

PANAD?
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF THE PRACTICE OF GIVING TEA (OR COFFEE) TO THE BUILDERS IN NORTH WALES

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropological ethnographies typically open with beautifully written descriptions setting the scene of a place and its culture. Idyllic scenery of traditional tribes in Amazonia, the colorful and exotic cultures of ‘others’ and vibrant stories of the rituals of those far away from us. Frequently anthropology overlooks the aspects of our own lives that are insightful and rich in culture. So here I begin, graciously presenting my reader with a highly-strung out description of the ‘mass construction site’ enveloping my home. Rubble, concrete and dust were merely decorative additions to the industrial scaffolding clinging onto the side of my home in rural north Wales. The scaffolding was just big enough to hold two men at a time, and some mud and rocks were piled in a mound in the corner. The basis of my ethnographic project occurred as I observed the ordinary and seemingly insignificant social norm of giving tea to the builders as they worked on repairing my home.

PANAD? - ASSUMING THE ROLE OF GIVER AND RECEIVER THROUGH THE EXCHANGE OF TEA/COFFEE.

Panad is the Welsh slang word for a cuppa. It encompasses feelings of locality and informality and is adopted by non-Welsh speakers that live in Wales. For individuals and families all over North Wales, offering tea to the builders as they work on your home is a social norm, a practice that is so ordinary and commonplace that it is often overlooked. My aim in this project is to show how this simple exchange between the builders and homeowners is culturally significant in a variety of ways.

My own experience of this exchange occurred on the third day of the builders' presence at my house, as my parents had returned to work, and the responsibility of offering tea was suddenly mine. I had previously asked my father what the best time to offer tea would be, and he suggested around midmorning - "half way through the morning - earlier than that and you'll have to do another one before lunch - later than that and it'll be too close to lunch".¹ So at precisely 10:15am, as my dad had suggested, I popped outside to offer the two builders who were working on the house at the time a cup of tea (I'll refer to them as Paul and Dave). In Welsh, I asked:

Me: Panad?

Paul: Oh I'd love one, ta.

Me: What about Dave (Dave was on the roof)

Paul: (yelling) Dave!! Wanna panad?

Dave: Ye cheers!

Paul: 2 coffees, please dol.

Me: Do you want sugar, milk?

Paul: 2 thanks.

After this brief exchange, I proceeded back inside to make the coffee and I realized that they had not clarified what they wanted...had it been 2 sugars or 2 coffees with sugar? Milk? Was there milk involved? Paul's answer had been vague. Also, to add to the confusion, I subsequently discovered that Paul didn't actually speak Welsh. This explains why he gave such vague answers, as I had assumed he spoke and understood Welsh. When I asked him about this, he claimed that he understood what I had said because this was one of the most common daily verbal exchanges between builders and homeowners. He said people often assumed his ability to understand Welsh, so he had learned what to answer for this simple daily exchange.

¹ I conducted my research in an area of North Wales where the Welsh language is largely and readily spoken, and so for the purpose of my ethnography I have translated all conversations from Welsh into English.

Remembering that my mother always insists on giving the builder's the 'bad' mugs, I fumbled around the back of the cupboard to retrieve them. The 'bad' mugs are two Mini Egg branded mugs that we got years ago from a commercial Easter egg package. They are absolutely horrific; a grotesque yellow colour that has begun to peel and fade covered with little pink eggs and the purple Mini Egg logo sheepishly up front. Had it been any other guests we would have given them our best mugs, yet for the builders they were only allowed the 'bad' mugs. For the coffee, I used cheap Tesco brand instant coffee rather than using our top-quality coffee machine with high quality ground coffee beans. I somehow felt like I would be wasting the quality coffee. When I returned outside with the coffee the two grabbed them like thirsty children. Dave exclaimed that I was a 'lifesaver'. I returned to the warmth of the house, while they returned to the comfort of their van for a coffee break.

4 important things occurred during my exchange with Paul and Dave;

- There was a specific time that had been suggested to me to offer a panad, and this moment represented a break from the builder's work.
- Paul was able to communicate through a symbolic word thus, the use of the Welsh language reflected locality and informality.
- A divide between inside and outside of the house caused me to use 'bad mugs' and cheap coffee.
- I became a giver and the builders became recipients of a social exchange.

The act of giving and receiving a panad is expected and anticipated. I found most my informants considered it rude not to offer a panad to the builders. Mauss stated that, 'exchanges are acts of politeness' (1954: 8). There is an obligation to give and to receive (Mauss, 1954: 17) that can be seen through the expectation of the practice of giving or receiving a panad. In fact, 'to refuse to give...just as to refuse to accept...is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality' (Mauss, 1954: 17). The exchange ensures that the builders do a good job on the house and maintains positive interactions between individuals.

On one day, my mother had offered the several builders on sight a panad, but had forgotten about the offer as she came inside, and sat down to read a book for an hour. Suddenly she jumped up throwing her book in the air, 'Shit! I forgot to make them tea!'. She hurried to get their drinks out to them, horrified at her own incompetence. Even though it was a simple and innocent mistake, my mum reacted in a way that implied that she had personally offended each of the men that had been waiting for their drinks, and damaged her own image as a gratuitous homeowner.

Throughout history food and drink have been 'symbols of social position and status'"(Gusfield, 1987: 75). I found that there is a recognized status quo that is established through the exchange of the panad. My informants stressed that breaching this status quo would be 'wrong'. For the builders to ask for a drink rather than wait for the offer implied 'cheekiness' and disrespect. This is because it assumes that what is given is a right, rather than a courtesy.

To see if the builders working on my home would challenge the status quo, I decided to wait and see if they would come and ask for tea rather than wait for me to offer. Nothing happened until around lunchtime, all of sudden Dave popped up by the window and knocked. He gestured a drinking sign through the window and I immediately understood the universal symbol for a panad. I nodded and went off to make them coffee again, assuming that they would want the same thing. As I brought the two mugs of coffee outside to the van, Dave began actively defending his decision to breach the status quo, explaining to me that they had finished painting the house, and reflecting that his actions had violated some imaginary boundary between the giver and receiver. As I placed the mugs down on the back of the dirty van, I apologized for not offering sooner due to being distracted. They both replied telling me not to worry, that it was fine, repeating that they were having lunch now. The role reversal created some awkward tension and Dave's need to justify his forwardness showed recognition that the act of giving a panad was a courtesy expected by the builders, thus making the exchange a sort of tangible right.

For one informant, the builders worked inside the house and tea breaks became social affairs; builders often joined the family to chat, drink and nibble on biscuits and cake. The build was a long affair and the tea breaks were a way for the family to feel comfortable around the strangers that were in their home for months. The builders became a part of the family, bringing extra sandwiches to smuggle to the dog (who consequently became fat as a result of all the attention). Months later, a member of the family saw one of the men that had been working on the house in town and said that they had hugged and chatted for a while. The lasting relationship formed between the builders and the family was all because of the momentary and fleeting moments established through the panad.

Exchanges are 'a form of communication which carry meaning' (Rosman and Rubel, 2009: 62). Through the exchange of a panad, homeowners and builders establish future relationships and homeowners show their respectability and gratuity. Though the exchange of a panad cannot be said to be a fundamental 'reciprocal relationship' the exchange creates a reciprocity reflected through the actions and interactions of both builder and homeowner (Hazam, 1987: 206).

TEA TIME – THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE AS REALIZED THROUGH TEA TIMES.

'Contemporary industrialized societies are time bounded' (Gusfield, 1987: 73). The act of drinking tea or coffee corresponds with the way that builders structure their day. In British culture the occasion of drinking tea is 'linked to certain divisions of the day [so] that the notion of temporality seems to be imbued in its essence' (Hazam, 1987: 205). By offering tea or coffee at specific times of the day, individuals create a symbolic temporality that impacts both work and leisure. A typical daily structure for builders would be; a midmorning tea or coffee, a drink with lunch, a midafternoon tea break (and in some cases another will be offered upon leaving or packing up). 'The most regular indicator [of time] or clock is coffee' (Gurr, 1987: 231). One builder joked that they wouldn't be able to cope with a day of work without their morning coffee, and that the last tea of the day was a time to catch up and gossip about news from the village.

Societies conceive time in different ways, reflecting the way that a society is organized. Evans-Pritchard claimed that the Nuer in Ethiopia structured the day through their economic activities, what he calls economic time (1993: 17). Time can be understood as process linked, rather than abstract and transcendent (Evans-Pritchard, 1993: 17). On site, the builders lacked easy access to clocks and rarely wore a watch, so abstract time becomes irrelevant to them. Alfred Gell argued that time becomes process linked through social activities such as farming practices, rituals or events, which contrasts to our abstract conception of time (1992: 17). The builders relied on the tea breaks at specific moments of the day to structure their workday and to contrast work with leisure. They essentially perceived time through the daily cycles of the panad.

COMMUNICATION – THE USE OF SLANG AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE TO REPRESENT WIDER SOCIAL MEANINGS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF PANAD.

Paul had constructed meaning out of a language that he did not speak, through repeated exposure to similar questions, allowing him to pick up the basics of what was said without fully grasping the words themselves. Simply hearing the word was enough for Paul to understand. Panad became more than a slang word for a cup of tea, but a symbol of the exchange and a communication tool, gaining a ‘culture-specificity’ (Goddard 2013: 19). There are certain words that have particular connotations and meanings that cannot be translated into another language, ‘such words, which contain a wealth of culture in their meaning, can be called cultural key words’ (Wierzbicka 1997).

Though I’m not suggesting that the word panad is changing the way that Welsh people view the world from their cups, I do think it’s significant to consider the way that words can have culturally specific meanings. Words become symbolic of deeper understandings, hence panad does not just mean a cup of tea, it is more than that - it is symbolic of relationships, companionship and locality. Panad differs from the English ‘cuppa’ because of its local and culturally specific connotations of Welsh-ness. One informant claimed that it is “a particularly Welsh thing to invite someone for a panad”. All that is required in the exchange is ‘panad?’ and anyone can interpret and understand the connotations, regardless of whether they speak Welsh or not. Just saying ‘panad?’ can be the

same as asking anything from ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’ to ‘Do you want a tea break?’

The formality or informality of the exchange could be expressed through the use of language. The use of formal (*chi*) or familiar (*ti*) second person pronouns can establish authority and formality, or friendship and informality within the exchange (Trosset 1959: 103). Typically, *ti* is used when addressing children or animals, or friends, and *chi* used to address adults or figures of authority (Trosset 1959: 104). However adult use of *ti* is highly variable and can be influenced by ‘strategic social factors’ (Trosset 1959: 104). The ‘strategic use of *ti* is a way of injecting a personal tone of closeness and warmth into interpersonal encounters’ (Trosset 1959: 104). In my fieldwork, I noticed that youth (persons under 20 years old) addressed the builders with *chi*, adopting a sense of formality and reflecting the social expectations of respecting adults. If the builders were above a certain age, around 40 years old, most adults would also refer to the builders as *chi*, but if they were younger a more equal *ti* would be adopted.

In Welsh society, the authority of older individuals and recognition of guests at the home are established through the use of formal pronouns. A desire to create an egalitarian social value can be reflected through the particular use of speech in an exchange (Trosset, 1959). The common saying ‘paid a galw fi'n *chi*, galwa fi'n *ti*’ is a symbolic way of ascertaining informality and exhibiting friendliness.² Often in the case of builders, the homeowner aims to establish this egalitarianism to create a sense of equality between the builders and the homeowners and to make them feel comfortable and welcomed.

DIVIDES - OPPOSITIONS THAT SHAPE BEHAVIOR; INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, DIRT AND CLEANLINESS, GOOD AND BAD.

The division of inside and outside is experiential as the builders are mostly located outside the house and the homeowners are situated inside. Due to the physical separation between parties, further separation occurs that is ideological in nature, distancing the builders from the home. The outside carries many symbolic connotations including the idea of contamination, dirt and

² The translation of which would be ‘don’t call me you (formal), call me you (informal/familiar)’.

exposure. Inside spaces are associated with privacy, cleanliness, control, and homes are especially unique to the individual's own personal preferences, and is the most vulnerable and safe space for any individual. Douglas stated that, 'dirt is matter out of place' (1966: 41). Connotations of dirt are associated with the builders because they work outside with materials that would be considered as dirt within the home. The idea that builders could contaminate the home is present because of the divide that occurs between the clean home and dirt from the outside. 'Nothing is dirty in itself; dirt only exists because, as matter out of place, it lies outside and threatens the social system' (Wolkowitz, 2012: 17). To protect the home from this external contamination and dirt, homeowners generally used 'bad' mugs for the builders that could enter the outside without fear of damage or contamination.

Despite the aim of creating an informal egalitarian atmosphere through speech, the reality of the situation showed that builders are seen as complacent with dirt due to their location outside of the home, and their active engagement with dirt, cement, mud or paint. The homeowner in contrast present themselves as the professional modern individual, working 9-5 in an office dressed in clean and formal clothing - a stark contrast to the grime and dirty experience of the builders. The act of giving 'bad' mugs is a conscious effort on the part of the homeowner to protect the inside the home from the contamination from the outside.

Interestingly, in a case where the builder's worked inside the house there was no divide between inside and outside. A few months in, the builders began to help themselves to tea and coffee without consulting the family at all, showing that after a certain stage, formalities were broken down and the status quo dynamic changed between homeowner and builder, allowing the builder to assume an active role in the process. The lack of divide between inside and outside allowed for the breakdown of formal qualities, which fueled ideas about dirt and contamination, and as a result there was no further distinction between what mugs could or could not be used.

CONCLUSION

By observing this practice that occurs around my home, I learnt how to engage with common culture in a new way and notice details that had seemed insignificant to me before. The overwhelming reaction of the majority of my informants to my research topic was bemusement and confusion, unable to see how the ordinary daily habits and rituals we engage in could be culturally significant. A radio program by Phil Trow and Alice Butterworth discussing 'brew etiquette' of giving tea to builders showed that in fact, this is a widely discussed and popular topic among the British public. Trow claimed that he was 'generous with [his] brew' but had specific 'workmen mugs' - as did many of my informants. A guest on the program, William Hanson, stated that he has 'back of the cupboard (...) standard brand' tea and coffee saved especially for the tradesmen, and drew a line firmly on biscuits, unless it was on their last day as a sort of goodbye. This shows that this kind of exchange is exceptionally unexceptional and occurs not only in North Wales but on a wider scale throughout Britain.

The practice of offering and receiving a panad is a cultural practice that is expected both by builders and by homeowners in North Wales. The social interaction reflects a certain egalitarian and communal Welsh spirit, while establishing good relations for the build and efficiency of work. The structure of the day can be revealed through specific tea breaks, and these breaks represent moments of leisure in contrast to work. Divides between inside and outside the house generate concepts of dirt that shape the interaction and cause a separation between builders and homeowners. Finally, the symbolic word 'panad' represents much more than just a cup of tea, but encompasses ideas about locality, creates positive and lasting relations, and reflects a community's desire for Welsh-ness.

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