

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Tha seanfhacal ann – “Aithnichear duine air a chuideachd” – *a man will be known by his company*. Aithnichear duine air a chuideachd. Dh’fhaodamaid an seanfhacal atharrachadh rud beag airson ’s gum biodh e fìor mun Ghàidhlig a bharrachd air daoine. ’S ann tric a tha luchd-ionnsachaidh a’ faighneachd dhìom, “ciamar a dh’aithnicheas mi facal a tha fireann is facal a tha boireann.” Agus ’s i an fhreagairt as fheàrr – le a chuideachd.

Seo an “seanfhacal” ùr agam – “aithnichear gnè an ainmeir air a bhuadhair” – *the gender of a noun will be known by its adjective*. Aithnichear gnè an ainmeir air a bhuadhair. Tha mi a’ ciallachadh le sin, gu bheil e cuideachail ainmear agus buadhair ionnsachadh còmhla. Bòrd mòr, uinneag mhòr, doras beag, eala bhàn is mar sin air adhart.

Ma tha am buadhair air a shèimheachadh (neo *lenited*) tha an t-ainmear boireann. Mura h-eil, tha e fireann. De mu dheidhinn “caora”, mar eisimpleir? An canadh tu “caora mòr” airson *big sheep* neo “caora mhòr”? Uill, chanadh tu “caora mhòr”, nach canadh? Mar sin, ’s e facal boireann a th’ ann an “caora.”

Tha dòighean eile airson gnè fhaclan a chuimhneachadh, agus gheibh sibh sin ann an leabhar-gràmair sam bith, ach bu mhath leam an-diugh sùil a thoirt air cuid de dh’fhaclan a bhios ag atharrachadh an gnè bho àite gu àite, agus bho thuisseal gu tuiseal.

Tha “muileann” na eisimpleir de dh’fhacal a dh’atharraicheas a ghnè bho sgìre gu sgìre. Tha caraid dhomh ann an Siorrachd Rois a’ fuireach ann am Bail’ a’ Mhuilinn. A bheil muileann boireann neo fireann ann a sin? Uill, tha mi an dòchas gun do dh’obraich sibh a-mach gu bheil e fireann. Airson “the mill”, canaidh daoine “am muileann.”

Ach tha loch ann an Sgìre Uig’ ann an Leòdhas air a bheil “Loch na Muilne” mar ainm. Anns an sgìre sin, tha “muileann” boireann, agus airson “the mill”, canaidh daoine “a’ mhuileann”. Far nach eil Gàidhlig làidir mar chànan dùthchasach an-diugh, leithid ann an Inbhir Nis, agus far nach eil e follaiseach dè chanadh muinntir an àite o shean, bidh sin a’ fàgail taghadh aig na Gaidheil. Mar eisimpleir, airson “Millburn Academy”, bidh cuid ag ràdh “Ard-sgoil Allt a’ Mhuilinn”. Ach tha feadhainn ann a chanas “Ard-sgoil Allt na Muilne.” A thaobh gràmair, tha an dà chuid ceart.

’S e “tobar” eisimpleir eile de dh’fhaclan a dh’atharraicheas an gnè bho sgìre gu sgìre. Agus, mar an ceudna, “ceò” agus “dealbh”. Ach tha cuid de dh’fhaclan Gàidhlig nas duilghe na sin, leis gu bheil iad atharrachadh an gnè bho thuisseal gu tuiseal. Thàinig seo gu m’ aire o chionn ghoirid nuair a bha mi a’ bruidhinn ri buidheann o thall thairis mu dheidhinn ainmean-àite ann an Alba.

“Dè,” dh’fhaighnich fear aca a bha rudeigin feallsanachail, “dè an gnè a th’ aig an fhacal Gàidhlig airson ‘earth’. An robh na Gaidheil o shean a’ coimhead air ‘Mother Earth’ mar rud boireann?” Uill, b’ fheudar dhomh smaoinichadh airson mionaid! ’S e am facal a thagh mi airson “earth” – “talamh”. Canaidh sinn *talamh tioram*, is chan e *talamh thioram*. B’ fheudar dhomh innse dha gur e facal fireann a bh’ ann.

Ach fuirich mionaid! Ciamar a chanas sinn “the surface of the earth”? *Uachdar na talmhainn*. Mar sin, anns an tuiseal ghinideach, neo *genitive case*, tha *talamh boireann*! Tha amharas agam gum bi mo charaid fhathast a’ beachdachadh air dè tha sin a’ ciallachadh! Dhomhsa, tha e a’ ciallachadh gu feum sinn a bhith mothachail nach eil riaghailt-ghràmar sam bith ann nach gabh briseadh!

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Faclan na seachdaine: fireann: *masculine*; boireann: *feminine*; gnè: *gender*; ainmear: *noun*; buadhair: *adjective*; muileann: *mill*; talamh: *earth*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: dh’fhaodamaid an seanfhacal atharrachadh rud beag: *we could change the proverb a little*; ciamar a dh’aithnicheas mi X?: *how do I recognise X?*; gu bheil e cuideachail ma dh’ionnsaicheas sibh ainmear agus buadhair còmhla; *that it is helpful if you learn a noun and an adjective together*; is mar sin air adhart: *and so on*; air a shèimheachadh: *lenited (grammatical)*; bho thuiseal gu tuiseal: *from case to case (grammatical)*; tha caraid dhomh ann an Siorrachd Rois a’ fuireach ann an X: *a relative of mine in Ross-shire lives in X*; Loch na Muilne: *the loch of the mill*; far nach eil e follaiseach dè chanadh muinntir an àite o shean: *where it is not obvious what the indigenous inhabitants would have said in the old days*; thàinig seo gu m’ aire o chionn ghoirid: *this came to my attention recently*; cha robh smid Gàidhlig aca: *they did not have a word of Gaelic*; a bha rudeigin feallsanachail: *who was somewhat philosophical*; bh’fheudar dhomh smaoinichadh: *I had to think*; fuirich mionaid!: *wait a minute!*; nach eil riaghailt-ghràmar sam bith ann nach gabh briseadh: *that there is no grammatical rule in existence which cannot be broken*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdaine: *Talamh (earth) is a masculine word but it declines irregularly, and takes a feminine form, na talmhainn, in the genitive singular case. So we get uachdar na talmhainn (the surface of the earth). In the nominative, we have talamh tioram (dry land). If talamh declined regularly as a masculine word, the genitive with an adjective would be eg uachdar an talaimh thioraim. But it is not! Instead it is eg uachdar na talmhainn tioraim. (In Irish Gaelic, both genitive forms exist as the word is found in both masculine and feminine forms). This irregular declension is unusual but not entirely unique. The word cruinne (the world, roundness) behaves similarly, being masculine in the nominative and feminine in the genitive. Thus we say an cruinne (or an cruinne-cè) for “the world”, but gu crìch na cruinne for “to the ends of the earth”. The question then arises as to how each of these declines in the dative singular – ie do they terminally slenderise as a feminine noun does? Cruinne is simple – it already is slenderised, so we say air a’ chruinne. But what about talamh? MacFarlane’s “Am Briathrachan Beag” (1912) gives it as feminine, ie air an talaimh, but general usage today makes it masculine ie air an talamh. Can you think of another word which sometimes changes gender when it declines? (I’ll whet your appetite with another example next week!)*

Seanfhacal na seachdaine: Aithnichear duine air a chuideachd: *a man will be known by his company*.

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