Gaelic - A Language Tutorial[1]

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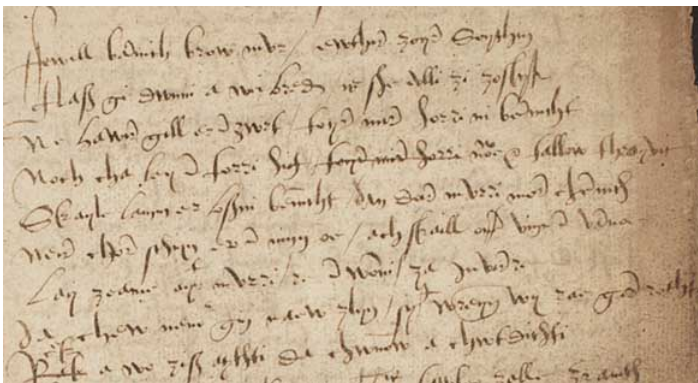
LAGB 2009, Edinburgh

History: usually assumed to be brought with settlers from Ireland in about the 4th/5th century AD. Close connections with Ireland over the next centuries in the literary language, but clear morphological and phonological distinctions appeared by the time of the Dean of Lismore's book (1480-1551), which was written in Scots orthography.

(1)   Is fadda noch ni nelli fiym, is fadda liym in nycheith ryr
in lay dew gay fadda zoyth, di bi lor fadda in lay de

(2)   Is fad an nochd na neula faim, is fada leam an oidhche
an raoir
an la an diugh ge fada dhomh, do bu leor fada 'n latha
an dè

(3)   Long tonight are the clouds above me, and long to me
last evening
though today is long to me, much longer was yesterday

Geography:

- 2001 Census figures reported about 60,000 speakers.
- By 2001 fewer than half Gaelic speakers lived in wholly Gaelic speaking households.
- Some evidence of a very slow growth amongst younger speakers because of Gaelic medium education at primary level, but lack of secondary education through Gaelic leads to attrition in teenage years.
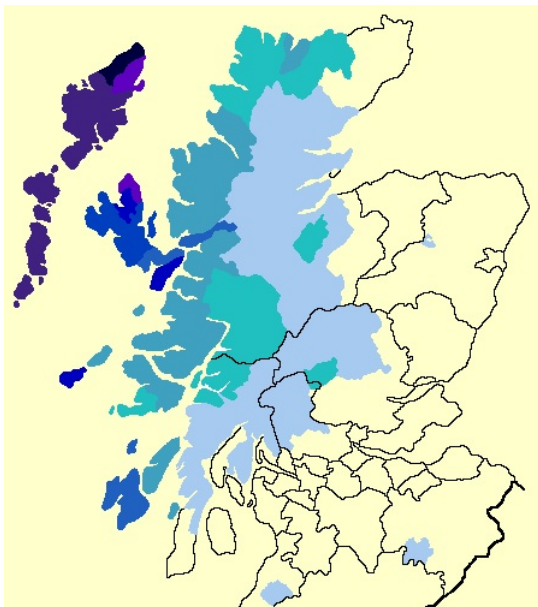
(With thanks to Anna Bosch)

Table: Stressed Vowels, Long or short

	Front Unrounded	Back Unrounded	Back Rounded
High	i	ɯ	u
Mid	e	ɤ	o
Low	ɛ	ɑ	ɔ

Table: Unstressed Vowels, short

	Front Unrounded	Central Unrounded	Back Rounded
High	i		u
Mid		ə	
Low	ɛ	ɑ	ɔ

Word Stress: Initial

(4) Cha do dhìochuimhnich mi na   litrichean.
     NEG PAST forget.PAST   I the.P letter.P
     'I didn't forget the letters.'

['jiːəxɐ̃ɲiç]. (but buntàta 'potato', Catrìona)
Diphthongs (rising/falling): (Barra)

(5) laimh 'hands' [lˠãĩv] — grìomh 'deed' [gðĩãv]

Nasalization

(6) caomh 'kind' [kũːv] — craobh 'tree' [krɯːv]

Table: Obstruants

	-con, -asp	-cont, +asp	+cont, +voice	+cont, -voice
-pal	p t k	p^h t^h k^h	v ɣ	f x s h
+pal	p^j t^j k^j	p^{hj} t^{hj} k^{hj}	v^j $ɣ^j$	f^j x^j s^j h^j

Lack of dental continuants (ð, θ) and of voiced sibilants (z, ʒ)

Phonetic realizations

- Labials are usually never realized as palatalized, but show a palatal glide, or zero phonetic effect.

  (7)   beò [bjɔ],

- Other consonants have secondary palatal articulation to a greater or lesser extent.

- Pre stress aspirated stops are heavily post-aspirated, whereas post-stress they are preaspirated, where preaspiration of velarsvaries dialectally in how homoorganic it is. ([ʰk]/[ˣk])

Table: Nasals

	labial	dental	velar
velarized		n^γ	ŋ
neutral	m	n	
palatalized		n^j	$ŋ^j$

Table: Secondary Articulations in Sonorants

	lateral	dental nasal	rhotic
velarized	lˠ	nˠ	rˠ
neutral	l	n	ɾ
palatalized	lʲ	nʲ	rʲ

Phonetic realizations

- Velarized n, l are dental, as opposed to neutral n, l, which are alveolar.

- Under lenition, in most dialects, palatalized lʲ lenites to l, while both palatalized and velar nʲ, nˠ lenite to n.

- velarized rˠ is a velarized trill, while palatalized rʲ has a range of realizations with ð being common.

Svarabhakti. Appears in clusters with falling sonority. Both vowels have stress, unlike usual word-initial stress.

(8)   dearbh 'certain' [dʲarav]

(9)   gorm 'blue' [gɔrɔm]

(10)   a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, u

(11)   caoineadh [kɯnʲəɣ]

What's with all those extra vowels?

(12)   caol   ri caol   is leathann ri leathann
        narrow to narrow and broad   to broad
        'when vowels surround a consonant, ensure that if the
        vowel on one side is narrow (i, e) so is the vowel on the
        other; mutatis mutandis for broad vowels a, o, u'

(13)   òl [ɔːlˠ] — dh'òlas [ɣɔːlˠəs]

(14)   buail [buɑl] — bhuaileas [vuɑləs]

Gives us a way of marking palatalized/non-velarized segments

Table: Phonemes/Orthography Mapping

	–con, –asp	-cont +asp	+cont, +voice	+cont -voice
-pal	/p t k/ <b d g>	/p^h t^h k^h/ <p t c>	/v ɣ/ <bh/mh dh/gh>	/f x s h/ = <f ch s sh/th>
+pal	p^j t^j k^j	p^{hj} t^{hj} k^{hj}	v^j ɣ^j	f^j x^j s^j h^j

(15)   botach beò [pɔʰtəx pjɔː], Domhnaill diùid [t̃ɔ̃əlʲ tʲuːtʲ],
        geamhradh goirt [kʲɑurəɣ kɔrʃt]

(16)   partan [pʰɑrtɑn] piuthar [pʰjuhər] tobar tinn [tʰopər
        tʰʲiːnʲ], comhchag [kʰɔ̃ːxɑk], cearc [kʰʲɛrʰk]

(17)   cat [kʰɑʰt] cait [kʰɑʰtʲ]

What's with all those extra h's?

(18) Dh'fhaighnich mi.
      ask.PAST   I
      'I asked'

(19) b, bh[v], c, ch[x], d, dh[ɣ], f, fh [ ], g, gh[ɣ], p, ph[f], s,
      sh[h], t, th[h]

These often appear in lenition contexts, and to mark loss of
historically present segments (sometimes resulting in hiatus).

(20) latha [lɑ.ə], abhainn [ɑ.inʲ]/[ɑvinʲ]

Sometimes they are used to mark special vowel sounds

(21) adhbhar [ɣːvər], leabhar [lʲɛuər]

<mh> nasalizes a preceding vowel, and sometimes leads to substantial rounding (amh can then be pronounced ə̃v or ũ).

(22)   dèanamh [tʲiːənˠu]

Svarabhakti plus loss of consonantal force can also give rise to hiatus:

(23)   onfhadh 'blast, storm' [ɔnɔ.əɣ], marbhadh 'murder' [mɑrɑ.əɣ]

(24)   Cha do   dhìochuimhnich mi na   litrichean.
          NEG PAST forget.PAST   I   the.P letter.P
          'I didn't forget the letters.'

(25)   xə tə jiːəxə̃ɲiç mi nə liʰtrɪçən

- Morphosyntactically triggered (by preceding head, or by syntactic context)

  (26) a mhac   a mac
        his son   her son
        [ə va^{x}k] [ə ma^{x}k]

- no straightforward phonological process (spirantization, debuccalization, deletion, loss of secondary articulation, etc)

- maps from occurring segment to occurring segment

Table: Lenition

Labials	Dentals	velars	Unaffected
p ∼ v	t ∼ ɣ	k ∼ ɣ	vowels
pʰ ∼ f	tʰ∼ h	kʰ∼ x	lˠ
m ∼ ṽ	s ∼ h		ŋ
f ∼ ∅	nˠ∼ n		h
	nʲ∼ n		
	lʲ∼ l		
	rˠ∼ ɾ		

(27) | **past** | **future** | **conditional** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *bhuail* | *buailidh* | *bhuaileadh* | 'hit' |
| [vual] | [puali] | [vualəɣ] | |
| *dh'fhàg* | *fàgaidh* | *dh'fhàgadh* | 'leave' |
| [ɣaːk] | [faːki] | [ɣaːkəɣ] | |
| *dh'òl* | *òlaidh* | *dh'òladh* | 'drink' |
| [ɣɔːlˠ] | [ɔːlˠi] | [ɣɔːlˠəɣ] | |

Introduction	Phonology	Orthography	Lenition	**Verbal Morphology**	Nominal Morphology	Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○	○○○○	○○	○●○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○	○○○○

Tense

(28) [ɣ] [pual] ↦ₗₑₙᵢₜᵢₒₙ [ɣ] [vual] ↦ᴅₑₗₑₜᵢₒₙ ∅ [vual]

(29) [ɣ] [ɔlˠ] ↦ₗₑₙᵢₜᵢₒₙ [ɣ] [ɔlˠ]

(30) [ɣ] [faːk] ↦ₗₑₙᵢₜᵢₒₙ [ɣ] [aːk]

Table: Tense Inflection

past	future	conditional
ɣᴸ–Verb	Verb–i	ɣᴸ–Verb–əɣ

(31)   Dhìochuimhnich/Dh'òl (independent past)

(32)   Nach do dhìochuimhnich/Nach do dh'òl (dependent past)

(33)   An duine a dhìochuimhnich/An duine a dh'òl (relative past)

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   **Verbal Morphology**   Nominal Morphology   Prepositional Morphology
⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝   ⃝⃝⃝⃝   ⃝⃝   ⃝⃝   ⃝⃝⃝⃝●⃝⃝⃝⃝   ⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝⃝   ⃝⃝⃝⃝

Dependent allomorphy

Table: Verbal Forms

	past	future	conditional
Dependent	təɣɔːlˠ	ɔːlˠ	ɔːlˠəɣ
Independent	ɣɔːlˠ	ɔːlˠi	ɣɔːlˠəɣ
Relative	əɣɔːlˠ	əɣɔːlˠəs	əɣɔːlˠəɣ

Introduction | Phonology | Orthography | Lenition | **Verbal Morphology** | Nominal Morphology | Prepositional Morphology

Subject Verb Agreement?

(34)   Dhìochuimhnichinn 'I would forget'

(35)   *Dhìochuimhnichinn mi

(36)   Dhìochuimhnicheamaid 'We would forget'

(37)   *Dhìochuimhnicheamaid sinn

Allomorphy of subject clitics?

Corresponding with each active form here is an impersonal
form. In the past, this is *(e)adh*, in the future it is *(e)ar* (used for
relative as well as non-relative forms) and in the conditional *-te*
(or *-ist*).

(38) Dhùineadh   an doras.
      Shut.PAST.PASS the door
      'The door was shut.'

(39) Dùinear   an doras.
      Shut.FUT.PASS the door
      'The door will be shut.'

(40) Dhùinte   an doras.
      Shut.FUT.PASS the door
      'The door would be shut.'

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   **Verbal Morphology**   Nominal Morphology   Prepositional Morphology
⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿   ⣿⣿⣿⣿   ⣿⣿   ⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿   ⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿⣿   ⣿⣿⣿⣿

Non-finite Form

(41)   root   verbal noun
       òl   òl   'drink'   zero morphology
       cuir   cur   'put'   depalatalization
       buail   bualadh   'hit'   suffixation
       rach   dol   'go'   suppletion

Introduction	Phonology	Orthography	Lenition	Verbal Morphology	Nominal Morphology	Prepositional Morphology
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Case

One common pattern

Table: Case Forms

	singular		plural	
	masc	fem	masc	fem
dir	cat mòr	caileag mhòr	cait mhòra	caileagan mòra
dat	cat mòr	caileig mhòir	cait mhòra	caileagan mòra
gen	cait mhòir	caileig(e) mòir(e)	chat mòra	caileagan mòra

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   **Nominal Morphology**   Prepositional Morphology
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Case

(42)

	singular		plural	
	masc	fem	masc	fem
direct	N	N	N–ʲ	N–ən
dative	N	N–ʲ	N–ʲ	N–ən
genitive	N–ʲ	N–ʲ–(ə)	˪N	N–ən

Introduction	Phonology	Orthography	Lenition	Verbal Morphology	Nominal Morphology	Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○	○○○○	○○	○○○○○○○○○	○○●○○○○○○	○○○○

Case

The interplay of gender and noun class gives rise to different patterns of lenition, palatalization and suffixation. There are also other patterns (addition of suffix for masculine plurals, depalatalization in the genitive etc). Many speakers nowadays assimilate the genitive case with the direct/dative cases and giving a basic two way distinction between *cat*/*cait* and *caileag*/*caileagan*

Lenition in the singular is grammatical agreement in case and
number

(43)   brathair 'brother', irregular genitive brathar, so brathar
        mhòir

(43)   Lenition in the (masculine) plural depends on the
        formation of the plural. Palatalization implies lenition.

(44)   balach mòr 'big boy' $\sim$ balaich mhòra $\approx$ gille mòr 'big
        lad' $\sim$ gillean mòra

Introduction Phonology Orthography Lenition Verbal Morphology **Nominal Morphology** Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○ ○○○○ ○○ ○○○○○○○○○ ○○○○●○○○○ ○○○○

Definiteness

Table: Definite Article plus Masculine Noun

	singular	plural
Dir	an cat mòr	na cait mhòra
Dat	a' chat mhòr	na cait mhòra
Gen	a' chait mhòir	nan cat mòra

Table: Definite Article plus Feminine Noun

	singular	plural
Dir	a' chaileag mhòr	na caileagan mòra
Dat	a' chaileig mhòir	na caileagan mòra
Gen	na caileig(e) mòir(e)	nan caileagan mòra

Introduction Phonology Orthography Lenition Verbal Morphology **Nominal Morphology** Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○   ○○○○   ○○   ○○○○○○○○○   ○○○○○●○○○   ○○○○

Definiteness

Table: Definite Article plus Noun

	singular		plural		
	masc	fem	masc	fem	
Dir	an N A	a' ᴸN ᴸA	naNʲᴸA-ə	naN-ən	A-ə
Dat	a'ᴸNᴸA	a' ᴸNʲ ᴸAʲ	naNʲᴸA-ə	naN-ən	A-ə
Gen	a'ᴸNʲᴸAʲ	naNʲ(ə)ᴸAʲ(ə)	nan N A-ə	nanN-ən	A-ə

Note the lenition in the dative singular of the masculine
adjective depends on presence of the definite article

Table: Pronoun Forms

		singular	plural
First Person		mi	sinn
Second Person		thu/tu	sibh
Third Person	masculine	e	iad
	feminine	i	

Table: Emphatic Forms

		singular	plural
First Person		mise	sinne
Second Person		thusa/tusa	sibhse
Third Person	masculine	esan	iadsan
	feminine	ise	

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   **Nominal Morphology**   Prepositional Morphology
⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙   ⊙⊙⊙⊙   ⊙⊙   ⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙   ⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙●⊙   ⊙⊙⊙⊙

Pronouns

Table: Possessive Clitics

		singular	plural
First Person		mo	ar
Second Person		do	ur
Third Person	masculine	a(+ lenition)	an
	feminine	a	

David Adger   Gaelic - A Language Tutorial

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   **Nominal Morphology**   Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○   ○○○○   ○○   ○○○○○○○○○   ○○○○○○○○●   ○○○○

Pronouns

Evidence that these are not simply genitive forms of the simple pronouns comes from their emphatic versions. The emphatic form of 'my cat' is not *mosa cat* but rather *mo chat-sa*. If we take the emphatic clitics to attach to pronouns, as in (43), this suggests that there is a null variant of the pronoun after the noun, and the proclitic grammatically agrees with this:

(45)   mo chat ∅-sa

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   Nominal Morphology   Prepositional Morphology
○○○○○○○   ○○○○   ○○   ○○○○○○○○○   ○○○○○○○○○   ●○○○

Definiteness

(46)   don bhaile 'to the town', don abhainn 'to the river'

(47)   dhan bhaile, dhan abhainn

(48)   dhan a' bhaile, dhan an abhainn

(49)   le peann 'with a pen' $\sim$ leis a' pheann 'with the penn'

(50)   ann an leabhar 'in a book' $\sim$ anns gach leabhar 'in every book'

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   Nominal Morphology   Prepositional Morphology
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Phi-agreement

(51)   leotha
       with.3P
       'with them'

(52)   *leotha iad
       with.3P them

(53)   leotha-san
       with.3P-EMPH
       'with THEM'

Introduction   Phonology   Orthography   Lenition   Verbal Morphology   Nominal Morphology   Prepositional Morphology
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Phi-agreement

Furthermore, only the non-agreeing form is possible with noun
phrase objects (*le cait*, 'with cats' vs. **leotha cait*).

(54)   Argument/Agreement Generalisation:
       (i) Overt nominal phrase arguments co-occur with zero
       agreement
       (ii) Overt agreement marking co-occurs with silent
       nominal phrase arguments

Introduction Phonology Orthography Lenition Verbal Morphology Nominal Morphology **Prepositional Morphology**
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Phi-agreement

(55) mu mo dheidhinn (*mi)
about POSS.1.S N (I)
'about me'

(56) os an cionn (*iad)
P POSS.3P N (*they)
'above them'

(57) mu mo dheidhinn -sa
about POSS.1.S N EMPH
'about ME'

(58) os an cionn -san
P POSS.3P N EMPH
'above THEM'