

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 at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk * This is Litir 320. Note that Roddy also broadcasts a simplified version – An Litir Bheag – on Monday evenings at 7.00 pm. This is also available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 16 corresponds to Litir 320.*

Thug mi seachad òraid o chionn ghoirid air seanfhaclan Gàidhlig co-cheangailte ri beathaichean. Nuair a bha mi gan rannsachadh, lorg mi feadhainn a bha gu math annasach. Seo fear dhuibh: *Dè sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt.* Dè sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt. Dè fon ghrèin a tha sin a’ ciallachadh? Dh’fhaodadh *mun cuairt* dà chiall a bhith air – cum an cat anns an nàbaidheachd, faisg ort. No cum an cat a’ tionndadh.

A rèir aithris, tha e a’ ciallachadh anns an t-seanfhacl seo – cum an cat a’ tionndadh. Dè sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt. Bidh daoine a’ cleachdadh an t-seanfhacl seo nuair a tha iad ag iarraidh air cuideigin cumail air leis an obair aige. Ge bith dè tha a’ tachairt timcheall air, bu chòir dha leantainn air leis an obair. Ach ciamar a dh’èirich an seanfhacl?

A rèir beul-aithris, tha e ceangailte ri seann chleachdadh pàganach air a bheil *taghairm*. Chì sibh mìneachadh air seo ann am faclair Dwelly. ’S e a bh’ ann dòigh airson an Donas a thoirt am follais. Bhiodh an Donas a’ freagairt ceist no a’ sàsachadh droch iarrtasan mì-laghail.

Nise, mus can mi dad eile mun taghairm, tha mi airson rabhadh a thoirt dhuibh. Ma tha sibh cianail measail air cait, ’s dòcha nach bi sibh airson èisteachd ris a’ chòrr. ’S e droch chleachdadh a bh’ ann. Bhiodh sreath de chait air an ròstaidh beò, fear às dèidh a chèile thairis air beagan làithean, air bior-ròstaidh os cionn teine. Mu dheireadh thigeadh buidheann de chait dhubha timcheall, agus iad uile a’ sgreuchail. Bhiodh an Donas nam measg ann an cruth cat dubh.

Nan nochdadh an Donas gu follaiseach na chruth fhèin, bhiodh e an uair sin a’ faighneachd de na daoine dè bha iad ag iarraidh. Bhiodh e a’ sàsachadh an iarrais. Ach mus tachradh sin, bhiodh cait eile a’ feuchainn ri stad a chur air a’ ghnòthach le bhith a’ bruidhinn ris na daoine a bha a’ dèanamh an ròstaidh. A rèir beul-aithris, bhiodh fear de na daoine ag èigheachd air an fhear a bha a’ tionndadh a’ bhior-ròstaidh, “Dè sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt.”

Tha Dwelly ag innse dhuinn rudeigin eile mun taghairm. Nuair a bha daoine ag iarraidh faighinn a-mach dè bha a’ dol a thachairt san ùine romhpa, bhiodh iad a’ marbhadh damh no bò. Bhiodh iad a’ feannadh a’ bheathaich, agus bhiodh iad a’ cur a’ bhian timcheall air duine.

Bhiodh iad a’ cur an duine air a dhruim dìreach ri taobh eas ann an àite iomallach. Chuireadh na daoine a’ cheist air agus bhiodh iad ga fhàgail airson beagan uairean a thìde leis fhèin. Nuair a thilleadh iad air a shon, bhiodh freagairt aige.

Am measg na tha a’ dèanamh aithris air a’ ghnòthach seo, tha Màrtainn Mac Ille Mhàrtainn anns an leabhar aige *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*.

Tha e ag aithris mu fhear ann an Leòdhas, *John Erach*, a chuir seachad oidhche mar sin ann am bian. Bha e air a chur troimh-chèile gu dubh leis. Is beag an t-iongnadh – ged a bha e fhathast beò às dèidh làimh, eucoltach ris na cait a chaill am beatha air a’ bhior-ròstaidh.

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Faclan na seachdaine: annasach: *unusual*; a’ tionndadh: *turning*; an Donas: *the Devil*; bior-ròstaidh: *roasting-spit*; a’ sgreuchail: *screeching*; damh: *ox*;

Abairtean na seachdaine: nuair a bha mi gan rannsachadh: *when I was researching them*; dh’fhaodadh mun cuairt dà chiall a bhith air: *mun cuairt could mean two things*; cum an cat anns an nàbaidheachd, faisg ort: *keep the cat in the vicinity, close to you*; bu chòir dha leantainn air leis an obair: *he should keep going with the work*; tha e ceangailte ri seann chleachdadh pàganach air a bheil taghairm: *it is linked to an old pagan custom called taghairm (a calling of the spirits)*; a’ sàsachadh droch iarrtasan mì-laghail: *satisfying bad and unlawful requests*; ’s dòcha nach bi sibh airson èisteachd ris a’ chòrr: *perhaps you won’t want to listen to the rest*; bhiodh sreath de chait air an ròstadh beò: *a series of cats would be roasted alive*; ann an cruth cat dubh: *in the shape of a black cat*; bhiodh cait eile a’ feuchainn ri stad a chur air: *other cats would be trying to stop*; dè bha a’ dol a thachairt san ùine romhpa: *what was going to happen in the future [lit. in the time ahead of them]*; air a dhruim dìreach ri taobh eas ann an àite iomallach: *flat on his back beside a waterfall in a remote place*; leis fhèin: *by himself*; nuair a thilleadh iad air a shon: *when they would return for him*; a chuir seachad oidhche mar sin ann am bian: *who spent a night like that in an animal hide/skin*; bha e air a chur troimh-chèile gu dubh leis: *he was deeply traumatised by it*; is beag an t-iongnadh: *it’s hardly surprising*; eucoltach ris na cait: *unlike the cats*.

Puing-chànain na seachdaine: Chì sibh mìneachadh air seo ann am faclair Dwelly: *you will see an explanation of this in Dwelly’s dictionary. I want to make a point about possessive names as I sometimes hear Gaelic learners saying “anns an fhaclair Dwelly”. Where a person’s name is in the genitive or possessive case following the preposition ann an (in), the indefinite form of the preposition is used ie ann an, rather than anns an. Thus we would say tha e ann an seòmair Chaluum (not tha e anns an t-seòmair Chaluum) for “it is in Calum’s room”. Similarly for “it is in Helen’s car” we would say tha e ann an càr Eilidh, not tha e anns a’ chàr Eilidh. But, of course, we can put names in the dative, following aig, rather than in the genitive, by saying tha e anns an t-seòmair aig Calum or tha e anns a’ chàr aig Eilidh. This is an important point – I suggest you try making up a few similar sentences to make sure you have a good feel for it.*

Seanfhacal na seachdaine: Dè sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt: *whatever you see or hear, keep the cat turning [ie don’t get distracted from your task by anything]*.

* Tha “*Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh*” air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig