

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleane@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 489. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 185 corresponds to Litir 489.

Dè an t-eun, le ainm Beurla a thàinig bhon Ghàidhlig, a tha na eun-stàite oifigeil ann an dùthaich thall thairis? Sin ceist dhuibh! Uill, ann an Litir 56 anns a’ bhliadhna dà mhìle (2000), sgrìobh mi mun fhacal *ptarmigan* ann am Beurla, agus mar a thàinig e bhon Ghàidhlig *tàrmachan*. Chaidh am “p” neo-fhuaimnichte a stobadh a-steach le muinntir nam faclairean Beurla agus tha e a-nise stèidhichte. Tha *ptarmigan* mar sin a’ coimhead coltach ri facal a thàinig bhon t-seann Ghreugais – mar *pterodactyl* – seach fear a thàinig bhon Ghàidhlig.

Tha àite sònraichte aig an *tàrmachan* ann an Alasga anns na Stàitean Aonaichte. Tha na h-eòin cho pailt, agus fhuair na daoine uiread de thaic bhuapa, le bhith gan ithe nuair a bha biadh eile gann, ’s gur e an *tàrmachan* eun-stàite Alasga. Chaidh an inbhe sin a bhuileachadh air ann an naoi ceud deug, caogad ’s a còig (1955).

Chan eil an *tàrmachan* ann an Alasga buileach co-ionnan ris an *tàrmachan* againne. ’S e an t-eun air a bheil sinn fhèin a’ gabhail *tàrmachan*, no *ptarmigan* ann am Beurla, *Lagopus mutus*. Tha e diofraichte bho a charaid, a’ chearc-fhraoich (no *red grouse*) air a bheil luchd-saidheans a’ gabhail *Lagopus lagopus*.

Ann an Alba, chan eil dath na circe-fraoiche ag atharrachadh anns a’ gheamhradh. Cha bhi i a’ dol geal idir. Ach bithidh an *tàrmachan*. Agus ann an Alasga bidh *Lagopus lagopus* a’ dol geal anns a’ gheamhradh – oir tha tòrr a bharrachd sneachda acasan na tha againne. Mar sin, ged a tha an t-eun nas dlùithe ann an càirdeas ris a’ chirc-fhraoich againne, ’s e *ptarmigan* seach *grouse* a tha daoine a’ gabhail air. *Willow ptarmigan* mar ainm slàn. Agus ’s e an seòrsa a th’ ann an Alasga fo-ghnè shònraichte – *Lagopus lagopus alascensis*.

Tha Alasga air a bhith anns na naidheachdan gu mòr **on a chaidh** an Riaghladair aca – Sarah Palin – **a chur air adhart** mar thagraiche nam Poblachdach airson Iar-cheann-suidhe nan Stàitean Aonaichte. Ach tha amharas agam, ged a chaidh na sgiobannan-camara gu ruige Juneau is Anchorage is Fairbanks, nach do bhodraig iad dhol gu Chicken. Seadh, Chicken, Alasga. Ainm neònach – agus tha mi a’ dol a dh’innse dhuibh mar a dh’èirich e.

Tha Chicken ann am meadhan Alasga, air an taobh an ear faisg air a’ chrìch le Canada. Chan e baile mòr a th’ ann idir. Anns a’ bhliadhna dà mhìle (2000), cha robh ach seachd duine deug a’ fuireach ann.

Chaidh Chicken a stèidheachadh anns an naoidheamh linn deug le mèinnearan a bha an tòir air òr. Tha mèinnearachd a’ dol fhathast – ach le digearan san latha an-diugh, seach spaidean. Aig toiseach an fhicheadamh linn, bha gu leòr de dhaoine ann airson oifis puist

fhosgladh. Ach, airson sin, dh'fheumadh iad ainm oifigeil a thaghadh airson na coimhearsnachd. Dè bha iad a' dol a thaghadh mar ainm air a' bhaile?

Uill, bha tàrmachain gu math pailt anns an sgìre. Bhiodh na mèinnearan fhèin gan ithe. Mar sin, cho-dhùin muinntir an àite "Ptarmigan" a bhith air a' bhaile mar ainm. Ptarmigan le "p" neo-fhuaimnichte. Ach, bha am "p" na thrioblaid. Cha b' urrainn do mhuinntir an àite thighinn gu aonta air mar a bhiodh am facal air a litreachadh. Agus mar sin, leig iad "Ptarmigan" seachad mar ainm agus thagh iad "Chicken" na àite!

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Faclan na Litreach: Alasga: *Alaska*; Na Stàitean Aonaichte: *The United States*; tàrmachan: *ptarmigan*; cearc-fhraoich: *red grouse*; fo-ghnè: *sub-species*; Iar-cheann-suidhe: *Vice-President*; sgiobannan-camara: *camera crews*; gu ruige: *to*; pailt: *plentiful*.

Abairtean na Litreach: dè an t-eun..?: *what is the bird..?*; eun-stàite oifigeil: *official state bird*; chaidh am "p" neo-fhuaimnichte a stobadh a-steach: *the silent [unsounded] "p" was stuck in*; a thàinig bhon t-seann Ghreugais: *that came from ancient Greek*; fhuair na daoine uiread de thaic bhuapa: *the people got so much help from them*; le bhith gan ithe nuair a bha biadh eile gann: *by eating them when other food was scarce*; chaidh an inbhe sin a bhuileachadh air: *that status was accorded it*; buileach co-ionnan ris: *completely identical to*; tha tòrr a bharrachd sneachda acasan na tha againne: *they get much more snow than we do*; nas dlùithe ann an càirdeas ri: *more closely related to*; mar a dh'èirich e: *how it came to be*; air an taobh an ear faisg air a' chrìch le Canada: *in the east close to the border with Canada*; mèinnearan a bha an tòir air òr: *miners who were after gold*; toiseach an fhicheadamh linn: *the start of the 20th Century*; dh'fheumadh iad ainm oifigeil a thaghadh: *they had to choose an official name*; cha b' urrainn do mhuinntir an àite thighinn gu aonta air mar a bhiodh am facal air a litreachadh: *the local people couldn't agree on how the word would be spelled*; leig iad "X" seachad: *they discarded "X"*; thagh iad "Y" na àite: *they chose "Y" in its stead*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *It's interesting how traditional modes of anglicizing Gaelic words that move into English as loanwords has not been followed in the most recent borrowing. Few words have survived the transition into English intact (loch and machair being exceptions). Some are slightly modified eg càrn to cairn, coire to corrie and gille to ghillie. Others are more heavily modified eg capall coille to capercaillie, claidheamh mòr to claymore and pìobaireachd to pibroch. And then we have spelling alterations like sporan to sporrán, cèilidh to ceilidh (dropping the accent) and crannag to crannóg. And, of course, we have the strange example of the intrusive and silent "p" in ptarmigan (the original being tàrmachan). And the recent borrowing? It's fèis – a music festival based around tuition. The Gaelic plural is fèisean. Both singular and plural forms have made the transition into English intact in the last thirty years, with the accent – an unusual phenomenon (and very welcome!)*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: [bh]on a chaidh an Riaghladair aca a chur air adhart mar thagraiche nam Poblachdach: *since their Governor was proposed as the Republican candidate*.

* Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA