

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 **

An t-seachdain 's a chaidh, dh'innis mi dhuibh mu fhacal Gàidhlig a tha ag atharrachadh a ghnè bho tuiseal gu tuiseal – *talamh*. Bidh cuimhn' agaibh gu bheil e fireann anns a' chuid as motha de shuidheachaidhean, ach boireann anns an tuiseal ghinideach. Agus ma leugh sibh a' phuing-ghràmaid anns a' Phàipear Bheag neo air an eadar-lìon, bidh cuimhn' agaibh gu bheil sin fìor mun fhacal *cruinne* cuideachd.

Tha e inntinneach gu bheil an dà fhacal sin co-cheangailte ri tìr. Agus seallaibh air an fhacal *tìr* fhèin. Tha a' chuid as motha de sheann fhaclairean ag innse dhuinn gu bheil e fireann. Agus, gu dearbh, canaidh sinn *tìr-mòr* airson *mainland* is chan e *tìr-mhòr* – anns a' chuid as motha de dh'àiteachan co-dhiù. Ach ciamar a chanas sinn *of the land*? Dè an coltas a th' air an fhacal anns an tuiseal ghinideach?

A rèir cuid mhòr de dh'fhaclairean an latha an-diugh, 's e *na tìre*. Canaidh sinn *coltas na tìre*, mar eisimpleir. Anns an t-suidheachadh sin, tha *tìr* ag obair mar fhacal boireann. Agus chan e dìreach faclan co-cheangailte ris an *talamh* a tha ag atharrachadh an gnè mar sin. Air falbh on tìr, tha am facal *muir* ag atharrachadh a ghnè cuideachd.

Dhomhsa, agus do mhòran eile, tha *muir* boireann. Airson *the sea*, canaidh sinn *a' mhuir*. Tha a' mhuir ciùin an-diugh. Anns an tuiseal ghinideach, tha e ag obair ann an dòigh an ìre mhath àbhaisteach; canaidh sinn *na mara*. “Taigh na mara” – sin soighne a chì sibh air mòran thaighean air taobh siar na Gaidhealtachd. Agus 's dòcha gun cuala sibh an seanfhacal “A' taomadh na mara le cliabh” – *bailing the sea with a creel*. Bha e a' taomadh na mara le cliabh. Tha sin a' ciallachadh gu robh e a' dèanamh obair mhòr, 's dòcha, ach obair gun fheum. Obair nach tigeadh gu crìch a-chaidh.

Ann an cuid de dh'àiteachan, leithid ann am pàirtean de Leòdhas, ge-tà, tha *muir* fireann. Airson *the sea*, canaidh daoine *am muir*. Agus airson *of the sea*, canaidh iad *a' mhara*. Agus tha àiteachan ann far a bheil *muir* ag obair mar a tha *talamh*. Canaidh daoine *am muir* mar gu bheil e fireann, ach canaidh iad cuideachd *na mara* mar gu bheil e boireann anns an tuiseal ghinideach.

Mus fhàg sinn gnè fhaclan, bu mhath leam ur n-aire a thoirt do riaghailt eile a th' air a briseadh an siud 's an seo. Mar is trice, ma tha ainmhidh neo duine fireann, bidh am facal air a shon fireann cuideachd, mar eisimpleir, *tarbh* neo *damh* neo *fear*. Agus ma tha e boireann, bidh am facal boireann, leithid *bò* neo *eilid* neo *bean*.

Ach tha cuid de dh'fhaclan ann a bhriseas an riaghailt sin. Bidh sibh eòlach air *boireannach* mar thà. Tha am facal sin fireann. Agus ged a bhios *capall* uaireannan a' ciallachadh “each boireann” agus ged a bhios *mart* uaireannan a' ciallachadh “bò”, tha na faclan sin an-còmhnaidh fireann.

Agus tha am facal *sgalag* an-còmhnaidh a' ciallachadh “fear a bhios ag obair air tuathanas”. Feumaidh an neach fhèin a bhith fireann. Ach tha am facal boireann. Canaidh sinn “an sgalag bheag” is “lànna na sgalage bige”. 'S dòcha gum bi cuid agaibh airson faighneachd “carson?”. Carson a tha an cànan mar sin? Uill, leis an fhìrinn innse, chan eil fhios a'm. Agus nan toisichinn air rannsachadh air a sin, tha amharas agam gum biodh e car coltach ri bhith a' taomadh na mara le cliabh!

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Faclan na seachdainne: soighne: *sign*; fireann: *masculine*; boireann: *feminine*; tarbh: *bull*; damh: *stag*; eilid: *hind*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: mu fhacal Gàidhlig a tha ag atharrachadh a ghnè bho thuisseal gu tuiseal: *about a Gaelic word which changes its gender from case to case*; boireann anns an tuiseal ghineadach: *feminine in the genitive case*; a' chuid as motha de sheann fhaclairan; *most old dictionaries*; anns an t-suidheachadh sin, tha tìr ag obair mar fhacal boireann: *in that situation, tìr works like a feminine word*; obair nach tigeadh gu crìch a-chaoidh: *work which would never be completed (come to an end)*; bu mhath leam ur n-aire a thoirt do riaghailt eile: *I would like to draw your attention to another rule*; an siud 's an seo: *here and there (lit. there and here)*; lànna na sgalage bige: *the hand of the small servant*; nan toisichinn air rannsachadh air a' chuspair sin: *If I were to (would) start on researching that topic*; tha amharas agam gum biodh e car coltach ri X: *I suspect it would be rather like X*.

Puing ghràmair na seachdainne: *Following on from last week's grammatical point, muir and tìr (like talamh and cruinne) also show gender flexibility. Muir is most commonly feminine (a' mhuir in the nominative and na mara in the genitive) but it can be masculine in which case it is am muir in the nominative, and a' mhara in the genitive. But, like talamh, it can also have a masculine form (am muir) in the nominative and still be feminine in the genitive (na mara). Tìr also behaves as a masculine word in some situations (eg tìr-mòr for mainland) but is commonly perceived as feminine (na tìre) in the genitive. And while animals and persons which are male are generally given words which are of masculine gender, and vice-versa for females, this rule is not without its exceptions. Boireannach (a woman) is a masculine word in all situations. For big woman, we say boireannach mòr, not boireannach mhòr. The same applies to capall and mart which may refer to female horses or cattle. The converse is true of sgalag which means a male agricultural worker or servant. The word is feminine in all situations. [NB In the text I have used “fireann” for masculine and “boireann” for feminine. Some grammarians prefer “fireanta” and “boireanta”, retaining “fireann” for “male” and “boireann” for female, as in people and animals. Both terms are acceptable, although it would be good if Gaelic grammarians would agree on a standard terminology!]*

Seanfhacal na seachdainne: A' taomadh na mara le cliabh: *bailing the sea with a creel*. Note that the genitive case of muir is used here because it follows a verbal noun and carries the (definite) article.

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

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