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 roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk ** This is Litir 353. 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 49 corresponds to Litir 353.*

Cò às a thàinig am facal *beagle* ann am Beurla? Uill, 's dòcha gum bi cuimhne agaibh gu robh sinn a' toirt sùil an t-seachdain sa chaidh air an leabhar le Teàrlach MacAoidh – *The Gaelic Etymology of the Languages of Western Europe.* **Bha beachd aig Teàrlach còir air iomadach facal** – agus *beagle* nam measg. Ach dè tha na faclairean ag ràdh? Leis an fhìrinn innse, chan eil iad cinnteach cò às a thàinig am facal. Tha cuid dhen bheachd gur dòcha gun tàinig e don Bheurla bhon Fhraingis. Ach tha MacAoidh ag ràdh gun tàinig e bhon Ghàidhlig – *beag* agus *sùil* – *beag-shùil* – *beagle*, "a dog with small eyes".

Agus dè mu dheidhinn *begin*? Tha a' chuid as motha de eòlaichean cànain ga cheangal ri *biginnan* anns an t-seann Ghearmailtis. A rèir MhicAoidh, **faodar tùs an fhacail a lorg** ann an Gàidhlig – *bith* ("life") agus *gin* ("to procreate, produce"). *Bith-gin.*

'S e facal eile ann an leabhar MhicAoidh – *belfry*. Tha sin a' tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig *beachd* ("watch, observe") agus *frith* ("small, little") – chaidh e don Bheurla, ge-tà, bhon Fhraingis *beffroi*.

Agus tha am facal mith-chainnteach *bin* aige cuideachd. Tha sin a' ciallachadh "pòcaid le airgead ann". Nise, tha mi a' dol a chur seo ann am Beurla mar a sgrìobh MacAoidh e oir tha e iongantach. Tha *bin* a' tighinn bhon fhacal Ghàidhlig "*binn*, melodious; whence by metaphor, money that chinks in the pocket with a sound melodious to the ears of the thief who wants to appropriate it." Uill, dè chanas mi?

Agus bidh fios agaibh gur e a' Ghàidhlig airson *black* – dubh. Mar sin, am biodh dùil againn gun tàinig am facal Beurla *black* bhon Ghàidhlig? Uill, tha Teàrlach MacAoidh ag ràdh nach eil *black* idir coltach ri a leithid ann an cànanan Eòrpach eile – *schwartz, noir, negro* is mar sin air adhart – ged a bha facal *blak* ann an seann Bheurla nan Sagsannach, a bha a' ciallachadh *inc*. Cò às a thàinig e, ma-thà? 'S e freumh an fhacail, a rèir an leabhair – "*blàthaich*, to warm, make hot; *blàths*, warmth, heat; *blàthaichte*, warmed, heated, whence blackened by the heat."

Tha mi air a bhith a' gabhail beagan spòrs le beachdan Theàrlaich MhicAoidh. Saoilidh mi gu robh e cho measail air a' Ghàidhlig 's gun robh e airson "dearbhadh" gu robh buaidh mhòr aice air cànanan Eòrpach eile, eadhon ged a tha cuid de na beachdan aige annasach dha-rìribh. Ach le cuid de na faclan, bha e dìreach a' sealltainn gu robh rudeigin sa chumantas eadar a' Ghàidhlig agus cànanan eile – mar a rinn Alasdair MacBheathain anns an fhaclair aige, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language.* Chaidh sin fhoillseachadh ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a sia, (1896), naoi bliadhn' deug às dèidh foillseachadh leabhar MhicAoidh.

Bu mhath leam crìochnachadh le bhith a' toirt sùil air an fhacal Ghàidhlig *bleigeard*, no *blaigeard.* Gu mì-fhortanach, chan eil sin ann am faclair MhicBheathain ach tha daoine dhen bheachd gun tàinig e bhon fhacal Bheurla *blackguard* – air a sgrìobhadh mar *"black-guard"*. Ach an e sin a bh' ann am *blackguard* bho thùs – *black guard*?

Uill, tha MacAoidh ag ràdh nach e facal dà-fhillteach a th' ann idir, ach facal Ceilteach aon-fhillteach. Anns a' Ghàidhlig, 's e *"blagair*, a boaster, an impudent boaster". Tha e a' cumail a-mach gun do ghabh luchd na Beurla a-staigh e mar mhith-chainnt agus gun do chruthaich iad tùs Beurla dha, le bhith ga litreachadh mar *"black-guard"*. Chan eil mi cinnteach, ach tha sin nas coltaiche, chanainn, na *bin* no *begin…*

* * * * *

Faclan na Litreach: Teàrlach MacAoidh: *Charles Mackay;* eòlaichean cànain: *language experts;* Gearmailtis: *German language;* Fraingis: *French language;* mith-chainnteach: *colloquial, slang;* inc: *ink;* freumh: *root;* Alasdair MacBheathain: *Alexander Macbain;* dà-fhillteach: *compound, with two elements.*

Abairtean na Litreach: leis an fhìrinn innse: *to tell the truth;* tha cuid dhen bheachd gur dòcha gun tàinig e: *some are of the opinion that perhaps it came;* dè chanas mi?: *what can [do] I say?;* am biodh dùil againn?: *would we expect?;* nach eil X coltach ri a leithid ann an cànanan Eòrpach eile: *that X is not like its equivalents in other European languages;* seann Bheurla nan Sagsannach: *the old Saxon language;* saoilidh mi: *I reckon;* gu robh e cho measail air a' Ghàidhlig: *that he was so keen on Gaelic;* gu robh buaidh mhòr aice air: *that she had a great effect on;* tha cuid de na beachdan aige annasach dha-rìribh: *some of his opinions are extremely strange;* gu robh rudeigin sa chumantas: *that there was something in common;* chaidh sin fhoillseachadh: *that was published;* às dèidh foillseachadh leabhar MhicAoidh: *after the publication of Mackay's book;* bu mhath leam crìochnachadh: *I would like to finish;* facal Ceilteach aon-fhillteach: *a simple [single-element] Celtic word;* gun do chruthaich iad tùs Beurla dha: *that they created an English origin for it.*

Puing-chànain na Litreach: faodar tùs an fhacail a lorg: *the origin of the word can be found.* Faodar *is an example of a future passive – note that it is the auxiliary verb* faod *that goes into the passive, compared to the English in which the substantive verb ("found", given in Gaelic as the infinitive) is in a passive form.* Faodar *is a useful word to remember. Here are some other uses:* faodar a ràdh.. *(it might be said);* faodar gabhail ris gu .. *(it might be accepted that);* chan fhaodar smocadh ann an àite poblach sam bith *(smoking is not permitted in any public place).*

Gnàths-cainnt na Litreach: Bha beachd aig Teàrlach còir air iomadach facal: *Charles had an opinion on many words. Note the idiomatic use of* còir *here – it might be translated idiomatically as "good old (Charles)" although it has a bit less of a sense of the slapping-on-the-back than the English. But it means you think kindly of the person, even if you don't agree with his opinions – although it can also be used ironically.* Còir *is also used as a term of address in letters; eg for "Dear Duncan" we might write* "A Dhonnchaidh chòir".

* Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoineachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig.