

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 **

Ho ro, mo nighean donn bhòidheach. Hi ri, mo nighean donn bhòidheach... Bidh sibh eòlach air an òran, tha mi cinnteach. Ach an do bhuail e oirbh a-riamh mar a tha an dà bhuidhair, an dà adjective, ag obair ann an dòigh eadar-dhealaichte. Chan e mo nighean dhonn bhòidheach a chanas sinn, ach mo nighean donn bhòidheach.

Aig a’ chiad shealladh tha sin rudeigin annasach, leis gu bheil am facal *nighean* boireann, mar a shaoileadh tu, agus tha e a’ sèimheachadh an fhacail *bòidheach*, ach chan eil e a’ sèimheachadh *donn*. ’S e is coireach airson sin am fuaim, agus an dòigh sa bheil an teanga is am beul a’ gluasad. An dèidh “n” aig deireadh facail boirinn, mar is trice, cha bhithear a’ sèimheachadh “d” neo “t” neo “s” aig toiseach a’ bhuidhair.

Seo eisimpleirean far nach eil an “d” air a shèimheachadh: canaidh sinn *beinn mhòr* ach *beinn dearg*, *sgian bheag* ach *sgian dubh*, *Clann Ghriogair* ach *Clann Dòmhnail*. Tha an aon seòrsa rud a’ tachairt le “t”, mar eisimpleir canaidh sinn *nighean tana*, is chan e *nighean thana* mar a bhiodh dùil ’s dòcha. Canaidh sinn *bean tuigseach*, seach *bean thuigseach*, agus *glùn tachaiseach*, seach *glùn thachaiseach*. Agus seo eisimpleirean le faclan a’ tòiseachadh le “s”: *ealtainn gheur* ach *ealtainn salach*; *madainn mhath* ach *madainn sàmhach*, *clann mhòr* ach *clann seang*.

Agus tha an dearbh rud a’ tachairt leis a’ bhuidhair “seann”. Bidh cuimhn’ agaibh gu bheil grunn bhuidhairean ann a tha a’ dol air thoiseach air an ainmeir, air thoiseach air a *noun*, seach as a dhèidh. ’S iad “deagh”, “droch” agus “prìomh” eisimpleirean dhiubh. Agus bidh cuimhn’ agaibh gu bheil na buidhairean sin a’ sèimheachadh an ainmeir as an dèidh.

Mar eisimpleir, canaidh sinn *droch dhuine*, is chan e *droch duine*; *Prìomh Mhinistear*, seach *Prìomh Ministear*; agus *deagh sheachdain* an àite *deagh seachdain*. Uill, tha an aon rud a’ tachairt le “seann”, a tha cuideachd a’ dol ron ainmeir. Ach tha *seann* a’ crìochnachadh le “n”. Agus, mar is trice, cha bhi e a’ sèimheachadh fhaclan as a dhèidh, a tha a’ tòiseachadh le “d”, “t” neo “s”.

Dè chanas sinn airson *old house*, ma-thà? *Seann thaigh*? Chan e, ach *seann taigh*. Dè mu dheidhinn *old people*? Uill, ’s dòcha gum bi fios agaibh mar-thà gur e *seann daoine*, seach *seann dhaoine* a th’ ann. Agus airson *old saucer*, canaidh sinn *seann sàsar*, seach *seann shàsar*.

Tha a leithid ri fhaicinn ann an ainmean-àite cuideachd, gu h-àraidh leis na dathan cumanta, *dubh* is *dearg*, an dèidh n. Dh'ainmich mi *Beinn Dearg* mar-thà, is tha mòran dhiubh sin air a' Ghaidhealtachd, ach seo dà eisimpleir eile – *Bidean an Eòin Deirg*, faisg air Ach nan Seileach ann an Siorrachd Rois, agus *Cruach an Fhearainn Duibh* ri taobh Loch nan Uamh ann an Lochabair.

Agus seo eisimpleir eile. Dè a' Ghàidhlig a th' air *big dogs*? A bheil e agaibh? *Coin mhòra*. Bidh sibh a' cuimhneachadh gu bheil ainmearan, a bhios air a chaolachadh nuair a tha iad iolra neo *plural*, a' sèimheachadh a' bhuadhair a tha a' dol còmhla riutha. Coin mhòra, ma-thà. Ach dè a' Ghàidhlig a th' air *black dogs*? A bheil sin agaibh? *Coin dubha*. Chan eil an sèimheachadh ann as dèidh an “n”.

O shean, bha seòrsa de choin ann air an robh “coin dubha Ghriogarach”. Chaidh an ainmeachadh mar sin air sgàth 's gu robh iad air an cleachdadh airson muinntir Clann Ghriogair a lorg nuair bha iad air an comharrachadh leis an riaghaltas mar eucoirich. Coin dubha, gu dearbh.

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Faclan na seachdaine: buadhair: *adjective*; sèimheachadh: *lenition*; Clann Ghriogair: *the MacGregors*; Clann Dòmhnail: *the MacDonalds (Clan Donald)*; tuigseach: *understanding*; glùn: *knee*; tachaiseach: *itchy*; ealtainn: *razor*; seang: *slender, lean*;

Abairtean na seachdaine: tha an dearbh rud a' tachairt le X: *the same thing happens with X*; tha a leithid ri fhaicinn ann an ainmean-àite cuideachd: *the same type of thing is to be seen in place names as well*; *Bidean an Eòin Deirg*: *pinnacle of the red bird*; *Cruach an Fhearainn Duibh*: *rounded hill of the black land*; bidh sibh a' cuimhneachadh gu bheil ainmearan, a bhios air a chaolachadh nuair a tha iad iolra, a' sèimheachadh a' bhuadhair a tha a' dol còmhla riutha: *you will remember that nouns, which are slenderised when they are plural, lenite the adjective which goes with them*; bha seòrsa de choin ann air an robh “coin dubha Ghriogarach”: *there was a type of dog(s) known as the “black dogs of MacGregors”*; nuair a bha iad air an comharrachadh leis an riaghaltas mar eucoirich: *when they were classified by the government as criminals*; coin dubha, gu dearbh: *evil dogs, indeed* (dubh may also mean “evil”).

Puing ghràmair na seachdaine: *The substance of this week's Litir is the general tendency for words starting with “d”, “t” or “s” (sometimes called the “dental consonants”) not to be lenited after a terminal “n” on the previous word, even where the “normal” grammatical rules would demand a lenition. This is the reason that the famous “black knife” of the Gaidhealtachd is a sgian dubh (often horribly anglified to “skean dhu”, with the “dh” pronounced as a “d”), and not a sgian dhubh as might be expected, given that sgian is a feminine noun. The same occurrence explains why we have mountains called Beinn Bhàn, with the adjective lenited following the feminine noun, but several others called Beinn Dearg, without the lenition. Similarly, while “the head of the white dog” would be ceann a' choin ghil, “the head of the black dog” would be ceann a' choin duibh, with an unlenited “d” following the “n”. This also explains why we say seann dotair, seann tarbh and seann sàbh, when the adjective seann would normally lenite the following consonant (eg seann charbad, seann mhansa). How would you say in Gaelic “the red pens”?*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: An do bhuail e oirbh a-riamh?: *did it ever occur to you?*

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