

The conceptualising function of Scottish Gaelic preposed adjectives

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Abstract: This paper focusses on the conceptualising function of Scottish Gaelic preposed adjectives (i.e., AN vs. NA phrases). A combined analysis of a corpus study and interviews with native speakers was applied in the research which underlies the article. Preposed adjectives are often encountered with abstract concepts, verbal nouns, or with words with more complex semantics in general, while plain adjectives tend to qualify more tangible, countable nouns, such as people or objects, as well as pronouns. The plain adjective *dona* ‘bad’ often conveys criticism, and *aosta/sean* ‘old’ tend to refer to biological (or physical) age. The paper also addresses similarities with other languages.

Keywords: preposed adjectives; conceptualisation; abstraction; compound words; animate/inanimate

1. Introduction

The aim of the research this article is based on was to investigate the difference between phrases containing preposed adjectives and phrases with plain adjectives (of the same meaning) (*deagh-* vs. *math* for ‘good’; *droch-* vs. *dona* for ‘bad’; and *sean(n)-* vs *sean* or *aosta* for ‘old’), as well as to identify some rules and factors which determine compoundhood in such phrases. This research is based on a corpus study carried out on a sub-corpus of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic), as well as on interviews with 10 native speakers to check and refine the observations arising from the corpus study. From the number of results that have emerged from the study, this particular paper focusses on the conceptualising function of Scottish Gaelic preposed adjectives as compared to their plain counterparts.

After the methods having been described in section 2, section 3 deals with the conceptualising function of the preposed adjectives *deagh-* ‘good’, *droch-* ‘bad’, and *seann-* ‘old’. In section 4 the results of the interviews with native speakers are summarised. Finally, section 5 comments on the situation of preposed adjectives in the context of Celtic languages, and,

in section 6, a brief comparison is made between the discussed Scottish Gaelic adjectives and those in a couple of other languages.

In the discussion about adjectives, preposed adjectives (when referring to them separately) are marked with a hyphen to distinguish between the preposed and plain adjectival forms (i.e., *deagh-*, *droch-*, *sean(n)-* vs. *math*, *dona*, *aosta/sean*). In my discussion I apply the spelling for each type which occurs the most frequently in the sources for convenience.

2. Methods and materials

In order to investigate the difference between the two adjective types, a combined analysis of corpus study and interviews with native speakers was carried out. In the corpus study a great amount of data was analysed from a wide range of sources. However, the majority of the results have a speculative manner. By contrast, the interviews, although less representative due to the limited number of participants, have the overall advantage that they have provided a definite perspective of the few issues discussed through them. The advantages and disadvantages of both methods used are presented in the table below:

Table 1

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Corpus study	great amount of data analysed	results are speculative
Interviews	personal differences are better reflected	limited number of participants; informants are more self-conscious, less natural ¹

2.1. Corpus study

In the corpus study I wished to compare the use of the preposed and plain adjectives (A+N, N+A): *deagh-/math* for ‘good’, *droch-/dona* for ‘bad’, *sean(n)-/aosta/sean* for ‘old’. For that purpose I collected all phrases containing these words occurring in a subcorpus of 74 texts from the 205

¹ It has to be added that in this particular study, which focusses on the revitalisation of Scottish Gaelic, the self-conscious aspect of the interviews might prove even useful, if the informant lays emphasis on any potential differences in meaning, as it may help to retain the variations of the language.

texts of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic). *Corpas na Gàidhlig* was established by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh at the Department of Celtic and Gaelic, University of Glasgow, in 2008, as part of the DASG project (Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (Dàta airson Stòras na Gàidhlig), see Ó Maolalaigh 2013; 2016 on *Corpas na Gàidhlig* and DASG). I used the freeware software AntConc (concordance package, version 3.2.4 for Windows, developed by Laurence Anthony, at Waseda University, Japan) to collect data from the corpus. All of these sources were published in the 20th century (or at the beginning of the 21st century): the texts originate from 1859–2005 (the earliest material in one of the sources dates back to the early 19th century). They represent various dialects, most from the Outer Hebrides (ever more from Lewis towards later sources: the last 8 between 1990 and 2005 are all from Lewis). The registers also embrace a vast range of styles: poetry (poems and songs), prose (novels, short stories), essays, narratives (storytelling); religious hymns, prayers and biblical texts; some descriptions for museums, drama, history, riddles; a couple of academic texts, political and law texts; a handbook for home nursing, a war diary, one instance of literal correspondence.

Subsequently, I carried out statistic analysis on the occurrences of adjectival phrases (A+N or N+A). In the statistic analysis I use the following terms: **token**: one occurrence of a certain phrase; **type**: all occurrences of the same phrase. I provided the **mean/average** of the occurrences for both preposed and plain adjectival phrases:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N x_i,$$

where x_i is the occurrence, i.e., number of tokens for each type and N the number of all occurrences of all types, i.e., the total number of tokens. The **standard deviation** (the square root of *variance*):

$$\sigma = \sqrt{V(x)} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum x_i^2 - \left(\frac{1}{N} \sum x_i\right)^2},$$

which indicates the expected occurrence of a type in general, i.e., how far it may fall from the average. The sum of these two (**mean + standard deviation**) gives the threshold value over which the frequency of a type is salient compared to the average. Low occurrences may also be of importance if both types of adjectives are attested, as is the case with *droch ghala(i)r* and *galar dona* ‘bad illness’ in section 3.2, for instance.

The Irish examples in section 5 are taken from the online corpus *Corpas na Gaeilge* (The Corpus of Irish).

2.2. Interviews

In the interviews 10 informants were interviewed: 6 native speakers² from Lewis (1L, 3L, 5L, 6L, 11L, 12L), 1 from Harris (10H), and 3 from South Uist (2U, 4U, 7U). Concerning their age, 4 of them were between 25 and 60, and 6 were 60 or above. Their exact distribution among the age groups was as follows:

Table 2

20–30:	1 (Lewis) 1L
30–40:	1 (South Uist) 4U
40–50:	1 (Lewis) 3L
50–60:	1 (Harris) 10H
60–70:	4 (1 from South Uist, 3 from Lewis) 2U; 6L, 11L, 12L
70–80:	2 (1 from South Uist, 1 from Lewis) 7U; 5L

Each interview lasted for 30 or 40 minutes, and the test included seven exercises (referred to as sections (§) in the discussion in section 3) altogether, three of these to explore the meaning and use of preposed and plain adjectives, the remaining four focussing on the use and degree of Scottish Gaelic intensifiers and other issues which are not pertinent to the subject of the present paper. The exercises which are relevant here included mainly translations, and a picture description. They were constructed to investigate conceptuality in preposed adjectives vs. tangibility in plain adjectives; the role of contrast in sentences containing both the preposed adjective *seann-* and the attributive plain adjective *aosta/sean* for ‘old’; etc. The productivity of the different types of adjectives was examined by non-sensible or loan words, and the conceptualising role of preposed adjectives was studied by unusual collocates.

According to my observations, plain adjectives qualify tangible nouns, while preposed adjectives convey conceptuality and abstractness. To test this observation, §1 contained tangible nouns: professions, animals, and vehicles. I gave two pictures of each to the informants with two adjectival phrases to be translated (I also used some other plain adjectives for distraction). In §1b the informants had to translate unusual phrases consisting of tangible or abstract entities and the adjective ‘good’, ‘bad’, or ‘old’ (e.g., *good feather*, *old sadness*).

² I consider someone a Gaelic native speaker if their first language was Gaelic.

In §2 the phrases to be translated were ‘good day’, ‘bad day’ with pictures reflecting weather, and ‘good night’, ‘bad night’ with pictures implying more complex/abstract meanings. Whether preposed adjective *seann*-reflects traditionality, I aimed to examine with the pictures for the use of *seann*-/*aosta*/*sean* with people, clothes and dances, although this picture description did not really work out as planned, apart from a couple of examples of plain adjective *aosta* regarding the age of a person. In the corpus the choice for the adjective used with certain nouns appeared to be influenced by the number of the noun. In §3 I asked the plural of certain adjectival phrases to examine the preferences to the adjective in singular and plural.

In §4 the informants had to translate nonsense words and loan words qualified by ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘old’. This section was supposed to identify the **default adjective** – the adjective used automatically, more productively by the speaker. Loan words may also relate to the default usage of adjectives with types of entities (e.g., object (*yoyo*), food (*spagetti*, *sushi*), abstract (*déja vu*), etc.).

The main purpose of §5 was to investigate the connection between pronunciation (i.e., stress) and orthography (i.e., hyphenation): to understand the use of hyphen in words such as *droch-latha*, *droch-bhean*, and occasionally the difference between the phrase with preposed and plain adjective (e.g., between *deagh obair* and *obair mhath*). The section was also meant to check more figurative or specific meanings, such as in *droch-shùil* ‘evil eye’, *droch-rud* ‘devil’, and *droch-dhaoine* ‘criminals/villains’. §6 and §7 served to investigate the use and meanings of intensifiers. Table 3 (overleaf) summarises the structure of the interviews.

The disadvantages of explicit questions and translation lists are obvious: informants tend to use prestigious forms without realising it. Another problem could be that they start seeing a pattern or will not concentrate on the actual collocate, which could influence their word choice – either using the same kind of adjective spontaneously, or (probably less usually) changing it for variation. In neither case do we gain a reliable picture of actual everyday speech. To minimise this problem the translations were mixed up and a couple of irrelevant examples were applied in the questionnaire as an attempt to distract the attention from preposed adjectives.

Due to limitation of time and of the length of the test, some aspects of the interviews did not work out in the planned way and only a small number of the questions could be addressed from those emerging from the corpus study. Therefore the chapter on native speakers’ judgements is not so high in proportion to the amount of data analysed in the corpus

Table 3

Exercises	Description	Pertinence
§1a	pictures with tangible nouns	
b	unusual phrases with tangible/abstract nouns	
§2a	mixed up translations (sentences)	not all relevant
b	pictures with time expressions	not relevant
c	mixed up translations (sentences)	not all relevant
d	difference between <i>deagh bhiadh</i> and <i>biadh math?</i>	not relevant
e	pictures on the age of people, clothes, dances, etc.	did not work out as planned
§3a	plural of phrases with the intensifier <i>sàr</i>	not relevant
b	plural of certain adjectival phrases	not relevant
§4a	nonsense phrases	
b	loan words	
c	mixed up translations (sentences)	not all relevant
§5	stress and hyphenation	not entirely relevant
§6	meaning and degree of intensifiers	not relevant
§7	translations with intensifiers	not relevant

study. On the other hand, this part of the research has clarified many of the questions which were addressed in the interviews, and in some cases even questions that I did not specifically raise. These include an insight to dialectal difference between Lewis and the southern islands, the difference between the attributive plain adjectives *sean* and *aosta*, the use of *dona* to express criticism, the use of *deagh-* in conceptual nouns and that of *math* in tangible ones. It has proved to be essential in the final distribution of preposed and plain adjectives.

3. Results of the corpus study

According to the results of the research, nouns qualified by preposed adjectives *deagh-*, *droch-* and *seann-* appear to refer to entities with more complex semantics, while plain adjectives *math*, *dona* and *aosta/sean* normally stand in more pronominal expressions or emphasise the quality in phrases (such as criticism with *dona* and biological or physical age-reference in

the case of *aosta/sean*). In the following sections, I introduce evidence for the above statement in all three adjectives studied. 3.1 reflects upon the conceptualising function of *deagh-* in comparison to *math*, in 3.2 *droch-* is compared to *dona*, and in 3.3 the same is discussed for *seann-* vs. *aosta* (or *sean*).

3.1. Abstraction with *deagh-*

The occurrences of *obair mhath* in 12 out of 1066 examples (1.1%) and *deagh(-)obair* in 5 out of 908 examples (0.6%) may be close enough to consider *obair* as a word occurring in both constructions to a similar degree. Although the majority of examples for *obair* occur with *math*, in 6 out of 12 tokens *obair mhath* refers to placement, employment (1a), rather than the work itself, which makes it similar to a physical place. In (1b, c) *obair mhath* appears to denote a work which presumably has a tangible outcome. With *deagh-* it refers to a more abstract concept (1d, e, f).

- (1) a. Fhuair e deagh fhoghlum; fhuair e **obair mhath**; ach fhathast cha robh e riaraichte.
'He received good education; he found a good job; but he still wasn't satisfied.'
- b. Rinn e **obair mhath** an sin, gu sònraichte ann am mathematics...
'He carried out good work there, particularly in mathematics...'
- c. ... a nis air faicinn na h-**oibreach mhath**, ùrail a tha chlann ri deanamh le Beurla...
'... now that we have seen the fresh, good pieces of work that the children are doing in English...'
- d. ...'s tha iad an diugh pòsda 's a' dèanamh **deagh obair** anns an t-saoghal.
'...and today they are married and do a good job in the world.'
- e. Ma rinn sinn **deagh-obair** anns na làithean a dh'fhalbh, molaidh an obair sin i fhéin...
'If we did a good job in days that have passed, that work will praise itself...'
- f. Cha rachainn-sa an urras ort fhéin nach tu a rinn e air son **deagh-obair** fhaighinn dhut fhéin!
'I wouldn't trust you not to have done it to get a good job/work for yourself!'

In the last example *deagh-* seems to convey the same meaning as *math*; however, the hyphen may indicate that it belongs to another class for this speaker. Nevertheless, it still seems to be less specific than the previous examples with *obair mhath*.

As we have already seen in the above examples for *obair* 'work', *deagh-* may have a conceptualising function. (I give a further example with *comhairle* 'advice' in (2).)

- (2) a Mhàthair na **deadh chomhairle**
 ‘oh, Mother of good advice’ (in a prayer)

If we consider the frequent occurrence of preposed *deagh-* with words referring to emotions, mental concepts and morality (e.g., *deagh(-)dhùrachd* ‘good wish’, *deagh dhòchas* ‘good hope’, *deagh eòlas* ‘good knowledge’, *deagh aobhar* ‘good reason’, *deagh(-)ghean* goodwill, *deagh-nàdar* ‘good nature, good temper’), it can easily be understood why it is appropriate for this function. In some cases it is associated with respect (*deagh charaid* ‘good friend’, *deagh mhaighistir* ‘good master’), and frequently occurs with verbal nouns as well (*deagh ghabhail* ‘good let’, *deagh phàigheadh* ‘good payment’, and see *deagh oibreachadh* ‘good working’ below). Having an abstract sense is not surprising in the case of *deagh dhòchas* ‘good hope’ and *deagh chomhairle* ‘good advice’, which do belong in this category, and occur mostly with *deagh-*. What really is of interest here, is the abstraction present in examples with *deagh obair*, but usually absent from those with *obair mhath*. The ability of *obair* to have a more abstract meaning as well as a more factual one, therefore, may be a good reason for its more frequent occurrence in both combinations.

- (3) Aig inbhe an reic, bha na brògan air an **deagh oibreachadh** agus glè shealltanach.
 ‘In selling condition (lit. ‘at the selling stage’), the shoes were “worked” (i.e., fashioned) well and were very attractive.’

The word choice may be influenced by semantics in *astar* as well, where *astar math* usually refers to distance or size of an area, and *deagh astar* to speed (note that we perceive distance and size as more concrete compared to speed). The four examples of *deagh astar* originate from three different sources. One of them (4h) does not fit this theory, referring to distance. However, it is encountered in a poem, from the same writer as one of the other examples, and as such, does not necessarily follow the general rules of the language. There also might be an exception among the examples with *math* (4i), but it may be ambiguous as well.

- (4) a. ...bha e air **astar math** a chur às a dhèidh.
 ‘... he had left a long way behind.’
 b. ... ged a chumadh sinn **astar math** eadar rinn is Loch a’ Bhaile Mhargaidh.
 ‘... although we would kept a good/great distance between us and the Loch of Baile Mhargaidh’
 c. ... bha Murchadh **astar math** gu Galldachd.
 ‘... Murchadh was a long way towards the Lowlands.’

- d. Thug an rathad so sinn **astar math** a mach as a' bhaile.
'This road took us a long way out from the town.'
- e. ... a tha a' ruith troimh dùthchannan anns am faighear daoimein agus **astar math** de ùrlar a' chuain aig bèul nan aibhnichean sin...
'... that runs through countries in which diamond and a good piece of sea floor can be found at the mouth of those rivers...'
- f. Bha iad a nise a' dèanamh **deagh astar**...
'Now they travelled at great speed...'
- g. Le gaoth bho 'n ear dheas bha an **deagh astar** aice...
'With the wind from southeast it travelled at great speed...' (i.e., the ship)
- h. ... Bha i **deagh astar** uap'. (in a poem)
'...it was a long way from them.'
- i. Tha na ròidean anns a' chuid mhóir de'n Fhraing farsaing agus dìreach, agus dhéanadh càr **astar math** 's gun mhóran coileid orra...
'The roads in a great part of France are wide and straight, and the car would travel at speed (a good distance) and without much stir on them...'

By contrast, *àm math* and *deagh àm* seem to show different meanings without exception: *àm math* stands for 'appropriate time' (e.g., *Tha sinn an dochas gu'n toir gach ni a tha am Freasdal a' toirt mu'n cuairt 'n a am math fhein, luathachadh latha mor na sithe*. 'We hope that everything that the Goodness (i.e., Heaven/God) brings about, will bring the big day of peace closer in its own good time'; ... *chan e àm math a th' ann dha duine, tha cadal gad iarraidh*. 'it's not a good time for a man, sleep wants you'), while (*ann*) *an deagh àm* means 'in time, in its time' (*Thill sinn an deagh àm air son dinneir*... 'We returned in good time for dinner.'; ... *rainig iad an Druim-ghlas an deagh àm*. 'they reached Druim-ghlas in good time.'; *Tha thu dìreach ann an deagh am*... 'You were just in (good) time.'; *Cluinnidh sibh sin an deagh am*. 'You will hear that in (good) time/when its time comes.'), or *Nuair a tha sinn a' feitheamh an latha anns am bi barrachd smachd againn air ar dòigh-beatha fhéin ann an Albainn, 'se deagh àm a th' ann beachdachadh air an inbhe 's air an obair tha gu bhith aig a' Ghàidhlig 's na tha fuairgte rithe ann am beatha ar dùthcha*. 'When we are waiting for the day when we'll have more control over our own lifestyle in Scotland, it's a good time to consider the status and work that Gaelic is going to have and which is attached to it in our country's life.' This latter example occurs in the only formal text among the relevant tokens. (See also *deagh dhuine* meaning 'the right man/person' as opposed to *duine math* for 'good/religious man/person' below.)

In several cases both combinations *deagh dhuine* and *duine math* occur in the same text(s), which can be really useful. In *Na Klondykers*, for

example, the two occurrences of *duine math* appear in neutral, descriptive sentences, meaning ‘a good man’ ... *cha do thionndaidh duine math eile an-àirde*. ‘... no one else good turned up.’; *’S e duine math a bh’ann. Iain. Duine snog*. ‘He was a good man. Iain. A nice man.’ In contrast, *deagh-* can be observed in the sense ‘the right man’, as in the paragraph below:

- (5) Agus an uair sin, dh’fhaighnich iad dha Iain an deigheadh e ann. Bha aon àite eile air a’ bhàta agus bha Iain aon uair anns an Oilthigh, agus mar sin ’s e **deagh dhuine** a bhiodh ann air an sgioba bheag aca.
 ‘And then they asked Iain if he would go (there). There was one more space on the ship and Iain was once at University, and therefore he would be a good man in their small crew.’

(Note that the default collocation for *duine* is with *math*, i.e., that occurs in most constructions (28 tokens vs. 2 for *deagh dhuine*), due to its (concrete) reference to a person.)

In the case of *cuimhne*, which word has a high occurrence both with *deagh-* and *math*, I was not able to differentiate between the word combinations – neither do dialects or register/style of writing show any preference to one adjective over the other, not even in the same work (cf. examples from *Hiort* in (6)).

- (6) a. Tha **deagh chuimhne** agam air Hiortaich a’ tighinn chon an taigh againn...
 ‘I remember well people from St Kilda coming to our house...’
 b. Bha **deagh chuimhne** fhathast aig Lachlann Dòmhnallach air an latha...
 ‘Lachlann Dòmhnallach still remembered the day well...’
 c. Tha **cuimhne mhath** agam a bhith a’ coiseachd sìos chun na h-Eaglais...
 ‘I remember well walking down to the church...’
 d. Bha **cuimhne mhath** air aon earrach air an tàinig a’churrach Hiortaich gu Baile Raghnaill airson sìol-cura fhaighinn.
 ‘They remembered well one spring during which the coracle from St Kilda came to Balranald for seeds.’

On the other hand, in most tokens of *cuimhne* the two words are distributed among the sources so that both do not occur in the same work, which suggests there must be personal preference for one adjective or the other. There is only one source (*Suathadh ri Iomadh Rubha*, from Lewis) where both types occur and a change in meaning can be observed, although only three tokens occur in this source. Here, *cuimhne mhath* carries the most frequent meaning ‘to remember well’, whereas *deagh chuimhne* shares its meaning ‘good memory’ with *cuimhneachan math* ‘good memories’. Note that the same pattern of pluralisation can be observed in this example as

in the case of *deagh rùn* ‘good intention’ – *rùintean math* ‘good intentions’, which can be found in the same source. (Furthermore, *air* never precedes any collocations with *math* in the corpus.)

- (7) a. Bha **cuimhne mhath** aige nuair...
 ‘He remembered well when...’
 b. **Cuimhneachan math.** (in a dialogue)
 ‘Good memories.’
 c. B’ fhiach e thàmh a bhi ann an sìochaint agus a chliù air **dheagh chuimhne.**
 ‘It was good for him resting in peace and leaving good memories about himself.’

In general, the examples with *cuimhne* appear to show a random distribution among the writers, indicating their individual preference, rather than referring to dialect or register. This arbitrary usage is rather frequent throughout my data and creates exceptions and uncertainty in most cases. However, some patterns may be discerned, even in cases where exceptions are rather rare.

3.2. Abstraction with *droch-*

The feature of conceptualisation can be observed in the case of other preposed adjectives as well. In this section some more abstract meanings are introduced in the cases of *duine* ‘person, man’, *rud* ‘thing’, *àite* ‘place’, *bean* ‘woman, wife’, *boireannach* ‘woman’, and *galair* ‘illness, suffering’.

The only word which is common with both *droch-* [19]³ and *dona* [11] is *duine*. Both of these can mean ‘bad man; bad person’, *droch dhuine* seems to show the meaning ‘non-Christian’ or ‘pagan’ (as opposed to *duine math* – see example (20)), and *duine dona* has the connotation of a ‘grumpy, unsatisfied person’. Regarding *droch-* in combination with *duine*, a distinction can be observed between singular and plural: *droch dhaoine* refers to non-Christians, or bad men but with a religious connotation in all but one source (which refers to pirates (‘people who are out of the law’), thus it arguably may carry the same meaning after all); whereas *droch dhuine* mainly means ‘bad man’ (whose behaviour or intentions are not acceptable). The various meanings are listed in examples (8)–(10):

- (8) ‘bad man/person’:
 ‘S e **droch dhuine** a th’ annad, Hector.
 ‘You’re a bad man, Hector.’ (in a dialogue)

³ Occurrences are shown in square brackets.

– [...] Chòrd e rium a bhith a’ marcadh na tè ud. Cha do chòrd gèam rium a-riamh cho mòr. Bha agam ri tòrr shielding a dhèanamh, fhios agad?

– **Duine dona.**

‘[...] I enjoyed riding that girl. I have never enjoyed a game so much. I had to make loads of shielding, you know?’

– Bad man.’

‘Oh, an diòl-déirce truagh!’, ars ise. “**duine dona!** na bithibh a’ toir feairt air, car son tha sibh a’ dol a dh’éirigh gus am bi e faisg air an latha? A’ cosg soluis!”

‘“Oh, the miserable wretch!”, she said. “bad man! don’t pay him any attention, why are you going to get up before it is near daytime (i.e., why are you getting up before daylight)? Wasting (the) light!”’

The first two examples in (8) are from the same source. Compare the second and the third examples, in which *duine dona* reflects the speaker’s criticism of someone (both are dialogues). *Dona* is common in vocatives, non-verbal statements, or criticism: *Àite dona!* ‘A bad place!’, *Bean dhona, cha n-fhiù i, /Cuir g’ a dùthaich i dhachaigh!* ‘A bad woman/wife, she’s not worth it, send her home to her country (i.e., place)!’, also: *Tapadh leat, a dhuine dona!* ‘Thank you, bad man/non-Christian!’ in the religious poem with the title *Fàilte an diabhail do’n droch dhuine* ‘The devil’s welcome to the bad man/non-Christian’. (There may be a similar distinction between *droch bhoireannach* and *bean dhona*, discussed below – see (21) and (22).)

(9) occurs in a narrative about Paul Jones, *spùinneadair-mara oillteil* ‘a dreadful pirate’ (lit. ‘sea-robber’). It refers to people outside the law; however, its meaning is arguably the same as in (8). (I have not encountered this specific meaning for *duine dona*.)

(9) ‘criminal, villain’:

Tharruing e mu ’thiomchioll sgioba de **dhroch dhaoine** mar bha e féin agus ghoid iad air falbh leis an t-soitheach.

‘He gathered a crew of villains as he was himself and they plundered with the vessel.’

(10a) evidently refers to pagans as it is explained in the text itself, the other example is not so specific but still occur in a religious context.

(10) droch dhaoine as ‘non-Christians, pagans’:

a. An nis is ann air **droch dhaoine** a tha mo sgeulachdan anns a’ cheud àite, sgeulachdan air buitsichean, firionn agus boirionn, na truaghain sin a bha an còchreutairean a’ creidsinn a reichd an anam ris an Diabhul...

‘Now my stories are about pagans in the first place, stories about witches, male and female, those poor souls whose fellow-humans believed they had sold their souls to the Devil...’

- b. **Droch dhuine** ... E-fhéin 's an Glaisean, tha mallachd Dhé orra.
 'A bad man (i.e., not acceptable by religion, without faith) ... He himself and the Finch, God's malediction is on them.'

Both combinations may occur in more recent texts, although usually with rather similar meanings.

- (11) duine dona 'grumpy person':
 Cha'n e 'n là math nach tigeadh, ach an **duine dona** nach fanadh.
 'It is not that the good day wouldn't come, but that the bad person wouldn't wait for it.'

This special connotation of *dona* is present in a couple of texts from around the 70s, mainly proverbs. *Droch-* may have a similar meaning, attested in a text from 1983; although, the meanings 'grumpy' and 'bad man' may overlap in this example (see (12) below).

- (12) **Droch dhuine** a bh' ann am Paddy Manson – fear à Liverpool a bha cho buaireant', greannach ri cat air lìon-beag!
 'Paddy Manson was a bad person – a man from Liverpool who was as annoying, bad-tempered as a cat on a fishing line!'

As the various connotations of *droch dhuine/duine dona* are very closely related (religion regards a bad person as non-Christian, just as an unsatisfied, ever-complaining person can be annoying in other people's eyes, and therefore considered 'bad'), these different meanings can all overlap, and in a number of cases it is hard to distinguish between them:

- (13) a. C' ar son a tha slighe nan **droch dhaoine** a' soirbheachadh?
 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' (Jeremiah 12:1)
 b. Cha'n e 'n là math nach tigeadh, ach an **duine dona** nach fanadh. or Chan e an là math nach tig, 's e an **droch duine** (sic!) nach fhuirich ris.
 'It is not that the good day wouldn't/doesn't come, but/it is that the bad person wouldn't/doesn't wait for it.'
 c. Eil e a's an teine mhór gu-tà?...còmh' ri na **daoine dona**, a' dìosgail fhiacalan...
 'Is he in the big fire though? ... together with the bad people/sinners, grinding (lit. 'creaking') his teeth...'
 d. **Droch dhuine** ... E-fhéin 's an Glaisean, tha mallachd Dhé orra.
 'A bad man ... He himself and the Finch, God's malediction is on them.' (repeated)

In (13a) *droch dhaoine* means 'bad/evil men', but with religious connotation (note that it occurs in the Bible). (13b) is a proverb, in which both collocations are attested. In this example *duine dona* (as well as *droch dhuine*?)

may refer to an unsatisfied, grumpy person who is always complaining; on the other hand, it may be only the proverb that describes a ‘bad man’ as being impatient. (13c) and (13d) appear in the same text. Concerning this fact, I assume there must be a subtle difference between them, although it is not clear in either case which meaning they are supposed to convey. *Droch dhuine* here may reflect a religious connotation according to the context, as well as *daoine dona* refer to non-religious people (sinners, the damned in hell; note the character is ‘grinding/gnashing his teeth’, which may refer to their psychological state just as complaining does). (There is one more plural example with *dona* besides (13c): ***Daoine mosach, dona, dalma...*** ‘bold, bad, nasty people’. This token can be encountered in a poem, where it stands among other adjectives, qualifying the noun – this appears to be a common feature of plain adjectives.) It is also worth noting that in five out of the eleven tokens *duine dona* is present in either vocative or non-verbal phrases.

All three examples for *rud dona* ‘a bad thing’ can be encountered in recent texts, where they have a very similar meaning to *rudeigin dona* ‘something bad’, which, carrying a pronominal sense, always stands with *dona* in the corpus. *Droch rud* [15], on the other hand, refers to something more specific – a ‘bad issue’, a ‘crime’; or to the ‘devil’ (religious connotation), which senses are very similar to those of *droch dhuine*. In some cases (example (17)), *droch rud* has a similar meaning as *rud dona*: ‘a bad thing’ (connected to the words *iomadh, fìor, sam bith*; but also to *idir*).

(14) *rud dona* ‘a bad thing, something bad’:

- a. ... chan e **rud dona** tha sin.
‘... that’s not a bad thing.’
- b. Bha i daonnan sona dòigheil nuair a bha **rudan dona** a’ tachairt.
‘She was always happy and contented (even) when bad things happened.’
- c. ... An e **rud dona** a tha ann!
‘Is it a bad thing!’

Examples (14a) and (14b) are from the same source; example c appears in the same source as (15a), which thus represents a clear distinction between *rud dona* as ‘something bad’ and *an droch rud* meaning ‘the devil’ (note the article; in (15a–b) ‘devil’ (or ‘demon’) is referred to with two different words).

- (15) an droch rud ‘the evil, badness’:
- Thàinig beagan dhen **deamhain** anns na sùilean aice a-rithis. [...] Thàinig **an droch rud** na sùilean a-rithis.
‘A bit of the devil came into her eyes again. [...] The evil came into her eyes again.’
 - ... làn dhen **an droch rud**, ’s air a riaghladh le **deamhain**.
‘... full of badness, and governed by demons.’
 - Mun tug e freagairt gu toil dhith, fhuair **an droch-rud** greim air...
‘Before he gave an answer to her satisfaction, the devil got hold of him...’
- (16) droch rud ‘bad business; crime, offence’:
- Bha fhios agam nach bitheadh Mgr MacPhàil an sàs ann an **droch rud** sam bith!
‘I knew that Mr MacPhàil wouldn’t get involved in any bad business!’
 - Bha claisean na aodann a’ dèanamh eachdraidh air **droch rudan** a rinn e na là...
‘Grooves on his face told us about bad things he did in his days/time...’
 - ... bha a’ chàin a bha sin a-rèir cho dona ’s a bha an **droch rud** a rinn e.
‘... that tax/fine, was in proportion to how bad/serious the offence/crime was that he committed.’

Example (17), *droch rud*, is understood as ‘a bad thing’, but in a more tangible sense, similar to *rud dona* ‘something bad, anything bad’ – if *droch rud* (for other, grammatical reasons) is meant to refer to ‘anything bad’, it tends to combine with *sam bith* (see Examples (16a) and (17d)).

- (17) droch rud ‘a bad thing’:
- Cha b’ e **droch rud** idir a bha air a bhith anns a’ chogadh dhaibhsan.
‘The war had not been a bad thing at all for them.’
 - ’S iomadh **droch rud** a ràinig do dhà chluais riamh...
‘Many bad things (have) reached your two ears before ...’ (i.e., ‘you have heard about a lot of bad things in your life’)
 - ’S fìor **dhroch rud** a th’ ann a dhol a phòsadh airson airgid...
‘It is a really bad thing to get married for money...’
 - Bha mi airson nach éireadh **droch-rud** sam bith dhi...
‘I didn’t want anything bad to happen (lit. ‘rise’) to her...’

In example (17a), *idir* may serve as evidence for *droch rud* referring to a more specific thing than *rud dona*, since *idir* mainly accompanies *dona* in predicative or adverbial phrases (see (18)), whereas *rud* in *rud dona* is used in a more general, pronominal sense.

- (18) a. cha deach a' chlann-nighean a ghoirteachadh glè dhona idir
 'the girls weren't hurt very badly at all'
- b. cha 'n 'eil mo shliasaid idir dona
 'my leg/thigh is not bad (i.e., painful) at all'
- c. nach robh naidheachd idir cho fìor dhona...
 'the news weren't so really bad at all...'

While (17a) and (b) may be explained by the forces of semantics, the choice for *droch-* may be driven rather by grammar in (17c, d). In (17d) the usage of *droch-* may be due to the conditional/subjunctive sense of the sentence (lit. 'I was for that nothing bad would rise/happen to her'). While (17d) contains uncertainty, (16a) above, with the very similar usage of *droch rud sam bith*, is conditional in a pure grammatical/semantical sense (it refers to an imaginary situation), which results in the same grammatical pattern. In (17d) the precise meaning of *droch-rud* is not completely clear. It may stand for 'a bad business/thing' as the earlier examples in (16) – note the use of a hyphen, which may serve as evidence for its more integrated, compound-like sense. Finally, the use of *droch-* in (17c) can be accounted for by its co-occurrence with *fìor* (which, at the same time, makes it more specific as well).

Droch-àite ([12], mostly written with a hyphen) shows the meanings 'bad place', or 'hell' (again religious connotation), whereas *àite dona* [1] appears to refer to the quality of a place (in the sense of 'ugly, dirty'). (In the source, from which examples (19b) and (c) are taken, all three senses can be encountered.)

- (19) a. ... gu ìochdar **ifrinn**, dha'n **droch àit**...
 '... to bottom of hell, to **hell**...'
- b. Tha **droch-àite** ann an Loch Aoineort, struth, 's e 'n Struth Beag an t-ainm a th' ac' air, agus tha e ruith aon seachd mìle 'san uair, nuair a tha e aig spìod.
 'There is a **bad place** in Loch Aoineort, a stream, it is called the Little Stream, and it runs seven miles an hour when it is at speed.'
- c. **Àite dona!** àite salach! àite fuathasach salach! Àite grànda!
 '**A bad place!** dirty place! terribly dirty place! An ugly place!'

As it may have become clear from certain examples above, in the case of *duine* 'man/person', *rud* 'thing' and *àite* 'place', *droch-* tends to carry the religious meaning in sources where both combinations occur (cf. *droch spiorad* 'bad spirit' (in various senses) – all eight tokens with *droch-*). This (a) may be surprising considering that in the case of *deagh-* and *math*, the

plain adjective *math* tends to carry out this function; (b) may account for the uneven distribution of *droch-* and *dona* in favour of *droch-* if we assume that the choice between the plain and the preposed adjective here is driven by the aim to create a more salient contrast between *math* and *droch-*.

- (20) a. Tha na h-Eireannaich mar mhuinntir eile, **droch dhaoine** 's **daoine maithe** 'nam measg.
 'The Irish are like other folks, bad people and good people (non-religious and religious?) among them/mixed.'
- b. Bha e fada gu leòr nan tachradh e dhuin' a dhol a **dhroch-àite**. Nan tachradh e a dhuine dhol a dh'**àite math**, dh'fhaodadh e bhith coma ged a bhiodh dà bhliadhna air. Bha àiteachan dona gu leòr ann an àiteachan.
 'It was long enough if a person happened to go to a bad place. If a person happened to go to a good place, he might not care even if he had to be there for two years. Some places were bad enough.'
- c. 'S **àite math** an seo nam biodh esan as an **droch-àite**, e fhéin 's a bhean!
 'This is a good place if he were in hell (note the definite article), himself and his wife!'

Also consider the proverb *Cha d' fhuair droch-ràmhachiche ràmh math riamh* 'A bad rower (has) never found a good oar' for the possible distinction between the two adjectives.

There are two words meaning 'woman' in Gaelic: the masculine noun *boireannach* and the feminine word *bean*, the latter used both for 'woman' and 'wife'. In the case of *bean* a shift in meaning can be observed between its form with *droch-* and that of *dona*: *droch-bhean* [9] is quite common in proverbs or riddles, probably with the meaning 'bad wife' (see (21a)), while the two occurrences of *bean dhona* appear to be very similar to *duine dona* in that they describe the quality of the person they are referring to – the first example in (21b) is from a waulking song, in which *bean dhona* expresses the speaker's opinion – just as in the similar examples for *duine dona* above (in (8)); the second example here occurs in a list of qualifying features (also a description). Interestingly, the example of *boireannach dona* [1] shows religious connotation (although it may qualify/criticise the Christian values of the woman), while *droch bhoireannach* [2] means something like *bean dhona*, with the difference that it may convey a more specific, more integrated sense – referring to something more beyond the compositional meaning 'bad woman', to someone who teases and plays with men.

- (21) a. droch-bhean ‘bad wife’:
 ... nach robh teaghlach ann ach e fhéin, nach robh aige ach **droch-bhean** nach deanadh sian ...
 ‘... that he was the only one left of the family (lit. ‘that there wasn’t a family but himself’), that he didn’t have but a bad wife who wouldn’t do anything ...’
 Ceannaichidh a’ h-uile fear an **droch-bhean**, ach am fear aig am bi i./Is urrainn do h-uile fhear/neach a cheannsachadh an **droch-bhean** ach an duine aig am beil i.
 ‘Every man can control the bad wife, but the man who she belongs to (i.e., her own husband).’
 Ciod iad na ceithir nithean a’s miosa anns an domhain? [...] diubhaidh nan diubhaidh **droch bhean**./...diùghaidh an t-saoghail, **droch-bhean**.
 ‘What are the four worst things in the world? [...] Worst of the worst is a bad wife.’/‘...the worst [thing] in the world, a bad wife.’
- b. bean dhona ‘bad/silly woman/wife’:
 ... **Bean dhona**, cha n-fhiù i Cuir g’ a dùthaich i dhachaigh!...
 ‘A bad woman/wife, she’s not worth it send her home to her country/place!’
 ‘N e sin a’ chomhairle a thug **a’ bhean dhona** shocharach gun chéill ort?
 ‘Was that the advice that the silly bad senseless woman gave you?’
- (22) a. droch bhoireannach ‘bad woman’ (someone who is teasing men):
 Chan eil annamsa ach **droch bhoireannach**, agus cha bu chòir dhut gnothach a ghabhail ri mo leithid-sa.
 ‘I’m just a bad woman, and you shouldn’t do business with my kind.’ (in a dialogue)
 ... Seo am fear a dh’ innseadh dhàsan mu chunnart bho **dhroch bhoireannaich**, a thubhairt, ‘ga earalachadh, gun robh salachair agus truailleadh anns na liopan dearga.
 ‘This is the man who would tell him about the danger of bad women, who said, warning him, that there was dirt and perversion in the red lips.’
- b. boireannach dona
Boireannach dona Crìosdaidh.
 ‘a bad Christian woman’ (religious connotation)

It is worth considering for a moment the distribution of *droch*- and *dona* conveying religious connotation. *Dona* occurs together with religious words in more recent texts (which might signify a spread of its usage), and usually refers to people or anthropomorphic figures (such as *boireannach Crìosdaidh* ‘a Christian woman’, *diabhal* ‘devil’, *ainglean* ‘angels’ (although note coordinative *math is dona* here, in which case plain adjectives are more frequent according to my study), as opposed to the more abstract *droch spiorad* ‘bad spirit’ in texts from all dates. (*Diabhal dona* ‘bad devil’ actually refers to a living person who drinks too much.) Consequently, it may not

be the spiritual quality of religion that is important here, rather the evaluation of a human (thus tangible) entity (see *duine math* ‘good/Christian man’, also with religious connotation). By contrast, in *droch dhuine* ‘pagan’ (10)) the quality of being non-Christian or evil functioned as an inherent feature, not as an expression of criticism.

Galar ‘illness, great suffering’ is another case of meaning shift. According to the examples, *galar dona* [1] represents the literal sense ‘bad illness’, while in *droch ghalair* [2] the preposed adjective triggers abstraction, transforming the meaning into ‘suffering’ which may be caused even by love:

- (23) a. *droch ghala(i)r* ‘bad illness’ (in an abstract sense):

Am faca tu riamh cho neo-shunndach ’s a bha e falbh? Bha ’n **droch ghalair** air a shiubhal bho chionn greise; is rinn e an gnothuich air mu dheireadh...

‘Did you ever see how unhappily he went about? A (lit. ‘the’) bad illness had pursued him for some time now...; and it (has) finally beat(en) him...’

Gu sealladh... ’S e **droch ghalair** a th’ ort. C’ò ’n té?

‘Goodness... You’re in a bad pain. (lit. ‘It’s a bad illness you have.’) Who’s the girl?’

- b. *galar (fior) d(h)ona* ‘a (really) bad illness’:

FIABHRAS A’ CHAOLAIN, **galar fìor dhona** a gheibhear fhathast anns an dùthaich so mar thoradh air uisge truaillidh.

‘FEVER OF THE ENTRAILS, a really bad disease that can be still got in this country due to/through contaminated water.’

Note the use of *fìor* before *dona* (which is unusual according to our observations so far) – this may indicate that the abstraction firmly determines a kind of meaning shift in this word (i.e., *galar*).

3.3. Abstraction with *seann-*

In the case of the adjectives for ‘old’ certain cases show a distinction between the preposed adjective for expressions with more complex semantics and the plain adjective for the more tangible meaning of age. *Seann-*, with its great number of tokens, is highly productive, appearing with all sorts of words, while *aosta* (appearing much less frequently) does not occur with any noun in significant numbers which cannot be found also with *seann-*.

The plain adjective *aosta* (and *sean*) normally refers to the age of a person, animal, or – sometimes – object (e.g., *aodach aosta* ‘old clothes’), while *seann-* is commonly encountered in fixed expressions, it may convey traditionality (e.g., *seann-taigh* ‘a (traditional) black-house’ vs. *taigh*

aosta/sean ‘an old house’ (physical age of the building)), or refer to former types (e.g., *seann téipichean céire* ‘old wax tapes’) and roles (e.g., *seann saighdear* ‘old soldier, veteran’, *seann leannan* ‘old sweetheart’). Consider also the possible distinction between *caraid aosta/sean* ‘old friend’ (describing the age of the person) and *seann-charaid*, referring to a long-existing friendship. In respect of plain adjectives, *sean* is commoner in South Uist, while *aosta* is preferred in Lewis. When both are used, *aosta* is regarded as more polite, entitles respect, and it shows a somewhat intensified sense (i.e., ‘really old’) compared with *sean* ‘old’.

Aosta is the typical qualifier of pronominal words like *cuid* ‘some’ and *dithis* ‘two persons’; however, *tè* ‘one (female)’ and *feadhainn* ‘ones’ can be encountered with *seann-* in a number of tokens (discussed below). The few verbal nouns in the corpus are all qualified with *seann-*, and the only loan word with *aosta* is *baidsealair* ‘bachelor’ (which itself has a much more common synonym (*fleasgach*), which usually stands with *seann-*), whereas *seann-* qualifies a great number of loan words otherwise. This suggests that here *aosta* may highlight the old age of the bachelor.

The three most common nouns both with *seann-* and *aosta* are *duine* ‘person/man’, *bean* ‘woman/wife’ and *boireannach* ‘woman’. All of these show similar patterns. The distinction is not very clear in either case, since both adjectives are present in most sources, with subtle differences in meaning. The collocate with *seann-* seems to be a neutral compound expression (e.g., *’S ann thachair sean bhean thruagh orm ...* ‘That was when I came across a wretched old woman’), whereas *aosta* may be used in cases where the quality of being old is important from the speaker’s point of view. In certain cases *seann bhean* ‘old woman’ may refer to a particular person (... *nach ann a chaidh Coinneach a shealltainn air seann bhean a bha air an leabaidh.* ‘... wasn’t that that Kenneth went to see an old woman who was on the bed.’), as opposed to statements like *Sgreadail mhnathan aosd’ agus ghruagach* ‘Screaming of old women/wives and maids’.

Combinations of the two adjectives occur twice – one with *daoine*, the other with *mnaoi* (dat. sg of *bean*): *seann-daoine aosda chaithte shàraich* ‘weary worn aged old people’; *air an t-seann mhnaoi aosd* ‘on the aged old-woman’. The redundant use of *aosta* may indicate that *seann daoine* ‘old people’ and *seann mhnaoi* ‘old woman/hag (dat.)’ are treated as compounds, although both tokens occur in poetry, thus it may only serve as a device for emphasis. (See also Irish examples, such as *seanóir aosta* ‘old elder’ and *sean-nós aosta* ‘old traditional custom’.)

Seann taighean [34] refers to ‘traditional houses’ or ‘black-houses’ (see (24a) below). Alternatively, in some poems, it may mean a house where

somebody used to live (see (24b)). The only token with plain adjective *an tigh aosda ud* (from Lewis) may literally mean '(that) old house' (where the quality of oldness is important).

(24) a. Cha charaiceadh i às an t-**seann thaigh** airson a dhol a thaigh-geal.

'She wouldn't move from the old house to go to a white-house.'

b. a **shean taigh** chliùitich a' bhàrd

'oh famed old house of the poet'

Leag iad **seann tigh** Anna Shiosail,/'S reic Iain Friseal an t-each spàgach.

'They knocked down/demolished Ann Chisholm's old house,/And Ian Fraser sold the waddling horse.'

There are three more cases encountered with both types of adjectives which could be of interest here, the first of these is a time expression, the other two are the pronominal expressions *tè* 'one (fem.)' and *feadhainn* 'ones'. Preposed *seann-* is the adjective used with words referring to time (like *tìm/aimsir* and *uair*). In the case of *làithean* 'days', most tokens (24) follow this rule and have a very similar meaning. Nevertheless, 3 tokens stand with *aosda* (all three in poetry). These may refer to a person's age, and/or are connected with *cùimhne* 'memory'.

Tè and *feadhainn*, usually exhibiting a pronominal sense, would be expected with *aosta*, which, however, is not attested in many cases. In the corpus, I have encountered only 1 *té aosd* beside nine tokens for *seann té* (although three times in the same poem and further two in two other poems from the same source). *Seann té* appears to be related to the more informal language of the storytelling register (three tokens appearing in narratives, autobiographies). Another possible explanation for the choice for *seann-* is related to dialects, as the source of poetry containing five tokens of *seann tè* originates from South Uist. Uist dialect(s) seem to show a preference to use the preposed adjective *seann-* over the plain adjective *aosta*. Most importantly, however, *seann té* happened to serve as a reference to an inanimate feminine noun in only one example; although most examples of *seann tè* meaning *cailleach* 'old woman/female', come from South Uist (the one from Lewis is encountered in an autobiography), whereas the only example of *té aosd* is from Lewis (where the plain adjective is more commonly used).

Similarly, in the case of *feadhainn* (18 with *seann-*, five with *aosta*), most tokens mean 'people'. However, there are some among those with *seann-*, which only function as a back-reference to something (like *taighean-dubha* 'black-houses', *brògan* 'shoes'), i.e., it represents a rather pronominal sense. On the other hand, *seann-* very often occurs in general statements

(‘the old ones/old people’). These statements mostly refer to old customs or lifestyle, which represents a very similar aspect to compounds like *seann òran* ‘folksong’, *seann sgeulachd* ‘traditional story’, *sean-fhacal* ‘proverb’, etc. (being associated with traditions), or are related to old times (the ‘old ones’ may have been young then; cf. *sean shaighdear* ‘veteran’ below). Interestingly neither do the examples with *aosta* show a pronominal sense, all referring to people. However, they appear to have a more qualifying function (as opposed to its more lexicalised usage in ‘old ones’), or may refer to a particular situation, rather than a general statement. *Feadhainn aosd(a)*, is more of an adjectival phrase (where the quality of age is more important and highlighted). Again, there is only a coordinative example with the plain adjective *aosta* from South Uist, whereas the rest are from Lewis. *Seann-* is more evenly distributed among the sources. A good example for the usage of *aosta* here is from Lewis: *feadhainn aosd-aosd* (pl) and *fear aosd-aosd* (sg) occur in the same dialogue. Both *feadhainn* and *fear* refer to people; however, their old age is even more emphasised by the repetition of the adjective. (Similarly, *fàileadh dorch aost* ‘an old dark smell’: highlights the aging quality of the smell (probably very uncomfortable as if food had been left somewhere for a very long time).)

4. Native speakers’ judgements

I intended to test the conceptualising function of preposed adjectives with unusual phrases (such as ‘good feather’ or ‘old happiness’). However, the use of adjectives *deagh-* and *math* did not show any difference between tangible and conceptual nouns. One possibility is that it might have worked as one of the factors in the past that determine the present distribution of *deagh-* and *math* (consider words like ‘good reason’ and ‘good intention’, the Gaelic for which were *deagh aobhar* (occasionally *reusan*) and *deagh rùn* for most speakers), but synchronically it has less influence on the word choice. According to my results, *deagh-* seems to substitute *math* in the south (probably losing the distinction), and spread in the north as well (giving more opportunity for variation).⁴ The eldest informant from South Uist (7U) still uses *math* with many words: consider *each math* ‘good horse’, *ite mhath* ‘good feather’, *gloinne mhath* ‘good glass’, as well as the loan words *spagetti math* ‘good spaghetti’, *yoyo math* ‘good yoyo’. What is remarkable here is that all of these words are tangible – referring to either an object or an animal – as opposed to expressions like *deagh*

⁴ Although due to my limited data, general claims cannot be made.

obair ‘a good job’, *deagh reusan* ‘a good reason’, *deagh smuaintean* ‘good thoughts/intention(s)’, or *deagh chuimhne* ‘good memory’. The conceptual word I used with ‘good’ was ‘silence’ or ‘peace’ and the fact that even 7U from South Uist qualified this abstract word with *math* (*sàmhchair mhath*) suggests that there should be an alternative explanation for this word choice (why all informants excluding two from South Uist used the plain adjective *math* with the abstract noun as well: *sàmhchair/socair mhath* ‘good silence/peace’). Namely, this phrase might have a religious connotation such as *dòchas math* ‘good hope’.⁵

1L used *dona* with both tangible and abstract words, although *droch-* with nonsense words. For six speakers ‘bad’ was *droch-* in all three phrases. 10H was the only informant who used the plain adjective *dona* with ‘pillow’ and the preposed adjective *droch-* with the abstract ‘hope’ and ‘happiness’. ‘Bad mouse’ was *luchag dhona* for 11L, which may be an example of criticism (consider that the phrase is rather unusual). Two speakers from Lewis used the plain adjectives for food: *spagetti math* ‘good spaghetti’ and *sushi dona* ‘bad sushi’, but the preposed adjective in the case of *droch d(h)elicatessen* ‘bad delicatessen’. For describing a profession 1L chose the preposed adjective: *deagh sheinneadair* ‘good singer’. Similarly, 7U from South Uist did the same, although used the plain adjective with animal and vehicle: *each math* ‘good horse’ and *aiseag mhath* ‘good ferry’. In the cases of both *droch d(h)elicatessen* and *deagh sheinneadair* the preposed adjective might refer to the quality of a semantically more complex entity (an institute vs. a building, a profession vs. a person). (There is one example for the opposite distribution: *delicatessen dona* but *droch sushi*, although it might be just playing with the variation.)

1L and 6L generally used *aost*’ for a person’s age (6L even *duine aosta* for ‘a veteran’, but *seann iasgair* ‘old fisher’ for a profession; also 6L was one of the informants who translated ‘old horse’ as *each aosta* (animal)). Three more speakers translated ‘old infant’ using the plain adjective: 2U (from South Uist): *pàiste sean/aosta*, 5L: *leanabh sean* (although answered tentatively, and did not use the plain adjective in any other cases), and 10H: *òganach aosta* (the latter used *aosta* with the conceptual word ‘sadness’ as well). 2U from South Uist used *sean* or *aosta* with *pàiste* ‘child’ (age of a person – nonsense phrase) and *aodach* ‘clothes’ (object) (but not with *iasgair* ‘fisherman’ (profession), *càr* ‘car’ (vehicle) or *each* ‘horse’ (animal)). In Lewis *aosta* was occasionally used to mark the age of a person

⁵ *Ma(i)th* is the preferred adjective for ‘good’ in religious contexts, as suggested by the distribution of this adjective in the corpus.

or animal (three informants from Lewis (one of them was 12L) translated ‘old horse’ as *each aosta* (it might have been influenced by the picture, which shows a particularly old horse)).⁶

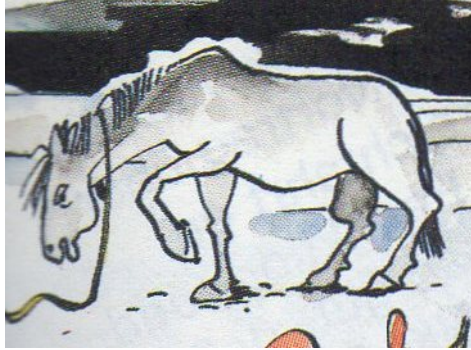


Figure 1

Some of my informants managed to give me subtle differences in meaning between phrases with preposed adjectives and those with their plain counterparts. 1L translated *deagh obair* as ‘a job well done’, while *obair mhath* as ‘a good *kind* of work’. 2U would say *deagh obair* when ‘you’re doing a good job’ or ‘a job is good’, but *obair mhath* only in the second meaning. This means that *deagh obair* refers to a more abstract concept for these speakers, although in a somewhat different sense.

A similar distinction can be observed in 7U’s word choice for ‘good memory’ (if there is any distinction at all). 7U translated ‘good memory’ as *deagh chuimhne*; however, could not think of a plural for this word at first: probably considering ‘memory’ as a mental skill. Trying to say ‘memory’ as a countable noun (i.e., a picture in your mind) the informant said *Bha cuimhne mhath aca...* ‘They had a good memory’ *Bha deagh chuimhneachan aca.* ‘They had good memories.’ If my interpretation is right, this speaker prefers *deagh chuimhne* for ‘good memory’ as a mental skill and *cuimhne mhath* for ‘memory’ as a picture in your mind (which is a more tangible, countable noun), but again *deagh chuimhneachan* in the plural (note that the first meaning does not have a plural). Although consider that this informant does not usually use the latter variant (*cuimhne mhath*) of this expression.

⁶ Informant 12L tends to use plain adjectives only (apart from compounds/fixed expressions like *droch shùil* ‘bad look, glare’): *math* for ‘good’, *dona* for ‘bad’, and *aost* for ‘old’.

The informants gave me the following translations for *droch rud*: ‘a bad thing/happening’; ‘a thing or sg you’re talking about, a news is bad’. Only 3L differentiated between two meanings, although with regard to the hyphenation even this informant was uncertain. According to the pronunciation (and to the abstractness of the meanings), he suggested ‘*droch ,rud*’ ‘a bad thing’ (literal) and ‘*droch-,rud*’ ‘full of badness’ (more abstract). Answering my question the speaker added that the latter could refer to ‘devil’, but only in an abstract sense.

Speakers 1L and 4U helped differentiating between *droch bhean* ‘a bad wife’ (failing at what a wife traditionally means) and *bean d(h)ona*: ‘a wife that is a bad person as well’. Here the plain adjective *dona* may convey criticism: *droch-* refers to the semantics (meaning) of *bean* ‘wife’, while *dona* evaluates the person herself. (6L, 7U and 10H would not use *dona* with *bean* at all.) *Droch dhaoine* refers to ‘bad people’ in general, reflecting on evilness. I asked only half of my informants (5) about the pictures which showed villains and criminals, but all of these speakers found that the phrase *droch dhaoine* matched the pictures:



Figure 2

We have already seen that the plain adjective *aosta* (and *sean*) normally refers to the **age** of a person, animal, or – sometimes – object (e.g., *aodach aosta* ‘old clothes’). This tendency is confirmed by the distinction between *seann-taigh* and *taigh sean* for 4U: in the sentence *Tha taigh sean agam*. ‘I’ve got an old house.’, *taigh sean* refers to a house in which ‘everything is old’, whereas *seann-taigh* denotes a previous house (e.g., the family’s old home). I gave two sentences containing ‘old friend’ to the informants, separated with other sentences: one with reference to ‘a long-existing friendship’ (*I’ve got an **old friend** from primary school.*) and one referring to age (*I’ve got young friends and old friends.*). In the translation for the first sentence every informant (apart from 12L) used the preposed adjective *sean(n)-*. In the other sentence, in which ‘old’ was in coordination with the opposite adjective ‘young’, four informants chose a plain adjective: *caraidean sean* (1L, 7U) or *caraidean aost(a)* (10H, 11L) (five with 12L). Nevertheless, I doubt it was influenced by the presence of the other plain adjective *òg* (as we usually see the opposite in coordinations with *math* and *droch-* (see (20) in section 3.2), which means that this word choice marks the age reference. Two informants from South Uist (2U, 4U) and 6L applied stress to make the distinction more obvious: ‘*seann-*, *charaidean* ~ ‘*seann-*’ *charaidean* (but ‘*seann-*’ *charaid* in the first sentence).

Two informants commented on the distinction between *aosta* and *sean*. 10H (Harris) felt that *aosta*, when used in relation to people, is more polite and milder than *sean*. For 2U (South Uist) *aosta* is stronger than *sean*, *sean* meaning ‘old’ and *aosta* ‘really old’. At first sight these two interpretations seem rather contradictory. However, 2U also adds that *aosta* refers to the older generation, which may eventually mean that *aosta* entitles respect, thus it may be felt more appropriate in connection with people. (This also may be the cause for the decreased use of *sean* these days.) In my opinion, this lofty connotation may explain its use in more literary expressions, and perhaps also with abstract concepts such as *brònach(d) aosta* ‘old sadness’ (10H), *déjà vu aosta* ‘old déjà vu’ and *toileachas aosta* ‘old happiness’ (6L) (although 6L does not always distinguish between preposed and plain adjectives).

Regarding the adjective ‘old’, it is worth noting that the meaning [being around for a long time] and actual age are very close meanings, which may account for the high productivity of *seann-*. It is difficult to differentiate for example between a more tangible, physical age of a building (‘it’s old so it’s falling apart’) or the concept of having existed for a long while. *Seann-* being the stereotypical adjective for the sense ‘old’, phrases with

aosta are idiosyncratic, unique in a sense (cf. *seann eòlas* vs. *eòlas aosta* for ‘old knowledge’). Their meanings can be illustrated on a scale:

animate: *aosta/sean* inanimate (tangible – objects) abstract (concepts): *seann-*

Figure 3

These meanings tend to merge (they are not clearly distinctive), which leaves *seann-* accepted in all meanings.

5. Preposed adjectives in other Celtic languages

There is a great number of preposed adjectives in Brittonic languages (i.e., in Welsh, Breton and Cornish). Adjectives very often show two different meanings according to their position in relation to the noun they specify (Breton examples from Hardie 1948, 61–62, Welsh from: Morris-Jones 1921, 80–84):

(25) Br. *choz varch* ‘bad horse’ vs. *march koz* ‘old horse’

W. *gwir grefydd* ‘true religion’ (i.e., genuine) vs. *hanes gwir* ‘a true story’ (i.e., true to fact)

yr unig beth ‘the only thing’ vs. *dyn unig* ‘a lonely man’

The same phenomenon can be observed in Romance languages: cf. Spanish *niño pequeño* ‘little boy’ vs. *pequeño niño* ‘baby boy/son’, French *fillette petite* ‘small girl’ (i.e., a girl who is small) vs. *petite fille* ‘little/young girl’ and *petite-fille* ‘granddaughter’, where the normal N+A order indicates a simple grammatical phrase, whereas the idiosyncratic A+N order refers to a more abstract construction, which may be considered a compound. Regarding Brittonic examples, A+N constructions are very often loose. However, there is a considerable number of examples for strict compounds as well:⁷ W. ‘*gau broffwyd* ‘false prophet’, ‘*priif ddinas* ‘chief town’ vs. ‘*prifford* ‘highway’, ‘*hen ddyn* ‘old man’ (Morris-Jones 1921, 80–84; Thorne 1993, 840–844).

⁷ In *proper compounds* the first element qualifies the second giving a specifier–generic constituent order. Proper compounds can be further divided into strict and loose compounds according to their stress patterns: **strict compounds** show regular word stress indicating their word status, **loose compounds** have stress on both elements, or secondary stress on the initial element (the specifier) (Morris-Jones 1921, 18–20, 80–84; Thorne 1993, 840–844; Hardie 1948, 55–56)

In Irish, the other major Goidelic language among Celtic languages, the distinction between the preposed adjectives *dea-*, *droch-*, *sean-* and the plain adjectives *maith*, *dona*, *aosta* is rather similar to the observations in Scottish Gaelic, although proper research has not been carried out in this language yet. Although all phrases may not follow the same patterns as in Scottish Gaelic, certain tendencies show obvious similarity. These include preposed adjectives relating to abstract or figurative/more integrated meanings; tangible words and enumerators⁸ more commonly qualified by *maith*; the rarity of phrases with *dona* in general; and the high number of both adjectives *seann-* and *aosta* with nouns denoting people. (26)–(29) contain more common Irish examples (from *Corpas na Gaeilge*):

(26) abstract or figurative meanings:

dea-mhéin ‘goodwill’

dea-chlú ‘good reputation’

ar an dea-uair ‘fortunately’

drochmheas ‘disdain, contempt’

drochuair ‘evil hour’ – *ar an drochuair* ‘unfortunately’

drochíde ‘abuse’

drochshaol ‘hard times’ (An Drochshaol ‘The Great Famine’)

drochrud ‘bad thing, evilness’

drochbhail ‘poor condition’

Consider also *dea-bhéasa* ‘(good manners;) etiquette’ vs. *béasa maithe* ‘good manners’ and *dea-scéal* ‘good news’ vs. *scéal maith* ‘a good story’. Most abstract nouns qualified by *droch-* do not occur with *dona* (neither *olc* ‘bad, evil’) in the corpus. Further figurative examples include: *drochfhéachaint* ‘evil look’ (ScG *droch-shiúil*), *droch-chroí* ‘ill will’ (lit. ‘bad heart’), *drochobair* ‘mischief’ (lit. ‘bad work’). Among the nouns frequent with *droch-*, *scéal* and *rud* are also found relatively frequently with *dona* (*scéal dona* ‘bad news, bad state of affairs’, *rud dona* ‘a bad thing’). *Duine* ‘man’ occurs in quite a high number with both adjectives meaning ‘bad’, although higher with preposed adjective, which may indicate a kind of compound usage, just as in Scottish Gaelic: *drochdhwine* [56] vs. *duine dona* [11] ‘a bad man’. Similarly, both *droch-stoirm/drochstoirm* and *stoirm dona*

⁸ “A small number of nouns”, with certain semantic and/or grammatical properties, which “are followed by the singular after the numerals ‘three’ to ‘ten’ (such as *dusan* ‘dozen’, *duine* ‘man/person’, *latha* ‘day’, *bliadhna* ‘year’, etc.” (Ó Maolalaigh 2013, 126)

‘bad storm’ show only a couple of tokens, whereas both tokens of *deoch* ‘drink’ stand with *dona*.

- (27) tangible nouns qualified by *maith*:
- cuid mhaith ‘a good part/share/portion’
 - roinnt mhaith ‘a good share/deal’
 - tamall maith ‘a good while’
 - rud maith ‘a good thing’
 - fear maith ‘a good man’
 - oíche mhaith ‘good night’
 - duine maith ‘a good person/man’
 - píosa maith ‘a good piece’

Sampla maith [232] and *dea-shampla* [152] ‘good example’ (as well as *deachomhartha* [49] and *comhartha maith* [40] ‘good sign’) have approximately the same number of tokens.

The most frequent Irish phrases with preposed *sean-* are highly reminiscent of those in Scottish Gaelic. These include compounds, and a number of them refer to people:

- (28) preposed *sean-*:
- sean-nós ‘traditional custom’
 - seanfhocal ‘proverb, old saying’
 - seanduine ‘old person’
 - seanfhear ‘old man’
 - seanathair ‘grandfather’
 - seanmháthair ‘grandmother’
 - seanbhean ‘old woman’
 - seanaois ‘old age’
 - seanfionndúir ‘veteran; old-timer’

Also *seanchailín* ‘spinster’ and *seansaighdiúir* ‘old soldier, veteran’ are attested in the corpus, correspondent to ScG *seann mhaighdean* and *seann s(h)aighdear*, respectively. Just as in Scottish Gaelic, many of these nouns occur only with *sean-*, and most tokens of *aosta* refer to human beings, such as *duine aosta* [168] ‘an old person/man’; *fear aosta* [42] ‘an old man’, *bean aosta* [25] ‘an old woman’, and *beirt aosta* [12] ‘two old people, an old pair’.

Preposed adjectives also form part of a number of adjectives (just as in Scottish Gaelic):

(29) adjectives:

deabhéasach, dea-mhúinte ‘well-mannered’

dea-chainteach ‘well-spoken; witty’

dea-chroíoch ‘kind-hearted’

dea-mhéineach ‘benevolent, well-wishing’

drochbhéasach ‘ill-mannered’

drochghnóthach ‘up to no good’

drochmheasúil ‘disdainful, contemptuous’

drochmhúinte ‘rude’

seanbhunaithe ‘(well-)established’

seanaimseartha ‘old-fashioned, dated’

seanfhaiseanta ‘old-fashioned’

seandéanta ‘outdated’

seanchríonna ‘precocious; experienced; wise’

Sean-Ghallda ‘Anglo-Norman, Old English’

One apparent difference between Irish and Scottish Gaelic preposed adjectives is that fixed structures in Irish are more common with *maith*, even though they refer to abstract, mental concepts: *aithne mhaith/eolas maith/fios maith + ag + ar* ‘to know someone/something well’ (lit. ‘to have good knowledge of someone/something’), *cúimhne mhaith + ag + ar* ‘to remember something well’ (lit. ‘to have good memory/remembrance of something’), which is not always the case in Scottish Gaelic. Furthermore, in Irish the preposed adjective *corr-* ‘odd, occasional’ also has a postnominal counterpart: cf. ‘*corr dhuine* ~ ‘*corr dhuine* ‘oddball’ vs. *duine corr* ‘an odd person’, which does not apply to Scottish Gaelic.

6. Preposed adjectives in other languages

In this section certain suggestions emerging from the study on Scottish Gaelic adjectives are discussed in a wider context. Firstly, the animate/inanimate contrast is a part of universal semantics in the world’s languages, so it is not surprising to exist in relation to the adjectives referring to age. Secondly, in section 6.2 conceptualisation and other distributions of meaning are revised regarding adjectives in a couple of other languages.

6.1. Universal contrasts and symmetries

6.1.1. Opposites (quality, age)

First of all, we find the opposites of quality ('good' vs. 'bad') and age ('new/young' vs. 'old') in every language, these concepts representing a part of human cognition. In Gaelic we have even seen the role of contrast in the different frequency patterns for the use of *deagh-* and *math* as opposed to *droch-* and *dona*. To recall the discussion on this, I here repeat sentences from (20):

- (30) a. ...'S **àite math** an seo nam biodh esan as an **droch-àite**... 'This is a good place if he were in a bad place.'
- b. Tha na h-Eireannaich mar mhuinntir eile, **droch dhaoine** 's **daoine maithe** 'nam measg. 'The Irish are like other folks, bad people and good people (/non-religious and religious?) among them/mixed.'
- c. Cha d' fhuair **droch-ràmbhaiche ràmh math** riamh. 'A bad rower (has) never found a good oar.' (proverb)

What is not universal in the world's languages, is the distinction between animate and inanimate usage of both 'new/young' and 'old', although the concept is present in most languages in some way or other: it often occurs in at least one of them, just like in English, which shows a distribution for the meanings 'young' (animate) and 'new' (inanimate). Examples from other languages are referred to in Table 4.

Table 4

Language	'new'	'young'	'old' (inanimate)	'old' (animate)
Hungarian	<i>új</i>	<i>fiatal</i>	<i>régi</i>	<i>öreg/idős</i>
Chinese			<i>jiù</i>	<i>lǎo</i>
Spanish	<i>nuevo/a</i>	<i>joven</i>	<i>antiguo/a</i>	<i>viejo/a</i>

Even in English the word *elder* can only be used for people and not for objects or concepts. In light of this it is worth taking a look at the other member of this opposition.

6.1.2. Animate/inanimate symmetry (age)

In the case of Scottish Gaelic three variations of 'new' can be encountered. These are as follows: *ùr* meaning 'new' or 'fresh', *òg* usually in the sense 'young', and *nuadh*, which may be a dialectal variant for *ùr*, in the inanimate sense 'new' (the Irish word for 'new' is *nua* or *úr*), but it also occurs in

innovative compounds with the meaning ‘modern’ (e.g., *nuadh-eachdraidh* for ‘modern history’). Considering these varieties, it is obvious that Gaelic does show the animate – inanimate distinction for both ‘old’ and ‘new’, the only difference being that there is no distinction of order in the case of ‘new/young’ (although note the A+N compounds of *nuadh-*), whereas the various meanings of ‘old’ may also be distinguished by word order. Interestingly enough, however, there are proper compounds to be encountered with *òg* as the specifier, referring to an early time, rather than to the age of a person or other living creature: *òg-mhadainn* ‘early morning, dawning’, *Ógmhios* ‘June’ (lit. ‘early/young month’).

The opposition of ‘young’/‘little’ and ‘old’/‘big’ has also proved to be a useful device in languages to express relationships: they form part of conventional compounds like *grandma* (German *Grossmutter*, Hungarian *nagymama*, etc., all of which literally come from ‘big mother’ (cf. Irish *mhàthair mhór* ‘my big mother’, i.e., ‘grandmother’), similarly *shima soni* in Navajo and *seanmhair* in Gaelic (literally meaning ‘old(er) mother’). In some languages we even encounter parallel expressions with ‘little’, as in Navajo *shima yazhi* ‘little mother’ for ‘aunt’ (the – now derogative – Hungarian *kisanyám* ‘my little mother’ might originate in the same – or similar – meaning). Chinese *xiǎo* ‘little, small, young’ + SURNAME and *lǎo* ‘old, experienced’ + SURNAME have special meanings in addressing each other, and show hierarchy at a workplace.

6.2. Meaning varieties and meaning change

According to the observations in the previous sections, preposed adjectives show a certain conceptualising function, for which we have seen various, colourful examples, often triggering change in meaning. In the case of *droch latha* and *latha dona* ‘bad day’ the difference is grammatical: the first being more subjunctive (with the future or conditional tenses), the latter more factual and certain (in present or past). *Deagh obair* has proved to be associated with job in a more abstract sense (‘good job’), while *obair mhath* referred to an individual work (‘good work’). Other examples for meaning change included *astar math* for ‘good distance’ and *deagh astar* for ‘good speed’, *àim math* for ‘appropriate time’ and *ann an deagh àim* meaning ‘in time’, *galar dona* for a ‘bad illness’ and *droch ghalair* for ‘great suffering’ (i.e., ‘bad illness’ in an abstract sense). The difference is even more salient when the more abstract phrase becomes a compound with a figurative sense such as *droch-àite* for ‘hell’ as opposed to *àite dona* referring to a dirty, unsuitable place. Similar compounds are *an droch-shùil* ‘the evil

eye', *seann ghille* 'bachelor' and *seann mhaighdean* (or *sean(n) nighean* in Lewis) 'old-maid'.

Seann- and *aosta* appear to have a number of specific functions in the corpus. While *seann-* is the typical adjective with reference to age, old types (e.g., *seann téipichean céire* 'old wax tapes', *seann teine* 'old fireplace'), previous roles ('former': e.g., *seann saighdear* 'old soldier, veteran', *seann leannan* 'old sweetheart') and traditionality (*seann òran* 'folksong, traditional song' (vs. *òran aosda* 'old song'), *seann sgeulachd* 'traditional story', *sean-fhacal* 'proverb, saying', *seann eòlas* 'lore', *seann-taigh* 'traditional (black-)house' (vs. *taigh aosta* 'old house'), etc.), *aosta* is associated with buildings or institutes having existed for a while (e.g., *'na shloinn seanchaidh aosda* 'in his old storyteller family', *cladh aosda Chille Chòmhghain* 'the old graveyard of Kilchoan') and gives a more poetic reference to age (e.g., *cnàmhan aosda* 'old bones', *ceann aosd* 'old head', *fuam aosd na mara* 'the old sound of the sea'), and the past: *làithean aosta* 'old days'. It also appears to show connection with wisdom (cf. *eòlas aosd nam boireannach* 'the old knowledge of (the) women'). I have also mentioned the possible distinction between *seann charaid* 'old friend' (where the friendship has existed for a long time) and *caraid aosta* 'old friend' (referring to the friend's age). If this suggestion is true, the similarity with the use of Spanish *viejo/a* is striking: *una vieja amiga* 'an old friend' (referring to the length of the friendship) vs. *una amiga vieja* 'an old friend' (age). (The difference between *una mujer vieja* and *una vieja mujer* 'an old woman' is similar to that between *boireannach aosta* and *seann bhoireannach* in Gaelic, where *seann bhoireannach* tends to refer to a specific person, whereas *boireannach aosta* appears to highlight the person's old age – cf. Hungarian *öregember* vs. *egy öreg/idős ember*.) In Table 5 (overleaf) I illustrate the relation between the patterns of the Gaelic and Spanish adjectives.

Since *seann-* is the more productive adjective for 'old' in Gaelic, it tends to be used for age, which, being the most natural, tangible sense, must be the default meaning of this adjective. We can also find old languages and ages – 'existed a long time ago' – with *seann-*, as well as buildings or institutes having existed for a while with *aosta* (see also *taigh aosta* 'an old house'). In the latter case, however, it has to be noted that we are discussing an inanimate object or concept, which may be closer in meaning to plain *antiguo* than preposed *viejo* – compare *un pueblo antiguo* and *'na shloinn seanchaidh aosda*.

An interesting distribution in the use of words for 'old' can be observed in Chinese as well. As we have seen before, in Chinese *lǎo* usually refers to people, as in *wǒ bǐ nǐ lǎo* 'I'm older than you.'. The word 'old' for objects

Table 5

Connotation	Type of adjective	Examples	Connotation	Type of adjective	Examples
existed some time ago, i.e., 'former'	preposed	<i>un antiguo colega</i> 'a former colleague'	earlier or traditional types, previous roles	preposed	<i>seann teine</i> 'old fire-place' <i>seann sgeulachd</i> 'traditional story' <i>seann saighdear</i> 'veteran'
existed a long time ago	plain	<i>un pueblo antiguo</i> 'an ancient people'	past, existed previously or earlier	plain and preposed	<i>làithean aosta</i> 'past days' <i>seann Ghàidhlig/Sean-Ghàidhlig</i> 'old Gaelic/Irish' <i>Seann Linn na Cloiche</i> 'Early Stone Age'
having existed for a long time	preposed	<i>una vieja amiga</i> 'an old friend'	having existed for a long time: – relationship – buildings or institutes	preposed or plain	<i>seann charaid</i> 'old friend' <i>'na shloinn seanchaidh aosda</i> 'in his old storyteller family'
age	plain	<i>una mujer vieja</i> 'an old woman'	age	preposed; and plain: especially more poetic expressions, mostly related to nature	<i>seann-duine</i> 'old man' <i>cnàmhan aosta</i> 'old bones' <i>leacan aosd a'</i> <i>chladaich</i> 'the old stones of the shore'

is *jiù*. However, we can express the sentence 'This book is old.' in two different senses: if we are referring to the paper the book was printed on, we can use the word *jiù* without any problems. On the other hand, if we mean to refer to the content of the book (an abstract concept), we have to say *lăo* instead of *jiù*.

- (31) Zhè shì běn jiù shū. ‘This book is old.’ (material)
 Zhè shì běn lǎo shū. ‘This book is old.’ (content)

7. Conclusion

The feature of **abstraction** appears to lie in the vocabulary – it forms part of the semantics of a word. This is a “historic” aspect: some words are inherently used with *deagh-*, others with *math* (e.g., *deagh aobhar* ‘good reason’, *deagh rùn* ‘good intention’, *deagh smuaintean* ‘good thoughts’, etc. vs. *each math* ‘good horse’, *ite mhath* ‘good feather’, *gloinne mhath* ‘good glass’, etc.).

With regard to abstract vs. tangible phrases, preposed adjectives tend to relate to more complex semantic structures, leaving the more obvious, more simple meanings to the plain adjectives. Therefore, plain adjectives tend to refer to the most tangible entities (people, animals, objects) and pronominal expressions. For instance, *deagh-* stands with professions or with a person with the appropriate qualities for a job, etc. (*deagh dhuine* as ‘the right man’ and also maybe *deagh oidhche iasgaich* ‘the right night for fishing’), whereas *math* qualifies vehicles and animals. Similarly, *droch-* refers to the complex semantics of *droch dheicatessen* ‘bad delicatessen’ (it may refer to the products, staff, etc., i.e., all parts of the whole institute – not only to the condition of the building itself), *droch àite* ‘bad place’ likewise (consider its occurrence in contexts with clear references to ‘hell’), whereas *dona* can describe the qualities of food. *Rud dona* (which is encountered in more recent sources of the corpus) expresses a pronominal sense similar to *rudeigin dona* ‘something bad’, whereas *droch rud* ‘a bad thing’ is probably meant more as a concept, let alone the abstract reference to someone’s character or behaviour as *droch-rud* ‘full of badness’. *Spiorad* ‘spirit’ is the only religious word in the corpus the tokens of which are each accompanied by the preposed adjective *droch-*, as opposed to references to people or anthropomorphic entities all qualified by *dona*.

Seann- also carries more abstract meanings compared to more pronominal *aosta* (*cuid* ‘some’, *dithis* ‘a couple (of people)’; *feadhainn* ‘ones’, *tè* ‘one’ (fem.)), although the latter two, mostly being references to people, also occur with *seann-* in the corpus (in sources from South Uist). *Seann-*, just as the other preposed adjectives, may easily convey more integrated meanings, such as *seann bhean* ‘old woman’, *seann-duine* ‘old man’, *seann bhoireannach* ‘old woman’, etc. (also consider *seann tè*, which is similar in meaning to *cailleach* ‘old woman, hag’ vs. *tè aosd* ‘old female’) or traditionality (see *seann-taigh* ‘a (traditional) black-house’ vs. *taigh aosta/sean*

‘an old house’ (physical/constitutional age), *seann fhacal* denoting the old *form* of a word, and *seann(-)òran* ‘folksong/traditional song’), as opposed to the most simple definition of age (biological or physical), which can be successfully highlighted by the plain adjective. Attributive *aosta* is often used to indicate a person’s or animal’s age (see for example *caraidean sean/aost(a)* in native speakers’ translations for age reference in the phrase ‘young friends and old friends’), and it is also encountered in connection with living organisms (*craobh aosda* ‘an old tree’), natural constructions (e.g., *na creagan aosd ud* ‘those old rocks’), body parts (e.g., *shùilean aosd(a)* ‘old eyes’), and other tangible (and countable) nouns, especially if it makes a distinction with a phrase containing *seann-* (e.g., *aodach aosta* ‘old clothes’, *làithean aosta* ‘past days’ – reference to somebody’s age or life, *òran aosda* ‘an old song’ vs. *seann-òran* ‘folksong’, *cànan aosta* ‘an old language’ vs. *seann chànan* ‘an old *form* of a language’).

In some cases the conceptualising feature of preposed adjectives is applied to differentiate between meanings: *deagh obair* can refer to ‘a good job’, or doing ‘a good job’, while *obair mhath* to ‘a good employment’ or ‘a good work’ (with a tangible result); *deagh astar* usually stands for ‘good speed’, while *astar math* for ‘good distance’; *deagh chuimhne* can mean ‘good memory’ as a mental skill, while *cuimhne mhath* ‘good memory’ as a picture in mind (the plural of which is either *deagh chuimhneachan* (native speaker from South Uist) or *cuimhneachan math* (from a Lewis source in the corpus) meaning ‘good memories’ (i.e., pictures in mind)). Similarly, *droch ghalar* stands for ‘a bad illness/pain’ (psychological), while *galar dona* for ‘a bad disease’; *droch dhaoine* refers to ‘bad people’ such as criminals or non-Christians, or convey the connotation of evilness, whereas *duine dona* ‘bad man’ expresses the speaker’s opinion about a person, just as *bean d(h)ona* evaluates the person who is a wife besides (unless it simply means ‘a bad woman’) as opposed to *droch bhean* ‘a bad wife’. In the case of *seann-* and *aosta*, both adjectives tend to refer to people; however, *aosta* is connected with biological age, as well as with respect (compare Chinese *lǎo* ‘old, experienced’ which is a respectful address towards a senior member at work). This indicates wisdom in certain phrases (see *sgialachdan aosda* ‘old stories’, *eòlas aosd* ‘old knowledge’, *a’ bhréig aosd* ‘the old lie’), and may be one reason why it occasionally occurs even with abstract nouns (see e.g., 10H’s *brònach(d) aosta* for ‘old sadness’).

Preposed adjectives are typical in all Celtic languages, especially with abstract meaning and complex semantic structure. The distinction between Irish preposed and postposed adjectives is similar to that in Scottish Gaelic, although proper research has not been carried out in this language

yet. Regarding more universal aspects, the animate/inanimate distinction between adjectives of age can be found in various languages (such as English *young/new* and Hungarian *öreg/régi*). The adjectives of age serve as a useful device to indicate relationships in the world's languages (cf. Navajo *shima soni* 'big mother' as 'grandmother' vs. *shima yazhi* 'little mother' as 'aunt').

As regards the relationship between word order and abstraction concerning age, certain similarities and differences can be observed between the Scottish Gaelic and Spanish adjectives meaning 'old': (1) former roles are indicated by a preposed adjective in both languages (*un antiguo colega* 'a former colleague' – *seann-leannan* 'old sweetheart'); (2) old institutes/families etc. ('previous' or 'having existed for a long time') can be expressed by using a plain adjective (*un pueblo antiguo* 'an ancient people' – *'na shloinn seanchaidh aosta* 'in his old storyteller family'), although not necessarily (see ScG *Sean-Ghàidhlig* 'Old Gaelic/Irish' and Irish *Sean-Ghall* 'Anglo-Norman, Old English'); (3) when qualifying certain words, the preposed adjective may refer to the length of the relationship (*una vieja amiga* – *seann charaid* 'an old friend'), whereas the plain adjective to the age of a person (*una mujer vieja* 'an old woman' – *duine aosta* 'an old man'; see also partitive *cnàmhan aosta* 'old bones'). On the other hand, *seann-* is a common adjective concerning people in every dialect of Gaelic (as well as in Irish), which means that *seann-duine* 'old man' is at least as frequently used as *duine aosta*, if not more. Although all adjectival phrases in Mandarin are preposed A+N, the two Mandarin adjectives for 'old', *lǎo* and *jiù*, besides the animate/inanimate opposition, show an abstract/tangible distinction as well, similar to the distinction between *seann-taigh* 'previous house' and *taigh sean/aosta* 'an old house': the adjective for animate nouns is used to express abstract concepts, while inanimate *jiù* refers to the physical age of an object.

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