



## Broken English - Beurla-chluaise

The English language did not become available generally in the Scottish West coast islands until after the 1872 Education Act. Gaelic was the language of the people, and in rural areas the children started school during the early part of the 20th century without a word of English. Towards the middle of the 19th century only an occasional person who might have gained a smattering of English as a Minister's man 'Gille Ministeir' or a 'Ghille', could speak broken English, 'Beurla-cluaise'.

One such person was a crew member in a white fishing 'lion mhor' boat, off the Shiant Isles. One day when a large merchant ship stopped and asked in English for a supply of white fish, the only broken-English person on board stepped forward and duly handed over a liberal supply of fish. In appreciation of the fishermen's generosity the crew of the passing ship handed over a good supply of tobacco and strong liquor as well as money.

The broken-English fisherman was thanking the ship's crew profusely, when one of his crewmembers concluded that he was showing off, and quipped 'na caith gu leir i gun fhios nach coinnich soitheach eile ruinn'. 'Don't use up all your English in case we meet another ship'.

[ends]

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