

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 rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Dè a’ Ghàidhlig air “pun”? Chan eil mi buileach cinnteach dè mholainn dhuibh, ach tha mi air dà rud fhaicinn – *cainnt-chluich* agus *cainnt-mhire*. Cainnt-chluich agus cainnt-mhire. Tha iad le chèile a’ dèanamh ciall, nach eil?

Chan eil fhios agam a bheil cànan sam bith eile cho math ris a’ Bheurla Shasannaich airson a leithid a dhèanamh. Gu dearbh, chan eil a’ Ghàidhlig cho math rithe. ’S e as coireach ris a sin, chanainn, gu bheil uiread de dh’fhuaimnean ann an Gàidhlig a tha rud beag eadar-dhealaichte o chèile. Tha dreach leathann is caol air connragan, agus bidh na fuaimreagan fada agus goirid, leathann agus caol. Mar sin, chan eil uiread de dh’fhaclan a tha co-ionann ann am fuaim ach aig a bheil ciall eadar-dhealaichte.

Ach chan eil a’ Ghàidhlig gu tur as aonais a leithid agus tha cuid de dhaoine gu math sgileil ann a bhith a’ cluich le faclan. Bha fear ann uaireigin a bha fìor ainmeil airson a leithid agus ’s dòcha nach cuir e iongnadh sam bith oirbh nuair a chanas mi gu robh e na bhàrd.

B’ esan Iain MacCodrum à Uibhist a Tuath no, mar a b’ fheàrr a b’ aithne do dhaoine e, Iain MacFhearchair. Bha e beò aig an aon àm ris a’ bhàrd ainmeil, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Bha e a’ sgrìobhadh a’ chuid bhàrdachd timcheall meadhan an ochdamh linn deug, agus as dèidh sin.

Bha e na bhàrd do Shir Seumas Dòmhnallach, a thug fearann dha leis gu robh e cho math air bàrdachd. Cha toir mi sùil air a bhàrdachd idir an-dràsta, ach bu mhath leam blasad a thoirt dhuibh dhen sgil a bh’ aige ann a bhith a’ gabhail spòrs le cainnt.

A rèir choltais, bha Iain gu math eòlach air seann dàin Oisein – dhen t-seòrsa a chaidh fhoillseachadh le Seumas MacMhuirich, no Seumas Mac a’ Phearsain, mar a tha mòran a’ gabhail air. Turas a bha seo, bha MacMhuirich ann an Uibhist, agus e ri tional sgeulachdan, nuair a thachair e ri fear anns a’ mhòintich eadar Loch nam Madadh agus Beinn a’ Bhaoghla. Cha robh fios aige cò bh’ ann. ’S ann dìreach as dèidh làimh a fhuair e a-mach gur e Iain MacFhearchair a bh’ ann.

Co-dhiù, chuir MacMhuirich a’ cheist air – “a bheil dad agad air an Fhèinn?” Bha e a’ ciallachadh le sin an robh fios aige air sgeulachdan no beul-aithris co-cheangailte ris an Fhèinn, na seann ghaisgich Ghaidhealach. Cha robh a’ cheist uabhasach snasail ’s dòcha, ach bha làn fhios aig MacFhearchair gu dè bha am fear eile ag iarraidh. “A bheil dad agad air an Fhèinn?”

Ach seo mar a fhreagair e. “Chan eil agus, ged a bhitheadh, cha ruiginn a leas iarraidh a-nise.” Canaidh mi sin a-rithist gus an tuig sibh nas fheàrr na thuirt e. “Chan eil, agus, ged a bhitheadh, cha ruiginn a leas iarraidh a-nise.” Bha e a’ ciallachadh le sin gu robh esan a’ tuigsinn bhon cheist gu robh MacMhuirich a’ faighneachd dheth an robh e air airgead a thoirt don Fhèinn a bha e a-nise ag iarraidh air ais bhuapa! Agus leis gu robh iad

air a bhith marbh airson timcheall air dà mhìle bliadhna, bha e ag ràdh nach robh feum sam bith ann dha ann a bhith ga iarraidh!

Thathar ag aithris nach robh MacMhuirich idir toilichte le dol a-mach an fhir eile, agus e dhen bheachd gu robh e a' magadh air. Thug e an còmhradh gu crìch agus dh'fhalbh e ann an cabhaig thar na mòintich gu ruige Beinn a' Bhaoghla.

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Faclan na seachdaine: cainnt-chluich, cainnt-mhire: *pun*; fuaimreagan: *vowels*; Uibhist a Tuath: *North Uist*; seann dàin Oisein: *the old Ossianic songs*; Seumas MacMhuirich, Mac a' Phearsain: *James MacPherson (MacMhuirich in the Gaelic of Badenoch, his home country)*; Loch nam Madadh: *Lochmaddy*; Beinn a' Bhaoghla: *Benbecula*.

Abairtean na seachdaine: tha iad le chèile a' dèanamh ciall: *they both make sense*; cho math ris a' Bheurla Shasannaich: *as good as the English language*; gu bheil uiread de dh'fhuaimean ann an Gàidhlig: *that there are so many sounds in Gaelic*; tha dreach leathann is caol air connragan: *consonants are broad and narrow*; gu tur as aonais a leithid: *entirely without such things*; 's dòcha nach cuir e iongnadh sam bith oirbh: *perhaps it won't surprise you at all*; nuair a chanas mi gu robh e na bhàrd: *when I say that he was a poet*; a thug fearann dha: *who gave him land*; bu mhath leam blasad a thoirt dhuibh: *I would like to give you a taste*; bha làn fhios aig X gu dè bha am fear eile ag iarraidh: *X understood perfectly what the other man was wanting*; seo mar a fhreagair e: *this is how he replied*; thathar ag aithris nach robh X toilichte: *it is reported that X was not pleased*; le dol-a-mach an fhir eile: *by (with) the other man's behaviour*; thug e an còmhradh gu crìch: *he finished the conversation*; thar na mòintich gu ruige Beinn a' Bhaoghla: *across the moor to (reach his destination in) Benbecula*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdaine: bha MacMhuirich ann an Uibhist, agus e ri tional sgeulachdan: *MacPherson was in Uist, collecting stories. Note the use of agus here – this is common. But the main point I want to make is why I said “ri tional” and not “a’ tional”. Actually, I could just as easily have said “a’ tional”, in which tional appears as a verbal noun, but I chose to use it as a noun and precede it with “ri” which here means “engaged in” or “occupied in”. Either is acceptable, but the “ri” accentuates the fact that this was his purpose in being in Uist. You might have heard this in the phrase “dè tha thu ris?” (what activity are you engaged in?) Tha mi air a bhith ri obair-dachaigh fad an fheasgair (I have been engaged in homework all afternoon).*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine: a bheil dad agad air an Fhèinn?: *this can be understood two ways. It was meant as “do you have anything (information/stories/folklore) about the Fingalians?” But Iain MacFhearchair chose to interpret it as meaning “do the Fingalians owe you anything (ie money)?”, to which he replied, “chan eil agus, ged a bhitheadh, cha ruiginn a leas iarraidh a-nise” (no, and even if they did, I need not ask for it now). The Fingalians, of course, had been dead for hundreds of years. This is a good idiom to remember: a bheil dad aig X air Y? Does Y owe X anything? Bha dà not aig Calum orm (I owed Calum £2). And a useful one in the pub - tha pinnt agam ort (you owe me a pint).*

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