



Guests and hosts: What hospitality may reveal in the heritage language classroom



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ABSTRACT

This paper engages with the notion of *hospitality* (Herzfeld, 1987; Pitt-Rivers, 1963) in order to analyze and understand the practice of receiving visitors in two Farsi mother tongue classrooms in Copenhagen. We focus on visits by students' friends. Although uninvited by the principal teacher, he treated the visitors as guests and provided them with exercises and attention. We argue that the relational models of hospitality and of education do not unproblematically meet in or map onto the same situation. At the same time hospitality shed light on general challenges of mother tongue education, for instance that it needs to attend to different and potentially conflicting agendas in order to exist. Data come from a longitudinal fieldwork, and we use Linguistic Ethnography as our methodological approach.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we engage with community-based heritage language education using hospitality as an analytic lens. Although rarely deployed within linguistics, hospitality is a widely used notion within the social sciences and a range of disciplines within the humanities (anthropology, tourism, philosophy, migration studies and political science, etc.) (e.g. Herzfeld, 1987; Lynch, Germann Molz, Macintosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011; Pitt-Rivers, 1963). In the following we engage with it as a sociolinguistic practice and from a linguistic ethnographic perspective (Rampton, Maybin, & Roberts, 2015). Empirically we draw on fieldwork in two Farsi heritage language classrooms in Copenhagen where visitors were received on numerous occasions during instruction. This observation distinguished the classrooms from other classrooms in which we have done fieldwork, and it came somewhat to our surprise. We gradually recognized the presence of visitors as a regularity and started interrogating it as a practice. Time is certainly a scarce resource, and as a non-compulsory educational offer, the heritage classes competed with students' other (perhaps preferred) leisure activities. This had the social effect that the student

group varied in size and composition from time to time, and the relative frequency of guests also pointed to the classes' vulnerable position in students' lives. The teacher's acceptance of guests showed his acknowledgment of this vulnerability, and students' parents likewise had to accept the dilemmas of everyday life reality and combine the investment in children's language education with acceptance of them bringing friends. Visitors included parents, siblings, other relatives, and friends of students or parents.¹ Some visits were pre-arranged with the teacher, some were not; some visitors came once, others returned; some eventually became students themselves. As analysts, we wondered what made the visits different from and similar to each other, and what social consequences they had. Clearly, the welcoming of guests – hospitality – was practiced in particular ways because this was an educational endeavor of a certain kind. While hospitality presupposes social roles of guests and hosts, at least one dominant model of classroom education involves the social roles of teacher and student. Also, whereas hospitality involves the temporary integration of an outsider, community classrooms are generally expected to be spaces of instruction in the language and culture associated with students' country of origin, whether ancestral or their own. All of this led to

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¹ The researchers could be included on the list, of course, but our relation to the class was significantly different from that of other guests in many respects. We are thus exempted from this analysis.

certain practical challenges, and in particular we argue that disfluencies during encounters between guests and hosts came about due to uncertain mappings between the educational model and the model of hospitality. We document how social questions were not solved easily through the adoption of hospitality; on the contrary, sometimes they were exacerbated.

Hospitality is seen as fundamental to understandings of community, moral obligations toward the Other, and social roles and identities such as in- and outsider, family, friend and alien (e.g., [Derrida, 2000](#); [Dikeç, Clark, & Barnett, 2009](#)). We propose that it may shed light on general challenges of community-based heritage language education if we approach hospitality as an emic understanding and practice. In addition, our empirical demonstrations of 'hospitality in practice' (with all the real-life contiguities and uncertainties this entail), of 'hospitality and mobility', and of 'hospitality as work' add nuances to the understanding of the very concept of hospitality, which is specifically what [Lynch et al. \(2011\)](#) ask for.

We will give a theoretical introduction to hospitality (Section 2), and then introduce our methods and empirical field (Section 3). After this follow micro-analyses of interactional encounters in which friends of Farsi students engage in interaction with the teacher. Last (Section 5) we propose explanations of the troubled situations witnessed and develop more general perspectives on heritage language education.

2. Hospitality

The notion of hospitality is rarely engaged with in socially oriented linguistic work (e.g., sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology and ethnography, etc.). When it happens, it is mostly applied in (*etic*) speech act or facework analyses ([Badameh, Al-Momani, & Migdadi, 2016](#): 129; [Kallen, 2005](#); [Labben, 2017](#); [Nwoye, 1992](#); [Sharifan, 2011](#): 104, 150) as a (meta-level) cultural concept ([Sharifan, 2011](#)), a social value ([Feghali, 1997](#)) or a ritual ([Sobh, Belk, & Wilson, 2013](#)). In this paper we attempt to show participants' own situated understandings, based on the interpretation of signs revealed in interactional encounters.

Theoretically we conceptualize hospitality as a *cultural model*, that is, an organizing "schema for enacting (culturally typical) relations and situations" ([Ortner, 1989](#): 60). As such it takes on "ordering functions achieving a degree of generality and transferability across a variety of somewhat disparate social situations" ([Ortner, 1989](#)). A cultural model is anchored in social interaction where it indexes a "typification of actor, relationship, and conduct" ([Agha, 2006](#): 23). With regard to hospitality this involves the relationship between the social roles conventionally named 'host' and 'guest.' It also involves their relation to social space: the transformation of a 'stranger' and 'outsider' into a legitimate Somebody, a 'guest', occurs within somebody else's territory ([Barnett, 2005](#); also [Naas, 2003](#): 159). As [Boudou \(2012: iii\)](#) points out, the social meaning of 'outsider' can assume various forms, only one of which is 'guest.' Our analyses further suggest that the meaning of 'guest' may involve additional meaning dimensions, such as 'difference'. In terms of practices, for the host hospitality involves "the rendering of comfort to a visitor within one's territory" ([Herzfeld, 1987](#): 77), and for the guest it involves the acceptance of the host's authority and demonstrations of appreciation ([Pitt-Rivers, 2012](#): 217; also [Marsden, 2012](#)). Accordingly, reciprocity and asymmetries are core elements in the symbolic relation of hospitality, where territorial legitimacy and attention are exchanged for gratitude and respect.

Regardless of the concerted efforts of guests and host to comply with the hospitality model, they sometimes fail to live up to each other's expectations. They may not share an understanding of hospitality, or they may not share an understanding of what counts as appropriate behavior within this model. The greater the

difference between the participants (in terms of age, background, experience, etc.), the more likely such threats to social order are to occur. As guests can disrupt and violate expectations, norms, rules, and territorial boundaries as defined by the host, they may threaten the host's "patterns and pathways" ([Dikeç et al., 2009](#): 6), and consequently they represent potential trouble. Social face is also an important aspect, not the least social face as defined in relation to the group (e.g. [Nwoye, 1992](#)). Herzfeld demonstrates this through an analysis of hospitality rituals in Crete, which – he argues – prevent rumors that could damage the reputation of the host or of the entire community ([Herzfeld, 1987](#): 77–78). It needs to be mentioned that the arrival of an outsider may even lead to the creation or accentuation of social borders and norms ([Derrida, 2000](#); [Dikeç et al., 2009](#)). In fact, [Boudou \(2012\)](#) suggests that hospitality, as practices that give status and comfort to a visitor, enables inter-group sociability while preserving intra-group integrity. The uncertainties and (potential) trouble associated with strangers, outsiders, and guests make Herzfeld suggest that a newly arrived outsider or stranger is a 'shifter.' The eventual meaning and interpretation of this person depends on contextual factors, among which we find "the relationship between host and guest and . . . the nature of the audience to which the [hospitality] event is presented or related" ([Herzfeld, 1987](#): 77). From this perspective, we may interpret a host's acts of hospitality as a way to manage an outsider into a guest position in order to avoid challenges and potential negative consequences.²

In sum, we approach hospitality as a cultural model, which projects role relations and engenders expectations of conduct in social encounters. Acts of hospitality and the granting of legitimacy to an outsider can be (and probably often are) conditional and influenced by an understanding of potential gains. This does not alter the participants' mutual orientation to the cultural model or their status as insider vs. outsider in relation to a territory and a social group. Methodologically our approach differs from previous treatments of hospitality because we focus on enactments of the model in social encounters from an emic perspective.

Before engaging in analyses of hospitality, we will now introduce the empirical field and research methods.

3. Material and methods

Our study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two Farsi mother tongue classrooms. It is part of a larger project on mother tongue education in Copenhagen, involving Farsi, Arabic, Turkish, and Polish classrooms; a project which explored language attitudes, language ideologies, identifications, and language use. The approach is linguistic ethnographic ([Maybin & Tusting, 2011](#); [Rampton et al., 2015](#)) which implies, e.g., that the main entry to social analysis is language data; that we apply microanalysis to get insight into larger scale phenomena; and that we interpret observations in light of an in-depth understanding of the specific context in which they occurred.

The fieldwork was conducted over one year (2013–2014), primarily by Ghandchi. Ghandchi also worked as a voluntary assistant

² Hospitality practices vary cross-culturally. Within the Iranian context, hospitality overlaps with the cultural code of *ta'ārof*, which involves rituals concerning invitation, compliment and offer. Ta'ārof reflects and emphasizes "differential status in interaction" ([Beeman, 1976](#): 312), the host's politeness and good upbringing and the knowledge of behavioral norms ([Koutlaki, 2009](#)). Through the practicing of ta'ārof, a host also demonstrates his respect for a potential guest. A guest as an apt culture member should adequately identify what counts as sincere invitations and offers from those only made because of politeness. In case of prearranged invitations there is no need to regard ta'ārof as a determining factor. As for the present study, we do not engage with ta'ārof among other things because we have a particular focus on prearranged visits.

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