Bun as Bree

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A series of short articles on Manx Gaelic grammar, idiom, vocabulary and pronunciation.

These little pieces, which I intend to produce every month, are aimed at intermediate-advanced learners of Manx Gaelic and everyone who has an interest in the quirks of the Manx language. Some of the things I will mention will be familiar to many people, some to a few people, and some perhaps will not be widely known. I hope these articles will be interesting, and please let me know if what I say is incorrect, or if I have omitted something relevant.

In all the sections and tables below, most of the etymologies and examples in phonetic transcription of native speakers are from George Broderick's *Handbook of Late Spoken Manx*; some are based on Irish and Scottish dictionaries and my own suppositions. The symbol ´ after a consonant in the transcriptions indicates that that consonant is slender or palatalized. Symbols in square brackets [] are in phonetic transcriptions; letters in angle brackets <> are the English/Manx alphabet, so <y> and [j] both indicate the sound at the beginning of English 'yacht' or Manx *yiow*.

My yuillyn vie:

Historically every consonant in Gaelic has a broad and a slender variant. In the context of Manx the broad form is, in simple terms, the 'neutral' form while the slender form is the palatalized variant—roughly speaking it has a <y> sound built into it. In Irish and Scottish spelling the broad / slender distinction is integrated into the spelling system, but in Manx it is more patchy. Sometimes an attempt is made to show the distinction—for example in *lioar* the 'i' clearly shows the the 'l' is slender. However, there are many cases of ambiguity and confusion where Manx spelling is inadequate. We will look at a few of these cases in this article.

The letter 'g' in Manx at the beginnings of words often has an 'i' after it to show it is slender:

giare (Gaelic: gearr), gial (Gaelic: geal) etc.

But what about the word *guilley*? The letter 'u' is often used in Manx spelling, and also in Gaelic orthography, to show that a sound is broad: e.g. *guin*, *guirr*, *guee*, so it seemed reasonable to me in learning Manx to assume that the purpose of the 'u' in *guilley* is to stop you from thinking, on the basis of the following 'i', that the 'g' is

slender. There seemed to be no other point to it. But you soon learn in Manx that the spelling frequently doesn't feel a need to follow logic: the 'g' *is* in fact slender, and the 'u' seems to be following the English spelling rule in words like *guest* where the 'u' is to show that the 'g' is not 'soft', that is, pronounced as <j> (cf. the word 'gesture'). But this is wholly unnecessary in Manx: *g* is almost always hard (*cliegeen* and *dangere* notwithstanding) and there are scores of words beginning with 'gi' and 'ge' which have no 'u' such as *giare*, *gial*, *geddyn* etc.

The 'g' in *guilley* is definitely slender / palatalized. We have cognate evidence: in Irish we have *giolla*, in Scottish Gaelic *gille*. In both cases the 'g' is slender. We have direct native speaker evidence; in Broderick's dictionary most of the recorded native speakers show palatalization of this 'g', a typical pronunciation being [g´ɪl´ə]. We also have evidence from Ned Beg Hom Ruy and from Cregeen's dictionary that I will mention below.

Note that the palatalization is only slight and is part of the consonant; there should not be a separate <y> sound (in IPA [j]) after the 'g', but rather a tinge of <y>, as it were, built into the consonant itself. What palatalization really means is that the 'g' is pronounced further forwards on the hard palate instead of the soft palate (or velum). Sounds produced on the hard palate automatically have a <y> tinge.

The real relevance of all this becomes apparent when *guilley* is lenited. Thinking the 'g' to be broad, I and probably many other people, have tended to say things like *my ghuilley* with a gutteral <gh> [ɣ] sound like in *ghooinney* or *ghow*, whereas it is actually the <y> sound of the lenited forms of *giare* and *gial*, namely *yiare* and *yial*: so in the song *Arrane Oie Vie* we should sing *my yuillyn vie*, not **ghuillyn*.

This is proved by Cregeen with the help of his very useful indications of mutations. Although he does give *ghuilley* (since *gh* is sometimes used to spell both pronunciations, even in *ghiare* etc.), he also gives *yuilley*. In addition, he has *yuiy* as the lenition of *guiy* 'goose', which is to be expected because this word too has an etymologically slender 'g', cf. Ir. *gé*, Sc. *gèadh*. and the majority of the pronunciations given by Broderick show palatal [g´] or [gj]. It is important to note that Cregeen gives no cases of 'y' where we would expect the broad 'gh', so it is reasonable to trust that where he gives 'y', it was pronounced as such. Note also forms in Cregeen such as *dy yigleragh* 'to giggle' and *e yimmagh* 'his lobster', which again correspond with the correct pronunciation of these lenited forms.

There is a smoking gun in the work of Ned Beg Hom Ruy. He only vaguely sticks to Bible spellings and generally reflects closely his pronunciation in his spelling. For example, he writes *dy chra* instead of *dy hraa*, which reflects that [h] had become [x] (the gutteral sound in Scottish *loch*) before [r]. He consistently writes *gilley* without the 'u', and for the lenited form, he has *yn chen yilley* for *yn shenn ghuilley*.

Spelling reform / standardization?

We have tended to avoid spelling reform like the plague for fear of confusing or putting off learners. This is certainly a valid concern, and one I share; hence a wide-ranging reform is probably not a good idea. However, I think there is a case for some

small reforms / standardizations in a small number of words where the existing forms are particularly confusing for learners.

So I make two tentative proposals, the second more tentative than the first:

<u>1) Standardization of the spellings 'gh' and 'y'</u>

I don't expect this to be contentious, since we largely do it already: we should make a firm distinction between 'gh' and 'y' in spelling the lenited form of 'g'. 'Gh' should be used always and only when it is pronounced broad, in words like *gharroo* (Gaelic: gharbh), *ghoo* (ghuth), *gherrid* (ghoirid), *gherrym* (ghairm) whereas *y* should be used always and only when it is slender, e.g. *yiare* (ghearr), *yimmagh* (ghiomach), *yial* (gheal), *yennal* [*gheanail*] and including *yuilley* (ghille) and *yuiy* (ghèadh). (For readers not familiar with Gaelic spelling, don't be deceived by the fact that Gaelic always uses the spelling 'gh'. The slender form is still pronounced roughly <y>; it is the consistent use of following 'i' or 'e' that tells you to pronounce the 'gh' slender. The lack of this consistency in Manx orthography is the reason why we need to mark the difference in the consonant itself.) Spellings like *ghuilley* should be avoided because they are traps tempting us into an incorrect pronunciation.

I think this change, and some similar ones, such as standardizing the difference between 'd-' and 'j-' in the past tense (see below), are necessary because Manx spelling has a different purpose today from when it was invented. In the eighteenth century it was used mainly by clergymen writing sermons etc. for their own use; they were native speakers, or at least familar with the native speech that was all around them, so they did not need an accurate spelling system because they knew very well how to pronounce the language. For example, mutations did not necessarily have to be represented consistently because they were an automatic adjustment made in reading aloud. Today there are no native speakers and we are all learners, so an accurate representation of mutations etc. is much more important. That is why we need to be clearer in our spellings than the translators of the Bible needed to be in their own age.

<u>2) Abolition of the 'u' in *guilley*, *guiy* and *guess*</u>

We should follow Ned Beg in writing *gilley*. *Guiy* could be replaced by *geiy*. And we would hardly notice if *guess* ('charm', G. *geas*), which is a rare word anyway, became *gess*.

I imagine this proposal will be more contentious, since *guilley* is a very common word, and I have reservations about changing it myself. Nevertheless let us not reject this idea without consideration: getting rid of a single letter would simplify the spelling of this word and save generations of future students much confusion. Of course, since there is no official standard, individuals can spell Manx however they like (within reason and within the bounds of comprehensibility), and perhaps this proposal will find favour with some. It is not without precedent: many extraneous h's have disappeared over the years, and most people now write *cliejeen* and *danjeyr*, despite the fact that *cliegeen* and *dangere* appear in the Bible.

Yn before slender vowels:

The quality of the 'n' in the definite article *yn* depends upon the following vowel. If the following vowel is slender, the 'n' will have a palatal quality. The problem is that this is not always shown in Manx spelling. In *yn arragh*, for example, there is no indication that the quality of the 'n' is any different from in *yn arrys*. Gaelic spelling is much clearer: the 'e' in *an **e**arrach* (which is otherwise silent) shows the palatal quality of the 'n', whereas there is no 'e' in *an aithreachas*. It is clear, however, that this distinction was live and well in native speech, even to some extent into the 20th century on the evidence of Broderick's transcriptions (see below); and the eighteenth century writers sometimes wrote things like *yn niarragh* (for *yn arragh* 'the spring'), *yn niagh* (for *yn agh* 'the horse') and *y niarn* (for *yn ayrn* 'the part'). The slender *n* is even preserved in the famous Manx place-name *Niarbyl*, which is really *yn arbyl* 'the tail' (referring to the shape of the rocks that stick out into the sea), in Gaelic orthography *an earball*.

Below I list the commonest nouns that should, based on etymology, cause the 'n' in *yn* to be slender. Since this distinction appears on the evidence given above to have been well preserved in Manx, I recommend learners to consciously learn and systematically apply the rule. Thus before the similar-looking nouns *oard* 'hammer' and *oarn* 'barley', which are etymologically *órd* and *eórn* with a broad / slender distinction the 'n' of the article should be realized differently:

yn oard as yn oarn - the hammer and the barley *ən ɔ:rḍ as ən´ ɔ:rn

Very roughly speaking, then, we should say *yn yoarn*, *yn yaggle*, *yn yagglish* etc., but bearing in mind that it is not with a separate <y> sound. Remember it is part of the <n> consonant.

aggle - 'fear' (Sc. eagal)
agglish - 'church' (eaglais)
agh - 'horse' (each) (spelt *yn niagh* - Proverbs 21:31, Zech. 10:3, Job 39:19)
arbyl - 'tail' (earball) (Ned Maddrell: yn Niarbyl - [ən N´a:bəl]
arragh - 'spring' (earrach) (*yn niarragh* - Exodus 24:31) (Ned Maddrell: [o̞zi N´arax])
askaid - 'boil, ulcer' (Sc. neasgaid)
aspick - 'bishop' (Sc. easbuig) (Harry Boyd: son yn aspick - [sa̞nɪn N´a:spɪt´])
assag - 'weasel' (Sc. easag)
ayrn - 'part' (Sc. earrann) (*y Niarn* - Coyrle Sodjeh p. 27)
oarn - 'barley' (Ir. eorna)
oayll, oalys - 'knowledge, magic spell' (Ir. eolas)
ollagh - 'cattle' (Ir. eallach) (Thomas Christian: yn ollagh - [n´ɔlɑx])
ollay (pronounced 'olla', ought to be written *olley*) - 'swan' (Ir. eala)

Most of the nouns beginning in 'e' and 'i' in Manx spelling will also be slender, but note the exceptions: eaghtyr (uachtar), eairk (adharc), earroo (àireamh), eayl (aol), eayn (uan), eaynagh (aonach), edd (ad), eiyrt (adhart), enney, ennaghtyn, ainjys (aithne), ennal (anal), ennym (ainm), eoylley (aoileach), erin (aifreann), erreeish (aircheas), eulys (aimhleas).

Note in passing the difference between the similar-looking words *eulys* 'anger' and *eunys* 'joy'. 'The anger' would be [ən euləs] with an [eu] sound (roughly like a Liverpool pronunciation of the vowel in 'boat' or 'moan', or like Welsh *mewn* or Classical Greek εὗ) and no palatalization of *yn*, whereas 'the joy' would be [ən´ ju:nəs], cf. Scottish Gaelic *èibhneas*, a variant of *aoibhneas*, since most combinations with *bh* or *mh* in Gaelic give [u:] sounds in Manx, sometimes [eu] and [au].

In the absence of Manx native speakers, a little knowledge of Irish and Scottish Gaelic is very useful to give clues to work out what Manx spelling is supposed to represent.

Unfortunately, there is no way Manx spelling as it stands could be changed to show the sort of invisible slenderness in *arragh*, *ollagh* etc. You just have to learn them.

d- and *j-* in the past tense:

A similar issue is the prefix *d-* which is applied to the past tense of verbs beginning with vowels and 'f-'. This prefix is either broad or slender depending on whether it is followed by a broad or slender vowel in Gaelic. That this distinction was maintained in Manx is shown by the spellings such as *jimmee* in the Bible and *jynsee* in 'Coyrle Sodjeh' (p. 46).

Slender *d-* is also attested in native speech: Joseph Woodworth has [d´ʒɪri] as the past tense of *irree* which Broderick spells *jirree* and Ned Maddrell has a slender 'd' in [d´iri] (spelt *dirree*). On the other hand, Thomas Christian has [dik] for the past tense of *eeck* (*deeck*), and Woodworth has [di:nʃ] for the past of *insh* (*dinsh*), with failure of palatalization in both cases. This may be due to the infrequency of these forms and resulting confusion about whether they are broad or slender; in the case of *dinsh* there may also be an element of dissimilation away from a palatalized realization due to the presence of the palatal <sh> at the end of the word. Cregeen however, gives *jeeck* and also *jetlee* (for Biblical *deeck* and *dettyl*), and also *jaggle(e)* 'frightened', Ir. *d'eaglaigh*, which shows that in the nineteenth century Manx preserved the slender pronunciation even when the following vowel was not obviously slender. All in all, the evidence suggests that where a broad or slender *d-* is to be expected etymologically, it occurred, and therefore I would recommend learners today to be systematic in making this distinction too. As to why the spelling 'd-' is preferred in both cases, perhaps this is due to standardization: the Bible editors recognized the two variants as a single prefix with a single meaning—past tense—and therefore generalized, much as in English we always write the past ending as '-ed' even though it has three pronunciations (or allomorphs), viz. jumpt, climbd and patted. Or perhaps it is because the pronunciation, at least sometimes and in some cases, tended towards a palatal 'd' [d´] rather than a full affricate [dʒ] (a combination of a <d> and a voiced <sh> sound), as in English 'jug' or Manx *jouyl*. Ned Maddrell's pronunciation, as well as any tendency to lose palatalization altogether, might support this.

I am not too bothered whether we pronounce, say, *dynsee/jynsee* with [d´] or [dʒ], so long as is distinct from the broad [d̪]. The latter in turn should not be the same as the English [d] sound, which is alveolar, meaning the tongue presses against the gum ridge behind the upper teeth: the Manx [d̪] is dental, meaning the tongue is pressed against the upper teeth themselves—the difference in sound is quite noticeable.

Conscious knowledge of the distinction is important in cases where Manx spelling is ambiguous, such as in *dennee* 'felt' and *deie* 'cried'. *Dennee* in Gaelic orthography would be *d'aithnigh*, with the 'a' indicating the 'd' should be broad; *eie* on the other other hand would be *d'éigh*, where the 'é' indicates that the 'd' is slender.

Because today's Manx speakers and learners do not have mother-tongue knowledge of what the correct pronunciation is, it is important the ambiguities of the spelling be removed as far as possible; therefore I recommend that the distinction between *d-* and *j-*, which already exists haphazardly in Manx spelling, be made systematic, so that one would continue to write *dennee*, but *deie* would become *jeie* etc. Wherever the etymology tells us there is a broad vowel, write *d-*; wherever etymology tells us there is a slender vowel, write *j-*.

I hope the following table, which includes the commonest verbs beginning with a vowel, will be helpful:

etymologically broad	Irish / Scottish cognate	etymologically slender	Irish / Scottish cognate
daag 'left' < faag, -ail	fág	**jagglee** 'frightened' < agglee, -aghey	eagal
daarlee 'cooked' < aarlee, -aghey	O.Ir. airlam	**jeaisht** 'listened' < eaisht(agh)	éist
daase 'grew' < aase	(f)ás	**jeddrymmee**	Ir. éadtrom, but Sc. aotrom
daill 'hired' < faill(ey)	Sc. faichill	**jee** 'ate' < ee	ith
dansoor 'answered' < ansoor	[Eng. answer]	**jeearree** 'desired' < yeearree	iarraidh
dark(ee) 'waited' < fark(ee), farkiagh	? Ir. faircsin	**jeeassee** 'borrowed' < eeassee, eeassaghey	Ir. iasacht
darr 'continued, lasted' < farr, farraghtyn	Sc. fairich	**jeebree** 'exiled' < eebree, eebyrt	Sc. diobradh
darree 'moved' < arree, arraghey	Sc. atharraich	**jeeck** 'paid' < eeck	íoc
deayshil 'untied, released' < feayshil, feaysley	fuascail	**jeginee** 'forced' < eginee, -aghey	Sc. èiginn
deiyr 'followed' < eiyr(t)	Sc. adhart	**jeie** 'cried' < eie	éigh
denee 'ask' < fenee, -aght	Sc. faighnich	**jettyl** 'flew' < ettyl, etlagh	Ir. eiteall
denmys 'named' < enmys	ainm	**jan** 'flayed' < fan(ney)	feann
dennee 'felt' < ennee, -aghtyn	Sc. aithnich	**jill** 'folded' < fill(ey)	Ir. fill
datt 'swelled' < att	at	**jimman** 'drove' < imman	Sc. iomain
doad 'kindled, lit' < foad(dey)	Ir. fadaigh	**jimmee** 'departed' < immee, -aght	Ir. imthigh
doanluck 'buried' < oanluck(ey)	adhlac	**jimraa** 'mentioned' < imraa	Ir. iomrádh
doardee 'ordered' < oardee, oardaghey	Ir. ordaigh	**jinjillee** 'lowered' < injillee, -aghey	Sc. ìslich
dob 'denied' < obb, obbal	Ir. ob	**jinsh** 'told' < insh	inis
dockle 'uttered' < fockle, fockley	focal	**jirree** 'rose' < irree	éirigh
dod 'was able' < foddee	prob. broad, cf. Sc. faod, but Ir. féad	**jiu** 'drank' < iu	ibh
dolmee 'emptied' < folmee, -aghey	Ir. folamh	**joonlee** 'washed' < oonlee, oonlaghey	Sc. ionnlaich
doshil 'opened' < foshil, fosley	Ir. foscail	**jyll(ee)** 'cried' < yllee, -agh(ey)	Sc. iolach
dosnee 'sighed' < osnee, -aghey	Ir. osnaigh	**jymmyrk** 'carried' < ymmyrk(ey)	Ir. iomchar

dreggyr 'replied' < freggyr(t)	freagair (in Manx, d and t are always broad before r)	**jymmyrt** 'rowed' < ymmyrt	Sc. iomairt
dreill 'kept' < freill, freayll	Ir. friotháil	**jynsee** 'learnt' < ynsee, -aghey	Sc. ionnsaich
duillee 'suffered' < fuillee, fuillaghtyn	fulaing		
duinn 'baked' < fuinn(ey)	fuin		
duirree 'stayed' < fuirree, -aghtyn	Sc. fuirich		

The practice of inserting an apostrophe after the *d-* or *j-*, while being etymologically justifiable, since the *d-* is originally an abbreviation of a particle *do* which still survives in full in some dialects of Irish and in the dependent past in Scottish Gaelic, is not common or necessary, and therefore need not concern us.

eo(y)

This combination is a variant of <eay> and should be so pronounced. *Beoyn* is probably something like 'beeyn', not 'byoan'; this is confirmed by evidence from poetry where it rhymes with *pian* (Pargys Caillit l. 2390; though it also seems to rhyme with *resoon* in l. 2807: perhaps it varied like *feayr* which can be *feeyr* or *fooyr*)

Note the following words, with pronunciation from native speakers (Broderick, *Handbook of Late Spoken Manx*):

eoylley	e:l´ə	freoagh	fri:x
feoh	fi:ə	beoyn	(not attested in speech)

Word building:

Words for asking:

Brie-briaght and *fenee-fenaght* are basically synonymous and interchangeable. Both take *jeh* to refer to the person you are asking.

Nee'm **briaght jeh** cre'n traa t'eh - I'll ask him what time it is
Fenee jeh vel eh goll magh noght - Ask him if he's going out tonight

Feysht, which functions as a noun meaning question (though *queshtan / question* is more common, cf. *ansoor*), is also a verbal noun meaning *to examine*. Here is an example from the Bible:

Eisht daag adsyn eh er-y-chooyl va ry-hoi **feysht** eh - Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him [then they who were to examine him left him straightaway] (Acts 22:29)

If you are asking for something, use *shir er*:

shir er girree - ask him to rise (cf. 2 Kings 9:2)
ta'n mac **shirrey** arran **er** e ayr - the son asks his father for bread (cf. Luke 11:11)

Note that *briaght* also has another meaning. In the phrasal verb *cur briaght er*, it has nothing to do with asking, but means 'discover, reveal, find out (in the sense of 'they found him out'), rumble ('they rumbled us)':

Nish va chammah ny ard-saggyrtyn as ny Phariseeyn er chur sarey, my va fys ec dooinney erbee c'raad v'eh, dy row ad dy **choyrt briaght er** cour y ghoaill eh.   Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him (John 11:57)

gowee eh kerraghey er dty vee-chairys, O inneen Edom, **ver** eh **briaght er** dty pheccaghyn - he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins (Lamentations 4:22)

Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter - Ny jean y ree y oltooan, eer ayns dty smooinaghtyn, as ny loayr dy olk jeh deiney ooasle ayns dty hiamyr lhiabbagh: son nee eean jeh'n aer yn coraa y chur lesh, as **ver** yn skianagh **briaght er** y chooish (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

This use of *briaght* is, I suspect, probably related to *brah* 'to betray, reveal'. To make it impersonal, you can use *çheet* or *ve*:

Tra cheayll Saul **dy row briaght er** David, as **er** ny deiney va marish - When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him (1 Samuel 22:6)

yn nah laa erreish da v'er varroo Gedaliah, as **nagh row briaght er jeet er** - the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it (Jeremiah 41:4)

Roish my **daink briaght er** dty ghrogh-yannoo - Before thy wickedness was discovered (Ezekiel 16:57)

It is easy to see how this idiom could be useful in contemporary Manx. Imagine saying / writing things like:

Haink briaght er y cho-chialg - The plot was rumbled
Haink briaght er y chooish - The matter was found out / discovered

Do not confuse this with *jannoo briaght er* or *briaght er / son* which mean 'ask for' in the sense of inquiring after someone.

Proverb of the Month:

Cha dennee rieau yn soogh y shang - The full belly never felt for the hungered