one of the main vehicles of change. After 1896 Spanish language instruction became compulsory. Education was partly an attempt to make faithful Argentine citizens of all young members of immigrant groups. Although the Welsh could preserve their language and values in the Chapel, in most phases of life they increasingly were faced with another language and a new set of cultural values. Children began to live a dual role. As the contacts of this young generation with outside groups increased, the acceptance of alien values also increased.

As would be expected advertisements concerning such institutions as the "Guardia Nacional" and the "Municipalidad" appeared in Spanish very early. The financial report of the municipalities were not published exclusively in Spanish until 1928. Similarly advertisements relating to the Banco de la Nacion appear in Spanish in 1899. This is partly explained by the fact that almost all of the Welsh population carried out financial transactions through the Cooperative Society.

It was in 1899 that the minutes of the Municipalidad appeared in Spanish. Change in this sphere is also seen through a change in leadership within the institution. Between 1895 and 1910 there was a considerable increase in the number of non-Welsh members serving on the local council, a reflection of the measure of support they received by the councilors from their respective peer groups. Obviously, the Welsh

were losing control in the political institutions, but the community had its own medium of legal authority centered in the Chapel which had the power to punish by excommunication any behavior not sanctioned by the in-group. Although Welsh was still the language of the Chapel one observer noted in 1910 that the morning service was drawing a large non-Welsh audience while the evening service, traditionally the main service in Wales, attracted most of the Welsh population.

Several conflicts with the Argentine government occurred before the Welsh lost control of the Municipality. While the government felt that the colony's administration, the Municipality, should align itself within Argentinian laws, the Welsh refused to adapt to this. Realizing they were losing political authority, the frustration of the Welsh was expressed through internal dissent. This in effect is a situation in which the minority group within the nation feels itself alienated, an alienation emphasized by discrimination by the politically dominant group. This situation arose due to the Welsh being unwilling to adapt their values, political aims, and cultural pattern to those of the Argentine out-group.

The eisteddfod is another institution through which change can be analyzed. This is an extremely old Welsh festival of dance, literature and song presented on a competitive basis. The changes which the eisteddfod has undergone in Chubut are many and complex, but the main area is in the language. The festival was held regularly until the 1920's after which it disappeared completely until restored by the editor of Y Drafod. After his death in 1951, there was no further eisteddfod until one was introduced as part of the centenary celebrations in 1965.

Unfortunately, not many of the programs published for the eisteddfod are available, but those that are accessible tend to be quite revealing. The programs for 1910 and 1911 are all in Welsh, as are all the competitions apart from two which called for translation from one language to the other. In 1947 the program was again entirely Welsh, and again translation competitions appear. Of eight recitation pieces



only one was in Spanish. However, a pamphlet published at this time suggested a compromise by permitting the children to compete in Spanish. It was not until 1949 and 1950 that the Spanish language began to be used in the proceedings. By 1965, however, some of the traditional competitions were dropped, and the festival was completely bilingual. The reason for this last change is that some of the written compositions simply don't lend themselves to a non-Welsh language. The eisteddfod remains, a word which sums up the Welsh contribution to community life. The focus has shifted, being no longer the expression of a minority group but rather the whole community. The change was inevitable. Had it not changed, the eisteddfod would have died a natural death. There remains a changed festival, a sacred name, a proud tradition, and the recognition of a contribution to one aspect of the local culture.

The process of assimilation is two-fold. There is the constantly repeated assimilation faced by each second generation group, and there is a culture change, the change in institutions outlined above (Ponsioen 1965:54). This second change is closely related more to the influx of newcomers reviving the old cultural values than to continuing tradition through succeeding generations.

This historical view of institutional change is one which the student is privileged to see only after a long period of time. The data which show it quantitatively are an abstraction. The leveling out of the infinite number of variations which give the total effect obscures the process as it appeared to those who took part in it. Where were these smaller changes taking place and what was their nature in that period which appears to be stable, but which was stabilized only by factors which cancelled one another? In discussing culture as such, and cultural change, it is easy to forget that they are products of human activity, and that the sum total may be very different from the reactions of individuals. Individual changes no doubt were taking place long before the interaction of new factors revealed change in history. The next task is to find the incidence of this individual change, or change within generations, as opposed to the long term institutional change.

The Welshman went to Patagonia with a set of cultural values nurtured in Wales, most of them linked with language and religion. The Welshman's function in society was to pass on to his children this cultural heritage. If the education of the child was restricted within the limits of the family group, this cultural equipment would appear practically unchanged in the next generation. Even in a wider context, if the social group is Welsh, the heritage is likely to be passed on and maintained. This was the case while the Welsh were a majority with Welsh being the language of the home, the street, and the shop, and the language of instruction. However, the picture changed when the Welsh became a minority. This condition first revealed itself as a struggle on the part of the old generation to retain its language and as a consciousness that it was losing ground. Attempts to maintain continuity were made through the authority of the family. Anyone who elected to marry outside of the group was ostracized, not only by members of the group, but also by the family. Such behavior served to decelerate change for quite a considerable length of time, but gradually deviant behavior on the part of those who adopted non-Welsh traits became more frequent and therefore more acceptable.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The Andean branch of the colony at 16 de Octubre and the acculturation of its members must be considered separately from the branch and acculturation of the Welsh in the Lower Chubut Valley. The institutions within the two locations were similar but the ecological situations differed. Although I do not wish to sound deterministic, I suggest this variation had a great bearing upon the acculturation process. This will be elaborated upon presently.

Because of the geographical location, the amount of land acquired by individual settlers, and the suitability of land for agriculture, the Welsh viewed 16 de Octubre from two points of view: firstly as an area of retreat from Argentine authorities and the threat of

assimilation, and secondly as an area where their economic circumstances could be improved. Between the two branches of the colony, contact based upon economic and kinship ties continued. However, the high degree of isolation in the Andes united the settlers into a very close group.

In the inter-war period, immigration from Southern European areas to Chubut continued. In the Lower Chubut Valley, the Italian and Spanish speaking population greatly outnumbered the Welsh. On the other hand, the newcomers to the Andean area were primarily Chilean. In both cases population pressure on the land occurred, but the partible inheritance system insured that established Welsh families remained on the land.

Today the in-group, out-group situation is very apparent. Those born of Welsh parents in Patagonia belong to the two social groups reflected in the in-group (us) and the out-group (them). From a Welshman's point of view, his group even though now a minority, is the in-group; the Latins are the out-group. These groups represent normative systems. What is acceptable in one is not necessarily acceptable in the other. When a choice exists of any elements, each group offers its own "rewards." The reward of the in-group is the solidarity of the family or the group, and a feeling of belonging. On the other hand, this entails corresponding "punishment" in the out-group, which withholds its rewards from those who accept any other norm. A comparison of the rewards of these two groups reveals that the minority in-group, the Welsh, offers the solidarity referred to above, absence of family schisms, and the possibility of rapid increase in status within the group. The out-group offers new and exciting experiences, the slighter possibility of higher status in a much larger society, higher income, and acceptance in the sphere of work and play. These latter rewards are constantly brought home to the child in its education as an Argentine citizen.

The children of the Welsh immigrants belong to one of three groups: those who accept the in-group norm, those who accept the out-group norm, and those who are in conflict between the two and/or are

apathetic. The first two groups are not mutually exclusive in all respects, for the Welsh norm does not cover all activities, but they do imply identification with the groups concerned. The first group consists mainly of the older members of the group but is diminishing very rapidly. The third group is small, but very interesting. Here is found the individual whose attachments to the family are so strong that he attends the religious service in Welsh although he cannot understand the language. He will not break away for fear it will affect family solidarity. The conflict is unresolved.

While the in-group remained entirely Welsh in language and background, choices were clearly defined. When immigration from Wales ceased, the situation changed. The individual could interact with the out-group and remain "in," precariously at first, but more surely as the second generation group increased and the first generation group diminished.

The local Latin value system is materially orientated; thus, socio-economic status is a very significant factor in the acculturation process. Contrast in status usually results in group distinction and aloofness, whereas similarity of status will lead more readily to a fusion of two groups. In the Lower Chubut Valley a post-war change visible in the land use pattern has occurred which bears direct relevance to contrast in socio-economic status between the two groups. Many of the recent Latin immigrants purchased small plots of extremely fertile land within the Valley and practiced intensive market garden agriculture. The Welsh, on the other hand, continued to practice their traditional extensive agriculture based on animal husbandry and cultivation of alfafa. However, the land of the Welsh has been extensively divided by two factors: the partible inheritance system and the drastic increase in alkalization. As a result the income of many Welsh families and correspondingly their socio-economic status are low. The Welsh are reluctant to change their agriculture system because of the risk involved, and the fear that time required with the new system will disturb their socialization pattern.

To counteract the fracturing of land the Welsh have developed a pattern of patrilocal extended family residence. Daughters marry off the farm and sons bring their wives to live in a house adjacent to the family house. The land is then farmed as a single unit and the proceeds divided. This heightens the cultural distinction visible in the landscape.

The above situation is not repeated in the Andes where landholdings were larger and the partible inheritance system has not been active for such a long time. Also the incoming group, i.e., the outgroup, consists to a great extent of Chileans whose socio-economic status is low. An overview of the current population distribution should help illustrate the present situation.

Within the Lower Chubut Valley the majority (77%) of the Welsh-speaking population lived in the west. This percentage decreases as one moves eastwards: 68%, 48%, 44%. Gaiman has the highest Welsh-speaking urban population. Twenty-two percent of its one thousand or so population speak Welsh. The percentage in Rawson and Trelew was 5% and Dolavon 20%. Of the Welsh population, those over thirty-five were, with exceptions, monoglot Spanish. Thus, if such linguistic evidence is a measure of culture change, the process of assimilation has been extremely rapid. Today there are many households in which the parents speak to their children in Welsh and are answered in Spanish.

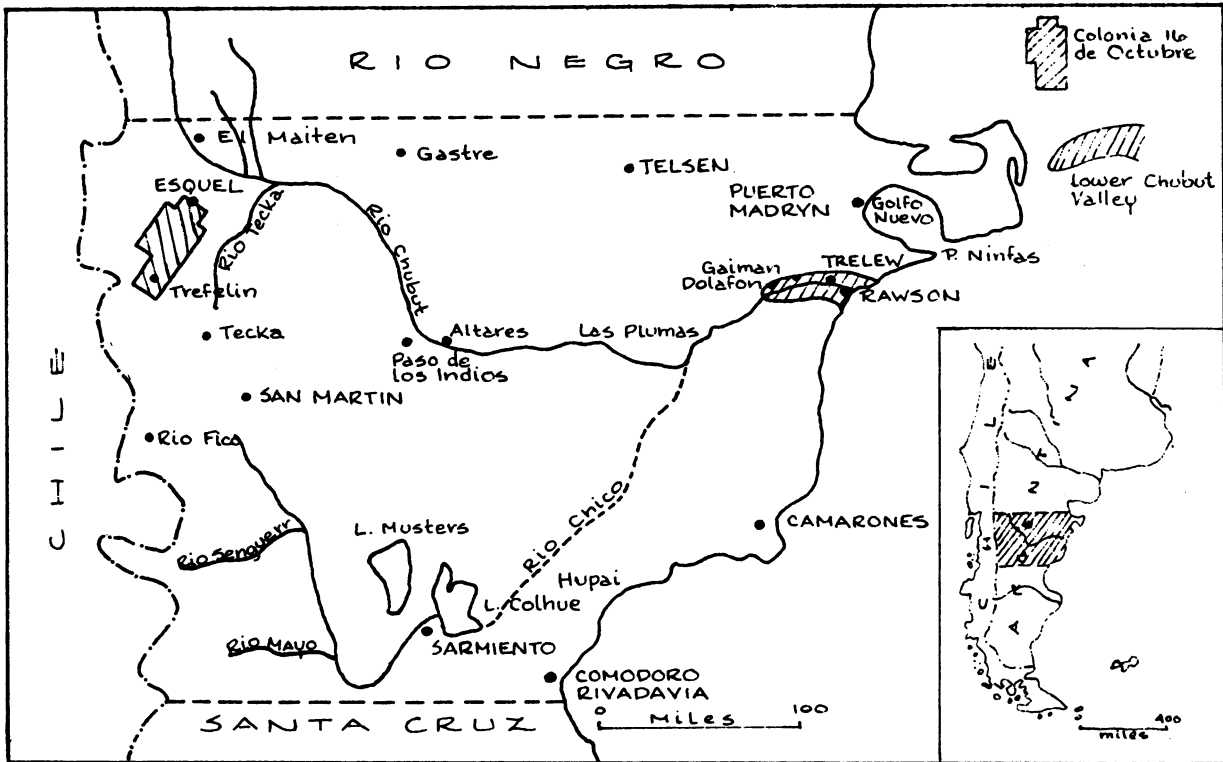
In the Andes, the Welsh language is much stronger. In rural areas the proportion of Welsh speakers is about 80% and in a nucleated settlement of about 1,200 people, Trevelin, it is 25%. Due to the high socio-economic status of the group the "cultural image" is high and the younger generation is proud to speak Welsh.

Another contrast between the two areas is in the part played by the Chapel in contributing to the internal cohesion of the group. The rapid acculturation within the valley has contributed to a religious split which is carried over to the community at large. In that it involves the Chapel, traditionally the unofficial legal arbitrator,

solution of this problem is difficult. The situation arose out of a desire in some Chapels to accomodate the younger generation by changing some aspects of the service from Welsh to Spanish. It is, in effect, the in-group adjusting to the patterns of the out-group. As a result the group feels threatened and has nothing to substitute for the elements it is losing. This situation is not evident in the Andes.

While the educated members of the Welsh community in the Lower Chubut Valley migrate to seek opportunities outside of Chubut, there will be an absence of influential leaders who could serve both as a link between the in-group and the out-group, and of prominent people whose influence would be felt by the younger generation, thereby promoting an increase in group prestige. This out-migration will continue as long as opportunity for a high socio-economic status is denied the Welsh by the nature of his agricultural occupation in this ecological niche. In the Andes the Welshman's prestige and status is high and there is a corresponding absence of out-migration in search of individual betterment.

In conclusion, Welsh culture in neither area has been completely absorbed. What is left is real enough and is being adapted to the new cultural values in a new guise. The eisteddfod is an example of this. Like most Welsh festive occasions, it is centered upon poetry and song. The singer may be effective in singing a Welsh song, although she does not understand the words, but the day is begun by swearing allegiance to the Argentine fatherland as well as by singing praise of the Welsh heritage. It will end with the singing of "Land of My Fathers" and "El Himno Nacional." These people are not exiles. In a land where history is recent and traditions meagre, they are proud of a different tradition which they will preserve in part, but they are prouder still of being Argentinians.



Map 1 Province of Chubut.

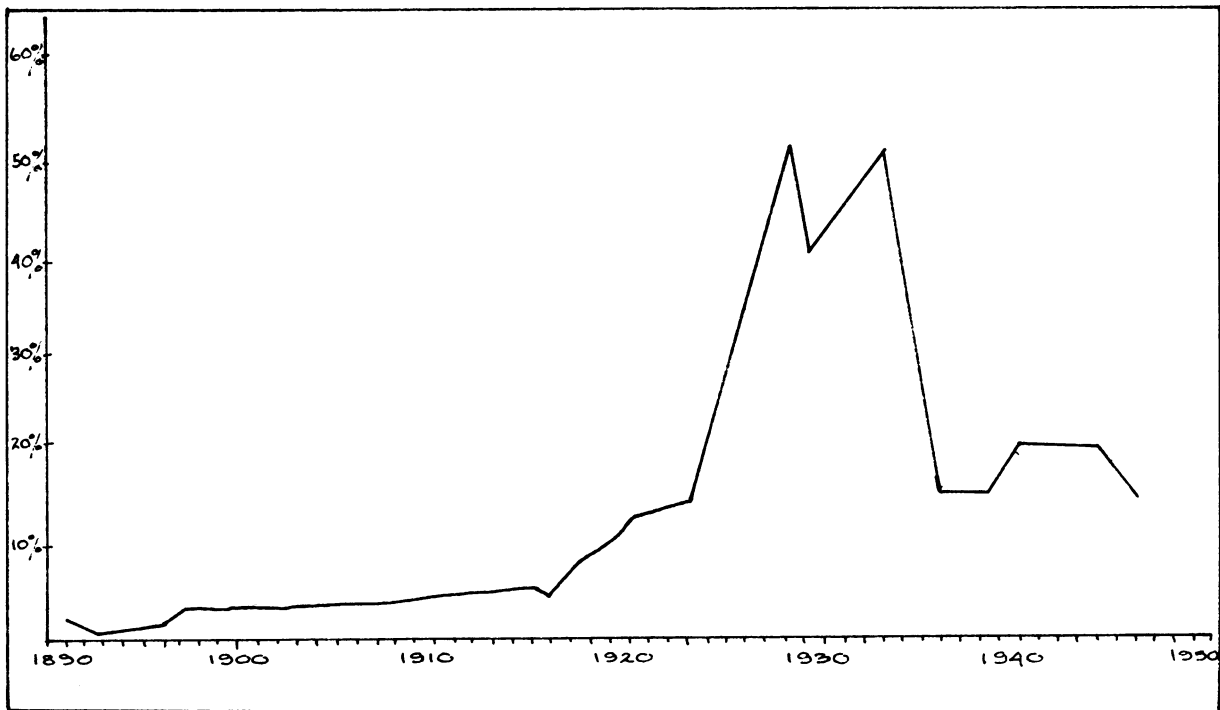


Fig. 1 Percentage of Spanish language appearing in Y Draford.

## NOTES

\* This is an extension of a paper read at the April 1967 meeting of the Kroeber Anthropological Society, Berkeley, California.

<sup>1</sup> Y Brut was published in 1865, Y Gwerinwr in 1914, and Y Gwilydydd in 1929.

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