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No. 13 - April 2012

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

The past habitual.

I have been asked by a number of people to clarify the issue of how the past habitual (I used to do, I would do) is expressed in Manx. This is a matter of some controversy among academics, and papers have been written in journals on this subject by Jennifer Kewley Draskau (2006, *Journal of Celtic Linguistics* 10 pp. 85-120) and George Broderick (2011, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 28 pp. 307-332).

The controversy centres on whether the conditional *veign / yinnin jannoo* should be used as an imperfect or past habitual. Kewley Draskau surmises that this usage arose “probably through the influence of English on the Manx speech of the older speakers and a conflation of the functions of English ‘would’” (p. 88) and that “in modern [i.e. revived] Manx, *v/beagh* and *y/jinnagh* are no longer frequently encountered as expressions of consuetudinal past events or states, either in speech or in texts, but are returned to their functions as subjunctives or conditionals. This is possibly a deliberate return to the orthodoxy of Biblical Manx, where the use of a conditional to express habitual past was so unusual as to arouse comment from Thomson” (p. 102).

Broderick on the other hand points out (p. 328) that Kewley Draskau “has seemingly not understood that *veagh / beagh* in Spoken Manx can be represented by */vi(:)x/*, */bi(:)x/* for the imperfect (cf. Ir. *bhíodh*) and */ve(:)x/*, */be(:)x/* for the conditional (secondary future) (cf. Ir. *bheadh*)” (i.e. the past habitual and the conditional, which were (and) are similar in form but nonetheless distinct in Irish, have fallen together in Manx so that the same form may be used in both functions, as is the case in Scottish Gaelic, where use of the ‘conditional’ to mean ‘used to...’ is very common).

Moreover, Broderick uses phonetic data from the last native speakers to assert the hypothesis that “Although in the substantive verb the old imperfect and secondary future have fallen together in Manx in the written form of the old secondary future, nevertheless, in the spoken language some semblance of distinction was made along traditional lines, i.e. */vi(:)x/* (Ir. *bhíodh*) was used for the imperfect and */ve(:)x/* (Ir. *bheadh*) for the secondary future, though later the distinction became blurred” (p. 327).

Broderick's hypothesis that the past habitual survived into Late Manx is certainly plausible; there is no particular reason to suppose that it should have died out, even if it merged in form with the conditional. It survives heartily in Modern Scottish Gaelic, although there is no difference in form between the two tenses in that language. The main problem with it is that the use of the 'conditional' for past habitual does not seem to be at all common in the Classical Manx of the Bible and other texts. Kewley Draskau (p. 91) cites the example of John 19.17 *gys ynnyd yiarragh ad ynnyd y vollag rish* 'to a place called the place of the skull' and claims 'this particular instance may well constitute the first recorded use of the conditional as an imperfect, a usage which later became so widespread in 'Late Manx' that some grammarians and lexicographers dissolve the distinction between form and function'. She also observes (same page) that 'Thomson (1981: 142) notes that the use of the conditional (yiarragh) as an imperfect in this idiom is quite exceptional'.

While it is perfectly possible and *a priori* quite likely that the Irish past habitual should have continued through Classical and Late Manx, the paucity of examples in Classical Manx could pose a challenge to this: are we to suppose that the past habitual existed 'underground' and largely unrecorded in popular speech throughout the eighteenth century and only pops up again in the Manx of Edward Faragher and the last native speakers?

Another consideration is the situation in Scottish Gaelic. Here the merging of the conditional with the past habitual is mirrored by the merging of the future with the present habitual tense.

So Irish: *chuirfeadh* 'would put' and *chuireadh* 'used to put' > Scottish *chuireadh cuirfidh* 'will put' and *cuiridh* (later *cuireann*¹) 'puts' > Scottish *cuiridh bheadh* 'would be' and *bhíodh* 'used to be' > Scottish *bhiodh (bhitheadh) beidh* 'will be' and *bidh* 'tends to be' > Scottish *bidh (bithidh)*

The Irish *-f-* is usually pronounced [h] today, in Scottish Gaelic it has been lost entirely resulting in the forms with *-f-* (conditional and future) being identical in form with the forms without *-f-* (past and present habitual). In the verb 'to be' the forms in [i] (past and present habitual) have supplanted the forms in [e] (conditional and future). Either way the distinction in form between the conditional and the past habitual, and between the future and the present habitual, has been entirely lost in modern Scottish Gaelic. However the use of *bhiodh a' dèanamh* 'used to (be) do(ing)' remains very common in Scottish Gaelic, and looks similar to how Faragher uses it.

Compare:

Bhiodh mi fhìn 's mo pheathraichean, gu h-àraid mise, **bhiodh** sinn a' cluich 'taighean beaga' - 'Myself and my sisters, especially me, we'd play at 'little houses'' (*Mas math mo chuimhe: Reflection of the Gaels*, 2010, p. 52)

And:

¹ *cuireann* was originally the dependent form, it is now used for both independent and dependent of the present tense in Irish.

Vagh y ny cheayrtyn tra **vagh** bine beg rouyr dy yogh ayns y volg **gholl** mygeayrt lesh y vadje y ayns y laue² - Sometimes when there was too much ale in his belly he would go about with the stick in his hand (EF 12)

However, Gaelic also uses the present/future tense in a similar way:

Bidh sgoiltean **a' tighinn** a-staigh a Thaigh Chearsabhaigh, agus cuideachd **bidh** mise **a' dol** a-mach gu sgoiltean cuideachd, agus cuideachd **bidh** mi **ag obair** le buidhnean eile, um, coltach ri seann dhaoine a tha a' fuireach anns an ospadal, no seann dhaoine a tha a' fuireach ann an Trionaid - Schools come into *Taigh Chearsabhaigh*, and also I go out to schools too, and also I work with other groups, um, like old people who live in the hospital, or old people who live in Trinity (Taigh Chearsabhaigh Heritage Officer Interview, Guthan nan Eilean, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig³)

In the last example, note how the present habitual progressive with *bidh* (Manx *bee*) is used for habitual or repeated actions (such as going out to schools), but the simple present (progressive) with *tha* (Manx *ta*) is used to denote continuous states, as well as continuous actions, where there is no emphasis on habituality. In Manx, in contrast, *ta* is used for both and *bee* only has a future meaning.

Ta mee goll magh dys scoillyn - I (habitually / repeatedly) go out to schools
Ta mee cummal ayns Doolish - I live in Douglas

Since Manx does not share Scottish Gaelic's use of the future for habitual present, one might expect this to be paralleled in the past, with the ordinary past continuous with *va* being used for both functions. This indeed appears to be largely the case in Classical Manx, where e.g. *V'eh goll mygeayrt...* might be expected instead of *Veagh eh goll mygeayrt...* for 'he used to go about'. This would suggest that the later widespread use of *veagh* in this way could indeed be from English influence (note that English too has this distinction in the past but not the present, like Manx but unlike Gaelic).

However, if Broderick is right about two separate forms of the verb 'to be' being preserved, then this would suggest that the inherited Gaelic past habitual did indeed persist in Manx. His data is persuasive but the limited number of examples, and the confounds, mean that it cannot be regarded as conclusive.

Here is a summary of all the instances he gives of the two forms from the native speakers (Harry Kelly once apparently corrects himself from the conditional form to the past habitual; M means recorded by Marstrander, identity of informant unknown).

Habitual (Irish *bhíodh* > Mx. *vi:x)

vi:x - HK, HK (<ve:x), NM, NM, NM, NM, NM, NM, TC, TC, HK, NM, NM, HK, NM, NM (16)

ve:x - HK, HK, JW (3)

² Veagh eh ny cheayrtyn tra veagh bine beg rouyr dy yough ayns e volg goll mygeayrt lesh y vaidje y ayns e laue

³ http://www.ambaile.org/en/item/item_videofilm.jsp?item_id=96210

Conditional (Irish *bheadh* > Mx. *ve:x)

ve:x - M, M, M, M, M, M, NM, HB, TC (9)

vi:x - NM (1)

There seems to be a tendency to use realization with [e] or similar vowels in the conditional and ones with [i] for the past habitual, but these data come from limited numbers of speakers and only Ned Maddrell and Thomas Christian give the expected forms for both functions; Maddrell also has an [i] form for conditional. Also the spellings in Faragher's stories are inconclusive: there is no clear distinction made between two pronunciations; he usually rights *vagh* indiscriminately, and forms such as *been* for the first person singular (Irish *bhéinn* and *bhínn*).

A summary of the two positions for and against the idea that the use of 'conditional' forms as past habitual was a natural continuation of older forms in the language, as opposed to being a late English-influenced innovation.

Points which support the two positions (my points, some following theirs)	
(Broderick) - the use of <i>veagh</i> etc. for past habitual is largely a natural continuation of the Irish past habitual tense - the conditional and past habitual functions of <i>v/beagh</i> are differentiated in pronunciation in Late Spoken Manx	(Kewley Draskau) - the use of <i>v/beagh</i> etc. for past habitual is a Late Manx innovation inspired by English influence
One would expect the conditional and past habitual to fall together in form but continue with both functions into Classical and Late Manx	There are few or no examples from Classical Manx. How did the past habitual remain underground for so long and then pop up in Late Manx?
<i>Bhiodh</i> etc. is widely used for both conditional and past habitual in Scottish Gaelic.	Scottish Gaelic uses the future tense as a present habitual, but this does not occur in Manx. This would be paralleled by the absence of the conditional with a past habitual function.
Broderick finds differences in pronunciation between the two different functions of <i>v/beagh</i> which suggest that the Irish distinction between <i>bheadh</i> (conditional) and <i>bhíodh</i> (past habitual) was maintained into Late Manx.	There was wide variation in pronunciation in Late Spoken Manx and the distinction Broderick finds is not completely consistent. Moreover the number of examples is quite small. His findings are suggestive and plausible, but not conclusive.
Edward Faragher extensively uses the 'conditional' form with a past habitual function.	Although Edward Faragher uses the 'conditional' with a past habitual function, he does not make any distinction in spelling between [vi:x] and [ve:x] as might be expected if such a distinction was maintained two generations after him (and his spelling generally closely follows his pronunciation, see Broderick 1982: 178)

Summary of the expression of the past habitual in Manx. Example sentence 'I used to play':

1) Va mee cloie

As ve cliaghtey ny saggyrtyn cheddin dy yannoo rish y pobble, tra **va** dooinney erbee **chebbal** oural, haink sharvaant y taggyrt, choud's va'n eill dy vroie, lesh aall three-meir ayns e laue - And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man

offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand (1 Sam. 2:13)

This use of the past progressive with *va/row* is common, and is used alongside *v/beagh* in Late Manx, as in this example from Faragher:

va ny yeesteeryn mannanagh **giu** ayns thie Kelly; jonnie yoan antonee vagh ad gra rish ayns ny laghyn shen, as **vagh** dheiney arklow **giu** ayns thie Turnbull son cha row cordaill erbee eddyr oc—the Manx fishermen would drink in Kelly's—Johnnie Juan Anthony's is what they called it in those days—and the men from Arklow would drink in Turnbull's (EF 12)

The behaviour of the Manx fishermen and the Arklow fishermen are clearly parallel, so the two forms are used interchangeably (though the *veagh* form probably emphasizes the habitual meaning more).

2) Va mee cliaghtey cloie

Ny my ve er fys da'n er by-liesh y dow, **dy row eh cliaghtey puttey**, as nagh vel eh er ghoail kiarail jeh, nee eh son shickyrys geeck dow son dow, as bee'n marroo lesh hene - Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own. Exodus 21:36

This can also be used with other tenses, *t'eh cliaghtey jannoo* 'he usually does' etc.

3) Boallin cloie

This is originally from a copula phrase *b'oayllagh* with the adjective *oayllagh* 'acquainted' (G. *eolach*), but it has been completely reanalysed as a conditional / past habitual verb form with the *-agh* ending, and therefore the form *boallin* arose for the first person. These forms are completely normal and there is no trace of the original analysis in Classical Manx, so efforts to restore **b'oayllagh dou* and the like are anachronistic.

Hem's magh myr **boallin**, dy chraa mee-hene - I will go out as at other times before [as I used to], and shake myself (Judges 16:20)

Nagh nee shoh eshyn boallagh soie shirrey jeirk? - Is not this he that sat and begged [that used to sit seeking alms]? (John 9:8)

4) Chloiein, yinnin cloie, veign cloie

As noted by Thomson and Kewley Draskau, these forms do not seem to be common in Classical Manx for past habitual.

Conclusion:

It seems impossible currently to come to a firm conclusion either way about whether the use of the 'conditional' for past habitual is a natural continuation in Manx of an

inherited form, or a late imitation of English. It may be a mixture of both: Broderick concedes this possibility when he writes (pp. 307-308), ‘As pointed out by Kewley-Draskau (2006: 114-115), contact with English (either through education or other means), initially among educated Manx people (including the Manx Bible translators), filtering down in the course of time to the ordinary people, especially when they became bilingual and later predominantly speakers of English, influences from English would naturally be expected, including interpretations of English “would”, and in this regard may have subconsciously coloured their use of the appropriate Manx form to express “would” when speaking or writing Manx. This scenario cannot be ruled out’ but considers that ‘Nevertheless, it is believed that there is a certain residue of the appropriate use of “would” in spoken and written Manx which has come down to us’.

Whatever its origins, though, the use of *v/beagh* etc. for the past habitual is well established in Late Manx, it is not simply an occasional feature. Moreover, Faragher’s Manx is in other respects lexically and idiomatically rich and grammatically accurate, and he was born in the 1830s in a largely monoglot Manx-speaking community (Cregneash): his Manx should therefore reflect natural pre-decay usage. There seems therefore no particular reason to avoid it in contemporary Manx, though the other strategies shown above are equally acceptable.

Conditional perfect

Manx uses the conditional tense in both the protasis (the ‘if’) and the apodosis (the ‘then’).

Agh **dy beagh** fys **er ve** euish, cre ta er ny hoiggal liorish y raa shoh, Share lhiam myghin na oural, **cha beagh** shiu **er gheyrey** yn vooinjer neu-chyndagh - But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless (Matt. 12:7)

Agh **dy beagh** ad **er hassoo** gys my choyrle, as **v’er choyrt** da my phobble toiggal jeh my ghoo, eisht **veagh** ad **er hyndaa** ad veih nyn raaidyn mee-chrauee, as veih nyn ghrogh-yannoo - But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings (Jer. 23:22)

But the past tense *va / row* can also be used in the apodosis:

Son **mannagh beagh** veg y treishteil jeh myghin **er ve**, **cha row** shin rieu **er ve** tayrmit gys arrys, agh dy jarroo goll-rish ny Jouill hene, **va** shin **er hannaghtyn** laane dy Vyskit as dy Ghoanlys noi Jee, dy bollagh mee-hreisteil er cooney veih - And if there had been no Hopes of Mercy, we should never have been drawn to Repentance, but, even like the Devils themselves, should have remained full of Hatred and Malice against God, utterly despairing of Relief from him (FRC p. 12:25)

dy beagh yh er aght elley, **cha row** eh **er ghoail** padjer gys Jee eh dy leih daue - otherwise he would not have prayed that God would forgive them (SW p. 226)

My with conditional

Although *dy* + dependent is the historically correct form to use with the conditional / past subjunctive, *my* + independent is often substituted: '*my* is not uncommon, especially to avoid the ambiguity attaching to *dy*' (Thomson note, FRC 26.1, also LS 11:40).

Ny **my huittagh** ad ayns stayd injil, foast ta dy chooilley pheccagh mie bione ad aarloo dy ghoail chymmey jeu as dy eaysley orroo - Or if they should fall into a low Condition, yet all good People that know them are ready to pity and relieve them (FRC p. 26)

Son **my veagh** Joshua er chur fea daue, cha row eh ny lurg shen er loayrt mychione laa elley - For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day (Heb. 4:8)

my yinnagh dooinney ooilley e chooid seiht son graih, cha beagh yn soiagh sloo jeant jeh - if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned (Cant. 8:7)

Future and conditional for volition ('I will, I would' = 'I want')

In Manx as in English the conditional and the future sometimes appear to imply wanting to do something. Thomson (FRC 36.7 note on *cha neaishtagh ad* 'they would not hear') treats such usages in Manx as 'misinterpretations' of an 'English ambiguity', and it may well be that English influence is evident here, though given that such usages are fairly common, it may be too harsh to judge such usages as always being a result of a misunderstanding (Lewin 2011: . Moreover, I see no particular reason why this usage shouldn't have arisen naturally. If words such as 'will' can go from meaning 'want' to meaning simply future in English, then why couldn't it go the other way. 'I would do it' (with an implied condition clause 'if I could') could, I think, easily give rise to a meaning of volition.

Proverb of the Month:

Bannit t'adsyn ta ruggit bwoirrin, t'ad sauchey veih dagh geay as dorrin - Blessed are they who are born female, they are safe from every wind and tempest

References and abbreviations:

Broderick, George (2011): 'The Imperfect and Secondary Future in Late Spoken Manx

Kewley Draskau, Jennifer (2006): 'Interlingual contact: Some modals with variable morphology in Manx Gaelic'. *Journal of Celtic Linguistics* 10 (2006): 85-120.

Lewin, Christopher (2011): 'A Sermon in Manx translated from the work of Thomas Wilson: text and commentary'. *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 28 (2011): 175-210.

EF - Stories of Edward Faragher (Ned Beg Hom Ruy), numbering follows Broderick's (1981-2) edition

FRC - Fer-raauee Creestee, edited by Robert Thomson (1998)