

An Naidheachd Againne

The Newsletter of An Comunn Gàidhealach Ameireaganach / The American Gaelic Society

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Given that each of the major smartphone platforms now boasts hundreds of thousands of software packages (“apps”) to accomplish almost every conceivable function, it was only a matter of time before we started to notice apps about Gaelic. So we decided to start a series of short reviews of these, and this is the first. Rudy Ramsey has written the first one, but reviews by others are most welcome.



Gàidhlig on the Go—LearnBots (iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch)

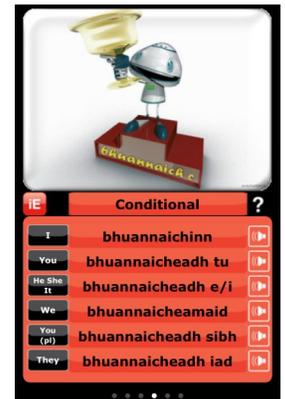
by Rudy Ramsey

LearnBots is a fun, and rather clever, way to learn and practice verb forms with the aid of a mobile device. Before I tell you about it, though, you need to do something for me. You know that “suspend disbelief” switch in your head that helps you enjoy science fiction? (You may be using it just now for political campaigns.) Well, you may want to turn it on for a paragraph or two.

LearnBots is an app that lets you drill yourself on verb forms. It teaches you the imperative, past, future, conditional, infinitive, and verbal noun forms of 101 different verbs, with conjugation, spelling, and pronunciation by a native speaker. What, no disbelief problems yet? Ah, I almost forgot. It uses images of a rather fanciful family of robots -- including a man, a woman, a dog, and a hive of bees -- to make things interesting and to visually tie the verb root to its meaning. And in my opinion, it works, at least as a motivational aid, and perhaps as a retention aid. I am absolutely certain, however, that some folks will see this as purely a gimmick. So your mileage may vary.

After I played with LearnBots for a bit, I went to its website (www.learnbots.com) to see what sort of folks would build an app like this. I was surprised at what I found, and it's clearly relevant to understanding what's happening here. These guys (iEdutainments) are not, first and foremost, builders

of iPhone apps. Rather, they're folks who work in one very specialized compartment -- the learning of verb forms in foreign languages. They've built a whole system for this, including flashcards, posters, books and ebooks, movies, animations, audio files, learning software, board and video games, smartphone apps, and more. They've done it for, I think, 22 languages so far, and they have a special interest in including minority languages. That's how we got on their list. They built their Gàidhlig materials, including the audio snippets that teach every pronunciation, with the aid of the several major Gaelic outfits, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Gaelic Books Council. The materials seem sound to me, though I'll confess that I'm not as strong in some of these forms as I would like. (Did I mention that I'm actually going to be using this app?)



If you “purchase” a free version of LearnBots through the iTunes store, you get full functionality, but for only 5 of the 101 verbs. That's certainly enough to help you decide whether or not this app is for you, though. If you decide that it is, you can do an in-app purchase of the full product, for \$4.99. Either version lets you select a verb in either Gàidhlig or English. Then you can work your way through a displayed list containing all the verb forms men-

tioned above. I've included screen images from both the iPhone and the iPad, to give you the idea.



You can work with the verbs all displayed, as in the second figure, or you can tap on the question mark, and the cells will all go blank. Tapping on a cell then causes its verb form to be both displayed and pronounced, so you can gradually repopulate the blanked display. And learn the verb.

LearnBots is based on a simple idea, unusually well executed, and it's worth a look by any Gàidhlig learner who uses an iDevice. It would be especially good for intermediate students, and for any advanced students who, like me, need vocabulary work. I can only hope that this verb company will soon spin off a subsidiary with a magic bullet for nouns. ☺



Links to online ACGA resources

- Main ACGA Website: <http://acgamerica.org/>
- ACGA Forum: <http://forum.acgamerica.org/>
- ACGA Facebook Page: <http://facebook.com/ACGAGaelic>
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You may comment on this article (and others like it) in the following ACGA Sub-Forum: <http://forum.acgamerica.org/viewforum.php?f=51>

AN NAIDHEACHD AGAINNE

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An Naidheachd Againne welcomes submissions. Contact the editors for more information.



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