

Language death is biggest cultural tragedy of modern age

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■ Thousands of years ago we spoke an ancestor of the Welsh language, Brittonic Celtic.

The original language of our country – the earliest language we know about – was Welsh. Three thousand years ago, and possibly much earlier, everybody in Norfolk spoke Welsh – or rather its ancestor, Brittonic Celtic.

By the year 1000, however, this ancient language had been pushed back to the far west of our country – Cornwall, Devon, Wales, the Lake District.

And now, although it's not doing too badly, there are only some areas of Wales where a majority of people use Welsh on a daily basis.

One problem Welsh people encounter in trying to preserve their language, and pass it on to future generations, is all the English people who are moving in.

Because North Wales is a beautiful area, people want to go and live there – and some of them then expect everybody to speak English to them.

Some even object, disgracefully, to the local language being used in schools, in a way they would never dream of doing if they had moved to France.

Language death is the biggest cultural

tragedy in the modern world. Perhaps 90pc of the world's languages will be dead in 200 years' time.

So the Welsh are quite right to do everything they can to defend their language against anything that jeopardises its future – including incomers.

But dialect death is also a tragedy; and here in Norfolk we are right to try to defend our dialect against anything which jeopardises its future too – including incomers.

Of course, when adults come in gradually and form a small proportion of the population, their children will acquire our local way of speaking, even if some incoming parents, disgracefully, don't want them to.

But if very large numbers of outsiders

were to arrive all at once, this would threaten our local culture and speech, because then the children will not be surrounded by a majority of locals to learn from.

It now seems that 30,000 new houses are going to be built in the Norwich area.

Quite a lot of them may be built in the unspoilt rural areas east of the city where I used to walk and cycle when I was young.

I know there are homeless people in the Norwich area – but surely not, at 2.3 per household, 70,000 of them?

No, apparently, this vast amount of new building is because “Norfolk is a beautiful area, and people want to come and live here”.

Speaking personally, I rather wish they wouldn't.