

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 **

Chuir mi ceist oirbh an t-seachdain sa chaidh anns na nòtaichean-gràmair – ciamar a chanadh sibh ann an Gàidhlig “*on top of a black bull*”? Mholainn-sa gun tòisich sibh le “*on top of the bull*”? ’S e sin *air muin an tairbh*. Agus *on top of the black bull* – *air muin an tairbh dhuibh*. A-nise, thoiribh an t-alt air falbh, agus dè th’ agaibh? *On top of a black bull* – *air muin tairbh dhuibh*.

Nise, chan eil mi a’ moladh gum feuch sibh dhol air muin tairbh dhuibh, oir tha e dona gu leòr dhol air muin eich, ge bith dè an dath a th’ air. Ach ma thachras e dòigh air choreigin, ann am Pamplona no Pabail, bidh fios agaibh dè chanas sibh ris an nurs – “bha mi air muin tairbh dhuibh agus thuit mi!” Uill, ’s dòcha nach biodh sin gu cus feum ann am Pamplona!

Fàgamaid an tarbh an dàrna taobh. A bheil fios agaibh dè th’ ann an *caora chrom*? Tha i co-cheangailte ri uisge-beatha. Caoraich agus uisge-beatha? Mmm. Feumaidh mi mìneachadh...

Cha do ghabh mi uisge-beatha mì-laghail a-riamh ach aon turas a-mhàin. Agus, mus gabh luchd na cusbainn no na poilis cus gnothaich rium, cha robh mi ann an Alba ach ann an Thailand, ann am baile beag iomallach far a bheil treubhan nam beann a’ fuireach.

’S e an duilgheadas a bh’ ann gu robh mi a’ faighinn aoigheachd ann an taigh ceannaire a’ bhaile, far am biodh e mì-mhodhail deoch a dhiùltadh. Co-dhiù, cha b’ fhada agus an robh an smùid orm. Chan eil fhios agam dè an seòrsa arbhair a bha iad a’ cleachdadh airson uisge-beatha a dhèanamh, ach tha fhios againn ann an Alba air an t-seòrsa as fheàrr – eòrna.

Anns an t-seann aimsir, bhiodh mòran de mhuinntir Dùthaich MhicAoidh a’ dèanamh uisge-beatha dhaibh fhèin, ged a bha e an aghaidh an lagh. Gu tric, bhiodh iad a’ ceannach eòrna ann an Gallaibh agus dh’fheumadh iad a bhith cinnteach nach fhaiceadh poileas na pocannan aca air an rathad dhachaigh.

Bha fear ann turas a thàinig dhachaigh le pocannan làn eòrna, ach chunnaic dithis phoileas e agus lean iad air. Nuair a ràinig e an taigh aige, bha na poilis air a shàil. Bha iad a’ coimhead airson rudeigin a dhearbhadh gu robh poit-dhubh aige.

Uill, bha aon rud anns a’ chidsin – a’ chliath bhon phoit-dhuibh. ’S e sin a’ phìob shnìomhach, a th’ air a dèanamh le meatailt, anns am bi an ceò a’ tiughachadh. Bhiodh a’ phoit-dhubh ann am badeigin anns a’ mhonadh, ach feumaidh gu robh an croitear air a’ chliath a thoirt dhachaigh leis. Nam faigheadh na poilis greim air a’ chlàith, bhiodh fios aca gu robh poit-dhubh aige.

Bha an croitear air dìochuimhneachadh mu dheidhinn na clèithe, a bha ri taobh an t-sinc. Gu fortanach dha, ge-tà, thòisich na poilis anns a’ bhàthaich agus fhad ’s a bha iad a-muigh an sin, ruith e timcheall an taighe, a’ coimhead airson fianais sam bith gu robh e a’ dèanamh uisge-beatha. Chunnaic e a’ chliath. Ach cho luath ’s a chunnaic e i, chual’ e cas-cheuman nam poileas, agus iad a’ tighinn a-steach. Dè dhèanadh e leis a’ chlàith?!

Chunnaic e siuga mhòr de bhàinne air a' bhòrd. Am biodh i mòr gu leòr? Dh'fhosgail an doras ach, mus do chuir a' chiad phoileas a cheann a-steach, chuir an croitear a' chliath anns an t-siuga agus, gu fortanach, cha robh i faicsinneach. Bha an croitear sàbhailte! Agus a' chaora chrom? O ... seallaibh air an uair. Seo deireadh na Litreach! Feumaidh a' chaora – agus sibh fhèin – a bhith foighidneach!

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Faclan na seachdainne: Paibil: *Bayble (in Lewis)*; cusbainn: *customs*; ceannaire a' bhaile: *the village leader (“headman”)*; eòrna: *barley*; Dùthaich MhicAoidh: *Mackay Country (N. Sutherland)*; Gallaibh: *Caithness*; poit-dhubh: *small still used by distillers of illegal whisky*; cliath: *worm (in distilling apparatus)*; snìomhach: *spiral*; a' tiughachadh: *condensing*; bàthach: *byre*; cas-cheuman: *(noise of) footsteps*; siuga: *jug*; faicsinneach: *visible*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: ge bith dè an dath a th' air: *whatever colour it is*; 's dòcha nach biodh sin gu cus feum: *perhaps that wouldn't be of too much use*; fàgamaid an tarbh an dàrna taobh: *let's leave the bull at one side (out of the argument)*; cha do ghabh mi X ach aon turas a-mhàin: *I only took X one time*; far a bheil treubhan nam beann a' fuireach: *where the hill tribes live*; far am biodh e mì-mhodhail deoch a dhiùltadh: *where it would be rude to refuse a drink*; cha b' fhada gus an robh an smùid orm: *it wasn't long until I was drunk*; nach fhaiceadh poileas na pocannan: *that a policeman wouldn't see the bags*; lean iad air: *they followed him*; bha na poilis air a shàil: *the police were on his heel(s)*; a bha ri taobh an t-sinc: *which was beside the sink*; ruith e timcheall an taighe: *he ran around the house*; airson fianais sam bith: *for any evidence*; cho luath 's a chunnaic e i: *as soon as he saw it*; dè dhèanadh e leis a' chlàith?: *what would he do with the worm?*; seallaibh air an uair: *look at the time*; feumaidh sibh a bhith foighidneach: *you will have to be patient*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdainne: *I hope you were able to follow the inflexion of the feminine noun cliath in the Litir. I take the traditional view – that feminine nouns should be slenderised in the singular dative (prepositional) case, although this is by no means adhered to universally today. But how do you slenderise a vowel combination like “ia”? The answer is that it changes to “èi”. Cliath is actually an easy one to deal with, as the same word is used for a fire grate or a harrow. In the dative singular it is clèith (nam faigheadh na poilis greim air a' chlàith). In the genitive singular it is also slenderised – clèithe eg mu dheidhinn na clèithe. If you forget how this slenderisation takes place, think of a familiar word. Fiadh (a masculine noun) slenderises, according to the rules, in the genitive singular – to fèidh. You may also be familiar with the word riadh for “banking interest”. Interest rate in Gaelic is ìre an rèidh – demonstrating the same inflexion. You may also have noticed slenderisation of the dubh in poit-dhubh even where there is no slenderisation of poit. I will deal with that in next week's puing-ghràmar.*

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdainne: ma thachras e dòigh air choreigin: *if it happens in some way or another. Note that grammatically it should be “ann an dòigh air choreigin” but that the “ann an” is often missed out in everyday speech.*

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