

## Duilleag Mìneachaidh

1.

**Bainne, beinne, boinne** | Milk, melk, mulk

In this lesson we take a look at the various Gaelic dialects and accents, their pronunciation, vocabulary and rhythm. Many learners choose to aim for a specific accent or dialect, perhaps the one spoken in their family or in the community where they live, by their ancestors or even friends. But whether you have an interest in a certain dialect or not, it is important for all learners to familiarise themselves with the different sounds and words used by speakers of the language - you won't get far in conversation if you don't understand what the other person is saying!

Some people think that Gaelic is particularly dialectal, but in reality the accents and dialects of modern Gaelic are not very different and certainly no more so than the dialects of English, Irish, Italian or German. Every language is made up of various dialects, and indeed sometimes the line between accent, dialect and language can be difficult and even controversial to define. As the Jewish linguist Max Weinreich said: **Tha cànan na dhualchainnt le arm is cabhlachd**, 'A language is a dialect with an army and navy'. There is perhaps some truth in this, particularly with languages within the same language family, however the grammar and vocabulary of a language would normally be sufficiently different to make mutual understanding too difficult for speakers of another language. A Lewis Gaelic speaker will have very little, if any difficulty speaking to someone from South Uist, however they will struggle to speak to most Irish speakers beyond some basic level of conversation. Indeed, it could be said that many of the varieties of Scottish Gaelic which are commonly referred to as 'dialects', are indeed more akin to 'accents', as the difference between them is primarily in their pronunciation rather than their vocabulary or grammar.

The first point we look at here, referred to in the title of this section, is a good example of this difference in pronunciation - **bainne, beinne, boinne** - milk, melk, mulk. This kind of variation in vowel sound is very common in English as well as Gaelic and many other languages.

On the next page we will look at some other common pronunciation changes in spoken Gaelic.

You will often not hear the **-bh-** (nor **-gh-** or **-mh-**) in the middle of a word, therefore **gabhail** is normally said **ga:ail** rather than **gavail**. In the same way, you will hear **sgrì:adh** [sgr̥i:əɣ̊] rather than **sgrìobhadh** [sgr̥i:vəɣ̊] and **leu:adh** [L̥e:əɣ̊] rather than **leughadh** [L̥e:vəɣ̊].

<b>-bh- / -gh-</b>				
<b>gabhail</b>	<b>ga:val</b>	<b>ga:al</b>	<b>go:al</b>	<b>gu:al</b>
<b>uabhasach</b>	<b>uəvəsəx</b>	<b>uə.əsəx</b>		
<b>àbhaist</b>	<b>a:viʃd̪i</b>	<b>a:.iʃd̪i</b>	<b>a:wɪʃd̪i</b>	<b>a:ɟiʃd̪i</b>
<b>abhainn</b>	<b>avɪn̪i</b>	<b>a.ɪn̪i</b>	<b>awɪn̪i</b>	<b>ajɪn̪i</b>
<b>sàmhach</b>	<b>sa:vəx</b>	<b>sa:əx</b>		
<b>sgrìobhadh</b>	<b>sgr̥i:vəɣ̊</b>	<b>sgr̥i:əɣ̊</b>		
<b>leughadh</b>	<b>L̥e:vəɣ̊</b>	<b>L̥e:əɣ̊</b>		

As is the case in English, there are a number of areas where you will not hear the **-t-** in the middle of a word. Therefore, you will hear **cinneach** [kʲi:N̪əx], especially in the Isle of Skye, rather than **cinnteach** [kʲi:N̪ɟəx] and **inne** [ĩ:N̪ə] rather than **innteach** [ĩ:N̪ɟə].

<b>-t-</b>				
<b>cinnteach</b>	<b>kʲi:N̪ɟəx</b>	[cinnteach]	<b>kʲi:N̪əx</b>	[cinneach]
<b>smaointinn</b>	<b>smɔ:N̪ɟɪn̪i</b>	[smaointinn]	<b>smɔ:N̪ɪn̪i</b>	[smaoininn]
<b>innteach</b>	<b>ĩ:N̪ɟə</b>	[innteach]	<b>ĩ:N̪ə</b>	[inne]
<b>cluinntinn</b>	<b>kl̥ũĩN̪ɟɪn̪i</b>	[cluinntinn]	<b>kl̥ũĩN̪ɪn̪i</b>	[cluinninn]
<b>cantail</b>	<b>kaN̪ɟal</b>	[cantail]	<b>kaN̪al</b>	[canail]

In North Uist, Skye and Harris, **-oi-** is heard as **-eh-** rather than **-oy-**:

<b>-oi-</b>				
<b>coimhead</b>	<b>k̥ɔ̃jəd</b>	[koyed]	<b>k̥ɛ̃jəd</b>	[keh-id]
<b>roimhe</b>	<b>R̥ɔ̃jə</b>	[roye]	<b>R̥ɛ̃jə</b>	[reh-e]
<b>coimhearsnachd</b>	<b>k̥ɔ̃jəRsNəxg</b>	[koyersnachk]	<b>k̥ɛ̃jəRsNəxg</b>	[keh-rsnachk]

As we heard in the recording of Barra Gaelic - [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1nDdRg1xbmF9P1nhhWKPWdt/tar-sgriobhadh-eileanaich-barraigh](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1nDdRg1xbmF9P1nhhWKPWdt/tar-sgriobhadh-eileanaich-barraigh) - people from Barra, at least in the south of the island, say **-st** rather than **-rt**. In most areas, other than Lewis, this is pronounced as **-rsht**.

<b>-rt</b>			[BARRAIGH]	[LEÒDHAS]
<b>ort</b>	oRʃd	[orsh̥t]	<b>ost</b>	<b>ort</b>
<b>ceart</b>	kiaRʃd	[cearsh̥t]	<b>ceast</b>	<b>ceart</b>
<b>sagart</b>	sagəRʃd	[sagarsh̥t]	<b>sagast</b>	<b>sagart</b>
<b>goirt</b>	gɔRʃdʲ	[goirsh̥t]	<b>gost</b>	<b>gort</b>

In a few different areas, Skye and North Uist in particular, people add an **-adh** at the end of short feminine words in the genitive case. For example, some people would say **doras na sgoileadh** rather than the standard **doras na sgoile**.

<b>-dh</b>		
<b>sgoil</b>	<b>sgoile</b>	<b>sgoileadh</b>
<b>clann</b>	<b>cloinne</b>	<b>cloinneadh</b>
<b>mòine</b>	<b>mòna</b>	<b>mòineadh</b>
<b>grian</b>	<b>grèine</b>	<b>grèineadh</b>
<b>gaoth</b>	<b>gaoithe</b>	<b>gaoitheadh</b>

## 2. Gàidhlig na h-Èireann | Irish Gaelic

In the second part of this lesson we discuss Irish Gaelic as the closest language to Scottish Gaelic and look at what makes it a distinct language rather than a dialect of the same language, which they were until they began to diverge around 1000 years ago. A bit like the previous section on dialects, some learners will have more interest in this than others, and obviously this course is not trying to teach Irish as well as Scottish Gaelic! However it is useful to understand some of the similarities and differences between them and the cultural context - the shared history and struggle of the Gaelic languages in Ireland and Scotland.

Because Scottish and Irish Gaelic are so closely related there is a lot that can be understood between the two languages. This is also true for other languages which are closely related: Dutch and German, or Swedish, Danish and Norwegian, or Portuguese and Spanish, for example. But there are big differences as well, especially

concerning grammar and verb systems.

Simple conversations are easy enough – there isn't a big difference between:

- **Ciamar a tha thu? | Conas atá tú?**
- **Tha mi gu math. | Táim (Tá mé) go maith.**

Although there are many similar words in the two languages, there is a not insignificant list of words we have in Scottish that they don't have in Irish, or that they have and we don't.

A few examples are given in this table. You hear **freisin** all the time in Ireland where we would say **cuideachd**. And they don't have the useful wee word **co-dhiù**, they say **ar aon nós**.

There is a big difference between verb systems: **gnìomhairean** or **briathra**. Again there are an awful lot that are similar, but some we have that they don't, some they have we don't and many that are used in different ways to mean different things. Examples can be seen in the table below.

ALBA		ÈIRINN	
GNÌOMHAIR	AINMEAR-GNÌOMHAIREACH	BRIATHAR	AINM BRIATHARTHA
<b>bruidhinn!</b>	<b>a' bruidhinn</b>	<b>labhairt!</b>	<b>ag labhairt</b>
<b>coisich!</b>	<b>a' coiseachd</b>	<b>siùil!</b>	<b>ag siùil</b>
<b>faigh!</b>	<b>a' faighinn</b>	<b>faigh!</b>	<b>ag fáil</b>
<b>falbh!</b>	<b>a' falbh</b>	<b>imigh!</b>	<b>ag imeacht</b>
<b>ionnsaich!</b>	<b>ag ionnsachadh</b>	<b>foghlaim!</b>	<b>ag foghlaim</b>
<b>stèidhich!</b>	<b>a' stèidheachadh</b>	<b>bunaigh!</b>	<b>ag bunú</b>
<b>seall!</b>	<b>a' sealltainn</b>	<b>taispeáin!</b>	<b>ag taispeáint</b>
<b>Is urrainn</b>		<b>Is féidir</b>	

Irish Gaelic has a **tràth làithreach** 'present tense' for all verbs, where Scottish Gaelic would use either **tha** or **bidh** with a verbal noun, or the future tense form with a present habitual meaning.

Irish uses **Níor** in place of **Cha do** as the past tense negative particle and **Ní** in place of **Cha** as the future tense negative particle. The same future tense form of the verb is used for the independent and dependent forms in Irish, where in Scottish only the independent future form changes to an **-(a)idh** ending.

Another big difference in the verb system is that Irish uses conjugation across the different tenses, whereas Scottish only uses this with 1st person conditional forms, the **-(a)inn** and **-(a)maid** endings.

ALBA		ÈIRINN	
GNÌOMHAIR	TÒISICH	BRIATHAR	TOSAIGH
TRÀTH CAITHTE		AIMSIR CHAITE	
✓ Thòisich	Thòisich mi	✓ Thosaigh	Thosaigh mé
⊖ Cha do thòisich	Thòisich thu	⊖ Níor thosaigh	Thosaigh tú
	Thòisich e		Thosaigh sé
	Thòisich i		Thosaigh sí
	Thòisich sinn		Thosaíomar (Thosaigh muid)
	Thòisich sibh		Thosaigh sibh
	Thòisich iad		Thosaíodar (Thosaigh siad)
TRÀTH LÀITHREACH		AIMSIR LÁITHREACH	
✗		✓ Tosaíonn	Tosaím
		⊖ Ní tosaíonn	Tosaíonn tú
			Tosaíonn sé
			Tosaíonn sí
			Tosaímid (Tosaíonn muid)
			Tosaíonn sibh
			Tosaíonn siad

## TRÀTH TEACHDAIL

## AIMSIR FHÁISTINEACH

✓ <b>Tòisichidh</b>	<b>Tòisichidh mi</b>	✓ <b>Tosóidh</b>	<b>Tosóidh mé</b>
✗ <b>Cha tòisich</b>	<b>Tòisichidh tu</b>	✗ <b>Ní tosóidh</b>	<b>Tosóidh tú</b>
	<b>Tòisichidh e</b>		<b>Tosóidh sé</b>
	<b>Tòisichidh i</b>		<b>Tosóidh sí</b>
	<b>Tòisichidh sinn</b>		<b>Tosóimid (Tosóidh muid)</b>
	<b>Tòisichidh sibh</b>		<b>Tosóidh sibh</b>
	<b>Tòisichidh iad</b>		<b>Tosóidh siad</b>

## TRÀTH CUMHACH

## MODH COINNÍOLLACH

✓ <b>Thòisicheadh</b>	<b>Thòisichinn</b>	✓ <b>Thosódh</b>	<b>Thosóinn</b>
✗ <b>Cha thòisicheadh</b>	<b>Thòisicheadh tu</b>	✗ <b>Ní thosódh</b>	<b>Thosófá</b>
	<b>Thòisicheadh e</b>		<b>Thosódh sé</b>
	<b>Thòisicheadh i</b>		<b>Thosódh sí</b>
	<b>Thòisicheadh iad</b>		<b>Thosóimis (Thosódh muid)</b>
	<b>Thòisicheadh sibh</b>		<b>Thosódh sibh</b>
	<b>Thòisicheadh iad</b>		<b>Thosóidís (Thosódh siad)</b>

There are further differences in the passive and 'subjunctive' forms, but hopefully the above tables show that Scottish Gaelic verbs are not as tricky as they might be!