

Gáilig Dhail Riada

The Gaelic Dialect of Bute, Cowal & Mid-Argyle

Lesson 002

Now that we've learned how to form basic sentences to say what condition we, others, or things are in, I bet you're wondering how to say that they're *not* like that.

Well, it goes like this: think of the roughest, hardest sound that you associate with Scottish Gaelic, and even with Scottish accents. To us Gaels it's not rough at all and flows out of the mouth effortlessly, but to those who wouldn't normally make this sound, especially to native speakers of English, it's a tough cookie to get started on.

Do we remember the word for *am, are* and *is*? Well let's look at that again:

tha

What we'll do now is just alter this word that little bit, and we have the next word that we're going to need to make the negative – rather than positive – statements. Just remove the **t** and replace it with a **c** like so:

cha

[not]

This is what we call the “negative particle” and you'll encounter it no matter what verb you're using in Scottish Gaelic and no matter whether you're speaking in the past, present, future or conditional tenses. It's ubiquitous, just like English *not*. Although it's not etymologically connected to **tha**, it's a nice easy switch mentally from there to **cha** and a switch also from thinking of **c-h** not as /tch/ but as /ch/.

Now let's just take a little detour for a tick. The verb that **tha** stands for, that basic verb *to be* is instantly recognisable to the English speaker when heard:

bith

[be]

Now just like English where we have *am*, *are* and *is*, **bith** is an irregular verb, so although I said we only have one form of the verb for each person, **tha**, the forms of the verb for positive and negative situations as well as for questions, are different. What's fantastic about Gaelic however, is that the word order does not change one bit. Don't worry, I'll explain more fully shortly.

For now, let's look at the irregular forms of the verb **bith**. We already know **tha** for when we want to talk about *how* something *is*. When making a negative statement, *ie* talking about how something *is not*, we're going to take our negative particle **cha** and add it to another word:

eil

[am, are, is]

When considering how to say this word, just maintain the idea of a lovely foaming pint of *Scottish Ale* in your mind, and you're almost there. The Gaelic word is a little shorter though, rather than *ale*, it's **eil**. Let's put the two words together then. The negative particle and what's called the dependent form of the verb **bith**, **eil**.

chan eil

[*lit.* not is *ie* is not]

Now why has that **n** appeared, you're thinking? Well, it sits in between the two vowels **a** and **e** and acts as a buffer. So rather than saying **cha eil** which is a little challenging, the **n** gives us a smooth transition between the two words: **chan eil**

In vernacular Argyleshire speech, you don't really hear much emphasis on the initial **ch** – these two words sounding a bit more like the English *an ale!* – but for now, I'd like you to get used to practicing that challenging sound /ch/ which will crop up often and give us **chan eil**

Although we've had to learn a couple of new words, we can rely on our previous knowledge of Gaelic sentence structure with **tha mi blàth** to gift us our sentence this time, simply switching out **tha** for **eil** and adding the negative particle **chan**:

chan eil mi blàth

[*lit.* not am me warm *ie* I am not warm]

Now that we've worked out how to make a negative statement, why not practice switching out **blàth** for some of the other adjectives you've learned so far like **fuar**, **fliuch**, **tiuram** and **briagh**?

It's time to turn our attention now to asking questions. How would we go about doing that? Well, we use what's called the question particle, similar to the negative particle and in this case the particle **an** has reduced slightly to **a'** due to this element of the language being so well-used, a bit like English *can not* becoming *can't*. Added to that we have our *Scottish Ale* again, except that it has a **bh** at the start, giving us:

a' bheil?

[am? are? is?]

So whenever you're looking to work out *how* something *is ie* you have a question that needs asked, just think of there being *a veil* over it. It has *a veil* over it and you can't quite see what's there yet, so you need to ask the question. Alter the pronunciation of the English a little with a nice Gaelic accent, giving us **a' bheil** rather than *a veil*, and you're there.

So with your new word, let's form a complete question:

a' bheil u blàth?

[Are you warm?]

As you can hear, we don't tend to pronounce the question particle here. In some Gaelic courses, you will be taught to pronounce every single letter, but in ours, we won't insist you pronounce letters you'll not hear in everyday speech. We'll still write them though, so that you can learn how the whole system works!

Isn't it nice that when we asked a question – although we changed our word from **tha** or **chan eil** to **a' bheil** – the word order didn't change? Instead of English *you are warm* having to switch round to *are you warm?* in order to ask a question (what a headache for learners), the word order in Gaelic does not change! Magic!

Now there's one form that we still need to show you, so that you have the whole set. We've had the positive statement using **tha**; we've had the negative statement using **chan eil**; we've had the positive question using **a' bheil**; now it's time for the negative question and negative question particle! And how easy it is to get to grips with the form required. You already know **chan eil**, the negative statement form, so in order to form the negative question, you quite literally just flip the word **chan** on it's head, inverting the statement to a question and the word from **chan**.... that's right, you've guessed it, to **nach**, the negative question particle! It's just **chan** backwards. And now you've got your negative question form!

nach eil u blàth?

[*lit.* not are you warm? *ie* Are you not warm?]

So let's revise what we've learned so far and cement these structures into our minds. We have a positive statement and a positive question. We have a negative statement and a negative question. These can be set out in a little table that makes a diamond shape, like so:

+ a' bheil?

+ tha

chan eil x

nach eil? x

This is how the verb *to be* operates in the present tense, when talking about *how* things are. We will learn soon how we talk about *what* things are, which is a little different. What's good about this system is that it works for every single verb: you have what we call the independent form which in this case is **tha**, *independent* because it doesn't need a particle like **an**, **chan**, or **nach** and you have the *dependent* form, which in this case is [**bh**]eil and does require a particle, making it therefore *dependent* on that!

I'm sure you're wondering how you would answer a question, now that you've learned how to ask one. Surely if someone asks **a' bheil u blàth?** [are you warm?] you don't have to reply with **tha mi blàth** [I am warm]. Well you're right, you don't, but... there are no Gaelic equivalents for the English *yes* and *no*, therefore you must learn how to use the appropriate form of the verb as your answer.

So let's kit you out with some examples of how this works for practice:

Q: **a' bheil u blàth?** [Are you warm?]

A: **tha** [am *ie* yes]

Q: **a' bheil u blàth?** [Are you warm?]

A: **chan eil** [am not *ie* no]

Q: **nach eil u blàth?** [Aren't you warm?]

A: **tha** [am *ie* yes]

Q: **nach eil u blàth?** [Aren't you warm?]

A: **chan eil** [am not *ie* no]

It's now time to introduce our first common phrase, which you don't tend to use much with people you see every day, but you would definitely use if you bumped into someone you've not seen in a week or two while out for a walk, or caught up with someone over video chat online for the first time in a while. That phrase is... *how are you?* which in Dalriada Gaelic is:

dé mar a tha u?

[*lit.* what like are you? *ie* how are you?]

By learning this phrase, we also learn the first of our five question words in Gaelic, **dé?** [what?]. When combined with **mar** [*like* or *as*] we get **dé mar** and therefore *what like?* or more correctly in standard English, *how?*

The **dé** is pronounced exactly like the English language name *Jay*. So if you want to remember how to begin the above phrase, just think: *I wonder how Jay is today?* The **a** after **mar** is something similar to the **n** between **cha** and **eil** in **chan eil**: it's a buffer, this time not between vowels, but between consonants, maintaining Gaelic's unique musical rhythm: **dé mar a tha u?**

To answer this question, you can use any of the words you've already learned:

tha mi blàth [I am warm]

tha mi fuar [I am cold]

tha mi tiuram [I am dry]

tha mi fliuch [I am wet]

Of course, you can also say:

tha mi gu math [I am well] sometimes shortened to a simple **tha gu math!**

Unlike English, the Gaelic adjective **math** [good] is regular, so instead of having to grapple with two separate words with completely different etymologies *ie good* and *well*, you merely add **gu** in before **math** and this makes it an adverb, literally *goodly!* Now you can ask someone how they are and answer them just as people did for countless generations in Bute, Cowal and Mid-Argyle:

dé mar a tha u? tha gu math!