A Warm Welsh Welcome? How an Understanding of Hospitality Might Inform Good Bilingual Practice in a Welsh/English Context

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This paper describes the tensions between Welsh and English speakers in two intercultural contexts where I work. It explores these intercultural tensions using Derrida's notions of hospitality, and asks whether it is possible to talk about extending hospitality to a language, rather than a person. I start by describing in a little more detail my own experience of the intercultural contexts of both church and college. I then go on to very briefly outline a theoretical framework for hospitality in terms of *host, guest* and *threshold*. Next, I describe a small study I carried out to evaluate a new Welsh-language pastoral group at college. I consider whether this might be understood as an effective act of hospitality towards the Welsh language. I end by considering how this study might inform good bilingual practice in both college and church, as well as perhaps other social contexts. The paper concludes that after the initial act of welcoming Welsh over the threshold by simple bilingual gestures, the host community needs to build an 'understanding space' where Welsh can flourish. This then in turn generates a second threshold where power relations are reversed.

Keywords

Hospitality; bilingualism; Welsh; Derrida

Background

I have two jobs: for half the week I am the minister of a bilingual Welsh Baptist Chapel, Salem Tonteg, and for the other half of the week I am the Co-Principal of South Wales Baptist College which trains women and men for ministry and mission.

In both church and college, I work in an intercultural context. Kwok Pui Lan has described interculturalism[1] as 'the interaction and juxtaposition, as well as tension and resistance when two or more cultures are brought together sometimes organically and sometimes through violent means in the modern period'.[2] In my case, the two cultures are, respectively, the Welsh-

[1] As opposed to multiculturalism.
[2] Kwok Pui-Lan, 'Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. by Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 23–39 (p. 25).

language chapel culture and the English-speaking church culture in Wales.[3] The relationship between the two languages and cultures is a very complex one. English has historically been imposed on Wales and become the dominant language in many areas. In the Baptist family there are monolingual English speakers who define themselves as Welsh, but there are also others in churches linked to English Baptist Associations who basically regard themselves as English and have little understanding of Wales as a distinctive nation with its own language.

In my chapel, these two cultures were brought together when Salem, originally a Welsh-language chapel founded in 1848, started an English-language service and an English Sunday School sometime during the last quarter of the twentieth century.[4] This caused considerable tensions between the two cultures, tensions which of course reflected the same tensions in wider society, and which in fact had been present in the chapel almost since it was founded. The church meeting minutes from 1926 note a proposal that 'sermons be in English' but this was decisively rejected in the next church meeting on 11 May 1926 which records the decision that 'the church accepts the recommendation from the officers, that the church in Salem will not turn into an English Chapel'.[5]

As for South Wales Baptist College, a college founded in Wales to train ministers primarily for a Welsh context, it is interesting to read in the review of the college commissioned under a Welsh-speaking principal (Revd Dr D. Hugh Matthews) in 2000 that

> there was one matter of concern which disturbs the panel and which may need to be addressed unless it was unique to a particular year. One student reports that, "There was a noticeable hostility to the Welsh element in the college" (from some students).[6]

Appointing a Welsh-speaking member of staff and encouraging other staff members to learn Welsh were two of the review's key recommendations. Clearly, even under a Welsh-speaking principal, the tensions of this intercultural juxtaposition were evident.

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[3] I have deliberately used the word 'chapel' to refer to the Welsh-speaking Baptist and Presbyterian churches — in this context, 'church' means the Anglican church. In the English-speaking context, the terminology depends on the location. In my experience, Baptist churches in towns and cities like Cardiff are more likely to be referred to as 'church', whereas in the Valleys, English-language Baptist churches are still very much 'chapel'. It's not uncommon where I live to hear people say 'I am chapel but my husband is church' or 'I go to church in the morning and chapel in the night'.

[4] The official history of Salem is a bit unclear about the date when this happened, but it seems to have been sometime between 1971 and 1980, certainly for the English-language Sunday School.

[5] Taken from the *History of Salem, Welsh Baptist Chapel, Llanilltyd Fardref Pontypridd*, written by Berwyn Davies (unpublished, 2000). The language of the quotation is interesting, and quite theologically correct: the people are the church who meet *in Salem*.

[6] Revd Dr Michael Ball et al., 'Review of South Wales Baptist College', (unpublished internal document, 2000), p. 39.

This paper explores these intercultural tensions using Derrida's notions of hospitality, and asks whether it is possible to talk about extending hospitality to a language, rather than a person. I start by describing in a little more detail my own experience of the intercultural contexts of both church and college. I then go on to outline a theoretical framework for hospitality in terms of host, guest and threshold. I then describe a small study I carried out to evaluate a new Welsh-language pastoral group at college. I consider whether this might be understood as an effective act of hospitality towards the Welsh language. I end by considering how this study might inform good bilingual practice in both college and church, as well as, perhaps, other social contexts.

Salem Baptist Chapel, Tonteg

I was called by Salem to be their minister in June 2013, as a Welsh learner who at that time was operating at *Sylfaen* (foundation level), roughly equivalent to the kind of Welsh that is able to hold basic conversations. The settlement process for Baptist ministers usually includes an opportunity for the potential minister to meet the whole congregation, and for both sides to ask questions. At this meeting, I asked whether the church saw itself as having one congregation or two (one Welsh- and one English-speaking)[7]. The gathered members were initially quite unsure about the answer, and debated it among themselves for a while, eventually coming to the majority consensus that they were one congregation but that more could be done to bring the two groups together.

As I sought to understand what it meant to be the minister of a bilingual chapel, I started to ask myself which linguistic group was the guest, and which was the host? Clearly, the Welsh-speaking congregation had originally been the host and the English speakers the guests. Franz Yoshiy argues that

> the host is the one who receives the guest and offers them hospitality, but in so doing remains the master of his house […] the host must affirm his ownership and control of the domain before he can invite the guest in, and the guest is invited in on the basis that this status quo is respected.[8]

But what seems to have happened in Salem is that the invited guests have grown so numerous that they are now the hosts. However, even that is not strictly correct, as there is an interesting asymmetry here that is not

[7] It is important to those concerned to distinguish between Welsh people and Welsh-speaking people. Many passionately Welsh people cannot speak Welsh.

[8] Franz Joseph Yoshiy II, 'Discerning Difference in Jacques Derrida's Ethics of Hospitality', *Kritike*, 11, no. 2 (2017): 198–221 (p. 209). N.B.: Yoshiy uses 'he' intentionally to preserve a hierarchical Derridean dichotomy.

usually present in other situations to which thinking about hospitality has been applied, for example, refugee groups.[9] The issue here is that Welsh speakers also speak English, and so can manage to participate in a social situation occurring through the medium of English, usually on an equal footing. But the converse is not true: English speakers cannot participate in a social situation being conducted through the medium of Welsh. So, in this paper I would like to consider what happens if we consider the languages themselves (not the speakers) to be the guests and hosts. Is it helpful, or even possible, to speak about offering hospitality to a language rather than a person?

What is Hospitality?

> "[H]ospitality" is [...] a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, "hostility," the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body.[10]

By its very nature, hospitality involves a host, a guest and the nature of the threshold between them. (For clarity, in this section I refer to the host as 'she' and the guest as 'he' in line with Derrida.)

In an act of hospitality, a host invites another (the guest) to cross a threshold. The threshold represents the boundary between the area where the host is at home, and the outside. Thus, from the beginning, the relationship is asymmetrical — the act of invitation needs to originate from the host, otherwise it is invasion and not hospitality. And the guest is usually not at home on the outside of the threshold in the same way that the host is at home on her side. Once the guest crosses the threshold, behaviours need to be negotiated. Is the host going to expect the guest to abide entirely by the host's own rules? If so, the place beyond the threshold is a place where the guest renounces all power and remains permanently the guest. Is the host going to renounce all power, and allow the guest to do as he wishes? If so, the threshold has actually disappeared. This is what Derrida and others have referred to as unconditional hospitality, in which there must be no pressure or obligation to behave in any particular manner: 'one might draw from this a rather abrupt conclusion […] hospitality is infinite or it is not at all.'[11] The question of whether such unconditional hospitality is actually possible is a moot point. Instead, what commonly happens is what Derrida has termed a

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[9] See for instance, Ivana Noble and Tim Noble, 'Hospitality as a Key to the Relationship with the Other in Levinas and Derrida', *Theologica*, 6, no. 2 (2016): 47–65.

[10] Jacques Derrida, 'Hostipitality', *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities,* 5, no. 3 (2000): 3–18, (p. 3).

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 48.

'hostipitality', in which the hospitality offered by the host retains a degree of hostility.[12] This is where the host and the guest must negotiate with each other the rules for co-existing within the same 'home'. In such a case, one might say that a new set of thresholds have been generated, and for each threshold the same tension between hospitality and hostility holds.

Why does the host make the hospitable gesture in the first place? It is often argued that people pursue hospitality because they are attracted to it as an ideal, out of a mixture of seeking the pleasure of the guest and a sense of duty.[13] Indeed, in Salem Chapel, the gesture of hospitality towards the English language contained these elements. There was a real sense that the church had something good to offer (the gospel of the saving love of Jesus), and that they wanted to share this good news with as many people as possible. But there was also an element of self-preservation and fear: it was clear that the demographic was changing, and perhaps the survival of the chapel was dependent on inviting English speakers in.

But is it in fact possible to offer hospitality to something that is not human? Gerasimos Kakoliris reflects on D. H. Lawrence's poem *The Snake*, and argues that

> hospitality ceases to fall under the condition that the other must be a human, that is, hospitality is not any more defined negatively, based on the otherness of the host as the limit between humans and animals, and hence as the limit of the ethical responsibility of the former. In this unexpected encounter, hospitality blurs the boundaries allowing the Other to appear in non-anthropocentric terms, claiming a place within the human ethical responsibility.[14]

Kakoliris is here considering the perhaps more straightforward case of humans offering hospitality to animals, but I think that the point about ethical responsibility still stands. I would argue that the speakers of the majority language, in this case English, have an ethical responsibility towards the minority language, Welsh, ensuring that not just that it survives, but that it thrives.

An Experiment in Hospitality?

In September 2019 we introduced a Welsh-language pastoral group for the first time at South Wales Baptist College (henceforth SWBC). All the students in this group were ministering in a Welsh-language context. Three of them were first language Welsh speakers, and one had learned Welsh and

[12] See for instance, Derrida, 'Hostipitality', p. 4.
[13] See for example, Kevin O'Gorman, 'Jacques Derrida's Philosophy of Hospitality', *The Hospitality Review* (2006): 50–57, especially p. 51.
[14] Gerasimos Kakoliris, 'Hospitality and non-human beings: Jacques Derrida's reading of D H Lawrence's poem "Snake"', *Hospitality and Society*, 6, no. 3 (2016): 243–255, (p. 252).

could speak it fluently. The aim of this group was twofold. First, it was to allow students to share their challenges and problems in their heart language, without the added barrier that comes from constant translation into English. The second was to help them to reflect theologically on situations in the same language that they would need to use once they were back in their church or placement contexts.[15]

In this simple way, Welsh was formally invited across the threshold of SWBC. Already, of course, Welsh had been a welcome guest in the college. Most formal communication from the college is bilingual (this is the norm in Wales), as is most college worship. In practice, this usually means that songs and prayers are displayed bilingually, and everybody can participate in the language of their choice. Bible readings are read twice, once in Welsh and once in English. But this pastoral group made the power dynamics feel very different. The previous year, I had hosted an English-language pastoral group, and the balance of power was clear. I was the host; the venue was my 'house' (my room in college); and the students were my welcome guests. As a tutor and experienced minister, I was the expert in the room. Now, as the person in the room (my 'house') who was least fluent in Welsh, things were often said which I did not quite understand, and when I came to express my thoughts and advice on a problem that the students were encountering, my words were far less eloquent than I would have liked them to be. I often stumbled over phrases and searched for words. As the students helped me to say what I wanted to say, the host/guest balance kept shifting. We were extending hospitality to each other.

As in any other well-functioning pastoral group, the sense of cohesion between these four students grew, and they would often end up sitting together at meals and in other informal social contexts. Naturally, this meant that they would speak Welsh to each other, and so it has become commonplace to hear Welsh spoken about the college, something which I think is relatively new. This has encouraged one student and one member of staff who are learning Welsh to try out their Welsh too.

As part of a review of the year, I asked the four students in my pastoral group to answer a few questions about their experience of being part of a Welsh-language pastoral group. All four of them agreed to take part, but in the end, one was unable to do so and withdrew.

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[15] For the importance of theological students to be able to reflect theologically in their placement language, see Dewi Arwel Hughes, *Castrating Culture: A Christian Perspective on Ethnic Identity from the Margins* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001).

Questionnaire Answers

Student A

Student A described themselves as

> a fluent Welsh speaker and I speak Welsh in my everyday life. I speak Welsh to my spouse, my children and in my work environment.

As a first-year student, student A had no experience of being part of an English-language pastoral group last year. When asked to place themselves[16] on a scale from 0-10 (where 0 denoted extremely uncomfortable and 10 denoted completely comfortable) to describe how comfortable they felt speaking Welsh in college this year, student A chose 6, and made the following comment:

> Obviously in College the majority of students do not speak Welsh, and due to this, although I do speak to my Welsh peers, I find that I have to turn to English on many occasions (this is not a problem, only when I forget English words). Also, I have found myself apologising for speaking Welsh, not that anyone has an issue with it, it is just polite and you do not want anyone to feel ignored.

Student A felt that being in a Welsh- (rather than English-) language pastoral group had provided them with more support from both tutor and peers. They commented,

> I believe it is essential, not only due to the language, but it is also our shared understanding of our culture. By this, I mean how we worship in the rural Welsh speaking communities, there is a marked difference.

Here student A is making the important point that chapels which have Welsh in common as their primary language also share a common church culture with traditions and expectations which are often absent from English-speaking chapels, even those in the same neighbourhood. This is borne out in the comment on the next answer, which affirmed that being in a Welsh-language pastoral group has made it easier to reflect theologically on placement experiences:

> Again it is the culture. I have been raised and worshipped in a very traditional form of worship, and I have found (not intentionally) that some of my English peers do not understand the differences. Therefore, it is a great platform to share ideas and worries in an understanding space.

The Welsh language has been invited across the threshold and an 'understanding space' has been created within the host's home where the guest can themselves be at home.

[16] In an attempt to further protect the anonymity of the respondents, I use third person plural pronouns to describe the students.

Student A gave the college full marks (10) for its hospitability to the Welsh language, and could not think of any ways in which more hospitability could have been demonstrated, commenting,

> The College has treated the Welsh language very well, and through this the Welsh culture and our history is being treated with great respect […] We had a lecture explaining the importance of the Welsh language, but also our history and how it has shaped us as a people. We have always had a unique culture, e.g. Eisteddfod, and it is wonderful that this is being opened up to the students.

Student B

Student B described themselves as

> a first language English speaker who has learnt Welsh. I usually try to speak Welsh to people who are first language Welsh speakers or people I have got to know through the medium of Welsh.

Student B is in their final year and had been in an English-language pastoral group last year. On the 0-10 scale of feeling comfortable speaking Welsh in college last year, they chose 7, commenting,

> I felt fairly comfortable, but often it didn't feel like there were many other Welsh speakers around. I was actually in a pastoral group with two other Welsh speakers, but it was an English-medium group.

In fact, the number of Welsh speakers in the College was the same last year as it has been this year, but 'it didn't feel like that' because there had been no 'understanding space' created within the host's home for the guest.

Student B had felt 'very positive' about the idea of trialling a Welsh-language pastoral group, and when asked why they thought the college had made this change, they replied,

> Pastoral group is supposed to be a safe place where people feel comfortable to share quite personal information and pray for one another. Often it is more difficult to do this in your second language, so it is important to provide a space where Welsh-speaking students can do so.

Of course, as a first language English speaker, student B would not derive these benefits in the same way as a Welsh speaker would, however they made this comment:

> It has been a very supportive group, and for me it has enabled me to learn more about what it is like for those doing ministry in a Welsh-speaking context, which will no doubt be helpful in my future ministry.

Here, we see the 'understanding space' creating a second threshold, which student B had to cross over in order to enter a Welsh-speaking pastoral space within the wider English-speaking space of the College as a whole. By being actively welcomed into this space by their fellow Welsh-speaking students, student B has gained more understanding 'about what it is like for those doing ministry in a Welsh-speaking context'. It is interesting to note

that a lack of knowledge of the Welsh chapel culture is not an impediment to crossing this threshold, but an inability to speak Welsh would be. Welsh is the passport which enables this second threshold to be crossed.

By accepting the invitation to cross this second threshold, student B has surrendered some of the host's privilege, and is no longer quite as 'at home'. They comment,

> As a second-language Welsh speaker, I sometimes find it hard to follow what some people are saying as they are from different parts of Wales where the accents are quite different.

When asked how comfortable they felt speaking Welsh in the college this year, student B chose 8 on the scale, and reflects,

> Because the Welsh-speaking students have got used to speaking to one another in Welsh in our pastoral group, I think that we feel more able to do so in informal social times […] I have really got to know one other student well through the medium of Welsh through sharing a room at Trefeca so I think that helped too […] with peers, I feel that our group has gelled very well and maybe the language factor is part of that.

The Welsh language pastoral group had no impact on student B's ability to reflect theologically on their placement experience

> because I am second language Welsh and I have mostly been ministering in an English-speaking context this year.

When asked how hospitable the college was to the Welsh language, student B awarded an 8, and commented,

> The pastoral group in Welsh has been a big help with this. I think the college does really well trying to make the services bilingual too.

Student B cited opportunities for Welsh language discussion in small groups, and use of Welsh in college worship, and the college covenant as activities which came across as hospitable to the Welsh language, and suggested that maybe one way of being more hospitable would be to invite a Welsh-language preacher to a college service (with translation equipment). They said that they had 'very much enjoyed' being part of the Welsh-language pastoral group and would be happy to do it again.

Student C

Student C described themselves as someone who speaks

> Cymraeg yn gyntaf bob tro, heblaw mod i yn ymwybodol bod rhyw un yn ddi Gymraeg.[17]

On the 'how comfortable did you feel speaking Welsh in College last year' scale, student C placed themselves as 5, commenting that

[17] 'Welsh every time, unless I am aware that there is someone who is "without Welsh"' — the 'without Welsh' is the Welsh-language way of describing non-Welsh speakers.

> as college was predominantly English, it was easier to keep quiet (especially at the start of 1st year).

In fact, there were at least four Welsh speakers in the college at the time, around a quarter of the student body, but in student B's words, it may not have felt like that to student C.

Student C's reaction on first hearing that the College was going to trial a Welsh language group was

> Great! Far easier to communicate in first language […] being with a group of people with similar experiences (worship styles, sizes and activities) and similar problems and situations.

In fact, student C comes from a different denomination (Presbyterian) than the other two students who took part (both of whom are Baptist). However, the chapel culture seems to be more closely tied to the language than it is to the denomination, in that student C felt that their Welsh-speaking Baptist fellow students had similar experiences, problems and situations. It would be interesting to know whether this sense of shared experience mediated by a common language setting would extend to students training for the priesthood in Church in Wales churches, for instance.

Student C thought that there had been more Welsh spoken and heard round the college during this year, and said that their 'comfort level' at speaking Welsh had gone up from 5 to 8 on the 0 to10 scale. They found that being in a Welsh-language pastoral group had provided more support, commenting,

> I have had far more contact with others (WhatsApp, phone, text etc) this year. I feel far closer as a group.

Student C said that being in this group had made it easier to reflect theologically on their placement experience. They awarded the college a mark of 7 out of 10 for its hospitability to the Welsh language, adding that

> the Welsh language seems far more part of college this year (not a noticeable add in, but expected).

I think that by this student C meant that Welsh felt a more natural part of College life this year.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The results from the questionnaire obviously need to be treated with caution for a number of reasons, not least the very small number of students involved, and the fact that the person commissioning the survey was the pastoral tutor herself. However, the results do seem to corroborate my feeling that the act of hosting a Welsh-language pastoral group had suddenly given

permission for Welsh to be spoken around the college. It was interesting that even though the total number of Welsh speakers had not changed from one year to the next, the perception of the students was that they were no longer an isolated minority as Welsh speakers. Creating the group constituted a formal act of welcome to the Welsh language, inviting it across the threshold. Once the threshold had been crossed, the group became what student A termed an 'understanding space', not just a space where members understood one another, but also a space in which understanding about the Welsh chapel culture could be gained by the tutor and student B, who was not a first language Welsh speaker. Thus, a new threshold had been created, in which the power balance was somewhat reversed, and the criterion for crossing the threshold and being allowed access was now the Welsh language.

If it is thought that creating parallel 'understanding spaces' in an intercultural church context would be a helpful contribution to bilingual worship, what can this study tell us about extending a welcome to the Welsh language in a church context?

First of all, in English-language worship contexts in Wales, the Welsh language needs to be invited to cross the threshold. In this case, the 'church' acts as the host, and the Welsh language is the guest. If the church is the host, who is the church? The church is those in authority, with the power to make decisions. It will be the minister, the trustees or deacons, the Sunday School leader, the worship leader. The host's welcome will manifest itself in the choice of songs, the bilingualism or otherwise of newsletters and announcements, the simple words of welcome at the beginning of the service (Croeso), or of thanks to acknowledge a contribution to the service (Diolch). Once Welsh starts to be used in a worship service in a non-self-conscious way, or without attention being drawn to it, then the presence of Welsh in an English language context becomes normalised. Welsh has crossed the threshold as an invited guest.

The presence of Welsh in this context as a normalising force may trigger different reactions. Welsh speakers or learners already attending the church may experience a welcome to this hidden part of their identity, and it may feel 'safe' for them to start using their Welsh in church. If a speaker from the front 'signals' that they speak Welsh, and that Welsh is welcome in this space, then a Welsh-speaking member of the congregation may feel brave enough to exchange some words in Welsh with that church leader. In this case, the congregation member is both host and guest. By having their Welsh-speaking identity welcomed, that person feels more fully welcomed or integrated into the church.

On the other hand, when Welsh crosses the threshold, monolingual English speakers may experience this as a threat. They may feel excluded

from communal worship if a song or response is available exclusively in Welsh, or they may feel excluded from conversations. If this happens, the host may withdraw their hospitality, and start to manifest hostility instead. Almost certainly, there will be a struggle to try to maintain the upper hand in the host-guest relationship, by defining and restricting the parameters within which Welsh can cross the threshold, and by defining and restricting the areas of the host's 'house' it is free to inhabit.

If, however, the initial foray over the threshold goes well, then perhaps a renegotiation of power boundaries can begin. Hospitality may become more radical — after all, true hospitality 'challenges and confuses margins and centre'.[18] In student B's words, Welsh becomes 'not a noticeable add-in, but expected'. This is the point at which the 'understanding space' needs to be consciously established, and is perhaps the second stage of the process. Welsh language speakers and learners may become part of the decision-making structures themselves, having a say in planning and participating in worship, but such structures are unlikely to operate in Welsh as the presence of even one non-Welsh speaker forces the whole group to revert to the common language of English. Thus an 'understanding space' within the church in which the Welsh language can flourish is essential, and it is less likely to arouse hostility if it is initiated by an English speaker who has learned Welsh. Sometimes, the person who lives on the threshold is the best person to initiate radical hospitality, and may be perceived as less of a threat by both camps. However, there is no circumventing the fact that such 'understanding spaces' constitute a second threshold which cannot be crossed without the ability to communicate in Welsh. Of course, a church could further demonstrate its commitment to such hospitality by investing in translation equipment, and it may be really important to do so — because the 'understanding space' allows the guest who has gained access to gain valuable understanding of their host's cultural life.

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[18] Paul Cloke and Mike Pears, *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), p. 131.