

Answer Verbs or 'Thubhairt' vs 'Thuir' and what's in it

Most people have come across these doublets, but few across any helpful explanations. Most just regard them as variants of the same 'thing', some say the longer forms are the 'old way' of spelling them and there are but a few sources which refer to them as stressed and unstressed forms. The latter is certainly true - but it actually goes beyond that. To begin with, here is a list of the most commonly seen variations:

an deigheagh	an deagh	would go?
an dubhairt	an duirt	said?
bhà	bha	was
bhitheadh	bhiodh	would be
bithidh	bidh	will be
chàidh/chathaidh	chaidh	went
thabhair	thoir	give
thà/thatha	tha	is
thubhairt	thuir	said

As so many things in Gaelic orthography which seem to be random, this isn't either. What the spelling is trying to reflect here with some of the most commonly used verbs is a phenomenon of spoken Gaelic - the distinction between what we have chosen to call 'neutral' and 'stressed forms'.

Neutral means that the verb is used without putting particular stress on it, for example because something else is stressed in the sentence or because it is just a simple statement or question you are making. Stressed means that for whatever reason, for example in answering a question or when stressing the verbal element of the sentence, you are putting emphasis on the answer. This is very common in languages - they differ in how exactly they do it though. Gaelic does two things - it lengthens the vowel of the stressed verbs and splits the single syllable into two. Huh? Well, let's look at an example:

1. Thuir mi ris dol ann	I told him to go there.
2. An dubhairt?	Did you?
3. Thubhairt!	I did!

The first **thuir** has quite a short vowel and has just one syllable. The other two on the other hand are "drawn out" somewhat and now there are two syllables. It's as similar difference as in English "Yes" and "Ye-es!" in terms of syllables - although it's still the same vowel, it's longer and there is kind of a break in between.

In general there is a tendency to lengthen the vowels slightly in stressed verbs, e.g. in:

1. Mhol mi an latha dhà	I greeted him.
2. An do mhol?	Did you?
3. Mol!	Yes!

In the last **Mol!** the vowel gets ever so slightly lengthened if you do a measurement of the vowels - by no means enough to make it sound like **mòl**, but just a bit.

So it actually makes sense to have **thubhairt** AND **thuir** when you are writing Gaelic - but however you write it, the important thing is to remember to pronounce them properly when speaking.