

Gáilig Dhail Riada

The Gaelic Dialect of Bute, Cowal & Mid-Argyle

Lesson 001

Can you laugh? If you can laugh, you can start speaking Gaelic. Let's give it a try:

hababababaha

Well there you are; you have your first word, which means all of the following: *am*, *are* and *is* but for every word you need in English, you only need a letter in Gaelic:

tha

You will learn shortly why the **t** is not pronounced. For now, let's move forward with how to use your new vocab.

The second word you're going to learn will tax you to the edge of your sanity in terms of difficulty. So batten down the hatches – it's coming:

mi

Take a wild stab at what that means! Precisely: *me*. But unlike in English, it's not spelt /me/ – it actually sounds exactly as it looks. And also unlike English, an **i** does what it says on the tin; it makes the sound /i/ just like the majority of European languages with which you might be familiar. To use a word as an example, think of *kilo* as *one kilo in weight*. While English has many different sounds which can be made with *i* – *fit*, *might*, *pirate* to cite just a few examples – Argyleshire Gaelic has one: /i/

Not only is it spelt so sensibly, there's only one word to learn!

mi instead of two ie *I* & *me*.

So in placing these two words one after the other to begin a sentence, we have:

tha mi

[*lit.* am me *ie* I am]

In order to give you something to say about yourself and not just leave you stuck with *I am* which hardly says much(!), let's give you a simple adjective to get you started:

blàth

[warm]

This word has a couple of silent consonants at the end, but don't worry about those; most languages do have the odd silent letter here and there. For instance, consider the English words *though* or *monologue* for just two examples!

So let's form our first sentence:

tha mi blàth

[*lit.* am me warm *ie* I am warm]

Now I bet you're wondering how we might go about switching that over to *you are warm* instead of *I am warm*. In English, you'd need to change two elements of the sentence, *I* and *am*, keeping just the adjective the same. In Gaelic, it's a simple case of removing *I* and replacing it with *you*, and you're done. What's even more attractive is the fact that we get to use the English word as our starting point, simply removing a couple of letters (how economical is this language?) and hey presto! you've got

your new word, and in Argyleshire dialect, it couldn't be simpler to say and spell. So, taking the *y* and *o* away from the English word, we're left with *you*

u

[you]

Now in the standard language, you'll see this word written **thu**, as if the word were sounded almost identically to **tha** give or take a vowel. In Central Argyle however, we don't spell this word using the **th** as it's confusing; we spell it exactly as it sounds!

So with your new word, let's form that sentence:

tha u blàth

[*lit.* are you warm *ie* you are warm]

It's just as easy to learn the words for *he/him* and *she/her*. Here are your instructions!

he

1. remove the *h*
2. pronounce the letter that's left as it looks, eg in English *get*

e

[he, him]

she

1. remove the *sh*
2. keep the sound that's left /ee/ but employ sensible Gaelic spelling!

What do you think the word is going to be? That's right, it's exactly the same sound you already know from **mi** except without the **m**!

i

[she, her]

What's more – as you can see – we don't need two separate words for each concept. Gaelic does the job with just the one. Now that's not to say that there isn't complex stuff on the way – every language has its intricacies! – but at the very beginning, Gaelic is extremely straightforward and will continue so for a while yet, you'll be pleased to hear!

What required ten words in English (*am, are, is, I, me, you, he, him, she, her*) required only five in Gaelic so far: **tha, mi, u, e, i**. Double the pleasure, half the work!

So let's kit you out with some more words to help you begin to express something about what's going on around you:

sinn [we]

- The **s** is “soft” when placed next to an **e** or **i** meaning that you pronounce it as English /sh/
- The double **n** when placed next to an **e** or an **i** gives us something approximating the Spanish *ñ* eg *mañana* meaning that this word is a bit like the English noun *sheen* except with a Spanish *ñ* at the end!

sibh [you, y'all & you formal *ie* to older people]

- Once again, the **s** is “soft” as Gaelic is nothing if not regular with its spelling.
- Final **bh** is unpronounced, leaving us able to re-employ our English word *she* as an approximate sound, although the Gaelic word is shorter, more clipped: /she!/
- You will also find this word pronounced almost like /shooy/ with some speakers, so keep an ear out for that. It is the same word though!

ead [they, them]

- Take the English word *bet*, shave off the *b*, and there you have it!

So the full set in action looks like this:

tha mi blàth [I am warm]

- The timing is like saying the English words *hammy* and *blab* as *blab blab blab!*

tha u blàth [you are warm]

- **tha** and **u** run together as one

tha e blàth [he is warm]

- **e** is actually unpronounced after the **a** in **tha** in our dialect

tha i blàth [she is warm]

- Like saying *hi* then *blab!*

tha sinn blàth [we are warm]

- The timing is like saying the English words *hashing* and *blab*

tha sibh blàth [yous are warm]

- The timing is like saying the English words *hashy* and *blab*

tha ead blàth [they are warm]

- The vowels in **ead** are unpronounced after the **a** in **tha**, as if saying *hat blab!*

tha Seumas blàth [James is warm]

- Just like in **sinn** and **sibh**, the **S** of **Seumas** is “soft” so the word sounds like the English *shame* with the extra /uss/ at the end and the “A” sound in the middle extended a little. As you can see, putting a name in here changes nothing about the grammar of the sentence – always a relief!

tha Móràg blàth [Sarah is warm]

- Like saying the English name *Moe* and the word *ruck* quickly one after the other, making sure to hang on the accented vowel. Although we translate **Móràg** as *Sarah*, the two names are etymologically distinct and the translation is therefore not a direct one.

Now that you know how to form sentences about anyone or anything in the present tense, why don't we add a few more adjectives to make things interesting?

fuair [cold] sounds just as it looks

fiuch [wet] as above, although admittedly this is a challenging one to get just right!

tiuram [dry] remember the **t** is “soft” here making the sound like *[ca]tch*

briagh [lovely] lovely it is as it's completely phonetic save the last couple of letters!