Ideological Directions in Welsh Language Policy

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Executive Summary

- Contemporary Welsh language policy shows consistent prioritisation of the Welsh language, as an abstract entity.

- This prioritisation significantly outweighs human wellbeing or Welsh identity as underlying motivations.

- That ideological weighting makes Welsh language policy quite unusual compared to other areas of government policy.

- This balance of focus could mean that potential future negative effects on people are not foreseen.

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Overview

- Capability theory

- Three ideologies of language: instrumental; constitutive; intrinsic

- Texts analysed

- Methodology

- Findings and discussion

- Conclusion

- Q&A

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Capabilities

- The ability to materially alter your life conditions, and pursue your objectives (see e.g. Sen 2004).

- Some related terms: functionings, positive freedoms, opportunities, choice sets, options.

- Starts with the basics of avoiding starvation, and goes on to include everything that a person can value in life, including intangibles like being happy.

- Also useful, the idea of "freedom restricting conditions" (Vizard, 2006), which may inhibit your capabilities.

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The 'constitutive' ideology

- 'The constitutive view says that language constitutes who I am, that my language and my identity are inextricably intertwined, that I cannot have concepts or views for which I do not have language, and that language allows me to express or articulate things that I could not have without having language.' (De Schutter, 2007: 8)

  - *i.e. not all that related to capabilities*

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The 'instrumental' ideology

- 'Instrumentalists [...] typically defend the idea that languages should be primarily seen as tools to perform non-linguistically defined things [and] [...] that government interference in the domain of language is only legitimate in so far as it attempts to bring about these non-linguistic goals.' (De Schutter, 2007: 9)

  - *centrally related to capabilities*
  - *according to this, access to a language cannot in itself enhance capabilities; it has to deliver other freedoms*

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The 'intrinsic' ideology

- '[L]anguages are morally valuable in themselves, independently of the value their speakers attach to them. This intrinsic argument stands opposed to instrumental accounts, which consider only the individual to be the bearer of rights.' (De Schutter, 2007: 10)

  - *i.e. language use can be seen as a legitimate priority without reference to capabilities*

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Texts analysed

- Iaith Pawb: A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales. 2003. (Hereafter 'Iaith Pawb')
  - http://cymru.gov.uk/topics/welshlanguage/publications/iaithpawb/?lang=en

- Recruitment and the Welsh Language: Guidance under Section 3 of the Welsh Language Act 1993. 2009. (Hereafter 'RWL')
  - http://www.byig-wlb.org.uk/english/using/pages/recriwtioa%27riaithgymraeg.aspx

- A living language: A language for living – A strategy for the Welsh Language [Iaith Fyw: Iaith Byw]. Public consultation draft. 2010. (Hereafter 'Iaith Fyw PCD')
  - http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/consultation/20101213alivinglanguageeng.pdf

- A living language: A language for living – A strategy for the Welsh Language 2012-17 [Iaith Fyw: Iaith Byw]. 2012. (Hereafter 'Iaith Fyw')
  - http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/122902wls201217en.pdf

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Methodology

- A form of 'discourse historical analysis' adapted from Sayers, Rock & Coffey (2011, in prep.)

- Counting up occurrences of constitutive, instrumental or intrinsic ideologies in the texts

- Weighing up these counts to look for overall ideological orientations

- Comparing related research and sociohistorical context

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Examples of constitutive ideology

- These were separated into two 'Types':

- **Type 1**: Personal identity:

  – '[The Welsh language] helps to define who we are as a nation - in our communities, in our relationships with friends and families and as individuals.' (Iaith Fyw PCD, Foreword)

- **Type 2**: national identity

  – 'The Welsh language is an important element in our national culture and identity.' (Iaith Pawb, p.50)

  – 'The Welsh language is an essential part of the cultural identity and character of Wales.' (Iaith Fyw PCD, Foreword)

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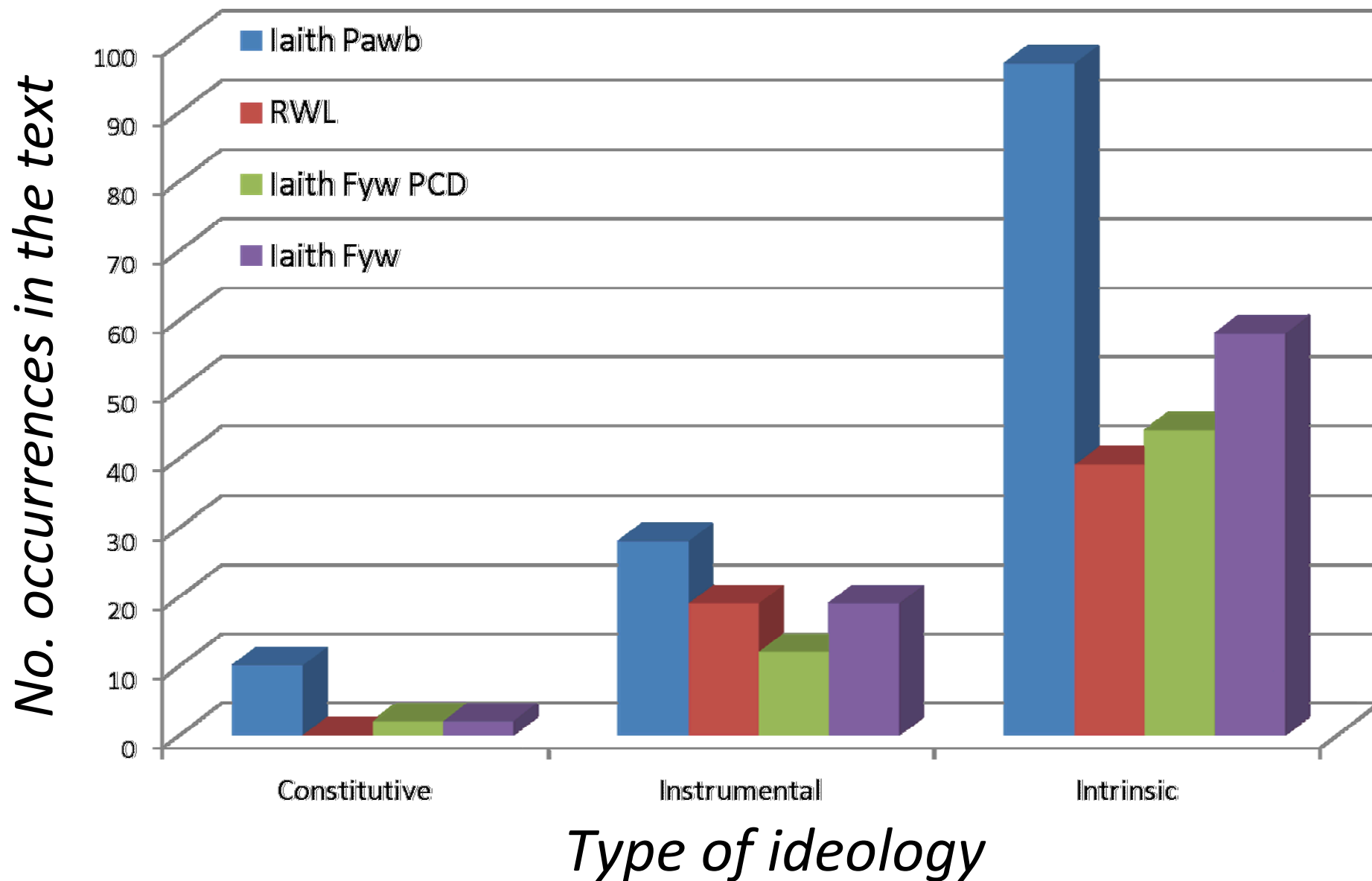**Dr. Dave Sayers • Honorary Research Fellow, Swansea University**

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Examples of instrumental ideology

- 'research shows that there is a growing appreciation of the educational, social, cultural and economic benefits of bilingualism.' (Iaith Pawb, p.39)

- 'Older people are one of the key groups of Welsh speakers that cannot be treated or cared for effectively in many instances unless it is in their first language.' (Iaith Pawb, p.48)

- 'the Language-Economy Discussion Group […] has undertaken research to highlight […] the extent to which the language can benefit the economic prospects of individuals and businesses.' (RWL, p.20)

- 'research undertaken by Consumer Focus Wales showed that 73% of respondents were more likely to buy again from a business […] if it provided them with a Welsh language service.' (RWL, p.22)

- 'Strengthening Welsh language services in health and social care is regarded as a priority since, for many, language in this context is more than just a matter of choice – it is a matter of need […] for instance, people with dementia or people who have had a stroke often lose their second language.' (Iaith Fyw PCD, p.16 – see also Owen, 2012)

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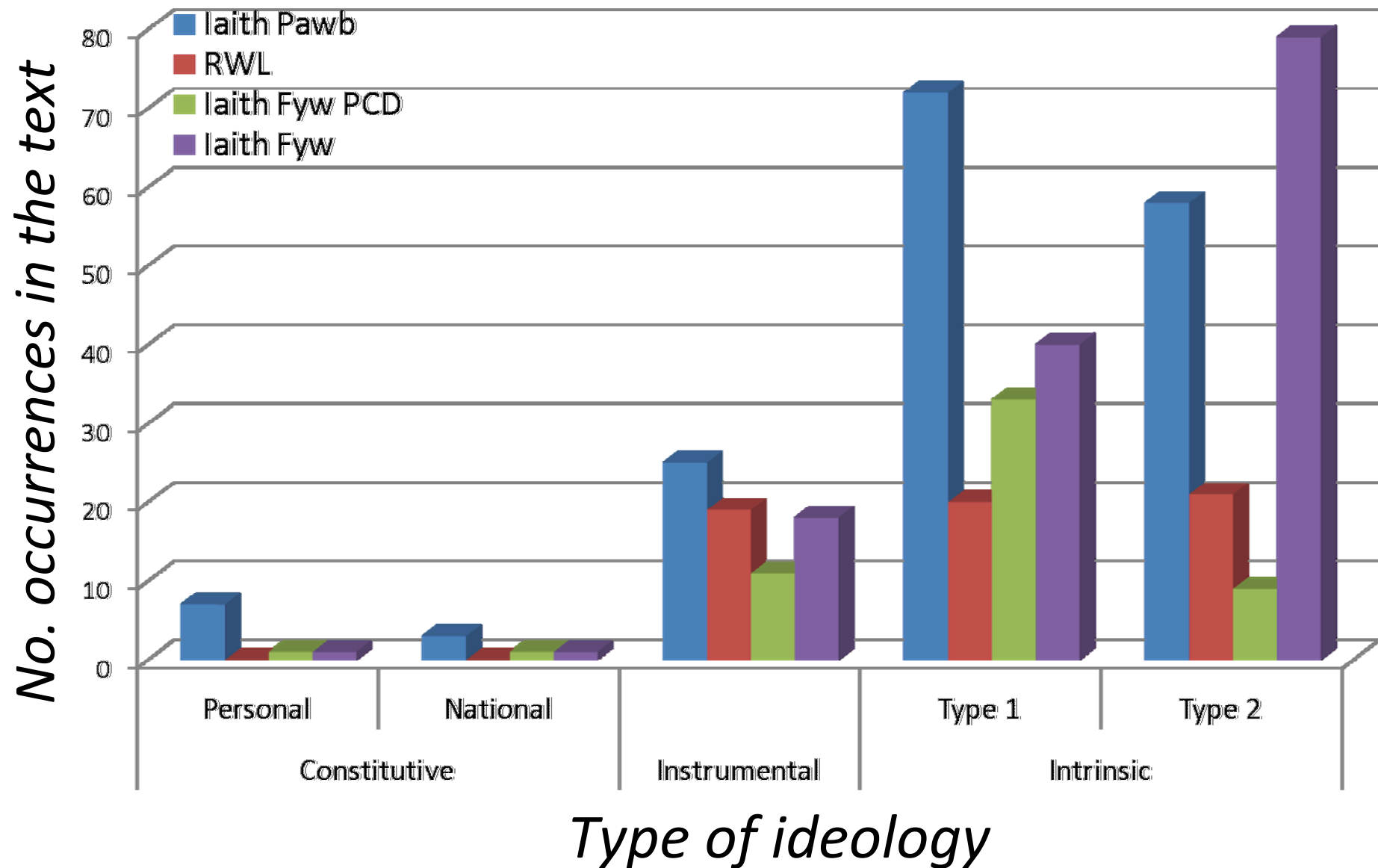Dr. Dave Sayers • Honorary Research Fellow, Swansea University

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Examples of intrinsic ideology

- Like the constitutive examples, these were also separated into two 'Types':

- **Type 1** explicitly posits the Welsh language as an abstract beneficiary, e.g.

  – 'The Welsh Assembly Government is strongly committed to supporting and promoting the Welsh language […] and we shall continue to do all we can to promote its well being.' (Iaith Pawb, p.9)

  – 'The Assembly Government is clear about the crucial importance of maintaining Welsh as a living community language if the language is to thrive and flourish.' (Iaith Pawb, p.21)

- **Type 2** doesn't explicitly identify the language as a beneficiary, but the only goal is to increases Welsh use, not human wellbeing or identity.

  – 'We shall also aim to bring about an increase in the use and visibility of the Welsh language in all aspects of everyday life, including work, leisure and social activities.' (Iaith Pawb, p.11)

  – 'All of the policies and projects discussed in this document have been included with a specific desired outcome: to increase the use of Welsh.' (Iaith Fyw, p.50)
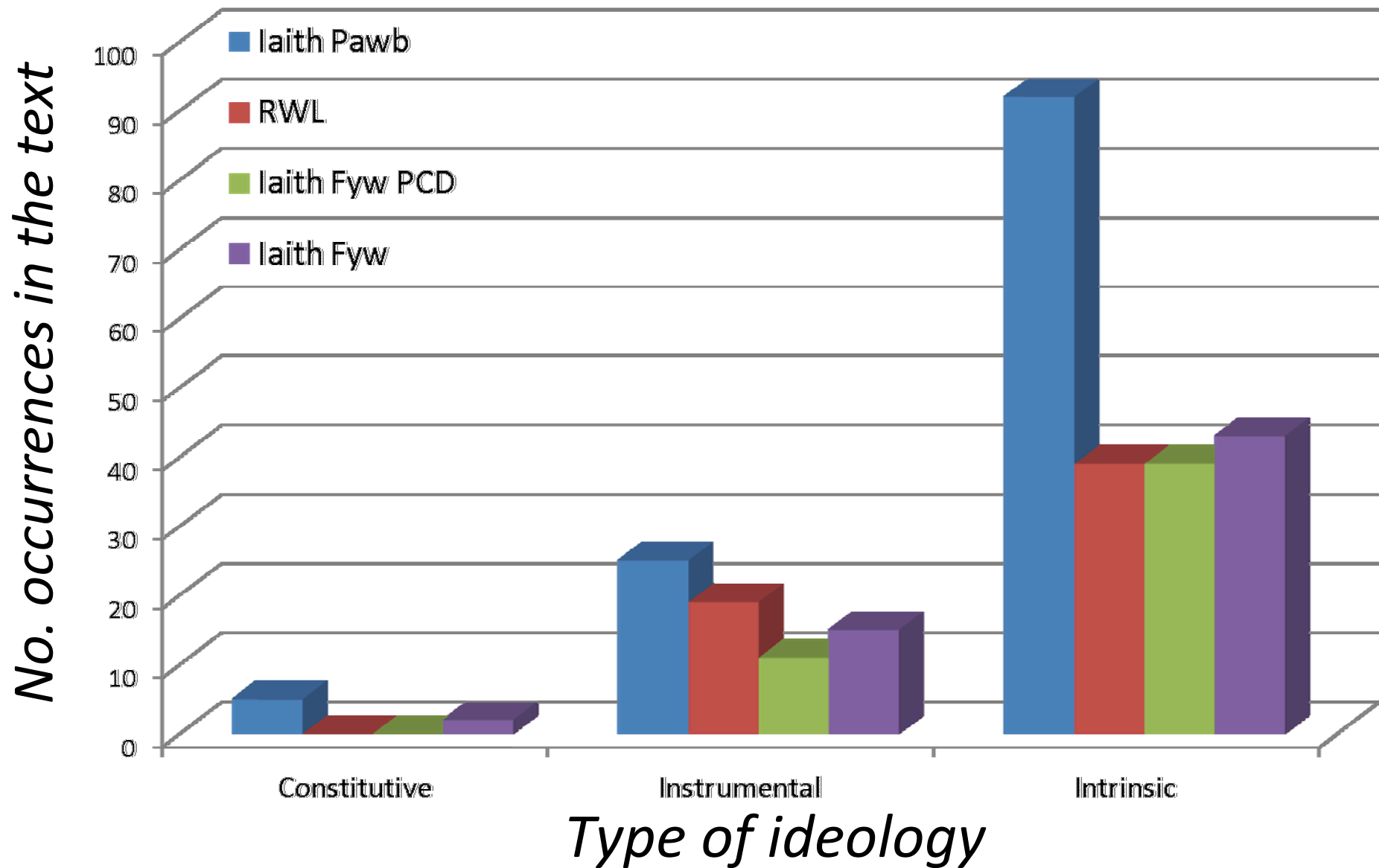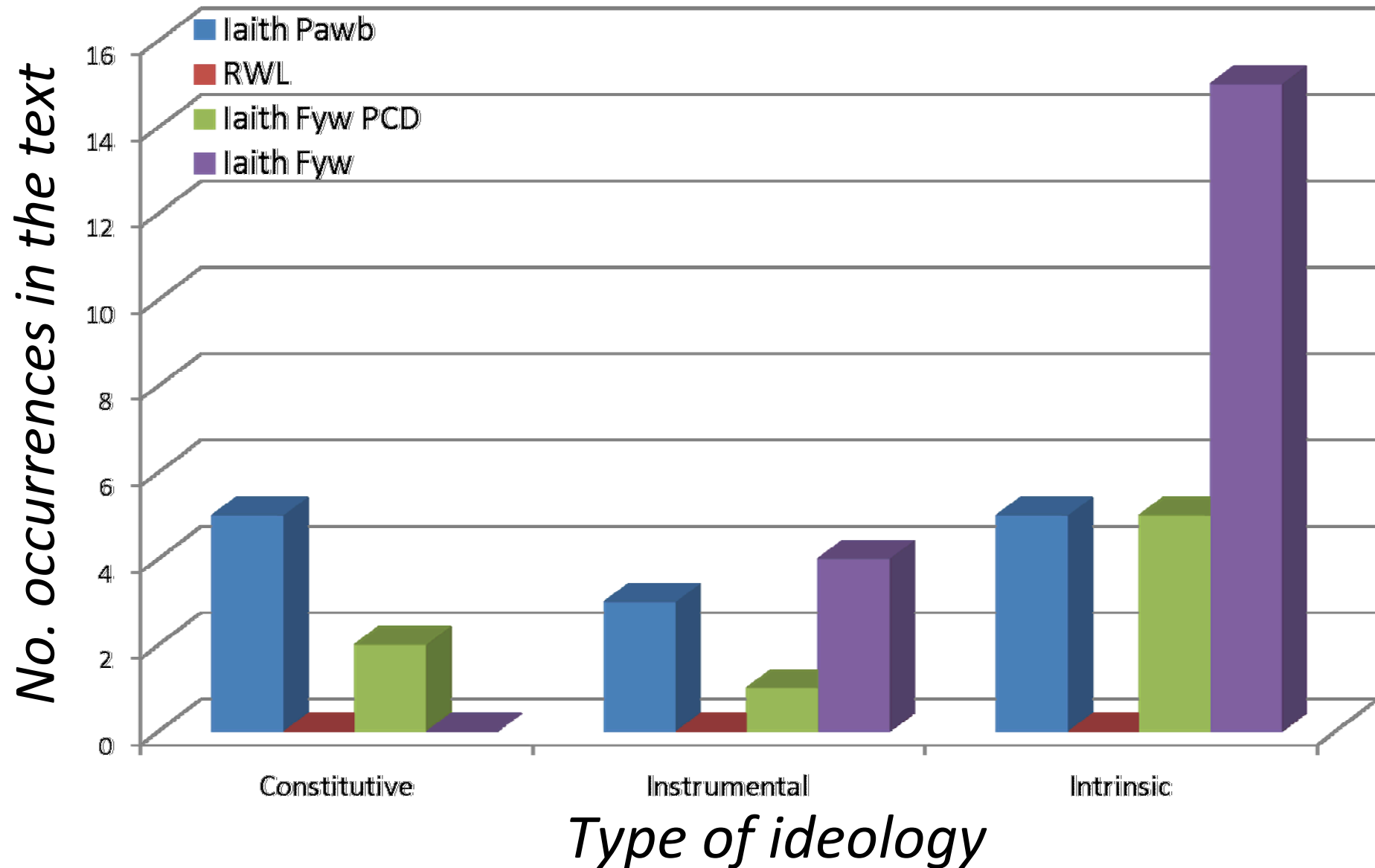
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Findings ('Types' conflated)

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Findings ('Types' separated)

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Overall findings ('Types' conflated, without the forewords)

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Overall findings ('Types' conflated, forewords only)

Legend:
- Iaith Pawb
- RWL
- Iaith Fyw PCD
- Iaith Fyw

Y-axis: *No. occurrences in the text* (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16)

X-axis: *Type of ideology* — Constitutive, Instrumental, Intrinsic

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Overall findings ('Types' separated, without the forewords)

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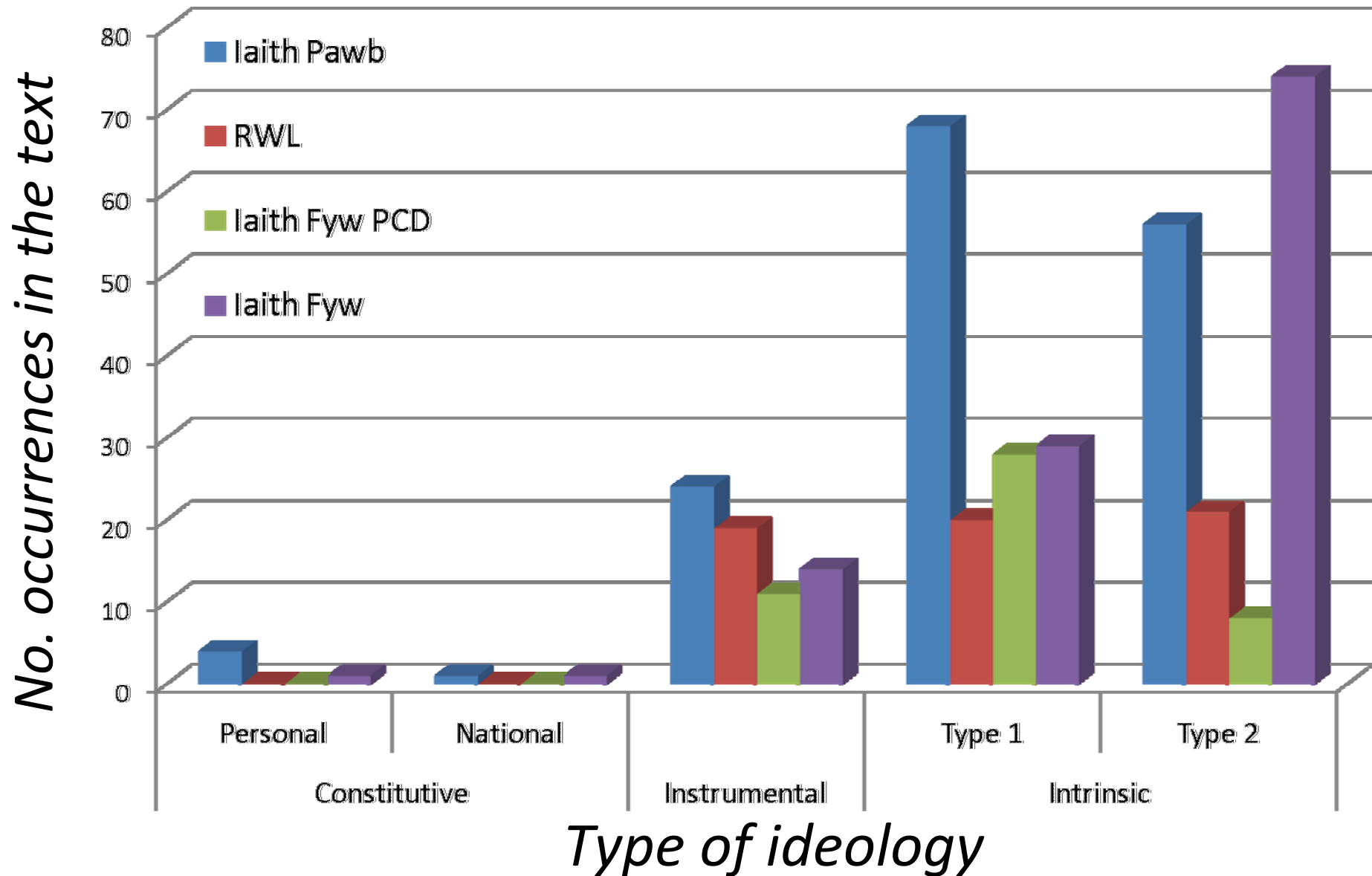
Overall findings ('Types' separated, forewords only)

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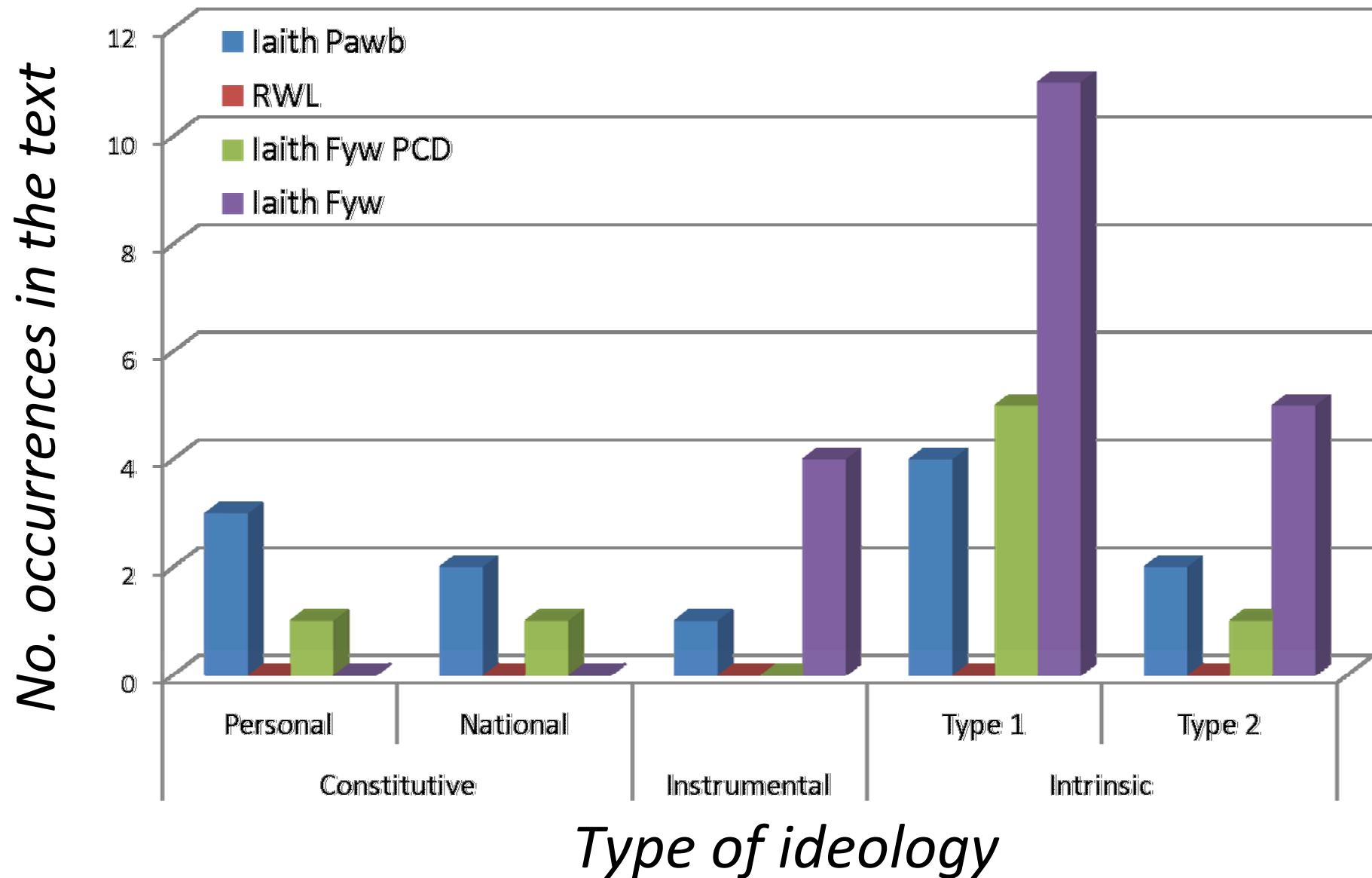
Sociohistorical context

- The origins of the Welsh language movement historically being disconnected from a specific concern over capabilities, more about cultural reaffirmation (Fevre, Denney & Borland, 1997).

- A historical tendency to consider the Welsh language almost as an anthropomorphised entity, in need of protection.

- 'Demography – the numbers and distribution of people [...] – is the usual focus [...]. [...] The very notion of "the Welsh language" [...] treats "the language" as if it truly were a living entity' (Coupland et al. 2005: 1–2).

- Accordingly, an increase in speaker numbers is routinely seen as the principal benchmark of success – see e.g. H. Jones (2005), evaluating the progress of Welsh language policy.

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Policymaking context

- Initial policymaking (as opposed to later consultation) takes place in what Scott refers to as a "policy community" (2001:66).

- In the case of WL policy (see e.g. Iaith Pawb p.13), this community has comprised government departments, and the Welsh Language Board (whose constitutional remit centres on promoting Welsh, i.e. 'intrinsic' goals).

- That policy community, on reading the policy docs analysed above, does not appear to have included departments like the Dept. for Communities & Social Justice, or Centre for Regeneration Excellence, which emphasise capabilities.

- This context helps to explain intrinsic ideologies underpinning WL policy, foregrounding the inherent importance of Welsh, and downplaying non-linguistic instrumental aims, or constitutive identity concerns.

- Overall this makes for quite unusual social policy. Social policy generally is concerned with capability-related social ills, and the fiscal burden of welfare programmes (see e.g. Sayers, Rock & Coffey, 2011, in prep.).

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Anti-instrumentalism?

- Having seen that the Welsh language is prioritised independently, the next important question is whether it is prioritised *above* human wellbeing, e.g. where potential damage to capabilities was identified, and explicitly justified in the name of promoting Welsh.

- There are identifiable acknowledgements and justifications of new forms of social exclusion created by promoting Welsh, albeit couched in caveats.

- There are some aims to mitigate such exclusion, but those do not reflect instrumental reasoning. They are reactions to exclusions *created by* the language policy, not ways to promote capabilities through language.

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'The [Welsh Language] Board accepts that advertising a vacancy which states that Welsh is essential or desirable may **discriminate against racial groups** which have a lower than average percentage of Welsh speakers. However, **this may be justified** due to the public bodies' need to recruit Welsh speakers in order to meet their statutory commitments under their Welsh Language Schemes, provided the need to speak Welsh is "essential" or "desirable" to the role.' (RWL, p.54)

'In terms of racial discrimination, if it could be objectively shown that a certain level of skill in the Welsh language was essential for the post and that the individual had been given reasonable opportunity to develop that skill and that no other suitable post (that does not call for that skill) was available for that individual to undertake, then – as a last resort an employer could be confident that **dismissing the individual would not be a contravention** [of the Race Relations Act]. However, every case would need to be considered on an individual basis and appropriate advice should be obtained before any steps are taken.' (RWL, p.65)

(emphases added)

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Justifying anti-instrumentalism

- Requiring Welsh for employment, in these WL policy docs, is only rarely linked specifically to instrumental reasoning, e.g. care for dementia sufferers quoted earlier (Iaith Fyw, p.16). For these, an English-only service would genuinely be a freedom-restricting condition, impinging on capabilities.

- Mostly though, such requirements follow from the WL Schemes, which are derived from overarching policy goals, which in turn (as analysed above) are mainly intrinsically motivated.

- Generally, a lack of Welsh-medium provision is not being posited in WL Policy as a freedom-restricting condition. However, a very real freedom-restricting condition is (in the example above) losing your job for failing to learn Welsh. And that is ultimately being justified, albeit with caveats.

Quantifying the priorities?

- During a policy consultation event in 2010, the govt minister and senior official present were asked about new provisions that may require part-publicly-funded charities to work bilingually. Would there be extra funds for this requirement?

- No.

- Would that ultimately mean less overall funding for the third sector?

- Yes, probably.

- Might that mean frontline reductions, and even some closures?

- Well, yes, if local authorities demand bilingual provision, which they could do.

- At what sort of level?

- Conceivably, where 100 organisations had been funded, perhaps in future 99 would be.

(Paraphrased from notes)

→ *This is not a detailed policy statement, but it suggests a mindset. Increasing WL usage (mostly intrinsically motivated, as above) can take priority over 1% of the work of charitable organisations (which is wholly focussed on capabilities).*

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Reflections of public opinion

- Firstly, Wales has extremely diverse opinions about Welsh in different areas (see Garrett et al., 2003; Coupland et al., 2006:354; Eddie Williams, pc.).

- Hodges (2009) found that parents in rural SW Wales choose Welsh-medium education not for instrumental reasons but for constitutive/intrinsic reasons – often vicariously so among Welsh non-speakers (see also Griffiths, 1994; Jones & Morris, 2009).

- A survey of trainee teachers in Wales showed 21.6% against, 48% for, and 30.3% neutral on the statement: 'Legislation protecting the Welsh language is necessary, even if it limits the choices of some English speakers in Wales' (May 2000: 117; for elaborations see pp. 119–123; and for ethnographic insights on similar attitudes see E. Williams, 2009: 80).

- This kind of support for the Welsh language is compatible with policies that foreground intrinsic concerns over instrumental ones, as well as pursuing positive discrimination in the labour market.

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Possible negative effects not foreseen

- In other minority language contexts elsewhere, general inattention to human need while promoting a language has led to:

    – greater wage disparities for immigrant groups (Reitz & Bannerjee, 2007)

    – …specifically for female immigrants, who tend to lag behind in marketable linguistic skills (Beach & Worswick, 1993)

    – overzealous hiring practices, skewed qualification priorities (Muma, 2012)

    – new tensions among native and non-native speakers (Robert, 2009)

    – …including new tensions among children and young people (Selleck, 2010)

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Conclusion

- Welsh language policy has historically needed to swim against a tide of minority usage within Wales.

- This may have led to a primary focus on language, bypassing concerns over individual/societal identity or instrumental utility for human wellbeing.

- It may also, however, have led to 'a blindness about how support for one set of rights might infringe on another' (Coupland & Bishop, 2006: 42).

- This has led to quite an unusual ideological orientation by comparison to other forms of social policy .

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Q&A

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