



an extract from "In Tune"

The Quarterly Newsletter from the Oxford Welsh Male Voice Choir

Llawlyfr Dysgu Cymraeg: Mutation: or 'Treigladau'

Some of the more observant of you will have noticed that certain familiar welsh words seem to change their first letter for no apparent reason. The most well known example must be in the sign at the end (or beginning?) of the Severn Bridge - "Croeso I Gymru - Welcome to Wales" (actually it means 'Beware of Dragons!'). You'll notice that the C of Cymru (Wales) has changed (mutated) to a G to give "Gymru".

This is because certain circumstances trigger a soft mutation in words beginning with certain letters. For instance, where you are going *To* or *From* somewhere - in Welsh "*I*" or "*O*". It isn't only place names which are mutated, adjectives are also affected. *Mae hi'n brydferth* means *she's beautiful* but you won't find the word 'brydferth' in the dictionary because it's a mutation of 'prydferth'. When you're describing somebody the describing word, or adjective, mutates if it starts with one of our nine letters.

Just to complicate things there are other mutations too: Nasal and Aspirate, with their whole set of rules affecting tenses. The rules can get quite complicated and there's no way you're going to learn Welsh in a page or two! If you do want to know a bit more though then have a chat with Lyn Davies.

By the way, "I" mentioned here is only for 'going to' somewhere. If you want to give 'something' to somebody, that translates into 'Wrth'. And if you want to say you're going out with someone' that translates to "rwy'n sponer gyda rhywun'

There are 9 letters in total that are affected by soft mutations. The Table below should help to clarify it a bit - maybe? So for example; Porthmadog - o Borthmadog, Treorci - i Dreorci, Caerdydd - i Gaerdydd, Bangor - o Fangor, Dolgellau - o Ddolgellau, Llanelli - i Lanelli, Rhos - i Ros, Maesteg - i Faesteg. I assure you, the fact one comes from (o) towns in the north, and goes to (i) towns in the south, really doesn't imply anything! - Honest! So; "I come from Llanelli" would be "*Rwy'n dod o Lanelli*" and "I'm going to Oxford" is '*Rwy'n mynd I Rydychen*'.

Base	<i>Soft mutation (Meddal)</i>	Nasal mutation (Trwynol)	Aspirate mutation (Llais)
Pob (every)	Bob	Mhob	Phob
Tad (Father)	Dad	Nhad	Thad
Calfaria (cavalry)	Galfaria	Nghalfaria	Chalfaria
Bangor	Fangor	Mangor	
Dau (two)	Ddau	Nau	
Gwaed (Blood)	_waed	ngwaed	
Llais (voice)	Lais		
Rhyddid (Freedom)	Ryddid		
Mam (Mother)	Fam		

Anyone keeping count will notice we're still one short. The last one – G – is slightly special in that it's already a soft sound so for its "soft" mutation it disappears completely. So "I'm going to North Wales" would be "*r'wyn mynd i Ogledd Cymru*", where Gogledd is the Welsh for the ~~barbarian~~ North. *'Whoops-got carried away.*

If you were to look up the words of Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau in a dictionary, you will see that many of them aren't there. And it's not that your dictionary is too small or too cheaply produced either.....

Mae hen *wlad* fy *nhadau* yn annwyl i mi
Gwlad beirdd a *chantorion* enwogion o fry
Ei gwrol *ryfelwyr*, gwlad garwyr tra mad
Dros *ryddid* collasant ei gwaed
Gwlad, gwlad, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad
Tra mor yn fur, i'r bur hoff bai
O bydded i'r hen iaith barhau

(It is that) old country of my fathers is dear to me
Country of poets and singers famous on high
Its brave fighters patriotic whilst good
For freedom they lost their blood
Country, Country I support my country
Whilst the sea exists a loved defence
Long may the old language stay

Another example, from 'Rachie':

I *bob* un sy'n ffyddlon
Dan ei *faner* ef
Mae gan I esu *goron* fry yn *nheyrnas* nef

To every one who is faithful
Under His flag
Jesus has a crown on high in the Kingdom of Heaven

The words Bob, Faner, Goron and Nheyrnas are mutated from (resp) Pob, Baner, Coron, and Teyrnas. (Every, Flag, Crown and Kingdom)

English words can only change their endings: but Welsh words change both the beginning and the ending: such was the development of our great language: anything which was needed to make it more singable was worth the effort!

Just for the sake of it, here's the other 2 verses of hen Wlad fy Nhadau, spot the mutations:

Hen Gymru fynyddig, paradwys y bardd,
Pob dyffryn, pob clogwyn, i'm golwg sydd hardd;
Trwy deimlad gwladgarol, mor swynol yw si
Ei nentydd, afonydd, i mi.

Os treisiodd y gelyn fy ngwlad dan ei droed,
Mae hen iaith y Cymry mor fyw ag erioed,
Ni luddiwyd yr awen gan erchyll law brad,
Na thelyn berseiniol fy ngwlad.

By the way, have you noticed that Cymru may be spelled sometimes as Cymry? This isn't a mutation. The difference is that Cymry with 2 x y (or 2 legs) is the Welsh people and Cymru is Wales.

Combined effort of Phil Gibbs (using the BBC website) plus a lot of additional input from Lyn Davies.