

Introduction to Pronunciation by Douglas McLean

Although it may seem more complicated at first, the Gaelic language is in fact more regular than English. The Gaelic alphabet has 13 consonants b, c, d, f, g, h, l, m, n, p, r, s and t; and five vowels a, e, i, o, u. (h) is never used at the beginning of any word in Gaelic. The letter (h) is primarily used as a tool. Despite having a smaller alphabet, Scottish Gaelic has far more individual sounds than English.

Broad to broad and slender to slender: Whenever there is a slender vowel (i or e) it will always be followed by another slender vowel after the consonant. Ditto for the broad vowels: aou.

Aspiration/lenition: Gaelic often aspirates vowels and nouns to show possession and to indicate that they are adverbs or adjectives modifying the verb or noun when they are following.

You will notice that much of the older text uses two accents, the grave (à) and the acute (á). Both indicated the length of the vowel, but the acute accent also dictated sound although it was a minor difference. The Gaelic Orthographic Conventions (1981) dispensed with the acute accent, retaining only the grave (à) accent that still **lengthens** the vowel.

Vowels:

a = ah – as in “father”

á = aah

e = a – as in “say”

é = aaa

i = e – as in “see”

í = eee

o = oh – as in “foam”

ó = ohhh

u = oo – as in “room”

ú = ooh

Here is a approximation of some consonant combinations:

bh = v

mh = nasalized v

th = breathing h

fh = no sound, except in the words fhéin, fhathast and fhuair, where they are sounded as h.

gh = pronounce as y before or after the vowels i, e

gh = pronounce as “ugh” before or after vowels a, o and u.

sh = h

g = k

(i)d(e) = j sound

(i)t(e) = ch sound

(i)n(e) = y sound

A Beginning **Vocabulary**

Gaelic nouns are masculine or feminine

mi – me

sinn – we

thu – you

i – she, her

e – he, him

iad – they

sibh – you (polite or plural form)

fhéin – self

fuair – cold

teth – hot

fluich – wet

beag – little/small

mór – big/large

an làtha – the day

gu math – well (also used to mean “very” preceding adjectives and adverbs)

dona – bad
trang – busy
an diugh – today
an nochd – tonight
gu dearbh – indeed
Ciamar a tha . . . ? – How is/are . . . ?
Calum – Malcolm
A Chaluum – Malcolm in address form
Peigi – Peggy or Margaret
A Pheigi – Peggy or Margaret in address form

The Present Tense

All questions in Gaelic must be answered in the appropriate tense. In Gaelic sentences the verb precedes the noun or pronoun

tha is
bha was
bithidh will be
a(m) bheil? am?
a(m) bhi? will?
nach eil? aren't?
chan eil isn't
cha bhi will not be
a(m) bi? will there be?
gum bi that there will be
nach bi there will not be
có bhitheas? what will be
gu bheil that there will be
gun robh that there was
an robh? was?
nach robh wasn't?

Read the following sentences without translating.

Exercise One

Translate the following sentences into Gaelic

1. Is she small? No, she is big.
5. Is he well tonight? He is well tonight.
6. The day is very cold.
7. Isn't it (i) very wet tonight? It is indeed.
8. We are very bad.
9. Are you (plural) hot today? No, we are cold.
10. Aren't they busy? They are indeed.

Translation

1. A' bheil i beag. Chan eil. Tha i mór.
5. A' bheil e gu math an nochd? Tha e gu math an nochd.
6. Tha na là gu math fuar.
7. Nach eil i fluich an nochd?
8. Tha sinn gu math dona.
9. A' bheil sibh teth an diugh? Chan eil. Tha sinn fuar.
10. Nach eil iad trang? Tha gu dearbh.