

Lesson 1 Bronze Card

Background

Before we start it is important to know some key grammatical points in Gaelic as you will come across them time and time again.

Broad Vowels: “a” “o” “u”

Slender vowels “e” “i”

All nouns in Gaelic are either masculine or feminine ie there is no neutral gender.

There are only 18 letters in the Gaelic alphabet ie no J,K,Q,V,W,X,Y,Z however these sounds are taken care of by using existing letters or combinations of letters. The letter “h” is used mostly for lenition and is seldom at the start of a word unless the word derives from Norse or is a borrowed word.

Phonetics:

Throughout this course you will see a phonetic system to assist you in pronunciation and this will be easily noticed because the words will be *italicised*. Therefore if you see anything in *italics*, these are not actual spellings but purely a reasonable version of how the word sounds. As in all languages, every area has their own dialect and Gaelic is no exception and as in all languages this doesn't mean that each area cannot understand the others dialect. So there is a great deal of scope for learners who may not have mastered the Gaelic “blas” or natural sounds of the Gaelic language as spoken by a native Gael.

Lenition:

Lenition is when you put an “h” after the first consonant. There are a number of reasons when you do this and these will be covered in the grammar sections that follow.

Slenderisation:

Slenderisation is generally when you add a slender vowel mostly an “i” after the last broad vowel in a word. This changes the sound of the word and this is used eg to make some nouns plural or put a proper name in the vocative case. Both Lenition and Slenderisation are used all the time in Gaelic so it is better to know exactly what they are.

Vocative Case:

When you address someone this is in the vocative case eg if you are addressing James (Seumas) you say “a Sheumais” *uh hay-meesh* which sounds like Hamish and is where the name Hamish comes from. The letter “h” has lenited the first consonant “s” and nullifies the sound of the “s” so that all you hear is the sound of the “h”. This is an example of lenition.

Quite often you will hear the girl's name Vari which comes from Màiri (Mary) which becomes “a Mhàiri” in the vocative case. The “mh” is a V sound in Gaelic as is “bh”.

There is no V in the Gaelic alphabet but you can get the same sounds by adding an “h” to either “m” or “b”. Whilst talking about “mh” and “bh” combinations it is worth pointing out that some words which have these letters in the middle of the word are not pronounced and disappear in speech . This is also a problem for learners as some dialects do pronounce them while others do not. In either case the word will be understood by most native Gaels whether it is pronounced or not.

Vocative Case Cont

Note that Masculine proper names in the vocative case both lenite and slenderise the Gaelic personal names but if you are addressing a female you only Lenite.

Eg Seumas - a Sheumais Note lenition (add an “h” after the “S”) Slenderise the last broad vowel “a” by adding an “i” immediately after the “a”. The end sound changes from an “as” sound to a “eesh” sound.

Also:

Eg Catherine which in Gaelic is Catriona – a Chatriona (Vocative Case) Note lenition only and no slenderisation.

Proper names beginning with a vowel do not lenite in the vocative case eg Anna , Iain , Anndra , Eilidh and they are not preceded by an “a” .

Graves/Acutes

Up until fairly recently vowels in written form were accompanied by a “grave” which extends the length of the verb or “acutes” which shorten the length of the verb.

Nowadays we do not use “acutes” but the “grave” is in common use which is a stroke going from top to bottom above the vowel (sordid memory jogger:- Graves go from above the ground down into the ground or down into the grave). “Graves” are very useful to learners as it gives the learner help towards pronunciation especially if it is a word that they are unfamiliar with.

Eg bata *bata* stick (the letter “a” is short)
 bàta *bah-ta* boat (the letter “a” is held a little longer)

Masculine/Feminine

There is no neutral gender in Gaelic so every noun is either masculine or feminine. There are obvious words which are one or the other but unfortunately with most nouns you have to learn them as you go along however it is not a major disaster if you get it wrong. It will just not sound right to the Gaelic ear but will probably still be understood.

There are some clues however eg most countries are feminine and most towns are masculine.

Definite Article

The definite article or simply “the” in Gaelic takes a number of forms eg “an” , “am” , An t-“ , “ a ’ ”. The only thing to know just now is that if the word for “the” precedes a noun starting with b, f, m or p , then the “an” changes to “am” . Lets call that Rule 1.

Greetings:

Madainn mhath:	<i>mah-teeng vah</i>	Good morning
Feasgar math	<i>feh-skar mah</i>	Good afternoon or good evening (Coming or going)
Oidhche mhath	<i>aye-chay vah</i>	Good night (on leaving)

Feasgar math can be used as a greeting in the afternoon or in the evening. Feasgar is a masculine noun and therefore does not lenite the word for “good” ie math. However both nouns for morning and night are feminine and so the adjective describing the noun ie “math” (good) will be lenited ie “mhath”

Rule 2: adjectives following a feminine noun lenite while adjectives following a masculine noun do not lenite. In Gaelic, adjectives follow the noun (the opposite to English but similar to 30% of all languages)

Rule 3: Masculine proper names that start with a consonant both lenite and slenderise but female proper names only lenite. Both Masculine and Feminine proper names which begin with a vowel do not lenite .

Think of this example and you won't go far wrong :-

Calum bàn - Fair haired Calum (note no lenition on “bàn”

But

Mairi bhàn - Fair haired Mary (note lenition on “bàn” to become “bhàn”

Uses of sibh and thu

The pronoun “sibh” which means “you” can be used when you are showing some respect to one person eg if you don't know them or they are older or are deserving of respect. Also always use “sibh” if you are addressing more than one person. If the person is well known to you or the person is younger, then use the less formal “thu”. The word for “you” can be stressed by adding “fhein” – *hayn* eg “Ciamar a tha sibh fhein” - How are you yourself? Note the “f” in “fhein” gets lenited and this nullifies the sound of the “f” just leaving the sound of the “h”

Ciamar a tha sibh? *Kimmer a hah shiv* How are you? Formal or addressing more than one person.

Ciamar a tha thu? *Kimmer a hah oo* How are you? Informal.

Response to “Ciamar a tha sibh” How are you?

Response 1: Tha mi gu math *Hah mee goo mah* I am well

Response 2: Tha mi sgìth *Hah mee skee* I am tired

Response 3: Chan eil mi dona *han yale dawna* Not bad

Note: sometimes the “mi” gets dropped

To be more polite you could add thank you to your response eg

Tha gu math tapadh leibh *Hah goo mah tahpa-leev* I am well thank you

Tapadh leibh is used as “thank you” when you are talking to a stranger or showing respect or addressing more than one person.

Tapadh leat *tah-pa lat* is less formal similar to the discussion about “sibh” and “thu”

Tha gu math tapadh leibh. Best use this form in a test where you probably don't know the assessor.

Weather:

Early conversations usually include aspects of the weather. To describe what the weather is like you can say:-

Tha i brèagha.	<i>Hah ee bree-ah</i>	It is beautiful
Tha i fuar	<i>Hah ee foo-ar</i>	It is cold
Tha i fliuch	<i>Hah ee flooch</i>	It is wet.
Tha i snog	<i>Hah ee snawk</i>	It is nice
Tha i blàth	<i>Hah ee blah</i>	It is warm

You can enlarge the sentence by including the word for today which is “an-diugh”, pronounced “*an dew*”.

Eg Tha i brèagha an-diugh

To ask for confirmation that the weather is beautiful you can add at the end of a sentence “nach eil?”, “*nach ale*”, “isn’t it” eg Tha i brèagha an-diugh nach eil?. It is beautiful today isn’t it?

To ask a question about the weather you use the question form of the verb “to be”, “a bheil” “*a vale*”.

Eg A bheil i fuar an-diugh Is it cold today?
A bheil i fliuch an-diugh Is it wet today?

To answer you reply to “A bheil” with “Tha” assuming you agree or “chan eil” – “*chan yale*” - No – if you don’t agree.

A bheil i brèagha an-diugh? Tha, tha i brèagha an-diugh
Is it beautiful today? Yes, It is beautiful today.

To add to your reply you could say it also warm “blàth” and use the conjunction word “and” which in Gaelic is “agus”. The word for “also” is “cuideachd”, “*koo-chuchk*”,

Eg

A bheil i brèagha an-diugh. Is it beautiful today?
Tha , tha i brèagha an-diugh agus tha i blàth cuideachd. Yes , it is beautiful and warm. also

Exercise:

Repeat using questions and answers for all other types of weather.

Note : we tend to use “i” (it) after the verb when talking about weather eg tha i fuar. We don’t actually know what our word for “it” is referring to. In this case we assume that we are referring to the Gaelic word for weather “aimsir” which is feminine. If we were meaning that the day is cold then we would use Tha e fuar. As the word for day “latha” is masculine. So it is not wrong to say “tha i fuar” or “tha e fuar”.

Where do you come from (Originally)

It is important for you to find out the best way to say in Gaelic , where you come from and where you are now staying. Make sure you are able to state this whether there is a Gaelic word for it or not. You can always use the English word if you wish.

Cò às a tha sibh. *Coe as ah hah shiv?* Where do you come from? (originally)

It is important to differentiate how to ask or state where someone hails from originally rather than where they or you are living or staying just now.

You can reply with the following form eg

Tha mi à Glaschu I am from Glasgow
 Tha mi à Dùn Eideann I am from Edinburgh
 Tha mi à Barraigh I am from Barra

You use the word for “from” ie “à” if the Gaelic place name does not begin with the definite article (the) eg Uibhist a Tuath – North Uist or Glaschu - Glasgow or Inbhir Nis – Inverness

However if the place name starts with (the) or in Gaelic (“An” or An t-) then you use the form “às” as follows :-

Tha mi às an Eilean Sgitheanach - I am from Skye

or

Tha mi às an Oban - I am from Oban

If there is no Gaelic word for the place you come from then just say the name after it eg “Tha mi à” or “Tha mi às an” if your place name starts with “The” in English.

Where do you live (now)?

The Gaelic for living or staying is “a’ fuireach” – “*uh foo-uh-ruch*”

To ask the question where are you staying you say :-

Càit a bheil sibh a’ fuireach “*catch a vale shiv a foo-uh-ruch*”

To reply you say :-

Tha mi a’ fuireach ann an Glaschu - I live in Glasgow

Tha mi a’ fuireach ann am Barraigh - I live in Barra (Note “an” changes to “am” if followed by the noun with a letter beginning with b, f, m or p.

But if the place name begins with “the” or in Gaelic “an” or “an t-“ then you say

Tha mi a’ fuireach anns a’ Ghearasdan. I live or I am staying in Fort William. “*uh yerastan*”

Tha mi a’ fuireach air an Eilean Sgitheanach I live on the Island of Skye. “*air an yay-lan skeep-an-uch*”

Note when you are living on Skye you say “air” for “on” but if you live in Fort William you say I live **in** Fort William using the word for “in the” which is “anns a’ ” in this case.

If you stayed in Glasgow which does not use “the” in front of Glasgow you use the word for “in” which is “ann an” Tha mi a’ fuireach ann an Glaschu”

Introductions:

When you introduce yourself to a stranger you say “ Is mise

Eg “Is mise Iain” – “Is mise Anna” – Is mise Eilidh”. Literally “ ’tis myself

To ask someone his/her name you say “ Dè an t-ainm a th’ oirbh?”

Dè – *jay* – What

An t-ainm – *an tenum* – the name

A th’ oirbh – *ah haw-riv* – that is on you

The “a th’ oirbh” Is short for “a tha oirbh” and is easier to say. Literally “that is on you”

Note: the Gaelic for yesterday is “an dè” – “ *an jay* ” – yesterday

When you refer to something in the past tense you use ”bha” instead of “tha” eg

“Bha i fuar an dè” - It was cold yesterday.

Now use all the previous lesson to form a conversation with your neighbour

Eilidh: Feasgar math, Is mise Eilidh, Dè an t-ainm a th’ oirbh?.

Màiri: Hello , is mise Màiri , ciamar a tha sibh?

Eilidh: Hello a Mhàiri , tha gu math tapadh leibh, ciamar a tha sibh fhèin?

Màiri: Chan eil dona ach tha mi sgìth. (ach – but)

Eilidh: Cò às a tha sibh?

Màiri: Tha mi a Glaschu . Co às a tha sibh fhèin?

Eilidh: Tha mi a Leòdhas. Càit a bheil sibh fhèin a’ fuireach?

Màiri: Tha mi a’ fuireach air an Eilean Sgitheanach. Càit a bheil sibh a’ fuireach?

Eilidh: Tha mi a’ fuireach ann an Inbhir Nis.

Màiri: Tha i breagha an-diugh nach eil?

Eilidh: Tha . Tha i breagha an-diugh ach bha i fuar an dè.

Màiri: Tapadh leibh Eilidh, oidhche mhath.

Eilidh: Oidhche mhath.