

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*Each week the West Highland Free Press publishes the text for Roddy Maclean's "Letter to Gaelic Learners" on BBC Radio nan Gaidheal (103-105 FM). This week's programme is broadcast at 11.50 on Friday (24th), without its usual Monday repeat owing to Christmas. The next letter will appear on 7th January.**

Bidh cuimhn' agaibh bhon t-seachdain 's a chaidh gu bheil am facal *deiseil* co-cheangailte ris a' làimh dheis agus ri rudan matha. Ach, air an làimh eile, ma dh'fhaodas mi sin a ràdh, chan eil rudan matha co-cheangailte ris an làimh chli. Agus tuigidh mi carson a tha daoine leis a' cheàrrag neo a tha *ciotach*, mar a chanas iad ann an ceann a deas na Gàidhealtachd, a' gabhail dragh mu dheidhinn sin.

Chan eil càil ceàrr orra ach gu bheil an làmh cheàrr aca nas sgileile nan làmh dheas. Agus seallaibh mar a tha am facal *ceàrr* a' ciallachadh *left* agus *wrong*. Ach tha an aon rud fìor ann an cànanan eile. 'S e "ciotach" a bha am facal *sinister* a' ciallachadh o thùs ann an Laideann.

Bidh cuimhn' agaibh cuideachd gu robh an làmh dheas co-cheangailte ri slighe na grèine tron adhar – slighe ris an can sinn *deiseil*. Agus bha mòran chleachdaidhean o shean aig ar sinnsirean anns am biodh iad a' gluasad gu deiseil a dh'aona-ghnothach airson 's gum biodh deagh fhortan aca.

Nuair a gheibheadh daoine bochda airgead bho chuideigin, rachadh iad trì tursan deiseil timcheall an duine mar bheannachd air. Nuair a rachadh iasgairean gu muir, bhiodh iad ag iomradh a' bhàta gu deiseil an toiseach. Agus mura deanadh iad sin, bhiodh iad dhen bheachd gum biodh droch fhortan aca air an latha sin. Chanadh feadhainn an-diugh gur ann saobh-chràbhach a bha na seann daoine is gu robh na cleachdaidhean sin a' buntainn ri linn nuair a bha na Gàidheil nam pàganach. Ach chan eil teagamh nach robh iad a' creidsinn ann an rudan mar sin gu làidir.

Anns an linn sin, bhathar a' creidsinn gu robh ifrinn anns a' cheann a tuath agus, mar sin, gu robh ifrinn fuar reòite. Tha sin gu math eadar-dhealaichte bhon ifrinn theth anns a bheilear a' creidsinn an-diugh.

Agus bha daoine a' creidsinn gun d'rachadh iad (neo gun d'rachadh an nàbaidhean co-dhiù!) sìos a dh'Ifrinn agus, leis a sin, bha iad a' coimhead air an àird a tuath mar àite ìosal. Agus chanadh iad "tha mi a' dol sìos gu tuath" neo "tha mi a' dol suas gu deas" agus chan e "suas gu tuath" agus "sìos gu deas" mar a chanar, anns an fharsaingeachd, ann am Beurla. Agus cluinnidh tu fhathast daoine ann an taobh siar Leòdhais ag ràdh ann an Gàidhlig gu bheil iad a' dol "sìos a Nis", sgìre ann am fìor cheann a tuath an eilein.

Ach 's dòcha gu robh an aon rud fìor uaireigin ann am Beurla, agus gur e luchd nam mapaichean a th'air dealbh dhen t-saoghal a thoirt dhuinn anns a bheil an àird a tuath aig a' cheann shuas agus an àird a deas aig a' bhonn. Bidh daoine ann an Essex is Hertfordshire, mar eisimpleir, ag ràdh gu bheil iad a' dol *up to London*, ged a tha iad a' fuireach gu tuath air Lunnainn. Tha mi a' deanamh dheth gur e seann chleachdadh a tha sin, agus gu bheil e a' dol à bith ann an Sasainn, dìreach mar a tha e ann an Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba.

Ach bu toil leam tilleadh don fhacal *ciotach* agus fàgaibh mi sibh an t-seachdain-sa le ceist. Bha laoch Gaidhealach ann anns an t-seachdamh linn deug a bha gu math ainmeil. Agus bha e ciotach. Agus tha frith-ainm air ann am Beurla, a bharrachd air Gàidhlig, a tha a' comharrachadh sin. Agus bha an gille aige na b'ainmeile fiù's na esan airson gaisge. Cò iad? Innsibh mi sin dhuibh anns an ath litir, a' chiad tè anns a' bhliadhn' ùir. Roimhe sin – ge-tà – Nollaig Chrìdheil agus Bliadhna Mhath Ùr dhuibh uile.

* * *

Faclan na seachdainne: co-cheangailte ri: *connected to*; clì: *left*; ciotach: *left-handed*; cleachdaidhean: *practices*; ag iomradh: *rowing*; saobh-chràbhach: *superstitious*; ifrinn: *hell*; fuar reòite: *cold and frozen*; taobh siar Leòdhais: *the west side of Lewis*; laoch: *hero, champion*; frith-ainm: *nickname*; gaisge: *heroism*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: ma dh'fhaodas mi sin a ràdh: *if I may (be permitted) to say that*; leis a' cheàrrag: *left-handed (the more common term in the northern Gàidhealtachd; in southern parts, notably the islands of Argyll, ciotach is more common)*; chan eil càil ceàrr orra: *there is nothing wrong with them (on them)*; airson's gum biodh deagh fhortan aca: *so that they would have good luck*; a' buntainn ri linn nuair a bha na Gàidheil nam pàganach: *belonging to a time when the Gaels were pagans*; chan eil teagamh nach robh iad a' creidsinn ann an X gu làidir: *there is no doubt that they strongly believed in X*; bhon ifrinn theth anns a bheilear a' creidsinn an-diugh: *from the hot hell which is believed in today*; luchd nam mapaichean: *the mapmakers*; gu tuath air Lunnainn: *north of London*; gu bheil e a' dol à bith: *it is disappearing (going out of existence)*; an gille aige: *his son*; a' chiad tè anns a' bhliadhn' ùir: *the first one (litir is fem.) in the new year*; roimhe sin: *before that*; Nollaig Chrìdheil agus Bliadhna Mhath Ùr dhuibh uile: *a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: rachadh iad trì tursan timcheall an duine mar bheannachd air: *they would go three times sunwise around the man as a blessing for (on) him. Do you remember rachamaid ("let's go") in Litir 27 (Nov 19)? Rachadh is built on the same root – rach (go) – and is in the subjunctive mood as is suggested by the –adh ending. Rachadh iad means "they would go". Rachamaid, as you have probably worked out, is also the first person plural in the subjunctive mood, meaning "we would go" (but the context will tell you which is meant). Rachamaid don Fhraing nan robh airgead gu leòr againn (we would go to France if we had enough money). The first person singular is rachainn (I would go). Rachainn dhachaigh nan robh càr agam (I would go home if I had a car). You may be thinking "how on earth do we get a' dol (going), chaidh (went) and thèid (will go) from a root like rach?" The answer is that it is one of Gaelic's ten irregular verbs (which are better viewed as a challenge than a threat!)*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: a dh'aona-ghnothach: *deliberately*. This phrase allows you to avoid an unsatisfactory translation of the English "I didn't mean it", ie cha robh mi ga chiallachadh, which learners often use. This phrase, however, does not really relate to an action other than communication eg Tha mi duilich gun tuirte mi sin. Cha robh mi ga chiallachadh (I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean it) and even then it is modern phraseology which would sound foreign to many older native speakers (see Dwelly p 192). But in the case, say, of a child breaking a window with a stone it should not be used at all. The offender might say something like: Tha mi duilich mu dheidhinn na h-uinneig. Cha do bhris mi a dh'aona-ghnothach i (I'm sorry about the window. I didn't break it deliberately).

* "Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh" is funded by Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig