Volume 20 Issue 47
Originally issued as G8



Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 20 Issue 8 Version 1.0 Year 2020
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Distribution of *Seann-*, *Aosta* and *Sean* Conveying the Meaning 'Old' in Scottish Gaelic

By Veronika Csonka
University of Glasgow

Abstract- This paper aims to investigate under what circumstances the preposed adjective seann- and when the plain adjective aosta or sean is used with nouns to convey the meaning 'old' in Scottish Gaelic. A combined analysis of a corpus study and interviews with native speakers was applied in the research. Seann- is highly productive, may describe traditional, older types or previous roles, it appears to be the default adjective for 'old', occurring in compounds, fixed expressions, names, etc. Plain adjectives are principally used in Lewis (and Harris) to qualify nouns as opposed to southern dialects. They are preferred when referring to biological (or physical) age. Sean is rare in present day speech, preferred in southern dialects, while aosta is more typical in Lewis. For certain speakers, aosta refers to an older age than sean, alternatively aosta conveys respect. Contrastive contexts may encourage the distinction between the two adjectival types, and thus the use of the plain adjective. Aosta may display more poetic qualities, which renders it efficient in poetic descriptions.

Keywords: *seann-, aosta, sean, preposed adjectives.*

GJHSS-G Classification: *FOR Code: 330199*



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Distribution of *Seann-*, *Aosta* and *Sean* Conveying the Meaning 'Old' in Scottish Gaelic

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Abstract- This paper aims to investigate under what circumstances the preposed adjective *seann-* and when the plain adjective *aosta* or *sean* is used with nouns to convey the meaning 'old' in Scottish Gaelic. A combined analysis of a corpus study and interviews with native speakers was applied in the research. *Seann-* is highly productive, may describe traditional, older types or previous roles, it appears to be the default adjective for 'old', occurring in compounds, fixed expressions, names, etc. Plain adjectives are principally used in Lewis (and Harris) to qualify nouns as opposed to southern dialects. They are preferred when referring to biological (or physical) age. *Sean* is rare in present day speech, preferred in southern dialects, while *aosta* is more typical in Lewis. For certain speakers, *aosta* refers to an older age than *sean*, alternatively *aosta* conveys respect. Contrastive contexts may encourage the distinction between the two adjectival types, and thus the use of the plain adjective. *Aosta* may display more poetic qualities, which renders it efficient in poetic descriptions.

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I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate the difference between phrases containing the preposed adjective *sean(n)-* and phrases with the plain adjectives *sean* or *aosta*, meaning 'old', as well as to identify some rules and factors which determine compoundhood in such phrases. The plain adjectives *sean* and *aosta* show predicative as well as attributive functions in the corpus; only the latter of these functions has been studied in this research. The paper is based on a corpus study carried out on a subcorpus 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. Throughout the paper, preposed adjectives (when referring to them separately) are marked with a hyphen to distinguish between the preposed and plain adjectival forms (i.e. *sean(n)-* vs *aosta*/*sean*).

After the description of methods and materials, data and statistics from the corpus study are introduced, followed by the discussion of the corpus study with a section on coordination and contrast (i.e. cooccurrence with the opposite adjectives *òg* 'young', *ùr* and *nuadh* 'fresh, new') as well as on context (with other adjectives, such as *còir* 'kind' and *liath* 'grey'). In Section 3.4 the distribution of *seann-* and *aosta* is explained; followed by a section on potential compounds and fixed expressions. In Section 3.6, lenition after *seann-* is studied. Finally, in Section 4, the results of the interviews with native Scottish Gaelic speakers are discussed.

Author: *University of Glasgow, University of Szeged.*
e-mail: *csonkaveronika@gmail.com*

II. Methods and Materials

a) Corpus study

A subcorpus of 74 texts was created from the 205 texts contained in the *Corpas na Gàidhlig*, which is a part of the DASG project,[1] and which was established by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh at the Department of Celtic and Gaelic, University of Glasgow, in 2008 (see Ó Maolalaigh 2013, and Ó Maolalaigh 2016 on *Corpas na Gàidhlig* and DASG). In order to collect data from the corpus, the freeware concordance package AntConc (version 3.2.4 for Windows) was used (developed by Laurence Anthony, Waseda University, Japan).

In the corpus study I wished to compare the use of the preposed adjective *sean(n)-* and atrributive plain adjectives *aosta*/*sean* (A+N and N+A phrases, respectively), with the meaning 'old'. For that purpose I collected all phrases containing these words occurring in a subcorpus of 74 texts from the 205 texts of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic). 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

[1] Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (Dàta airson Stòras na Gàidhlig)

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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*): $\sigma = \sqrt{V(x)} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N}\sum x_i^2 - \left(\frac{1}{N}\sum x_i\right)^2}$ 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. I also gave the type/token ratio (in percentage), which identifies *vocabulary richness* (type/token = vocabulary richness).

b) Interviews

In the interviews 10 informants were interviewed (6 from Lewis, 1 from Harris, 3 from South Uist). Each interview lasted for 30–40 minutes, and the test included 3 exercises in order to explore the meaning and use of preposed and plain adjectives. The exercises were mainly translations, and a picture description. The exercises 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.

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 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 raised. These include an insight to dialectal difference between Lewis and the southern islands, as well as the difference between the attributive plain adjectives *sean* and *aosta*. 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[2]

III. Results of the Corpus Study

a) Data

In the case of the adjective 'old', Scottish Gaelic distinguishes the preposed (attributive) adjective *sean(n)-*, attributive and predicative *aosta*, and *sean* in predicative, or occasionally attributive usage. Occurrences of *seann-*, *aosta* and *sean* are shown in Table 2, where the first column shows the total number of tokens produced by *AntConc*, the second only relevant tokens without words like *seanchaidh* 'storyteller', and the third contains examples that are relevant for the study (i.e. all predicative tokens have been left out for instance). In the case of *sean* and *aosta*, I give the numbers of predicative and attributive tokens separately.

[2] It has to be added that in this particular study the self-conscious aspect of the interviews might not lower the value of the results, as in the revitalisation of a language it may prove rather useful, especially in a semantic research: it may help to retain the colours of the language if the informant lays emphasis on any potential differences in meaning.

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Table 2

	All Tokens	Relevant Tokens	Relevant Examples (Preposed Adjective)	Different Types
seann	1309	1284	1284	
sheann	159	153	153	
sean(a)	1065	844	424	
shean(a)	645	543	439	
seanna	5	5	5	
sheanna	1	1	1	
			2306	479

		predicative	*attributive*	
sean		65	13	
shean		8	5	
		73	18	14

aost(a)	23	14	5	
aosd(a)	226	194	93	
	249	208	98	59

With regard to 'old', the corpus contains formally three different main types to deal with: the preposed adjective *sean (n)-/seana-/seanna-*, its form *sean* following nouns, and the plain adjective *aost(a)* (generally written as *aosd(a)* in sources published before 1999). (I use *seann-*, *sean* and *aosta* as shorthand for these formal categories respectively.) *Seann-* has given 2306 relevant tokens, which can be divided into 479 types (thus vocabulary richness is: 20.8%). I have also found 3 tokens for *leth-sheann* 'middle-aged', all with *duine*.

Aosta shows predicative sense in 208 cases (12 of which are back-references,[3] and 3 comparatives), and I have also excluded the 6 superlative phrases to maintain consistency. I have encountered 2 examples with *coimhead* 'look' and 24 phrases with *fàs* 'grow, become', 4 nouns (e.g. *An òige leis an aosd* 'The young with the old'; *eòlach air a' bheag 's air a' mhór, air aosda 's air òg* 'knowing the small and the big, [the] old and [the] young'; *Thuirt Aosd 'nan Làithean rium* 'The Old of the Days told me'), and 3 occurrences of *dè cho aosda/aost* 'how old'. From the 249 tokens 98 have proved to be attributive and thus included in the analysis. In turn, this has been made up by 59 types (60.2%). The difference of percentages might indicate that *seann-* is preferred to be used in certain collocates or fixed expressions in a great number, while the use of *aosta* may be more flexible, at least for some speakers.

In the case of *sean* (apart from its appearance as a preposed adjective), 5 (twice repeated) occurrences stand in place of *sin* (see below); I have counted 73 predicative examples (including *ro shean(n)* 'too old', *(fada) na bu sheana* '(by far) older'; *cho sean* 'so old', *sean gu leò(i)r* 'old enough', *leth-shean* 'middle-aged', and back-references, e.g. *Domhnall MacGilliosa (sean)* 'Donald MacLeish (senior)').

Example 1.

a. *"Sean; sean!" arsa Cailean. "Cha bu dona 'n tùrn a rainn* (sic) *e."* '"So; so!" said Colin. "It wasn't a bad job he did." (lit. "That; that!")
b. *Tha lùidhte gu 'n tachair sean cuideachd mu 'm fàg sinn an saoghal* '… that that will also happen before we leave the world'
c. *"Tha sean fìor, tha sean fìor"* '"That is true, that is true"'

There is 1 token with *coimhead* and 19 expressions with *fàs*. Neither have I included coordinations, as I was not sure whether I should treat them as attributive adjectives or predicative back-references. Some of them functioned as a noun. I have counted 63 such coordinatives with *sean* (most of them with *òg* 'young', some examples with *nuadha* or *ùr*

[3] A back-reference gives further qualities of a noun already mentioned, normally in the same sentence. A back-reference can be interpreted as a predicative expression without the substantive verb (e.g. *bha grunnan math dhaoine, og agus sean, an sin a' coinneachadh a' bhàta* 'there was a good number of people there, young and old, waiting for [lit. "meeting"] the boat'; *Bha seann duin' ann, gu math aosda liath* 'There was an old man, quite old [and] grey'), or it may be adverbial occasionally: *Bha Uilleam, sean, sgìth, a' coimhead troimh 'n uinneig* 'William, old and tired, was looking through the window'.

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'new'; including *uamhasach sean no uamhasach òg* 'terribly old or terribly young' and *sean ma tha thu no òg* 'if you are old or young'). (I discuss coordinatives in Section 3.3.) Furthermore, I have not counted *o shean* (52 occurrences), *a shean* (1) and *bho shean* (11) 'of old'. As a result, 18 attributive phrases remained, in 14 different types. 11 of these collocations have occurred once, 2 twice, and 1 of them three times; however, many of these are coordinatives. Excluding coordinatives, only 7 phrases remain which contain attributive *sean*, and are worthy of analysis. As all of these occur once, and most of them in poetry (*creathail shean* 'old cradle', *boile shean* 'old passion', *brataich shean* 'old flag' (dat.)) *sean* may be neglected as adjective which follows its noun. *Fion sean* 'old wine' appears in a riddle which also contain rhymes:

Ciod iad na ceithir nithean a' s miosa anns an domhain?

Diubhaidh teine, feirn ur,

Diubhaidh dighe, fion sean,

Diubhaidh duine, mi-run,

Agus diubhaidh nan diubhaidh droch bhean.

'What are the four worst things in the world?

the worst of fire is that of a new land,

the worst of drink, is old wine,

the worst person, ill-will,

and the worst of worst [is] a bad wife.'

There are three tokens from prose. *Beairt shàmhach shean* 'an old quiet machine' occurs in *An t-Aonaran* (with Lewis Gaelic), which represents a rather poetic language (see further discussion in Section 3.2). (In this source we encounter one example of the preposed adjective in *seana mhaighstir-sgoile* 'old school-master', whereas the rest of the tokens are qualified with *aosda*.) One of the remaining tokens includes a contrast with *òg* 'young': *Dh' fhaodadh a' chàraid òg (no is dòcha a' chàraid shean)* 'Maybe the young couple (or perhaps the old couple)'; and it may share two features with the last example, *(bho) bhodach sean bochd* '(from) a poor old man', namely that it originates from Skye (the utterer of the latter (the imaginary writer of the correspondence) comes from Skye; this also applies to the riddle above), and that it was possibly[4] written in the early part of the 20th century. Attributive, plain adjective *sean* may represent an old-fashioned use, considering that 3 of 7 examples date from the early 20th century. The date of origin of 3 is uncertain, whereas the remaining 1 token is from Lewis (1976) (just as *na linntean neo-shean* 'the recent (lit. "not old") centuries' from 1971, and *searbhanta leth-shean* 'a middle-aged servant' from 2001).[5] Regarding (*bho*) *bhodach sean bochd*, its source contains 4 tokens of coordinative *sean* as well. The sources of both latter examples show plenty of occurrences of preposed *seann-*.

Among my examples with preposed *seann-*, I have included 32 names or nicknames (e.g. *sean Chatrìona*, *seann Johan*, *seann MhacGilliosa*, *seann Ghuaderini*, *seana Mhàiri Logan*; *Seann Choinneach* (where *seann* is part of the name!), *seann Ruairidh Dhomhnaill Chaoil*, *seann Fhear Ghrianail* 'old Man of Grianail', *seann Righ Cuibhle* 'old King Wheel'; *Sean Cheatharnaich (Braighe) Lochabair (Iain Odhar)*); also with titles: *seann Mhgr. Curdie* 'old Mr Curdie', *seann Dotair Ros* 'old Dr Ross'; and one Biblical name: *seann Mhaois* 'old Moses'), 23 placenames (*seann Rhudha Stòrr* (sic!), *seann Dùn-Àluinn*, *seann Albainn* 'old Scotland'), 20 nationalities or origins (e.g. *seann Eiphitich* 'old Egyptians', *seann Lochlannaich* 'old Scandinavians/Norsemen', *sean Ghearmailteach* 'an old German', *seann Sgitheanaich* 'old people from Skye', *seann Hiortaich* 'old people from St. Kilda', *seann Ghàidheil* 'old Gaels') and 80 languages (e.g. *seann Ghreugais* 'ancient Greek', *Seann Innis-Tìlis* 'Old Icelandic', *sheann-Ghaeilge/Sean-Ghàidhlig* 'Old Irish', *seann Chuimris* 'Old Welsh'); which add up 155 proper names in 2306 tokens (6.7%). Among attributive *aosta*, I have counted 1 name (*Aonghas aosda* 'old Angus'), and 3 placenames (*na Cuimrigh aosd'* 'of old Wales', *Nis aosda* 'old Ness', *Ayr aosda* 'old Ayr'); i.e. 4 out of 98 tokens (4.1%). The plain adjective *sean* qualifies 1 word of nationality (*gach Gearmailteach sean is òg* 'every German, old and young'), although this one could be counted as a predicative back-reference. (Although I have not found other proper nouns with the plain adjective *sean*, it has to be noted that there are very few tokens for this form to make proper statistics.)

I have also included coordinatives, and counted with both nouns, separately (e.g. *seann fhear agus bean* 'old man and woman', *seann bhàrdachd agus/is sgeulachdan* 'old poetry and stories'; *bràithrean 's peathraichean aosda* 'old brothers and sisters', *iomad òran aosda 's rann* 'many old songs and rhymes'); just as coordinatives of the adjectives (e.g. *duine aosd no òg* 'old or young person', *an fheadhainn thinn is aosda* 'the old and sick ones') and listings (e.g. *eaglais mhór, aosda* 'an old, big church'). I have counted the genitive phrase *'na shloinn seanachaidh aosda* 'in his old storyteller family', lit. "family of storytellers", with the base word in accordance with similar *seann shliochd rìoghail/bhàrdail* 'an old royal/bardic lineage'.

[4] The book in which it was published contains texts written between 1903 and 1970.

[5] Preference for the plain adjective *aosta* in Lewis is also common, as discussed later, in Section 3.2 (see also 3.4 and 3.5.1).

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I have counted *seann ana-miannan* (pl) (1) together with *seann-mhiann* (1) 'old desire(s)', *comharran* (pl) (1) with *comharradh* (1) 'sign(s)', *cleachdadh* (12) with *cleachdan* (pl) (3) and *cleachdainn* (6) 'custom(s)' (as shown below), *tugha* (1) with *tughadh* (1) 'thatch', and *sgeulachd/sgialachd* (21) with *sgeula/sgiala* (3) 'story' (but not with *sgeul* (11) 'story').[6]

Example 2.

a. *a' gléidheadh nan seann bheusan is nan seann chleachdan* 'preserving the old virtues and old customs/habits'
b. *… nach eil e idir freagarrach no buannachdail a bhith deanamh tàir air na seann nithean 's air na seann bheachdan, 's air na seann chleachdannan …* 'it isn't at all appropriate or profitable to scorn the old things or the old ideas/views, or the old habits …'
c. *… bha e ainmeil leis an eòlas a bha aige air sgeulachdan agus seann chleachdainnean an t-sluaigh.* '… he was famous for the knowledge he had about the stories and old habits of the folk/community.'

On the other hand, I have not counted *gnáth* 'convention, custom, practice' together with *gnàths* 'custom, fashion; nature'. *Aosta* is intensified with *ro* in two cases, which I have included in the statistics: *mnathan ro aosda* 'too/very old women', (*do*) *bhliadhnachan ro-aosda* '(your) too old years' (i.e. 'considerably old age').

I have not counted attributive comparatives (e.g. *gheibh mi lorg air duine nas aosda na sibhse* 'I'll find someone older than yourself') and superlatives (e.g. *an seorsa creag as aosda anns na h-eileanan Breatunnach* 'one of the oldest kinds of rock in the British isles'), nor expressions with *cho sean* (15), *cho aosda/aosta* (common with *ri/'s*) (24; including *cho faillineach aosd* 'so fallible old' (physically), *cho seasrach aosda* 'so steady old', *cha mhòr cho aosda* 'almost as old', *leth cho aosta* 'half as old'), *sean gu leò(i)r* (2), *aosd (a)/aost gu leò(i)r* (10) 'old enough', as these may be regarded as predicative back-references – the two examples of *sean gu leò(i)r* are evidently predicative:

Example 3.

a. *no ni sam bith eile bhiodh sean gu leòir* 'or anything else that would be old enough'
b. *An fheadhainn againn tha sean gu leòr* 'Those of us who are old enough'

Neither have I included *leth(-)sheann duine* (3) 'a middle-aged man' and *searbhanta leth-shean* 'a middle-aged servant' and the expression (*anns na*) *linntean neo-shean* (with prefixed *sean*) '(in the) recent centuries'. I have counted *seann* in *a sheann (seann) chiontan* 'his (her) old sins' and *aosd* in *fear/an fheadhainn aosd-aosd* 'a really old person/the really old ones' only once.

Seann- qualifies a number of compound words and names. In the statistics I counted some of them together with their base-words (i.e. generic), while others separately. Compounds which identify a certain type of their generics have been counted together with their generics (e.g. a particular type of tree, kind of dog, a folksong with a specific theme or an object of a specific material, etc) as well as place names or institutes qualified by *seann-*:

Example 4.

a. *Types:*

sean bhean-uasal 'old noble-woman' (1/73 – 1.4%)

seann-òran seilge 'traditional hunting song' (2/23 – 8.7%)

sheann ghàrradh-cloiche 'old stone-garden' (1/2)

(species) *seann chraoibh sheilich* 'old willow tree' (6), *s. chraoibh dharaich* 'old oak tree' (2), *s. chraoibh ghiubhais* 'old fir tree' (1), *s. chraoibh leamhain* 'old elm tree' (1) (10 compounds out of 16 tokens for *craobh* – 62.5%)

seann chu chaorach 'old sheepdog' (1/4)

(material) *seann chòta-clò* 'old tweed coat' (1/5), *seann seacaidean clò* 'old tweed jackets' (1/6)

seann luibhean talmhainn 'old continental plants' (3/4)

b. *Placenames/institutes:*

seann qualifies the name: e.g. *na seann Choille Albannaich* 'of the old Scottish Forest', *seann eaglais Hogh/Seann Eaglais Hogh Mòir* 'the old church of (Big) Hogh', *an t-seann Chill* 'the old Kirk' */seann Chìll Chatain* 'old Kilchattan'

seann makes part of the name: *Seana Chreig* 'Old Cliff"

I have also counted *seann sia sgillinn* 'old sixpence' (1) as *seann sgillinn* 'old penny' (3), treating *sia sgillinn* 'sixpence' as a compound.

In other compound expressions I have counted the words in two groups: one for simple words and one for compounds (i.e. I counted the compound expressions as one, but separately from the single words they are based on). These contain professions, expressions which identify a less compositional type of the generic, where the specifier precedes the generic (proper compound), or where *seann* qualifies a fixed expression.

Example 5.

a. *Professions:*

bean 'woman; wife' (73) – *seana mhnàth-altruim* 'old nurse', *seann bhean-fhighe* 'old weaveress', *seann bhean-ghlùin* 'old midwife' (3)

fear 'man' (11) – *seann fhear-eòlais* 'old scientist/scholar' (1)

[6] Occurrences are shown in brackets.

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maighstir 'master' (2) – *seana mhaighstir-sgoile* 'old schoolmaster' (1)

b. *Other improper compounds:*

bodach 'old man; fellow' (32) – *a shean bhodaich-truisg* 'old cod-man (voc.)' (1)

àite 'place' (2) – *sheann aitean-adhlaic* 'old resting places', *seann ait'-analach* 'old cemetery' (2)

taigh 'house' (34) – *seann taighean-dubha* 'old black-houses', *seann taigh-solais* 'old lighthouse', *seann taigh-sgoile* 'old schoolhouse', *seann taigh cìobair* 'old "keeper's" (i.e. shepherd's) house', *seann tigh-chearc* 'old hen-house', *seann tigh-còmhnuidh* 'old dwelling', *seann tigh-stad* 'old inn', *seann tighean-aoraidh* 'old chapels' (8)

muc 'pig' (1) – *shean mhuc-bhiorach* 'old bottlenosed dolphin' (1)

dòigh 'way' (25) – *sean dòigh-sgrìobhaidh* 'old writing style', *sheann dòigh-beatha* 'old lifestyle' (2)

sean mhodhanna 'old ethics' (1) *seann mhodh labhairt* 'old manner of speech' (1)

comharradh (1) / *comharran* (1) 'mark, sign' – *seann chomharradh-crìche* (4)/ *s. chomharran-crìche* (12) 'old boundary mark'

c. *Proper compound:*

gnàth 'custom, practice' (1) – *seann gnàth-fhiosachad* 'old common knowledge' (1)

d. *Fixed expression:*

seann linntean 'old centuries' (10) – *Seann Linn na Cloiche/Linn Cloiche* 'Early Stone Age' (5)

I have also counted as one the following compounds: seann charbad-ghiùlain 'old transport carriage' and *seann charbad-cruidh* 'old cattle-carriage' as *carbad* 'carriage' (2), *rùm-cadail* 'bedroom' and *rum-sgoile* 'classroom' as *rùm* 'room' (2), *luchd-àiteachaidh* 'local people', *sheann luchd-eòlais* 'scholars' as *luchd-* 'people' (2) (constructional idioms)[7], *sean Cheann-cinnidh* '(clan's) chief' and *seann cheann-teagaisg* 'headteacher' as *ceann-* 'head, leader' (constructional idioms) (2). (The corpus includes examples with and without a hyphen in both types of compound expressions.)

I did not experience the same problem with the plain adjectives: *sean* does not qualify any compounds in the corpus, while each generic occurs only once with *aosta*, and never outside the compound (often in poetic word combinations such as *a chian chùrs' aost* 'its old distant course' (poetry), *a' chall-airm aost* 'the old army defeat', or in AN compounds: *Oisean nam mìn-chiabhan aosda* 'old tender locks' (poetry), (*gach seòrsa de) àrd-chlachaireachd aosda* '(every sort of) old chief masonry/stone construction').

[7] According to Booij's (2009: 207–211) definition, as a subtype of multi-word expressions, constructional idioms are bound constituents that are productive only in complex words. By analogy with idioms, I call the whole structure a *constructional idiom* and use the expression *constructional element* to describe its constituents. In other words (from the same source) a *constructional idiom* is a partially lexically specified productive pattern.

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b) Statistics

Occurrences of attributive *seann-*, *aosta* and *sean* are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

seann-:

occurrence	number of types
1x	288
2x	79
3x	21
4x	19
5x	14
6x	6
7x	4
8x	5
9x	7
10x	2
11x	3
12x	2
13x	2
14x	1
15x	2
16x	1
17x	1
18x	2
21x	2
23x	3
24x	3
25x	1
28x	1
31x	1
32x	1
34x	2
35x	1
73x	1
149x	1
204x	1
283x	1
305x	1

aosta:

occurrence	number of types
1x	45
2x	6
3x	3
4x	2
5x	2
10x	1

sean:

occurrence	number of types
1x	11
2x	2
3x	1

The average for *seann-* is 5.1232, and the standard deviation 22.7067, which result in the number 27.8299 as the threshold over which examples are worth being studied:[8]

305 – *seanair* 'grandfather'
283 – *seann duine* 'old man/person'
204 – *seanmhair* 'grandmother'
149 – *sean-fhacal* 'proverb, saying'
73 – *seana bhean* 'old woman/wife'
35 – *seann boireannach* 'old woman'

[8] In my discussion I apply the spelling for each type which occurs the most frequently in the sources for convenience.

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34 – *seann taigh(ean)* 'old hous(es)', *seann aois* 'old age'

32 – *seann tìm* 'old time'

31 – *seann bodach* 'old man'

28 – *seann charaid* 'old friend' (including 2 examples of *seann bhan-charaid~bhanacharaid* 'old female friend')

The average for *aosta* is 1.5932 with a standard deviation of 1.4743, thus relevant examples are above the occurrence 3.0675:

10 – *duine aosda* 'old man'

5 – *feadhainn aosda* 'old ones', *mnathan aosda* 'old women/wives'

4 – *boireannach aosta* 'old woman', *cànain aosta* 'old languages'

(3 – *òran aosda* 'old song', *làithean aosta* 'old days', *craobh aosda* 'old tree')

(There are not sufficient examples for *sean* to carry out statistics on it.)

The most relevant collocates are associated with people in both variations (*duine*, *bean*, *boireannach*), which might indicate the compoundhood of those with preposed *seann-*. *Seanair* 'grandfather' and *seanmhair* 'grandmother' are obvious compounds (called historical compounds in the literature)[9], also attested in the corpus as *sean-athair/sean(n)-mhàthair* (close compounds)[10]. They stand with preposed *seann-* even in the phrasal sense 'old father/mother', although written without hyphen. Apart from human examples *seann-* forms part of the expressions *seanfhacal* 'proverb, saying' and *seann aois* 'old age' (*seana fhacal* can occasionally mean 'old word' in the literal sense), and the time expression *seann tìm* 'old time' (mainly in the form *anns an t-seann tìm*, just like *aimsir* in *anns an t-seann aimsir* 'in the old time(s)'). *Seann-taigh* usually refers to traditional houses in the Western Isles as opposed to *taigh aosta* 'an old house' (as it is evident in examples like *seann taighean-dubha* 'old black-houses', *seanna thigh dhubh* 'an old blackhouse', *seann tigh Tirisdeach* 'an old Tiree house', *seann taighean tughaidh* 'old thatched houses'). The quality of traditionality can also be observed in *seann òran* 'folksong' and *seann sgeulachd* 'old story'. The most frequent tokens for *aosta* include the pronominal expression *feadhainn* 'ones', and *cànan aosta* 'old language', both of which, however, occur frequently with *seann-* as well.

Seann-, with its great number of tokens, is highly productive, appearing with all sorts of words, while *aosta* (occurring much less frequently) does not occur with any noun in significant numbers, which cannot be found also with *seann-*. 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 (see below).

Example 6.

a. *Seann auntie* 'old auntie'
b. *Seann-bhasagails/sean bhaisagal* 'old bicycle'
c. *Seann teipichean* 'old tapes'
d. *Seann sporangia* 'ancient sporangia (sponges)' (biological category)
e. *Seann phick-up* 'old pick-up'
f. *Seann bitch* 'old bitch'
g. *Seann fhactaraidh* 'old factory'
h. *Seann mhicroscope* 'old microscope'
i. *Seann Statistical Account (of Scotland)* (also in Gaelic as *Sean Chunntas Staitistigeil*) 'old Statistical Account'
j. *Seann Science notebooks* 'old Science notebooks'

Just as in the case of other preposed adjectives, verbal nouns are much rarer. All of these are qualified by *seann-* (e.g. *gach sean sgrìobhadh, is sean ràdh* 'all old writing and old saying'; *seann iasgach* 'old fishing/way of fishing'). *Seann-* also makes part of compound adjectives like *sean(n)-fhasanta* 'old-fashioned' (14), *sean-ghnàthach* 'of old customs, conventional' (1), *sean-fhaclach* (1) (among a list of adjectives in a poem: *Duine beag baganta,* […] *Sean-fhaclach, geur-fhaclach,/ Iomraideach, éibhinn;* … 'A small stylish man […] old-worded, sharp-worded, well-known, funny; …'), and *seann-aimsireil* 'of old times' (4), all of which have nominal counterparts (*seann fhasan* 'old fashion/style' (3), *sean ghnàthan* (1)/*seann ghnàths(an)* 'old custom(s)' (3), *sean-fhacal/seanfhacal* 'proverb, saying' (149), *seann aimsir* 'old time' (18)). All of these appear to be simple adjectival phrases, even *sean fhacal* 'old word' in this case (note that a hyphen is normally present in the adjectives but missing in the nouns, the adjectives being 'parasynthetic compounds')[11].

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 in Section 3.4). *Aosta* appears to be more common in sources from the early 20th century, and from Lewis in later sources. It tends to refer simply to age in most examples; however, its factuality is not so obvious in every case. In 4 sources (*Deireadh an Fhoghair* by

[9] Words that were once made up of two words but have ceased to be perceived as compounds – these words typically have initial (or regular) stress and the vowels in the second element are liable to be obscured.

[10] Specifier–generic compounds in which primary stress is initial, yet the second element bears secondary stress, thus not reduced phonologically (de Búrca 1958: 74–75).

[11] 'Parasynthetic compounds' are formed by a non-compound complex base with a derivational affix (e.g. *green-eyed*) (Scalise and Bisetto 2009: 53).

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Tormod Caimbeul, and three novels by Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn – both authors are from Lewis) *aosta* tends to be used in a poetic way (see examples below), while *seann-* is sometimes attached to words referring to concrete nouns, objects, like *sean bhòrd* 'old table' or *sean bhròg*an 'old shoes'.) In other sources where *aosta* can be found in a more figurative sense, *seann-* mainly refers to people or true compounds, or other more conventional connotations (representing old types of things, such as *seann taigh* 'old [traditional] house', *seann thobhta* 'old ruin', *seann tughadh* 'old thatching', *sean airgead* 'old money'). Also *sean chainnt*, *sean chànain* 'old speech, old languages' appears in a poem. In these sources *aosta* may refer to age in a figurative, partitive sense (i.e. the age of a body part referring to the age of the person; e.g. *cnàmhan aosda* 'old bones'), or to buildings or institutes that have been existed for a while (*cladh aosda Chille Chòmhghain* 'the old graveyard of Kilchoan', *'na shloinn seanchaidh aosda* 'in his old storyteller family'). *Deireadh an Fhoghair* abounds in poetic references to natural constructions: *fuam aosd na mara* 'the old sound of the sea', *na creagan aosd ud* 'those old rocks', *leacan aosd a' chladaich* 'the old stones of the shore', as well as with figurative references to age: *shùilean aosd(a)* 'old eyes', *ceann aosd (a sheanmhair)* 'old head (of his grandmother)'. Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn's novels also contain abstract or conceptual uses of *aosta*: *…na h-uillt a' ruith chun a' chuain 's ag innse sgialachdan aosda do'n oidhche* 'the streams running to the sea and telling old stories to the night'; *eòlas aosd nam boireannach* 'the old knowledge of (the) women'; *a' bhréig aosd'* 'the old lie'; just like some poems from the first half of the 20th century: *do bhliadhnachan ro-aosda* 'your too old years' (referring to age); *oighreachd aosd' a shinnsear* 'his ancestor's/forefather's old heritage'; *làithean aosta/aosd(a)* 'past days'. In all cases *aosta* either refers to age, or something that has existed for a long while – additionally, it may be connected with wisdom.

Almost all adverbs qualifying *aosta/aosda* (*buileach* 'completely', *anabarrach* 'exceptionally/ extraordinarily', *uabhasach* 'awfully, terribly', *(gu) math* 'quite', *rudeigin* 'somewhat', *car* 'a bit'; *aosda tuilleadh* 'extra old') can be found in predicative/adverbial sense – just as *ro(-)aosd(a)* 'too old' (24 altogether, including *ro(-)aosd tuilleadh* 'really too old, far too old', *beagan ro aosda* 'a bit too old' and *fada ro aosd'* 'far too old' for instance). 2 tokens of *ro(-)aosda* may be understood as attributive: *de shlàinte air mnathan ro aosda* 'of health on too old women'; *gun do bhliadhnachan ro-aosda/ A chrathadh dhiot gu h-ealamh* 'shaking your too old years off you quickly'. However, the fact that both occur in poems, confirms that *ro* 'too' should normally be considered similar to *cho* 'so': as a predicative back-reference. *Fìor*, just as in the case of other preposed adjectives, tends to accompany *seann-* (apart from the example *fìor àite aosda* 'a really old place').

Example 7.

a. *na fìor shean Ghàidheil* 'the really old (i.e. ancient/early) Gaels'
'na fhìor sheann(-)duine (liath) "in his really old (grey) man" (i.e. 'as a really old [grey-haired] man')
fìor sheann mhnathan 'really old women'
air an/an fhìor sheann dòigh (Ghàidhealaich) 'in the/a really old (Gael) way'
fìor sheann leigheas 'really old cure/remedy'
fìor sheann luinneag an orain aca 'the real/really old melody of their song'

b. *anns an fhìor-sheann aimsir* 'in (the) prehistoric time(s)'
fhior-sheann Talaimh/na fior-sheann Talmhainn '(of the) prehistoric Earth'
de fhìor-sheann lus talmhainn 'of a prehistoric continental plant'
fìor-sheann-Ch[r]uimreach 'Proto Welsh' (i.e. Brythonic)

Written with a hyphen, it exhibits a special meaning 'ancient' or 'prehistoric' (see Example 7b). The rest of the adverbs can be encountered in predicative sentences (*uamhasach sean*, *uabhasach fhéin* (*sean*) 'terribly old', *gu math sean* 'quite old', *ro shean* 'too old'); *cho* is connected to an adjective in *cho seann fhasanta* 'so old-fashioned'.

We can encounter various combinations of *seann-* with other preposed adjectives: in the case of *mo dheagh shean charaid* 'my good old friend' this may indicate the compoundhood of *sean charaid* 'old friend', similar to *deagh sheanmhair* 'good grandmother'; on the other hand, in *ann an deagh sheann aois* 'in good old age', *deagh* functions as an intensifier. *Corra-* combines with *seann-* in *corra sheann dàn* 'an occasional old poem' and *corra shean crabhcan* 'an occasional old hook'. *Seann-* itself may function as an intensifier before the preposed adjective *droch-*: *seann droch shaoghal* 'bad old world', *seann droch Nàmh* 'bad old Enemy'. This function is also present in *seachd seann sgith* 'sick and tired'. *Aosta* may show a similar negative connotation as *seann-* when combined with *dorch*: *fàileadh dorch aosd* 'old dark smell'. The two adjectives can also combine with each other, as in *seann-daoine aosda* 'old old people' and *an t-seann mhnaoi aosd* 'the old old woman (dat.)'. Furthermore, *seann-* shows a special meaning in *Seann Linn na Cloiche/Seann Linn Cloiche* (meaning '*Early* Stone Age', which sense of *seann-* is intensified in the compound *fìor-shean* 'ancient, prehistoric'), and it has even a more abstract meaning in *seann uisg* 'stagnant water' (with a similar negative connotation as *aosd* shows in *fàileadh dorch aosd*): *Bha fàileadh bho chòt' an dàrna fear mar seann uisg.* 'The smell of (lit. "from") the second man's coat was like stagnant water.'

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c) Seann-/sean/aosta in the context of other adjectives

As may be expected, coordinatives of *seann-*, *aosta* and *sean* are common with words such as *òg*, *ùr*, *nuadh* (see examples below).

Example 8.

a. *nithean nuadha agus sean* 'old and new things/matters'
b. *sunnd sean is òg* 'old and young joy'
c. *càirdean sean is òg* 'old and young relatives (/friends)'
d. *gach cleachdadh ùr is sean* 'every old and new custom'
e. *iomadh rud ùr is aosda* 'many old and new things'
f. *seiceidean ùra is seann bhròg*an 'new jackets and old shoes'
g. *an t-seann té 's an té ùr* 'the old female and the young female'
h. *seann-bhoireannach agus caileag òg* 'old woman and young girl'
i. *Seann Ian agus Ian Óg* 'Old Ian and Young Ian' (i.e. senior and junior)
j. *Seann Isbeil agus na brogachanan òga* 'Old Isabel and the sturdy little boys'

This contrast is often observable in the context (in the last three examples youth is only implied):

Example 9.

a. *Geug ùr air craoibh aosd.* 'A new branch on an old tree.'
b. *bean òg aig seann duine* 'the old man's young wife'
c. *a' chàraid òg (no is dòcha a' chàraid shean)* 'the young couple (or perhaps the old couple)'
d. *seann nithean an éideadh nuadh* 'old things in new clothes'
e. *bualadh* […] *air seann teudan ann an dòigh ùr* 'striking/plucking […] at old strings in a new way'
f. (*Dà rud nach còir a bhith falamh:*) *goile an t-seann duine agus làmh an leanaibh bhig* '(Two things that shouldn't be empty:) the stomach of an (lit. "the") old man and the hand of a (lit. "the") small child'
g. (*chum Annag*) *an t-seann làimh mhìn 'n a làmhan beaga fhéin* 'Annag held the dainty old hand in her own small hands'
h. (*Sgreadail*) *mhnathan aosd' agus ghruagach* '(Screaming of) old women/wives and maids'

In one example prefixed adjectives are coordinated in a similar manner (which might indicate that *sean chailleach* 'old hag' should be treated as a compound): *geàrr no sean chailleach* "short and old lady", i.e. 'young and old woman'. Besides coordinating opposite adjectives, the most frequent adjectives accompanying *seann-* and *aosta* are *còir* 'kind' and *liath* 'grey'. While *còir* is frequent with words connotating people, *liath* usually accompanies *seann-*:

Example 10.

a. *seann bhrògan rocach liath* 'grey, wrinkled old shoes'
b. *seann duine mòr, liath* 'grey, big old man'
c. *'na fhior sheann duine liath* "in his really old, grey man"
d. *na seann sùilean liathghorm* 'in her old greyish-blue eyes'
e. *cuid aosda, liath dhiubh* 'some grey, old ones of them'

The last example proves that the qualifier of *cuid* 'some' should be the plain adjective. *Còir* 'kind' also tends to accompany *seann-*. Naturally, adjectives which refer to old age, weakness and illness are also frequently present in the context of *seann-* and *aosta*. *Bochd* 'sick; poor' is also common with *seann-* (*a' bheairt aosd is bochd* 'the old and poor instrument' is the only token with *aosta*, although there is one with the plain adjective *sean* as well: *bho bhodach sean* 'from a sick old man').

Example 11.

a. *seann bhean chòir* 'a kind old woman', *seann bhoireannach còir* 'a kind old woman'
b. *seann chailleach bheag bhochd* 'a small poorly old woman', *an seann duine bochd!* 'the poor old man!'

The preposed adjective *seann-* may be single or repeated in coordinations:

Example 12.

Single:

a. *seann bodach is boireannach* 'an old man and woman'
b. *seann eòlas is ealain* 'old knowledge and arts'
c. *seann bhàrdachd agus/is sgeulachdan* 'old poetry and stories'
d. *seann phort no taladh* 'an old tune or lullaby'
e. *sean eachdraidh agus beul-aithris na dùthcha* 'the country's old history and oral tradition' *(not repeated) – sean eachdraidh agus seann bheul aithris* 'old history and old oral tradition' *(repeated)*

Repeated:

a. *air na seann nithean, air na seann bheachdan, 's air na seann chleachdannan* 'on the old things, on the old views, and on the old customs'
b. *na seann rudan agus na seann dòighean* 'the old things and the old ways'
c. *sean dàn no sean sgeul* 'an old poem or old story'
d. *seann phaipearan agus seann leabhraichean* 'old papers and old books'
e. *seann daoine 's seann mhnathan* 'old men and old women'
f. *seann mhaighdean, seann fhleasgach agus seann bhantrach* 'an old-maid, an old bachelor and an old widow'

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Words referring to old customs or manners (like Example f) are coordinated as full phrases in the corpus, i.e. they do not tend to drop *seann-* before the second noun (cf *mu sheann nosan no seann chleachdaidhean* 'about old traditions or old practices' and *nan seann bheusan is nan seann chleachdan* 'of the old morals and of the old customs').

d) Distribution of seann- and aosta

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. Interestingly, in the case of *duine*, *seann-* is more frequent in plural, whereas *aosta* mostly qualifies plural *mnathan* 'women/wives', whereas only 10 plural examples can be encountered with *seann-* out of 73 tokens for *bean* 'woman/wife'. (Naturally, the intensifier *ro* occurs together with *aosda* in *mnathan ro aosda* 'too/very old women', whereas *fìor* accompanies *seann-*, even in plural: *fìor sheann mhnathan* 'really old women/wives'.) 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 general statements like *Sgreadail mhnathan aosd' agus ghruagach* 'Screaming of old women/wives and maids'. One of the sources from Uist contains many examples with *seann-* for all *duine*, *bean* and *boireannach* – which seems to underlie my assumption that *seann-* is the preferred form in this dialect. There are also many tokens from the oral tradition of Easter Ross for *seann boireannach* 'old woman' and *seann bodach* 'old man' (and a few for *seann duine* 'old man/person'). *Boireannach aosta* 'old woman' can be encountered once in the notes; however, the informants always use *seann boireannach* (lenited in one or two cases). Attributive *sean* appears in a poem, coordinated with *òg*: *mnathan òg' is sean* 'young and old women/wives'.

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.

Another fact that could confirm the less emphatic, more trivial sense of *seann-* (included in the meaning of a compound) is that two other human denotations, *bodach* 'old man' and *cailleach* 'old woman, hag', which inherently contain the meaning of old age (at least synchronically), are considerably frequent with *seann-* themselves (*seann bodach* 31*, seann chailleach* 23). On the other hand, they show hardly any examples with plain adjectives (exceptions are *bodach* with *sean* (*bho bhodach sean bochd* 'from a sick old man'), and *cailleach* with *aosda* in a poem (*d' chaillich aosda chrùbte* 'your bent old hag (dat.)'), both appearing together with other adjectives in descriptions.

There are three further cases encountered with both types of adjectives which could be of interest, the first of these is a time expression, the other two are the pronominal expressions *tè* 'one (fem.)' and *feadhainn* 'ones'. As mentioned above, *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 *cuimhne* '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* besides 9 tokens for *seann té* (although 3 times in the same poem and further 2 in 2 other poems from the same source). *Seann té* appears to be related to the more informal language of the storytelling register (3 tokens appearing in narratives, autobiographies). Another possible explanation for the choice for *seann-* is related to dialects, as the source of poetry containing 5 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 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.

Similarly, in the case of *feadhainn* (18 with *seann-*, 5 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', *bròg*an 'shoes'), i.e. it represents a rather pronominal sense (as opposed to *seann té*, which happened to serve as a reference to an inanimate feminine noun in only one example). *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

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sean shaighdear 'veteran' below). 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.

e) Compounds and fixed expressions

In this section I discuss possible examples of compounds and other fixed expressions containing *seann-*. In many cases these nouns cannot be found with *aosta*, or only in a restrictive number, despite expectations (in that *aosta* is used when the collocate with *seann-* exhibits a special meaning). Nor are there any counterparts with *aosta* for the historic compounds *seanair* 'grandfather' and *seanmhair* 'grandmother' (as already discussed in Section 3.2). They can also be encountered in the extended forms *sinn/sìnseanair* or *si/sìn/sin(n)/sean(n)-seanair* 'great-grandfather', *sinn/sìn (n)-seanmhair* or *sinn-seana-mhàthair* 'great-grandmother', or *sean-sean-sean-seanair* 'great-great-great-grandfather' and *sinn-seann-sheanmhair* 'great-great-grandmother'. An alternative for *sinn-seanair* is qualified by the intensifier *dubh* (lit. "black"): *dubh-sheanair* (2) 'great-grandfather'.

The words for 'old-maid' and 'bachelor' follow the same pattern in Gaelic: *seann mhaighdean/sean-mhaighdean/seana(-)mhaighdean* (6) or *sean(n) nighean* (7) for 'old-maid' (lit. "old maid" or "old girl") and *seana-ghille/seann ghille* (5) (lit. "old boy") for 'bachelor'. The corpus suggests that *sean(n) nighean* is preferred in Lewis, and *seann mhaighdean* in other dialects. There are two synonyms for *seann ghille*, namely *fleasgach* and the loan word *baidsealair*, often qualified by the adjective 'old' in the corpus themselves: *seann fhleasgach*, *fleasgach aosta* and *baidsealair aost* (the latter is the only loan word with *aosta*, it occurs only once in the corpus – in a present-day source from Lewis, among a couple of examples for the use of *dona* and *math*)[12]. With the words *fleasgach* and *baidsealair*, *seann-* may function only as a confirmation – a kind of redundancy, cf the example *seann mhaighdean, seann fhleasgach agus seann bhantrach* 'an old maid, old bachelor and old widow', where it could be argued whether *seann* is an important qualifier of *fleasgach* 'bachelor' and *bantrach* 'widow', which examples may inherently (though not necessarily) involve the quality of oldness, or they only follow a similar pattern to *seann mhaighdean* 'old maid' (which would be *seann sheann mhaighdean* if consistency were retained in meaning).

i. *Traditionality*

Seann sgeul (11)/ *seann sgeulachd* (21)/ *seann sgeula* (3) and *seann eachdraidh* (15) share the meaning 'old/traditional story'; however, both have a more individual sense in some cases: *seann sgeul/sgeulachd* may refer to a story which is known by everyone in a community, similar to folktales or legends, while *seann eachdraidh* may be associated with the history of something or somebody in 4 or 5 tokens. In the 3 plural examples, *sean(n) eachdraidhean* refer to 'old stories' literally, just as *sgialachdan aosda*. This only example with the plain adjective appears in an abstract context from Lewis, in a source in which the use of similar poetic expressions with *aosta* is not unusual at all (see discussion in Section 3.2).

A very similar case to *seann sgeulachd* is *seann òran* ('folksong/traditional song') (23) in that both refer to traditional mental products (just like *sean-fhacal* 'proverb' and *seann eòlas* 'lore' below), written with a hyphen in academic titles: *Seann-òrain Innse-Gall* for *'Hebridean Folksongs'*, and *Seann-òran Seilge* 'traditional hunting song' in the *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*). Another similarity, besides the sense of traditionality, is the use of the plain adjective. *Òran aosda* (3) may exhibit a more literal meaning, 'old song' (once *òran Gàidhlig aosda* 'old Gaelic song', in a poem); however, again it appears in a poetic context from the same Lewis source as referred to in the previous section (in which plain adjectives are typical), and in early poems (from South Uist).

Other possible compounds referring to the common heritage of a community include *sean-fhacal*, *seann taigh* and *seann eòlas*. Most tokens of *sean (-) fhacal* have the meaning 'proverb, saying', even when written in two words (*seana fhacal/sean(n) fhacal*) (according to Kenneth MacLeod (in one of the sources) *gnàthfhacal*, also written as *gnàth-fhacal* or *gnàth-fhocal*, has the same meaning). Only in one token is it to be understood in the literal sense 'old word' (see below). The corpus does not contain any examples with the plain adjective (**facal aosta/sean*), moreover, there is one token further qualified by the preposed adjective, meaning 'old proverb': *an t-seana t-seanfhacail* [sic].

Example 13.

> *… tha cuid mar sin de 'n bheachd gu bheil a' facal "draoidh" air a thoirt bho "dru", seann fhacal airson darach, …* '… some then are of the opinion that the word "draoidh" (= 'druid') is taken from "dru", an old word for *darach* (= 'oak'), …'

[12] plain adjectives for 'bad' and 'good', respectively

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In the case of *eòlas* 'knowledge', both *seann eòlas* (9) and *eòlas aosd (nam boireannach)* (2; repetition) 'old knowledge (of [the] women)' have a meaning related to a common, general knowledge, or lore, although *aosd* appears in a more poetic usage from Lewis (see similar examples above – as well as in Section 3.2), whereas the one token for *seann-* from Lewis refers to a more tangible meaning (Example 14a) 'old knowledge and arts', or it appears in the expression *a shean(n) eòla(i)s* 'that he had known long ago' (Example 14b). *Seann eòlas* may be associated with a traditional sense of knowledge, general wisdom, whereas *eòlas aosd* may be related to a less specific and more abstract, less acquirable knowledge.

Example 14.

a. *Cha robh càil de'n t-seann eòlas is ealain a dh' àlaich a measg ar sìnnsirean a-nuas troimh na linntean, …* 'There isn't anything of the old knowledge and art that bred down among our forefathers through the centuries, …'
b. *Thainig an Caiptean dhachaidh gu clachan a sheann eòlais.* 'The Captain came home to the village that he had known long ago (lit. "the village of his old knowledge").'

Seann taighean (34) refers to 'traditional houses' or 'black-houses' (as I have already mentioned in Section 3.2) (see Example 15a below). Alternatively, in some poems, it may mean a house where somebody used to live (see Example 15b). The only token with plain adjective *an tigh aosda ud* (from Lewis again) may literally mean '(that) old house' (where the quality of oldness is important). However, since it occurs in a context in which the same house has already been referred to as *seana thigh*, it might serve as a variational device to avoid repetition.

Example 15.

a. *Cha charaicheadh 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.'

ii. *Reference to the past*

In two expressions *seann-* refers to earlier time, having the sense 'former': *seann saighdear* 'veteran' (6) and probably also *sean(n) leannan* 'former lover/sweetheart' (5). *Sean (n) leannan* occurs in early 20th century texts from Mull and Jura. Regarding *seann s (h) aighdear*, it would be worth checking whether *seann-* may simply refer to age, giving the literal meaning 'old soldier', or, rather that would be expressed by the plain adjective as in *saighdear aosta*. Similarly, I have not found any plain counterparts for *seann leannan* (although there are no tokens from Lewis for either of these expressions).

iii. *A fixed expression and an exocentric compound*

Seana(-)mhaide (8), although not a compound, in 7 out of 8 examples refers to a proverb (where it has the literal meaning 'old stick'): *An car a bha san t-seana mhaide 's duilich a thoirt às.* 'The twist in the old stick is difficult to take out.' (i.e. it is difficult to change ingrained traits, attitudes) (p. 158 in *Saoghal Bana-mhairiche*, ed. by Seòsamh Watson). However, there are no tokens with a plain adjective. Finally, *seann triubhas* (literally meaning "old trews") is the name of a traditional Highland dance, and it refers to the title of the tune it is danced to (exocentric compound)[13].

f) Lenition after seann

Most dental consonants remain unlenited after the dental ending of *seann-* – lenited examples are from Lewis in the first place. In *saoghal* (14) 'world', *slighe* (1) 'way' and in the phrase *an t-seana t-seanfhacail* (1) 'the old proverb', /s/ may change to /t/ in dative and genitive cases at least after the definite article and *seann-* – most of these examples are from Skye, one is from Lewis, found in autobiographies or narratives (storytelling register). Thomas Moffat Murchison refers to it as intrusive /t/ in the preface to *Sgrìobhaidhean Choinnich MhicLeòid* (one of the sources) (examples are shown in Example 16b below). Most stops are unlenited in the source from Easter Ross (*Saoghal Bana-mhairiche*). *Seann far-ainm* 'old nickname/by-name' (where *seann* qualifies a compound) and *seann fear* 'old man' (from Easter Ross) are examples for unlenited /f/ (*an t-sean[n] fheadhainn* 'the old ones' is always lenited, which resistance to change may imply that it is a fixed expression). Unlenited /m/ occurs only in the name *sean Màiri Anna Dhòmhnallach* (there is another example for an unlenited name in Example 16d). (In coordinatives only the initial of the first base noun is lenited: e.g. *seann dhaoine agus boireannaich* 'old men and women', *seann fhear agus bean* 'an old man and woman'.)

There is no obvious reason why there are both lenited and unlenited tokens in most sources, often even in the same words; i.e. there seems to be no consistency in the application of lenition. In certain cases it appears to depend on number (*seann duine* 'an old person/man' vs *seann dhaoine* 'old men/people'), or on case (nominative: *seann thaigh-seinnse* 'an old tavern' – genitive: *air beulaibh an t-seann taighe* 'in front of the old house', *dorus an t-seann taighe* 'the door of the old house'; nominative: *na seann shaighdearan* 'the veterans' – dative: *o na seann saighdearan* 'from the

[13] "[t] he compound implies some referent which is not directly referred to by one of its constituents" (Kastovsky 2009: 332)

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veterans'). Neither of these explanations, however, is sufficiently supported in all – or any – sources. /s/ may remain unlenited in a loan word, and lenited in other cases (cf *na seann Science notebooks* 'the old Science notebooks', *seann seacaid* 'old jacket' – *anns an t-seann Sheòmar-Leughaidh* 'in the old Reading Room' from the same source) (/s/ tends to be unlenited in loan words, such as *seann-sead* 'old shed', *seann-seileir* 'old cellar' or *seann seacaid* 'old jacket' in several sources). *Seanair* and *seanmhair* in most cases stay unlenited after additional prefixes of *seann/sinn* etc (i.e. in words like 'great-grandfather' or 'great-great-great-grandfather' – cf *shean-shean-shean-seanair*). There is a sole lenited token *shean-shean-shean-sheanair* out of 26 examples.

Example 16.

a. *unlenited dentals:*

/d/ *sean(n) dòigh*, *sean(n) dachaidh*, *seann dannsa*, *seann dealbhan*, *seann diabhal*, *seann dùthaich*, *seann dreach thabhartach*, *seann Dotair Ros*, *seann dongarees*, *seann droch Nàmh/air an seann droch shaoghal sin*

/t/ *sean Talmhainn*, *seann taidhrean càr*, *seann tobhta*, *seann togalaichean*, *seann tughadh*, *seann teaghlach*, *Seann Tiomnadh*, *seann teudan*, *seann teipichean cèire*, *seann-triubhas*, *seann trainnse*

/s/ *seann saoghal*, *seann-seanair*, *seann seanchaidhean*, *seann seòladair*, *seann sìogaidh*, *seann sùilean*, *seann sligean tomhais*, *seann sluagh*, *seann sia sgillinn*, *seann Seumas*;

b. /s/ > [t] (intrusive /t/):
(s)an t-seann t-saogha(i)l, *às an t-seann t-slighe*

c. *lenited dentals:*
/d/ > [ɣ] *seann dhuine/dhaoine*, *seann dhachaigh*
/t/ > [h] *seann thaigh*, *seann thobhta*, *seann thogalach*, *seann thrainnsichean*

d. *unlenited stops:*
/p/ *seann pioctairean*
/b/ *seann beul-aithris*, *seann bitch*, *seann bòtan*, *seann boireannach*, *seann bodach*
/c/ *seann ciopair*, *seann cruibhean*, *sean Caimbeul*
/g/ *seann gobhar*

From Example (Example 16d) *seann beul-aithris* 'old oral tradition' (compound) and *sean Caimbeul* (name) are not from Easter Ross, the geographic origin of (*na*) *seann cruibhean* '(the) old horseshoes' is uncertain, all the other unlenited stops are from Easter Ross (at least 34 tokens, most of which are unlenited /b/), just as unlenited /f/ in *seann fear* 'old man'. 'Intrusive /t/' can be considered as *homorganic defricativisation*.

IV. Interviews with Native Speakers

The corpus study has revealed many interesting patterns. However, many of these are suggestive rather than absolutely certain, and as such, require further investigations. One way to gain more insight into doubtful observations is to seek native speakers' opinion on the subject. Each interview lasted for 30 or 40 minutes, and the test included 7 exercises (referred to as sections (§) in the rest of the chapter) altogether, 3 of which are relevant for this paper, aimed at exploring the meaning and use of preposed and plain adjectives. The exercises were mainly translations, which are described in more details in the following paragraphs.

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 2 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. *old sadness*).

The role of contrast in the use of plain adjective *aosta* (or *sean*) was examined with the following sentences (also in §2 and §4):

Example 17.

a. *Gaelic is an old language as it stayed unchanged for centuries.* (age)
This song was written in the old language. (period of use)
The ancient language of the Greek wasn't an old language at that time.
(both – period of use vs age)

b. *I've got an old friend from primary school.* (existence of friendship)
I've got young friends and old friends. (age – used together with opposite)

I also intended to check if my assumption about the poetic connotation of *aosta* was right with the following sentence in §2: *The night whispered old words from the wood.*

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). I also asked for the phrase *true, old man* in one sentence with *seann-saighdear* 'veteran' (lit. "old soldier").

a) Informants

I interviewed 10 informants: 6 native speakers[14] from Lewis (1L, 3L, 5L, 6L, 11L, 12L), 1 from Harris

[14] I consider someone a Gaelic native speaker if their first language was Gaelic.

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(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:

20-30: 1 (Lewis) 1L

30-40: 1 (South Uist) 4U

40-50: 1 (Lewis) 3L

50-60: 1 (Harris) 10H

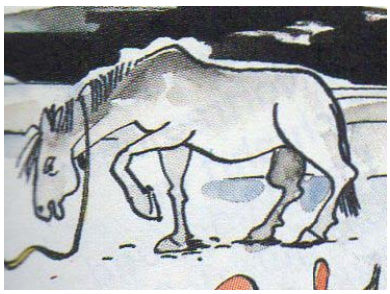
60-70: 4 (1 from South Uist, 3 from Lewis) 2U; 6L, 11L, 12L

70-80: 2 (1 from South Uist, 1 from Lewis) 7U; 5L

(12L tends to use only the plain adjective *aost'* in adjectival phrases, never the preposed adjective *seann-*.)

b) Results of the interviews

Similar to the corpus study, *seann-* has proved over-productive in both dialects, with Lewis speakers saying *aosta* 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)). 10H from Harris also uses both plain adjectives (*sean* and *aosta*) for 'old', whereas 4U (South Uist) uses only *sean*, to occasionally mark distinction with the preposed adjective *seann-*. Among Lewis speakers *aosta* was occasionally used to mark the age of a person 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)).



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).

We can see 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 within §3: 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 I have attested the opposite in sentences expressing contrast between the plain adjective *math* for 'good' and the preposed adjective *droch-* for 'bad'. This means that the above word choice marks the age reference. Two informants from South Uist (2U, 4U) and 6L applied stress to make the distinction more obvious: *ˈseann-ˌcharaidean ~ ˈseann-ˈcharaidean* (but *ˌseann-ˈcharaid* in the first sentence).

In the discussion of the corpus study I commented on the *poetic use of aosta* (see Section 3.2). In the interviews I used the following sentence to check my assumption: *The night whispered old words from the wood.* I used references to nature as in the examples from the corpus and a word combination which has a specific, fixed meaning with *seann-* (*seann fhacail* 'old words', or *seann-fhacail* 'proverbs'). However, none of my informants changed this phrase in the sentence (certainly apart from 12L who did use *faclan aost'*), which they naturally found rather strange. They all translated it as *seann facail ~ sean(n) fhacail ~ seann fhocail ~ sean(n) fhaclan*. (4U misunderstood the phrase.) I have to conclude that register might not be the clue for the use of *aosta* in a poetic sense. Before introducing an alternative explanation (in Section 4.2.1 below), I need to remark on the distinction of the two plain adjectives, *sean* and *aosta*.

Two informants commented on this subject. 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'

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(6L) (although 6L does not always distinguish between preposed and plain adjectives).

In the discussion of the corpus study I pointed out the high productivity of the preposed adjective *seann-*, and suggested that the plain adjectives start playing a role in the language when a *contrast* is evoked (see Section 3.4). To test this assumption I used two senses of 'old language' distributed between §3 and §6: one sentence referred to an older form of a language, the other to the age of a language. The third sentence contained both meanings. In the first two sentences all informants used *seann-*, apart from 6L (who translated *cànan aosta* as 'old language' in the sentence where it referred to age). In the sentence with the double phrase, stress made the difference for this speaker: *Cha robh ˌseann-ˈchànan na Greugaich na ˈsheann ˈchànan aig an àm.* (i.e. The old language wasn't *really* an old language.) (and since it is placed in focus, the speaker chose the preposed adjective in this case). At first 4U did the same, but subsequently this informant changed the sentence to make the distinction. 7U used the word *idir* 'at all' to emphasise the contrast: *Chan e ˌseann-ˈchànan idir a bha 'san t-ˈseann ˈchànan Greugach aig an àm sin.* "The old language of the Greek wasn't an old language at all at that time." 1L was the only informant who showed the expected result: this speaker used *cànan aost'* for age in the double sentence, and only there. 2U made the distinction as well, but translated 'ancient language' as *cànan aosta*, i.e. distinguished between the words 'old' (*seann-*) and 'really old' (i.e. 'ancient') (*aosta*) (see above, about the difference between *sean* and *aosta* for 2U). The other South Uist speaker (4U), who does not use *aosta* at all, chose *cànan shean* for 'ancient language', although was not certain about the sentence. (The same speaker made the distinction between *seann-duine* 'veteran' and *fìor dhuine sean* 'a true old man' in the sentence *He's not a veteran, he's a true old man.* (This speaker normally does not say *sean*.))

Although 11L used the preposed adjective in all four cases, a very interesting phonological pattern appears to have emerged in the answers: it might as well be a coincidence but the speaker used *sean-chànan* ([ʃɛn]) for a language that is old (age) and *seann-chànan* ([ʃaʊN]) for the earlier form of a language on both occasions. Table 4 summarises the relevant answers (any emphasis [stressed constituent] written in bold):

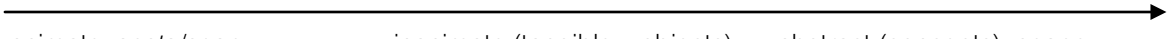
Table 4

	age	form	form	age
1L	*sean-*	*seann-*	*sean-*	*aost'*
2U	*seann-*	*seann-*	*aosta*	*seann-*
4U	*seann-*	*seann-*	*seann-/sean*	***seann-****/seann-*
11L	*sean-*	*seann-*	*seann-*	*sean-*
6L	*aost'*	*seann-*	*seann-*	***seann-***
7U	*seann-*	*sean-*	***seann-***	*seann-... idir*

i. *More on the distribution of seann- and attributive aosta/sean*

One of the major impacts of the interviews is clarifying the distribution of the adjectives meaning 'old' (i.e. preposed *seann-* and the plain adjectives *sean* and *aosta*). In this section more reflections are made on these words.

The meaning [being around for a long time] and actual age are very close meanings, which may be a possible reason for the spreading (and 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:



These meanings tend to merge (they are not clearly distinctive), which makes *seann-* spread in all meanings (living organisms have *age* in its more everyday sense (biological age), whereas old ideas, old customs, etc draw in extra connotations).

Aosta and poetry:

Attributive *aosta* and *sean* are the typical adjectives to indicate biological age, additionally, *aosta* may entitle respect. As *seann-* is so wide-spread, and for abstract nouns, in particular, the normal qualifier is the preposed adjective, *aosta* naturally lends idiosyncracy to the phrase, being unusual with abstract nouns (e.g. in *eòlas aosta* 'old knowledge'). In the case of body parts (as *cnàmhan aosda* 'old bones', *shùilean aosd(a)* 'old eyes', *ceann aosd (a sheanmhair)* 'old head (of his grandmother)'), the poetic sense originates from the *partitiveness* (from the reference to a part of the body, rather than to the person themselves). Regarding

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natural entities (sea, wind, rock, etc: e.g. *na creagan aosd ud* 'those old rocks', *leacan aosd a' chladaich* 'the old stones of the shore'), we usually feel them closer to animate entities, living organisms, although from a more abstract perspective. (Here we probably deal with different levels of abstractness.) *Aosta* may in effect anthropomorpholise these words (cf a similar distinction in the case of a building in Hungarian: *régi kórház* 'old hospital' – *régi* qualifying inanimate entities (i.e. objects or concepts, etc), this is the normal adjective in this phrase – whereas *öreg kórház* (*öreg* means 'old' in the cases of people and animals) displays a more personal, affectionate voice).

V. Summary

This paper investigates the use of the preposed adjective *seann-* as opposed to the plain adjective *aosta* or *sean* for the meaning 'old' in Scottish Gaelic. For this purpose a corpus study was carried out, followed by interviews with native speakers. It has been revealed in the research that preposed adjective *seann-* is highly productive. It occurs in compounds and fixed expressions (such as *seann-mhaighdean* 'old-maid', *seana (-) mhaide* 'old stick' or *seann uisg* 'stagnant water'), it may convey traditionality, or refer to former types and roles. As in the case of other preposed adjectives, *seann-* is even more frequently used in southern dialects (e.g. in South Uist), it frequently occurs with names and compound nouns, verbal nouns and loan words. Furthermore, this is the usual adjective used with time expressions (*tìm*, *aimsir*, and *uair*; even with *latha* 'day' in most cases). The most frequent combinations with both *seann-* and *aosta* denotated people. The corpus did not show many tokens for *sean* as an attributive plain adjective, the few exceptions were mainly found in poetry. Due to the high productivity of *seann-*, as usual, it is just as common in coordinatives (with *òg* 'young', *ùr* and *nuadh* 'new') as the plain adjectives *aosta* and *sean* (if not more common); however, *aosta* (and *sean*) are more common in listings (together with other adjectives – probably referring to age).

In some cases the choice for the preposed or the plain adjective is arbitrary, or shows an individual (and dialectal) preference for the preposed or plain adjective. Concerning the adjective meaning 'old', *seann-* appears to have spread greatly, as earlier sources abound with attributive *aosta*, while the later tokens are all from Lewis (native speakers from Lewis also used it frequently). Attributive *sean* appears to be more common towards the south (South Uist, Skye, etc); however, it is not so widespread in present day dialects. *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-* may easily connotate *old types* (see *seann-taigh* 'a (traditional) black-house' vs *taigh aosta/sean* 'an old house' (physical/constitutional age), and *seann fhacal* denotating the old *form* of a word), *a previous period* (*Seann Linn (na) Cloiche* 'Early Stone Age') or *a former role* (e.g. *seann taigh* 'previous house', *seann-chànan* 'an old form of a language' vs *cànan aost(a)* 'an old language', occasionally *seann s(h)aighdear* 'veteran' and perhaps *seann leannan* 'old/former sweetheart', *seann fheadhainn* 'the old ones') and presumably *traditionality* (see *seann(-)òran* 'folksong/traditional song', *seann sgeulachd* 'traditional story/tale'), as opposed to the most simple definition of age (biological or physical), which can be successfully highlighted by the plain adjective.

Attributive *aosta* (and/or *sean*) 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, body parts, 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* ('old language', i. e. existed for a long time) vs *seann chànan* 'earlier form of a language').

Although both *seann-* and *aosta* tend to refer to people, *aosta* is mostly 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'). *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). The low number of tokens with attributive *sean* may be explained by *aosta*'s connotation with respect. Incidentally, the poetic quality of *aosta*, besides its phonetical characteristics, may lie in its relative rarity compared to *seann-* or, in the case of body parts, in partitiveness.

With respect to phrases with the preposed adjective *seann-*, a number of unlenited tokens are encountered in the corpus, especially from Easter Ross (lenited ones are principally from Lewis). These might be either due to grammatical reasons (such as case or number distinction) or occur in loan words, but it shows inconsistency thoughout the sources. In certain cases an intrusive /t/ (i.e. homorganic defricativisation) can be observed after the dental in *seann-*.

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