

## Tanulmány

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### The Scottish Gaelic intensifiers *làn, sàr, sìor, and seachd*

#### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the meaning and use of the Scottish Gaelic intensifiers *làn, sàr, sìor, and seachd*. This study is based on a corpus study carried out on a subcorpus of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic). All of these words show “basic” and intensifier meanings – the latter mostly with adjectives and in fixed expressions (mainly with abstract nouns), except for *sìor*, which intensifies verbs. *Làn* ‘fully, completely’ conveys an absolute degree, the basic meaning of *sàr* ‘extremely, exceptionally’ is related to esteem, arts and nobility, high quality. *Sìor* ‘constantly, forever’ mainly intensifies the length of actions, *seachd* ‘beyond’ refers to more than the absolute degree of a quality, and it often occurs in comparative contexts.

*Keywords:* intensifiers, compounds, Celtic

#### 1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate the degree and meaning of the Scottish Gaelic intensifiers *làn* ‘fully, absolutely’, *sàr* ‘extremely, exceptionally’, *sìor* ‘constantly, continually’, and *seachd* ‘more than, beyond’, as well as to identify some rules and factors which determine compoundhood in such phrases.

This study is based on a corpus study carried out on a subcorpus of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic). After providing a brief description of the methods, sections 3–6 deal with each studied intensifier separately. Each section involves statistics, followed by the analysis of meanings and orthography.

At first the adverbial usage of *làn* is described (‘full (of)’), in which sense it also functions as a noun (‘fill (of)’), as well as in compounds (such as *làn-làimhe* ‘handful’). I refer to these forms as structures of quantity, and they may also carry intensifying sense (e.g. *làn feirg* ‘full of anger, filled with anger’). *Làn*, just as other adverbs, principally intensifies adjectives, but also a couple of verbs, and in fixed expressions it stands with (mostly abstract) nouns. It also forms part of compounds, such as *làn(-)àm* ‘high time’, *làn-duine* ‘grown-up man’ (there are also examples in the corpus which are not hyphenated: e.g. *làn oilean* ‘full-breed’). *Làn* may be used figuratively, as a confirmation of someone’s role as something: e.g. *làn charaid* ‘a real friend’, *làn-chridhe* (*laoich*) ‘a genuine/veritable heart (of a hero)’.

The root meaning of *sàr* is ‘a high-ranked person, chief’ as a noun and it refers to esteem, nobility, high quality as an adjective (‘excellent, exceptional’; ‘outstanding, leading’ – with professions). It certainly shows a connotation with the arts (e.g. *sàr-obair* ‘main work’ or *sàr obair* ‘an excellent work’; *sàr-bhàrd* ‘highbard’ or *sàr bhàrd* ‘an outstanding poet’). As an adverb (i.e. intensifier) its meaning is ‘extremely, exceptionally’. Two verbal tokens have

been encountered in the corpus – both examples of the verbal noun *tarraing* ‘drawing/teasing: *a’ sàr tharraing* ‘busy drawing canvas’ and *a sàr-tharruing* ‘keep teasing’. Compounds of *sàr* include *sàr-bhàrd* ‘highbard’, *sàr-obair* ‘main work’, and *sàr-fhear*, possibly ‘nobleman’ (or ‘gentleman’).

Unlike other intensifiers, *sìor* intensifies the length of an action, thus it usually stands with verbs. A number of its tokens combines with nouns, many of which are hyphenated: e.g. *sìor-mhaighdeannas* ‘eternal maidenhood/virginity’, *sìor-bheò* ‘eternal life’, *sìor-uisge* ‘eternal rain’. The corpus contains only two adjectival types (both are compounds): *sìor-mhaireannach* ‘everlasting, perpetual’, *sìor-bhinn* ‘ever sweet’.

*Seachd* either originates from the adverb *seach*, *seachad* ‘past, beyond’, or from the number ‘seven’. As an intensifier, it is frequently used with adjectives and in fixed expressions (with abstract nouns). In the corpus it shows the highest occurrences in the cases of *seachd sgìth* ‘more than tired’ (or *seachd seann sgìth* ‘sick and tired’) and *gu seachd sònraichte/sònruichte* ‘most especially’. It occurs twice with adverbs (*seachd tràth* ‘more than early’, *seachd neo-r-thaing* ‘more than naturally’) and once with a verb (*seachd-chùm* ‘more than kept’). It is often attested in comparative contexts (3 tokens of which contain comparative adjectives: *miosa* ‘worse’, *luaithe* (2) ‘faster’). (Occurrences are shown in brackets throughout the paper.)

## 2 Methods and materials

In the corpus study I wished to understand the use of the intensifiers *làn* ‘fully’, *sàr* ‘extremely, exceptionally’ and *sìor* ‘constantly’ (intensifier/A + A/N/V). For that purpose I collected all phrases containing these words occurring in a subcorpus of 73 texts from the 205 texts of the *Corpas na Gàidhlig* (The Corpus of Scottish Gaelic). *Corpas na Gàidhlig* was established by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh at the Department of Celtic and Gaelic, University of Glasgow, in 2008, as part of the DASG project<sup>1</sup> (see Ó Maolalaigh 2013; 2016a on *Corpas na Gàidhlig* and DASG). I used the freeware software AntConc (concordance package, version 3.2.4 for Windows, developed by Laurence Anthony, at Waseda University, Japan) to collect data from the corpus. All of these sources were published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (or at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century): the texts originate from 1859–2005 (the earliest material in one of the sources dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

To the best of our knowledge the texts collected in DASG were written by or gathered from native speakers of Scottish Gaelic, unless stated otherwise in the description of the sources, which was consulted during the research – such sources are referred to as using *acquired language*, and are always indicated in this study. Each example in the article has been translated into English by the author, proofread and advised on by Dr Michel Byrne and Professor Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh from the University of Glasgow.

<sup>1</sup> Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (Dàta airson Stòras na Gàidhlig)

In the next four sections I analyse the results from the corpus study on the intensifiers *làn* ‘fully, absolutely’, *sàr* ‘extremely’, *sìor* ‘constantly, continually’, and *seachd* ‘beyond’. These all have root meanings, on which the intensifier meanings are based: *làn* may form part of compounds as a quantity noun, whereas its intensifier meaning is more restricted. *Sàr* conveys a high position or quality, alternatively, it can be related to the arts. *Sìor* intensifies verbal meanings as opposed to the other adverbs above, which normally intensify adjectives (as expected). Interestingly these words frequently have hyphenated forms. *Seachd* is either related to the adverb *seach~seachad* ‘past, beyond’, or it originates from the number ‘seven’ (possibly both interpretations contribute to its intensifier use).

### 3 LÀN

The principal role of *làn* is predicative – adverbial as well as adjectival (‘full (of)’), in which sense it may be associated with a genitive construction (‘full of X’). It may function as a noun in the same sense (‘a fill (of)’ – this quantity noun is rather productive in Gaelic. It also has an adjectival usage (‘full, complete’; i.e. ‘full X’) and in some cases it may function as an intensifying adverb before adjectives (‘fully, completely, absolutely’; i.e. ‘fully X’). As an adjective it may show a special meaning (‘fully-edged’ or ‘veritable’). The intensifier *làn* mainly occurs with adjectives, or in abstract nominal structures.

Tokens	1383
Relevant	467
Other	
plain adjective	52
predicative or adverbial	705 (665+40)
adverb ( <i>gu làn</i> )	5
noun	154

Table 1.

Regarding *làn*, the corpus contains 467 relevant examples out of 1383 tokens, as Table 1 shows. Other examples include 666 predicative cases, 154 tokens of *làn* as a noun, 51 tokens as a plain adjective and 45 examples of adverbial usage (including 4 *gu làn* and 1 *ge làn* ‘fully’). There are 2 examples with the intensifier *ro* (i.e. *ro làn* ‘too full’), a number of tokens for (*a cheart*) *cho làn (ri)* ‘just as full (as); so full (as)’ and one for *cho ioma-mhodhach làn* ‘so full in many ways’. In 39 cases the different forms of *loma-làn* are used (it has a stronger, intensified meaning, something like ‘absolutely full’): 31 *loma(-)làn* (3 without hyphen), 5 *luma(-)làn* (only 1 with hyphen), 3 *lom-làn*. All but 4 tokens (*loma(-)làn*) are predicative/adverbial. There are also 5 examples for *leth(each)-làn* ‘half-way full’ among the predicative tokens (4 *letheach-làn*, 1 *leth-làn*). With regard to context, *làn* sometimes occurs together with *a’ cur thairis* ‘overflowing’. Predicative *làn* often takes *de/dhe/do/dha* or less frequently *le* in its prepositional phrase.

Among the 154 tokens of *làn* as a noun, 72 mean ‘(high) tide’ (including 1 *làn-mara*, 36 *muir-làn* (3 times without a hyphen), 2 *làn reothairt* and 1 *muir làn reothairt* ‘spring-tide’; or even the ‘long’ (phrasal) compound *làn-fo-thuinn* in a poem, lit. “tide under waves”). In

further 8 cases *làn* conveys quantity (e.g. *le botul 'na dhòrn/ Fhuair sinn làn ann an glainidh* “with a bottle in his hand we got fill in a glass”, i.e. ‘we filled a glass’). 75 quantity nouns serve as base for a genitive phrase, thus often take a prepositional phrase with *de/do* or simple genitive case (even the ‘long’ *làn-na-dùirne* ‘fistful’, lit. “fill of the fist”).

### 3.1 Statistics

Among the relevant tokens of *làn* I have counted 324 with nouns (69.4%), 72 with adjectives and 33 with participles (22.5%), and 38 verbal structures (36 with verbal nouns and 2 with root verbs: *làn-choisinn* ‘fully earned’ (i.e. deserved), *làn fhoillsich* ‘fully revealed’) (8.1%). The nouns include 2 prefixed ones (*làn cho-aonta* ‘full consensus’, *làn chomh-fhaireachdainn* ‘full compassion/sympathy’), 9 compound nouns and a proper name (of a geographical area: *làn-Ghàidhealtachd* “pan-Gaeldom” (i.e. ‘(the) whole Gaeldom’).

Combinations with the highest occurrences are as follows:

- 31 *làn(-)chinnteach* (15 with hyphen) ‘fully/absolutely certain’
- 28 – 27 *làn(-)chreidsinn* (15 with hyphen) + 1 *làn creidsinn* ‘fully believing’
- 20 – 12 *làn(-)dhùil* (4 with hyphen) + 8 *làn(-)dhùil* (2 with hyphen) ‘full expectation’
- 15 – 11 *làn(-)spàin(e)* (4 with hyphen) + 2 *làn spàineadh* + 1 *làn spàinne* + 1 *làn spàin-adhairc* ‘spoonful’/‘fill of a hornspoon’
- 14 – 13 *làn(-)thìd(e)* (2 with hyphen) + 1 *làn tìde* ‘high time’; ‘full time’
- 11 *làn(-)riaraichte* (7 with hyphen) ‘fully satisfied’
- 10 *làn(-)fhios* (5 with hyphen) ‘full knowledge’
- 9 *làn(-)ghaisgeach* (2 with hyphen) ‘a fully-fledged/veritable hero’; *làn-laghadh* ‘plenary indulgence’
- 8 *làn(-)chòir* (4 with hyphen) ‘full right’
- 7 *làn neart* ‘full strength’; 5 *làn(-)thoilichte* (2 with hyphen) + 2 *làn-toilichte* ‘absolutely happy’
- 6 *làn(-)bheachd* (1 with hyphen) ‘full opinion’

From the list above it is clear that *làn* is common with all sorts of abstract nouns, adjectives, and even the verbal noun *creidsinn* ‘believing’. It is attested among fixed phrases such as *fios/dhùil/còir a bhith aig* ‘to know (sg)/intend (to do sg)/have right (to do sg)’, with feelings, states of mind and convictions (*toilichte* ‘happy’, *riaraichte* ‘satisfied’; *cinnteach* ‘certain’, *creidsinn* ‘believing’; etc). It is a common device to express quantity (*làn-spàine* ‘a spoonful’), and it may well refer to power and strength (*neart* ‘energy, strength’). Further similar examples are to be encountered in the corpus, such as *làn-chinnt* ‘full/entire certainty’; *làn chreideas* ‘full credit/trust’, *làn chreidimh* ‘full/entire belief/faith’; *làn riarachadh* (2) ‘full satisfaction’; *làn thoileach* ‘fully/entirely willing’, *làn thoil (agus chridhe)* (2) ‘full/whole will(ingness) (and heart)’, *làn thoil-inntinn* ‘full enjoyment/pleasure’.

### 3.2 Grammatical structure

The most tangible and literal form of *làn*, referring to quantity, may occur together with the prepositions *de/do*, *le*, or, alternatively, it may take the genitive.

**Example 1.**

*basgaidean sràbhadh làn bìdh* ‘straw baskets full of food’  
*Tha’n tigh-osda lan de shealgairan agus iasgairan* ‘s an t-samhradh’ ‘The hotel is full of hunters  
 and fishermen in the summer’  
 ... ‘*S thig an Geamhradh làn le tuil.*’ ‘... And the Winter came full with torrent[s].’

This structure of *làn* is encountered in three occasions:

- in predicative or adverbial usage (see examples above)
- where *làn* functions as a noun, in the sense ‘a great amount’
- làn* followed by a noun indicating a full quantity (‘a whole ...’) of something – further evidence for the close connection between *làn* and the following noun in the genitive is that a number of tokens can be encountered with hyphen: e.g. *làn-spàine* ‘spoonful’, *làn-làimhe* ‘handful’, *làn-beòil* ‘mouthful’; *làn-sgeilid de uisge/làn-sgeilid uisge...* “a saucepanful of water” (even the figurative *làn-sùla* ‘eyeful’, lit. “full of eye” (in a poem)):

*Làn-sùla thu air thùs nan gruagach,  
 Reul-iùil fear-stiùradh a’ chuain thu;  
 Cuspair nam bàrd a ni duan thu,  
 Do mhaise toirt buaidhean-beòil dhaibh.*  
 ‘You are eyeful at the forefront of (the) young women,  
 you are a guiding star of the ocean’s steersmen;  
 you are the subject of the poets who make (i.e. write) an ode,  
 your beauty bringing them oral victories.’

In two cases the compound consists of a longer structure: *long mhór fo a làn-cuid-sheòl* ‘big ship under full sail’ (lit. “full set of sail”); *làn-dì-bheatha* ‘full welcome’ – the former is evidently a genitive structure; however, the origin of the latter is not clear, according to Dwelly’s dictionary *dì-* originates from *deagh-* leaving us with the meaning “completely good life”.

**More on quantity: predicative/adverbial and nominal usage:**

A further 83 tokens show the same structure as above; however, they cannot be considered as compounds by any means. The structure is more complex, containing a definite article or possessive pronoun and the genitive of the noun, as in Example 2.

**Example 2.**

- làn a’ bhotaill* ‘bottleful, fill of the bottle’  
*làn a chròig de shiùcar* ‘a full hand (of his) of sugar’  
*làn na cuache seo den bhùrn ...* ‘this whole bowl of (the) water/this bowl full of water’  
*le làn a bhonaid de chlachan* ‘with his cap full of stones/with a full cap of stones’  
*A’ giùlan làn a’ phoca dhiubh* ‘Carrying a pocketful (“a fill of the pocket”) of them’  
*làn na pìoba [smochd]* ‘one fill of the pipe [of smoke]’  
*làn na spàin(e)* ‘a spoonful’ (“one fill of the spoon”)  
*làn a dhùirn/mo dhùirn*, etc ‘a handful (of his/mine, etc)’  
*làn am beòil/mo bheòil*, etc ‘a mouthful (of theirs/mine, etc)’  
 ... *a’ cur làn a dhroma dheth de chaochladh pòr ...* ‘loading its back with a variety of crops (of the soil)’ (lit. “putting a backful of a variety of crops off”)

With *làn* reference is often made to body parts, and in certain cases this may express a more abstract meaning:

- b) 'S tha làn a chinn aige den chànan ... 'And he has a full head (of his) of the language'/ ... aig an robh làn a chinn a Ghàidhlig ... 'who had a full head (of his) of Gaelic'/le làn an cinn de Ghàidhlig 'with a full head of Gaelic/with their head full of Gaelic'  
 ... a' gealltainn dhut làn do bhroinn. 'promising you a full stomach/belly (of yours)'/ 'S math is fhiach thu làn do bhroinn. 'You're well worth/deserve your full stomach/belly (i.e. the fill of your stomach/belly).'

Furthermore, *làn* may be used in a broader or more poetic sense:

- c) làn an saoghal a dh' uisge 'a whole world of rain'  
 ... ghlan mi làn a saoghal a soithichean. "I cleaned a whole world of her dishes"  
 ... a' gabhail aon làn a shùl de ghleann a ghràidh ... "taking one eyeful (of his) of the valley of his love", i.e. '(he) taking one glimpse/glimpse of his beloved valley'

Frequently the same expressions exist with *làn* as a noun in a compound and in a grammatical phrase, as in Example 3:

**Example 3.**

a) COMPOUND	GRAMMATICAL PHRASE
<i>làn-dùirn</i> 'a fistful'	<i>làn a dhùirn</i> "a fill of his fist"
<i>làn-beòil</i> 'a mouthful'	<i>làn a bheòil</i> "a fill of his mouth"
<i>làn-spàine</i> 'a spoonful'	<i>làn na spàine</i> "a fill of the spoon"

The difference here is apparently that the grammatical phrases do not simply refer to quantity but emphasise the contribution of the particular person who does the action (by the possessive pronoun); the definite article appears in relation with objects (*botal* 'bottle', *poca* 'pocket/sack', *pìoba* 'pipe', *spàine* 'spoon', etc), the reason for its use is less obvious than that of the possessive pronoun, it seems to alternate freely between the fixed expression and the compound. In poetic language we have even encountered the variation *làn-sùla* 'eyeful', vs *làn a shùl* "the fill of his eyes". It is worth noticing that, while there is a hyphen in the former structures, it is absent in the latter. This even applies to longer structures such as *làn-cuid-sheòl* and *làn-dì-bheatha*:

b) COMPOUND	GRAMMATICAL PHRASE
<i>long mhór fo a làn-cuid-sheòl</i> 'a big ship under (its) full sail'	<i>Bha làn a chuid sheòl aige fèin ...</i> 'He was spoiling for an argument'/ 'He was champing at the bit'
<i>làn-dì-bheatha</i> 'full welcome'	<i>làn dìth a bheatha</i> 'full welcome (to him)'

In the first pair of examples the different structure actually changes the meaning; however, the second is exactly the same as we have observed above. The only problem that arises here is that the meaning of *dìth* is not clear. Dwelly relates this expression to *deagh-bheatha-te* "good life"-ed; however, *deagh a bheatha* "good his life" would not make any sense, since *deagh* cannot be separated from its noun (it should be *a dheagh bheatha* 'his good life' in this case). Another analysis may originate it from *Dia do bheatha* 'God of your life' or 'God is your life', which gives a better explanation for the role of the possessive pronoun. Consider George Calder's explanation of *'s e do bheatha* 'you're welcome' as "he [God] is your life" (Calder 1980, cited by Mark 2004). The use (presence and lack) of hyphenation indicates that the latter structure is a grammatical phrase, whereas the former may be considered as an exocentric compound.

Below examples of the above discussed possessive structure are listed, categorised under different meaning groups. Just as in genitive phrases, predicative/adverbial *làn* often refers to feelings, qualities and conditions (as shown in Example 4).

**Example 4.****FEELINGS**

a) with various words meaning ‘happiness’ and ‘cheerfulness’:

*làn de gach toileachas* ‘full of all contentment’, *toil-inntinn* ‘pleasure’, *cridhealas* ‘cheerfulness, heartiness’, *sùnn* ‘cheerfulness, joy’, *làn sonais is aobhneis* ‘full of felicity and bliss’, *mire* ‘of mirth’, *sogain* ‘of joy/delight’

b) just as with ‘grief’ and ‘sorrow’:

*làn mullaid* ‘full of sorrow’/ *cho làn de mhulad* ‘so full of grief’, *truais* ‘of pity’, *de ghruaim* ‘of gloom’

c) with other emotions and feelings:

*làn dòchais agus gràidh* ‘full of hope and love’, *làn gràidh agus aithreachais* ‘full of love and regret’, *làn de theagamh* ‘full of doubt’, *làn imcheist* ‘full of anxiety’, *làn pròis is uail* ‘full of pride and vanity’, *làn farmaid* ‘full of envy/jealousy’, *loma-làn eagail* ‘completely full of fear’, *loma-làn feirg agus taosgach de theine lasrach* ‘completely full of anger and brimming with blazing fire’, *le sùilean làn iongnaidh* ‘with eyes full of wonder’/ *Bha aodann làn iongnaidh* ‘His face was full of wonder/surprise’

These expressions are often accompanied by *cridhe*:

d) *O chridhe làn gaoil* ‘Oh heart full of love’

*le cridhe làn taingeachachd* ‘with a heart full of thankfulness’

*bha an cridheachan làn de bhuadhachas* ‘their hearts were full/filled with gratitude’

*... aig an robh an cridhe làn sàinnt agus gaol an airgid ...* ‘whose heart was filled with greediness and love for money’

I have also encountered one token with *inntinn*: *Bha m’ inntinn làn suigeirt ...* ‘My mind was filled with cheerfulness.’ As a result, *làn* serves perfectly to describe personality.

**PERSONALITY/QUALITY**

*Bha cridhe Mhr Màrtainn làn caoimhneis ...* ‘Master Martin’s heart was filled with kindness ...’

*fear làn roimh-bhreith* ‘a man full of prejudgement’

*... agus an guth aige làn de fhanaid, ...* ‘and his voice full of mockery’

There are also examples describing physical conditions:

**CONDITIONS/STATES**

*mo cheann làn cadail* ‘my head full of sleep’ (i.e. drowsy)

*ann an guth làn cumhachd* ‘in a voice full power/in a powerful voice’

*làn lùths* ‘full of energy’

*A chionn tha mo leasraidh làn ghalar ...* ‘Since my loins are full of pains ...’

*... an diugh bha mo shaoghal làn de bhlàths.* ‘... today my world was full of warmth.’

**SENSE and COMMUNICATION**

*làn de thuigs’ ’s de chiall* ‘full of understanding and of sense’

*cho làn dhe na smaointean* ‘so full of the thoughts’ OR *làn smaointean aig/air/mu dheidhinn* ‘full of thoughts of/on/about’

*... tha an gille làn dìomhaireachd gliocais os cionn a leithid ’sam bith ...* ‘the boy is full of the mystery/wonder of wisdom above the rest/everyone else’

*... ’s a thill dhachaigh làn de aithne is glòir ...* ‘and who came home full of recognition and glory’

*Bha e cho làn de chainnt ...* ‘He was so full of speech’ (i.e. spoke a lot)

*Bha e làn ghearanan.* ‘He was full of complaints.’

*làn leisgeulan (airson dragh a chur orm)* ‘full of apologies (for bothering me)’

In the last cluster we see more examples for the connection with mental qualities of *làn*, as well as its dynamic nature in relation with words of communication, as the last three examples convey immersion in various forms of communication.

In the case of feelings, etc the intensifying effect naturally remains, even though we do not deal with actual intensifier phrases in the case of genitive constructions. More abstract examples are as follows:

**Example 5.**

- a) *Dhasan tha an t-àite làn/ liuthad smuain ag éirigh suas.* ‘For him the place is full of so many thoughts arising.’
- b) ... *ma bha duine riadh làn de Ghàidhlig agus làn de dh’fhòghlam na Gàidhlig, b’ e an duine sin Dòmhnall MacFhionghain.* ‘... if someone was ever full of Gaelic and full of education of (the) Gaelic, that man was Donald Mackinnon.’ (i.e. knew a great deal about Gaelic)
- c) *Mo chluasan làn le mór uamhas nan gunnathan.* ‘My ears full with the great horror of the guns.’
- d) *Bha Ùistean dol dachaigh aon oidhche, làn liquor.* ‘Hugh was going home one night, full of liquor.’
- e) *làn dhen an droch rud/làn dhen an t-sàtan* ‘full of the evil/satan’

Another fixed expression can be encountered in relation to *gaoth* ‘wind’. It can be used either in a literal or an abstract sense, as Example 6 demonstrates.

**Example 6.**

- a) ... *dh’fhosgail am paraisiut mar sheòl mòr làn gaoithe os mo chionn.* ‘... the parachute opened above me like a large sail full of wind.’
- b) ... *bha a’ bhàrdachd aige mar e fhèin: làn gaoith.* ‘... his poetry was like himself: full of wind.’

Note also the following example containing genitive construction with the possessive pronoun, highlighted above: *Fhuair an long làn a cròic giobuill de ghaoith fhallain* ... ‘The ship got a bellyful of fresh north wind in its sail/sails’. Similar to *làn-beòil* for ‘mouthful’, Gaelic uses the construction *làn gum beul* to express ‘full up’ (lit. ‘full to mouth’): e.g. *bha iad làn gum beul le gràn brèagha glan cruaidh* ‘they were full up with lovely pure hard grain’ (i.e. the chests, in this case).

*Letheach-làn* ‘half-way full’ and *loma-làn* ‘absolutely full’ follow the same pattern as predicative *làn* in general (i.e. they can take the genitive or the preposition *de*). I have counted 3 quantity nouns (meaning ‘the whole’) among the 31 tokens of *loma(-)làn* (sic), one of which, in a poem, refers to the whole predicate (verbal phrase), intensifying the verbal noun (unless it can be interpreted as and adverb: ‘fully wrestling’), as Example 7 shows.

**Example 7.**

- a) *Ghabh Sine loma-làn na gloinne* ‘Jean took a full glass/ a glass full to the brim (lit. “a complete fill of the glass”)’
- b) ... *a ghiùlain loma-làn dhen a h-uile seòrsa a chuireadh bean-taighe feum air.* ‘... that delivered a full lot of everything/all sorts of things that a housewife would need.’
- c) ... *le loma-làn an t-saic de na h-uile seòrsa bidh.* ‘... with the whole sack completely full (lit. “with the complete fill of the sack”) of all sorts of food.’
- d) ... *No cheart cho dòcha loma làn/ A’ gleac ri fhaileas anns an Spàinnt* ... ‘or just as likely/may as well be completely full of wrestling with his phantom in Spain’

### 3.3 Meanings (of the intensifier)

If we consider the number of predicative tokens, it is not surprising that *làn* shows a tendency to express amount even in its compounds. On the other hand, before an adjective even *làn* functions as an intensifier, as adverbs before adjectives normally do. Thus, with an adjective it conveys the meaning ‘fully, [to a very high degree]’ (see Example 8).

**Example 8.**

- a) *làn fhileanta* ‘fully fluent’, *làn-Chriosdaidh* ‘fully Christian’ (dedicated to)  
 b) (participles:) *làn(-)riaraichte* ‘fully satisfied’ (often), *làn(-)thoilichte* ‘entirely happy’ (often), (*gu*)  
*làn-shònraichte* ‘most of all’ (lit. “fully especially”), *làn armaichte* ‘fully armed’, *làn*  
*fhosgailte* ‘fully open’, *làn-dhearbhte* ‘fully convinced’

This intensifier meaning, though abstract, is probably even more obvious in words like *làn-marbh* ‘fully dead/stone dead’, or *mu’s d’thainig iad gu làn sholus na firinn* ‘before they reached (lit. “came to”) the full light of truth’ (i.e. a high/absolute degree of truth, full spiritual consciousness). Usually, the more abstract a reference is, the more it can be intensified, and, accordingly, *làn* commonly occurs together with feelings or states of mind: *làn shona* ‘fully/entirely happy’, *làn mhuinghinneach* ‘fully/absolutely confident’, etc. It may even combine with the intensifier *cho* as in *cho làn shoilleir* ‘so entirely clear/evident’ and *cho làn-marbh* ‘so entirely dead’. I have encountered one token with the reverse order of these two intensifiers in *làn cho milis ri ...* ‘entirely so sweet as ...’.

The verbal use also shows the intensifier meaning ‘fully, absolutely’ and is frequently encountered with mental activity or abstract concepts:

**Example 9.**

- a) ... *bho ’n dìoghaltas a làn-choisinn i* ‘... from the punishment that she fully earned (i.e. deserved)’  
 b) *làn(-)chreidsinn* ‘fully believing’ /similar in meaning to the adjectival *làn(-)chinnteach* ‘absolutely sure’/, *làn(-)dearbhadh* ‘deep conviction’, *lan thuigsinn* ‘fully understanding’

Even in the case of *làn-fhosgladh* ‘fully/entirely opening’ and *làn fhoillsich* ‘fully revealed’ (in *Làn fhoillsich mi mo pheacadh dhuit* ‘I fully disclosed/revealed my sin to you’) the verbs exhibit a religious process rather than a physical action. Nevertheless, *làn* can appear together with verbs indicating a change in state, as we can see in the examples *làn-chrìochnachadh ionnsachadh* ‘fully finishing to learn’, i.e. ‘starting to fully understand, to be aware (of sg)’ and *Tha m’ aigne air làn-fhosgladh* ‘My spirit/soul has fully/entirely opened’.

With other verbs – associated with communication – *làn* conveys the meaning ‘constantly’, or ‘immersed’ (e.g. *làn bruidhinn* ‘full of speaking’, *làn troid* ‘full of quarrelling, intensely quarrelling’). On the other hand, if this suggestion is correct, then in the verbal phrases above *làn* functions as a predicative adverb (consider the examples below).

**Example 10.**

- a) *Thigeadh, is dh’fhuiricheadh, is dh’fhalbhadh iadsan, làn bruidhinn is làn diubh fhéin.* ‘They would come and stay and leave, full of talking and full of themselves.’  
 b) *Aig an ìre sin bha Tormod MacRaghnaill am baillidh làn troid.* ‘At that stage Norman MacRanald, the bailiff, was full of reproof.’

As we can see above, these are genitive constructions in effect, consisting of *làn* and a verbal noun.

Accompanying nouns, *làn* has a much more literal meaning, which could be translated mainly as ‘full’, or ‘all, the whole’ (usually with more tangible objects, geographical places, etc; I have grouped the first two meanings in Example 11 a and b in accordance with this classification). There is a third type, which denotes quantity, and shows a similar structure to the predicative usage. Here *làn* can be interpreted as a noun meaning [a certain amount] (‘complement, fill’ according to Colin Mark’s *Gaelic–English Dictionary*) and the noun it is connected to is in the genitive (see below for examples).

**Example 11.****a) 'FULL'**

physical	mental	other abstract
<i>làn neart</i> 'full strength'	<i>(le) làn aonta/cho-aonta</i> '(with) full agreement/consensus'	<i>thug làn bhuaidh air</i> 'took full victory on (sy/sg)', i.e. 'completely defeated (sy/sg)'
<i>aig a làn àirde</i> 'at his full height'	<i>làn-bhrìgh</i> 'full sense'	<i>làn chomas</i> 'full ability, capability; full potential'
<i>làn bhlàs</i> 'full taste' (sense)	<i>làn(-)mhathanas</i> (/làn mhaitheanas) 'full forgiveness'	<i>làn(-)shaorsa</i> 'full/entire freedom'
	<i>le làn-onairean cogaidh</i> 'with full military honours'	
	<i>làn mhuinghin</i> 'full faith' (feeling)	

**b) 'ALL THE ...'/'THE WHOLE ...'**

*'n an làn thrusgan* 'in their full gear/kit'

*làn armachd* 'full armour'

*làn-chruth na craoibhe* 'full shape of the tree'

*'na làn-oighreachd dhuinn* "in its full inheritance for us", i.e. 'fully inherited to us'

*Tha Rùnaire na Stàite a' cur a làn-thaice ...* 'The State Secretary gives (lit. "is putting") his whole support ...'

*an làn-torradh de mheasan abaich* 'the full growth of ripe fruits'

*làn inbhe oifigeil* 'full official status'

*Nithear so le làn bhraith-lìn a dhùbhlachadh air a leud ...* 'This is done by thickening the whole sheet in its width ...'

*roinn 'na "làn-Ghàidhealtachd"* 'area of the "pan-Gaeldom" (i.e. 'the whole Gaeldom)'

**c) QUANTITY (with de/dhe/do OR genitive)**

*làn-beòil* 'a mouthful (of)', *làn dùirn* 'a fistful (of)', *làn-làimhe* 'a handful (of)'

*làn bòla* 'a bowlful (of)', *làn cupa/copain* 'a cupful (of)', *làn(-)spàin(e)* 'a spoonful (of)' (*làn spàin mhòr* 'tablespoon', *làn-spàine bhig* 'teaspoon', *làn spàin-adhairc* 'horn spoon', etc), *làn truinnseir beag* 'a small plateful (of)'

*làn poca* 'a pocketful (of)', *làn meurain* 'a thimbleful (of)'

*làn carbaid* 'a "carriageful" (of)' (i.e. 'a carriage full (of)'), *làn saoghail de ghuin mhallaichte* 'a "worldful" of damnable pang' (i.e. 'a whole world of damnable pangs'), *làn taighe chaorach geala* 'a "houseful" of white sheep' (i.e. 'a whole house of white sheep')

**Fixed expressions:**

Connected to a noun connotating feelings or mental activity, *làn* may be interpreted as an intensifier, emphasising the degree of the mental entity described. With such nouns *làn* (just as other intensifiers) tends to form various conventionalised structures:

**Example 12.****a) ann an + POSS. PRONOUN structure:**

*bha e ann a làn bheachd* "he was in his full opinion", i.e. 'he was fully convinced', *ann làn bheachd* "in full opinion", i.e. 'fully convinced' (also: *de'n làn(-)bheachd* "of the full opinion"; *gun làn bheachd aige* 'without having a full (i.e. definite) opinion'); (*Bha na cailleachan a nis 'na làn uidheam* ('The old women were now) "in their full equipment"', i.e. 'fully-equipped' (also *fo làn uidheam* "under full equipment", i.e. 'fully-equipped')

**with profession:** *nar làn dhannsairean* "in our fully-fledged dancers" (i.e. '[we were] fully-fledged dancers')

**with state/condition:**

- **motion:** *'nan làn chabhaig* "in their full hurry", *'nan làn-shiubhal* "in their full travel", *ann an làn-ghluasad* "in full movement", i.e. 'fully moved', *ann an làn ruit* "in full dash/rush" (also *le làn ruit* "with full rush")

- **emotion:** *ann an làn thoil-inntinn* ‘full enjoyment/pleasure’ (also *le (mo) làn thoil (agus chridhe)* ‘with (my) full/whole will(ingness) (and heart)’); *ann an làn feirg* ‘in full anger’, i.e. ‘full of anger’
- **physical:** *ann an làn neart/’na làn neart* ‘in (his/its) full strength’; *an/’na làn mhaise/’na làn maise* ‘in (its) full beauty’ (also *aig a làn mhaise* ‘at its full beauty’)

b) + *aig* structure:

*bha làn(-d(h)ùil aige gu* ‘he fully expected that’ or *bha làn(-)dhùil/làn dùil aige* ‘he fully intended to’, etc (18 tokens; most of them without hyphen), (once also: *bha iad a nis an làn dùil gun* ... ‘now they fully expected that ...’)

*Tha làn fhios aca gu bheil* ... ‘They were in full knowledge that ...’; ... *aig am bheil làn-fhios gu’m* ... ‘... who were in full/complete knowledge that ...’, etc (9 tokens; 4 with hyphen), (once: *gheibh esan làn fhios air* ... ‘he gains/will gain full knowledge of ...’)

... *air a robh làn fheum aige* ‘... which he absolutely (i.e. badly) needed’ (1)

*Bha làn smachd aige air an luchd-èisdeachd.* ‘He had full control/power over the audience.’; *Chan eil an còmhnaidh làn smachd aig an dàrna aileal air an fhear eile,* ... ‘The second allele is not always completely dominant (lit. “does not always have full domination”) over the other one.’ (technical language)

*Tha làn mhaitheanas agad bhuamsa* ‘I fully forgive you’ (lit. “you have full forgiveness from me”)

... *far an robh làn-chinnt aig daoine nach robh teine* ... ‘... where people had full certainty (i.e. were absolutely certain) that there wasn’t fire ...’

*Tha làn chead aig mo charaid a bheachd a thoirt air rud ’sam bith a chual e...* ‘My friend has full permission to give his opinion on something he heard ...’ (2) (or with genitive case: ... *gun d’ fhuair e làn chead athar a chum a thogail mar a dhuine-cloinne fhéin.* ‘... that he got full permission of his father to bring him up as his own son.’)

*Oir tha làn chòir aig luchd na Gàidhlig air seilbh a bhi aca* ‘Because Gaelic people have (the) full right to possess what they have’; *Nach robh làn chòir aige air dèanamh mar a rinn athraichean?* ‘Hasn’t he got full right to do as his fathers/ancestors did?’; etc; *a làn chòir air a’ chrùn* ‘his full right for the crown’ (8 tokens; 3 with hyphen)

Below I give further examples for structures with *làn*:

#### Example 13.

a) *air a làn-ghleus* ‘fully locked’ (gun) (lit. “in its full lock”)

b) ... *nam biodh e air làn dòchas a chur anns an dithis* ... ‘... he wouldn’t have put full/absolute hope in the two ...’

c) *air mo/ar/an làn-dòigh* ‘in my/our/their full spirits’, i.e. ‘absolutely happy/pleased’

d) (a’ pòsadh) *le a làn deòin* ‘(getting married) with her full/absolute willingness’

e) *le a bhi a’ cur làn ùidh* ‘in which placing full interest’

f) *làn dearbhadh a thoirt* ‘giving full evidence/proof’

g) *thug e dha làn ùghdarras* ‘he gave him full power/fully authorised him’

h) ... *a’ dèanamh làn aideachaidh gu bheil* ... ‘fully confessing that’ (lit. “making full confession”)

i) *a’ dèanamh làn-oidhirp* ‘making full/all attempt’

j) ... *ged a dheanadh an t-ùghdair, a làn-dhìcheall air a bhith cur sìos gach nì* ... ‘although the author would make his full effort/all his effort to put down everything ...’

Note that in all 5 tokens of the expression *air làn-dòigh* ‘absolutely/completely pleased’ the intensified phrase stands with a hyphen, which indicates the compoundhood of *làn-dòigh*.

Further examples for the role of the intensifier *làn* in phrases expressing emotions or other mental activities/entities include:

#### Example 14.

a) *làn thuigse (is cinnt)* ‘full understanding (and certainty)’

b) *làn-aighear/(le) lànaighear* ‘(with) full delight/joy’

c) *làn-dùrachd (ar cridhe)* ‘(the) absolute wish (of our heart)’, i.e. ‘all we wish’; (*na làn rùn*)/ *làn(-)rùn* ‘(in his) full intention’

- d) ... *anns am bi làn-earbs' aige* '... in whom he has every/complete/absolute faith/confidence'; *làn earbsa a chur annad-sa* 'putting/placing absolute trust in you/fully depending on you'; *le làn earbsa* 'with full/absolute confidence'
- e) *làn(-)spèis* 'full affection/respect'; ... *gum faod mi làn ghaol a thoirt dhut* ... 'that I may show absolute love towards you'
- f) *làn-thròcair* 'full mercy'

There are a number of phrases which can be called compounds as *làn* contributes to their meanings in a less unpredictable (i.e. not fully compositional) way, which is, however, often not confirmed by hyphenation. Expressions are listed in Example 15:

**Example 15.**

- a) *làn slige* 'full shell'
- b) *làn chomataidhean* 'main committees' (vs *fo-chomataidhean* 'sub-committees')
- c) *làn(-)àm/làn(-)thìde* 'high time'
- d) *Bha an làn-ám aige bhith air ais* 'It was high time for him to be back'; *Tha an làn-ám agad an doctair fhaicinn.* 'It is high time for you to see the doctor.'
- e) *Tha làn-thìd' agad boireannach fhaighinn* 'It's high time you got a woman'; *nach eil làn thìde agad bruidhinn a-mach* 'isn't it high time for you to speak up?'
- f) *làn-duine/-dhaoine* "fully-fledged", i.e. 'grown-up man/men' (e.g. *Ciod nach dean làn-duine?* 'What does not make a full man?')
- g) *làn bhoireannach (bòidheach)* 'a (beautiful) full woman' (i.e. grown-up/fully-fledged)
- h) *làn oilean* 'full-breed'

All 5 tokens of *làn(-)àm* in the corpus have the meaning 'high time', and all but one is accompanied by the definite article as in the example above. *Làn(-)thìde*, on the other hand, never takes the definite article, still only 1 of the 14 tokens means 'full time' in place of 'high time': *Cha robh e gu mòran buannachd ach do fhear a bha 'na dhùil làn thìde choimhlionadh ann.* 'It wasn't much use but for someone who intended to fulfil full time there.'

Another fixed expression is *fo làn èideadh* 'in full garment' (lit. "under full garment"). The preposition *fo* 'under' often accompanies *làn*, as it can be observed in *fo làn uidheam* "under full equipment", i.e. 'fully-equipped', and *fo làn-sheòl* 'under full sail' as well. As *làn-ghòraiche* 'complete silliness/absurdity' is deadjectival (i.e. derived from the adjective *gòrach* 'foolish/silly'), *làn* here conveys the same meaning 'fully' as with the adjective. In effect, we can encounter all sorts of examples for the intensifier meaning of *làn*, referring to an absolute degree (such as *aig làn ìre* 'at full level', *aig a làn airde* 'at his full height'; *thug [...] làn bhuaidh air* 'gained full victory over'; *làn fhàilte* 'a full welcome' or *làn dì-do-bheatha/làn-dì-bheatha/làn dì-beatha* 'a full welcome'). *Làn ghrian samhraidh* 'full sun of summer/full summer sun' is a creative usage of *làn*, similar to *làn bhoireannach* "a full woman" (i.e. "fully-fledged", grown-up woman), as the sun cannot be literally full.

There is one more sense in which *làn* can be used. This may be the most abstract and most pragmatic usage of all (in that it reflects the speaker's opinion, is subjective, and thus flexible and arbitrary), which explains why I have not found many examples for it.<sup>2</sup> In these cases *làn* appears to confirm a previously stated or suggested claim, in the sense 'actual, real, veritable'. Its vague, pragmatic usage is even more accented in the following dialogue:

- "... *Chan e fear stuic a th' ann.*" [...] "He's not a stockman."  
*"Làn fhear stuic..."* "A fully-fledged stockman..."

<sup>2</sup> A number of studies suggest that the objective meaning referring to the physical world or senses is the principal and probably first usage of words (e.g. Lackoff & Johnson 1980; see also Jackendoff 1983 on the mental representation of language).

Here *làn* could even be translated as ‘fully, definitely’. A similar use of *làn* can be attested in the phrase *làn charaid* (‘a real friend’ in the sense of ‘good’, ‘a friend in all respects’), and maybe also in *làn-chridhe (laoich)* ‘a genuine/veritable heart (of a hero)’: ... *Cuiream mo bhròn a thaobh,/ ’S air sgàth balachain ar fàrdachd/ A dhearbhan an làn-chridhe laoich, ...* ‘... Let me put my sadness aside, and for the sake of the little boys of our home who tested their genuine hero heart, ...’.

### 3.4 Orthography

**Hyphenation** is an important feature of orthography in that it can be a sign of compounding, as it may indicate initial stress or conventionalisation of fixed expressions, although it is not always reliable. In the case of the intensifier *làn* hyphenation does not appear to show any specific patterns: fixed expressions (like *làn(-)àm* ‘high time’, *làn(-)àite* ‘the whole place/everywhere’, *làn(-)bheachd* ‘full opinion’, *làn(-)chinnteach* ‘completely/absolutely certain’, etc) mostly occur/are encountered both with and without a hyphen. In intensifier meaning *làn* is often followed by a hyphen (the rate being the highest in the case of adjectives following *làn*: here, 54 out of 86 tokens are hyphenated (63%) (64 out of 106, including participles (60%)), which, however, still does not indicate a significant difference in the numbers of hyphenated and non-hyphenated examples). With verbs the rate is similarly 53% (20/38 tokens), while hyphenation does not tend to occur with nouns (108/324 tokens, i.e. 33.3%). (In the case of *fios* and *fiosrach*, for instance, the noun stands with a hyphen in approximately half of the tokens, while the adjective in almost all its occurrences (although there are only 4 tokens for *làn(-)fhiosrach* in the corpus: 4/9 *làn-fhios* ‘full knowledge’ vs 3/4 *làn-fhiosrach* ‘of full knowledge’).)

Hyphens appear in other abstract/figurative expressions (e.g. *làn-bhiadh* ‘full/nutritious food’, *làn-bhrìgh* ‘full sense’, etc), or expressions of quantity (see examples of *làn-spàine* ‘a spoonful’, *làn-beòil* ‘a mouthful’, etc. above). Nevertheless, in general certain expressions seem to be fixed, and thus written with a hyphen (e.g. *làn-aighear* ‘full delight’, *làn-dòigh* ‘full spirit’, *làn(-)armachd* ‘full armour’ (2 out of 3 are hyphenated), *làn-mór* ‘high tide’ (only 2 tokens)), while others are not (e.g. *làn dhùil* ‘full expectation’, *làn bheachd* ‘full opinion’, *làn chòir* ‘full right’, *làn mhathanas* ‘full forgiveness’, *làn thìde* ‘high time’, etc are only occasionally hyphenated). Among verbal nouns *creidsinn* ‘believing’ (16/29), *dearbhadh* ‘proving, convincing’ (2), *fosgladh* ‘opening’ (1), *crìochnachadh* ‘ending, finishing’ (1), etc occur with hyphen. Long structures with hyphen (i.e. phrasal compounds) are: *làn-fo-thuinn* ‘tide under waves’, and *làn-na-dùirne* ‘fistful’ (‘fill of the fist’), *làn-dì-bheatha* ‘full welcome’. *Làn-ghòraiche* ‘complete silliness/absurdity’, mentioned above, incorporates an adjectival meaning into a noun, which renders it a parasynthetic compound<sup>3</sup>, thus the hyphen.

### 3.5 Lenition

Initial mutations are morphological changes on the first consonant of words which are characteristic of Celtic languages. In Scottish Gaelic lenition is the most wide-spread such mutation. It occurs in various grammatical constructions, such as after certain numbers and prepositions, or after the definite article in certain grammatical cases. In the genitive case, for

<sup>3</sup> ‘Parasynthetic compounds’ are formed by a non-compound complex base with a derivational affix (e.g. *green-eyed*) (Scalise and Bisetto 2009: 53).

instance, the singular of masculine proper names as well as the plural of both masculine and feminine (indefinite) nouns are lenited (Ó Maolalaigh 2008: 84; Mark 2004: 639, 641).

In Celtic languages in general, lenition is indicative of compoundhood: in proper compounds (where the specifier comes first) the initial of the compounds' second element is usually lenited (**compounding lenition**), whereas in improper compounds (in which the specifier follows the generic), the initial of the specifier is lenited if the first noun is feminine (or in oblique cases – dative, genitive: **grammatical lenition**) (Lucas 1979: 20, 61–2; Mhac an Fhailigh 1968: 172). However, lenition is not always indicative of compounding as it is applied in a number of other morphological cases. As we will see, it shows different patterns in the case of each discussed intensifier.

Lenition (softening) is an initial mutation “whereby certain consonants which appear at the beginning of words are made ‘softer’. This is indicated in writing by adding an *h* to the consonant.” (Ó Maolalaigh 2008: xxii) The sound alterations triggered by lenition in Scottish Gaelic are indicated below:

<i>b</i> > <i>bh</i> :	/b/ > [v], [v']
<i>p</i> > <i>ph</i> :	/p/ > [f], [f']
<i>g</i> > <i>gh</i> :	/g/ > [ɣ], [j]
<i>c</i> > <i>ch</i> :	/k/ > [χ], [χ']
<i>d</i> > <i>dh</i> :	/d/ > [ɣ], [j]
<i>t</i> > <i>th</i> :	/t/ > [h]
<i>s</i> > <i>sh</i> :	/s/ > [h]
<i>f</i> > <i>fh</i> :	/f/ > [∅]
<i>m</i> > <i>mh</i> :	/m/ > [v]

There are certain phonological conditions which block lenition. The most typical of these is the so-called **dental/homorganic rule**, according to which dental sounds (/t/, /d/, /s/) are not normally lenited after other dentals (/t/, /d/, /n/, /l/) (Lucas 1979: 16). Examples for the dental rule in Scottish Gaelic are: *sgian-dubh* ‘black-knife’ (as a part of traditional clothing); *seannduine* ‘old man’, *seann(-)taigh* ‘traditional (black-)house; previous house’, etc).

In genitive phrases, naturally, lenition does not occur<sup>4</sup> except in plural (cf *làn dhaoine* ‘full of people’, *làn dhathan* ‘full of colours’, *làn dhealbhannan* ‘full of pictures’, *làn dhearcan* ‘full of berries/currants’). Bearing this in mind, there are principally two factors that prevents *làn* from causing lenition. These are as follows: firstly, *làn* does not lenite in phrases of quantity due to their genitive quality (*làn bocsa de fhiodh* ‘a full box of wood’, *làn gogain de uisge* ‘a full gurgling of water’, *làn preis de shàl* ‘a full/whole pot of salt’, *bho làn peile gheibh sinn poca no dhà* ‘from a bucket/pail-ful we take a bag or two’, etc); secondly, as *làn* ends in /n/, dental consonants following it tend to remain unlenited. In effect this clearly shows only in words beginning with /d/ with respect to *làn* in the corpus: in the case of words beginning with /t/ or /s/, incidentally both criteria apply (e.g. *làn soithich de smeuran* ‘a full dish of brambles’, *làn taighe chaorach geala* ‘a whole house of white sheep’). None of the 3 words beginning in the consonant cluster /sl-/ are lenited in the corpus (one of them – *làn slige* ‘full shell’ – being idiomatic in the sense that its reference cannot be clearly derived from its compositional meaning, i.e. not perfectly unambiguous). However, all three words

<sup>4</sup> This can be well observed in pairs of predicative and compound structures, e.g.

- *abharsac mhór làn biadh air a shlios* ‘a large haversack full of food on its slope’; *bha na cladaichean loma-làn bìdh* ‘the shores were completely full of food’ vs *làn-bhiadh* ‘full/nutritious food’

- *tha i làn brìgh agus teagaisg* ‘it is full of meaning and moral’ (i.e. the parable) vs *làn(-)bhrigh* ‘full sense’

coming from the same author (Mull, early 20<sup>th</sup> century), I do not find it worthwhile to further discuss the question.

Examples of quantity (genitive structure) can be found almost with every lenitable phoneme. Similar, abstract structures also occur, see *làn feirg* ‘full of anger, filled with anger’, with the genitive of *fearg* ‘anger’.

The potential influence of certain dialects has not proved to contribute in the variation of lenition. I cannot provide an explanation for uncertain lenition of words beginning in /m/. At first sight there seems to be a distinction between the 2 tokens of unlenited *làn maise* ‘full beauty’ and the 5 occurrences of lenited *làn mhaise*, as all lenited forms appear in the prose of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the two unlenited tokens are both encountered in poetry (we also encounter *làn-marbh* ‘completely dead/stone dead’ in a poem). On the other hand, *làn mathanas* ‘full forgiveness’ and *làn(-)mhathanas* occur in one and the same source (*làn mathanas nam peacannan* ‘the full/complete forgiveness of (the) sins’, *air làn mhathanas am pheacannan* ‘on/at full/complete forgiveness of my sins’) (it could also be a typing error, as the unlenited form occurs only once). Alternatively, it seems more affected by pronunciation, i.e. when more emphasis is placed on the intensifier, resulting in uneven stress (e.g. *Tha làn mhaitheanas agad bhuamsa* ‘I fully forgive you’, lit. ‘You’ve got full/complete forgiveness from me’). There is another possible explanation, which can also be observed in the case of *lànmhara~lànmara* ‘tide’ in, namely the shift /mh/ > /m/ in nasal environment. Here /mh/ assimilates with the nasal and becomes more sonorant itself (see Ó Maolalaigh 2003 on nasalisation).

## 4 SÀR

Tokens	122
Relevant	93
Other	
predicative or adverbial	2 (1 each)
noun	27

Table 2.

The 122 tokens of *sàr* involve 93 relevant cases. Almost all of the remainder are nouns, referring to a highly ranked person or chief, which meaning is very close to the meaning of the intensifier itself (see section 4.2 below). I have found one only example of predicative usage among other adjectives (a list of adjectives): ... *mìorbhaileach, barraichte, sàr* ... ‘marvellous, outstanding, noble’, and one adverbial, in a riddle: *Cha shiubhail e ’s an adhar,/ Cha shiubhail e air lar;/ Ach siubhlaidh e sar,/ Eadar lar agus adhar.* ‘It doesn’t travel in the air, it doesn’t travel on the ground; but it travels nobly/elegantly, between earth and sky.’

### 4.1 Statistics

Most tokens of *sàr* (84) stand with a noun (including 7 compounds, and 1 name: *sàr Mhac Shir Eachuinn* ‘noble Sir MacEachen’. (Note that in *mun t-/ an sàr MacAsgaill* ‘(about) the chief MacAskill’ (both from the same source) *sàr* is a noun, therefore the name remains

unlenited.) There are 6 examples with adjectives (e.g. *sàr-mhaiseach* ‘most lovely/graceful’, *sàr-chruaidh* ‘extremely hard’, *sàr-iomraideach* ‘most well-known’) and 2 for participles (*sàr-thoilichte* ‘extremely happy’ and *sàr-shnaidhte*, the latter being a complex (‘parasynthetic’) compound (similar to *green-eyed*), where the qualifier *sàr* is an adverbial modifier of the base: *O aodainn sàr-shnaidhte* ‘Oh **nobly carved** face’). In the corpus *sàr* can be encountered twice with the verbal noun *tarraing* ‘drawing’ (once with a hyphen – *sàr-tharraing as* ‘keep teasing’ –, once without – *sàr tharraing* ‘busy drawing’).

The word, with which it occurs together most, is *obair* ‘work’ (once even in the compound *obair-ghrèis* ‘embroidery’), and it is also common with reference to people, as it is shown below:

- 8 – *obair* ‘work’ (+ 1 *obair-ghrèis* ‘embroidery/needlework’)
- 7 – *bàrd* ‘poet/bard’
- 5 – *duine* ‘man’ (+ 4 *duin’(-)usal* ‘gentleman’); *fear* ‘man’ (+ 1 *fear-ealain* ‘artist’)
- 3 – *gille* ‘boy; fellow’; *companach* ‘companion’; *laoch* ‘hero, warrior’

It is worth noting that *bàrd* is close behind, and as it is usually connected with the arts (see *sàr-obair nam fir-ealain* ‘main work of the artists’, *sàr obair Heinrich Wagner* ‘Heinrich Wagner’s main work’, or *sàr obair-ghrèis* ‘excellent embroidery/needlework’ itself), it is not impossible at all that the famous book edited by John MacKenzie with the title *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach – The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry and Lives of the Highland Bards* (1841), has influenced its use. The phrase *Sàr-obair nam bàrd* ‘Main work of the poets’ itself is used for an anthology elsewhere. Besides *sàr(-)lao(i)ch*, I have encountered 1 example for *sàr-ghaisgich*, and 1 for *sàr-chruaidh*, all meaning ‘great/outstanding hero’.

## 4.2 Meanings

*Sàr* qualifying nouns conveys the sense of being noble like a hero or an artist. It is commonly encountered with words denoting human beings or professions, in which case it may be translated as ‘excellent’, ‘outstanding’ or ‘leading’ (in a similar sense as *àrd-ollamh* (lit. ‘high doctor’) is used for ‘professor’) (see Example 16).

### Example 16.

- a) *Sàr-Ghàidheil* ‘a great/leading Gael’, *sàr-chlachair* ‘an excellent stonemason’, *sàr-iasgair* ‘an excellent fisherman’, *an Sàr-dhruidh deireannach* ‘the last leading/high druid’
- b) *sàr-dhuine agus deagh fhear-teagaisg* ‘an excellent/great man and a good teacher’, *sàr-fhear gasda* ‘a fine, noble man’, *sàr ghillean Leòdhais* ‘great lads of Lewis’, *sàr ghille sunntach* ‘a light-hearted great fellow’
- c) *sàr-chruaidh/sàr-ghaisgeach/sàr(-)laoch* ‘a great hero/warrior’
- d) *a sàr-mhac òg* ‘her young outstanding son’ (i.e. Christ)

Also consider the following, more abstract examples: ... ‘*S fear dha’ m b’ aithne le sàr anail/Gabhail rann na Féinne*. ‘... And who can with **excellent breath**, sing the rhyme of the Fenians.’ (i.e. he has a strong, beautiful voice); ‘*S tha ’n creutair gun tìr/ A’ deanamh sàr uaill às a nàir!* ‘And the senseless creature makes (lit. “is making”) **noble pride** out of his shame!’.

The connotation of nobility is well expressed through its common occurrence together with words like *usal* ‘noble’ (or note the example with *gasda* ‘fine’ above): e.g. *sàr bhàird usal* ‘an excellent/outstanding noble bard’; *An sàr dhuin’ usal stuama, stòlda* ‘The solemn, modest noble excellent man’ – also encountered in compounds: *sàr dhuin’-usal* (3) ‘an

exceptional gentleman’, *sàr bhean-uasal* (1) ‘an exceptional lady’. (In the expression *sàr-eucoraich gun ghràs* ‘biggest malefactors/sinners without grace’, on the other hand, *sàr* is applied to intensify a negative moral quality in a deadjectival noun – see below.)

In the case of words denoting non-animate entities, *sàr* likewise shows the sense of excellence, exceptionality, **high quality**, especially in relation with creative activity or showing **prestigious** social status: *sàr-obair* ‘an excellent/outstanding work’, *sàr-obair-ghréis* ‘excellent embroidery/needlework’, *sàr-dhràma* ‘an excellent/outstanding drama’, *sàr thea* ‘excellent tea’; *sàr chlogaid is lùireach* ‘excellent/noble helmet and coat’, *sàr ghniomhan* ‘excellent/outstanding/great things/deeds’. (*Sàr* is often related to **the arts**: *sàr-fhear-ealain* ‘leading artists’, *sàr luchd-ciùil* ‘outstanding musicians’, *sàr-bhàrd* ‘an excellent/outstanding/leading bard/poet’, *sàr-obair-ghréis* ‘excellent needlework’, *sàr-dhràma* ‘an outstanding/excellent drama’.) An alternative meaning of *sàr* is ‘**main**’ (in the sense ‘the best’) (e.g. *sàr-chompanach* ‘main companion’, see Example 17a below). It is an interesting question whether *sàr* in the compound *sàr-fhacal* conveys the sense ‘**habitual**’ or has the same connotation of nobility as in *sàr-bhriathran* ‘noble words’ (Example 17b): *Nach mairg, [...] a theireadh a shàr-fhacal* ‘Isn’t it pity, to use his **habitual/noble** phrase’.

#### Example 17.

- a) *Ach an tràth so bha mo shàr-chompanach ri dol air an turas còmhla rium, mo bhràthair gaolach òg.* ‘But this time **my main/best companion** was to go with me, my young loving brother.’ – *a shàr-chompanach* ‘his main companion’ (both with possessive pronoun and hyphen!)
- b) *Bu tric b’e do shòlas san òg-mhadainn shamhraidh  
 bhith ‘deilbh air na beanntan seo àilleachd do smuain,  
 bhith snìomh nan sàr-bhriathran ‘s a’ càradh do ranntachd,  
 ‘s a’ coilionadh ealaidheachd ghreannmhor do dhuain.*  
 ‘It was often your solace in the summer daybreak  
 designing the beauty of your thought on these mountains,  
 spinning your **noble words** and putting your verse together,  
 and completing the witty artistry of your ode.’

With abstract nouns (sometimes from an adjective, like *gasdachd* ‘splendidness’ from *gasda* ‘splendid’), *sàr* can function as an **intensifier**: (*air a*) *sàr dhòigh* ‘in an (her) excellent form/extremely happy’; *ann an sàr òrdugh* ‘in an excellent order’; *sàr-urram* ‘great honour’; *sàr mhisneach* ‘exceptional courage’; *sàr-ghasdachd, tlachd is beus* ‘great splendidness, relish and demeanour’. Even *sàr leuman* ‘mad dash(es)/(skip(s))’ could be interpreted as an intensified phrase if referring to the intensity of the action. With regard to people, it may function as an intensifier in the case of deadjectival nouns: ... *ged a bha mòran de na sàr-ionmhainn air bu mhotha mo dheagh thoil air dol thairis bho slighe nan uile bheò.* ‘... although many of **the most beloved**, who I was fond of the most, have disappeared from the path of all the living (i.e. left the world of the living).’; *sàr-eucoraich gun ghràs* ‘the biggest malefactors/sinners without grace’. *Sàr* conveys intensifier meaning in *sàrchleas* ‘a great trick’ and *sàr bhunait* ‘a sure foundation’:

*Feuch suidhichidh mise mar stéidh ann an Sion clach, clach dhearbhta, clach-chinn na h-oisinn; sàr bhunait, esan a chreideas cha chuirear gu h-amhluidh e* ‘Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, **a sure foundation**: he that believeth shall not make haste.’ (Isaiah 28:16)

In the case of adjectives (or participles) *sàr* shows the expected intensifier meaning, frequently coloured by the connotation ‘noble’ again:

**Example 18.**

- a) *sàr-chlis* ‘extremely/exceptionally clever/swift’
- b) *sàr-ghlan* ‘exceptionally pure/clear’
- c) *sàr-mhaiseach* (2) ‘exceptionally pretty/handsome’
- d) *sàr-iomraideach* ‘exceptionally famous/renowned/well-known’: *a’ Bhiobuille, mar leabhar shàr-iomraideach san t-saoghal* ‘of the Bible, as the most well-known book of the world’
- e) *sàr-chruaidh* ‘exceptionally hard’, *sàr thoilichte* ‘exceptionally happy’

Here, again, all except *cruaidh* (*an neach mu choinneamh roghainn sàr-chruaidh* ‘the man before an exceptionally hard choice’) display positive qualities/emotion. *Sàr-chruaidh* and *sàr thoilichte* express deep feelings.

With the verbal noun *tarraing*, similar to the function of *làn, sàr* gives the meaning ‘intensively, fully immersed’ to the predicate, in which case the intensity of the action is enhanced, but it might also be associated with an upward direction, either literally (in movement or physical position) or metaphorically (cf “winding someone up”, i.e. ‘teasing’):

**Example 19.**

- a) ... *Leinibh bheaga dannsa./ Luchd na mara a’ sàr tharraing/ Canabhas ri cranntaibh, ...* ‘Little children dancing, seamen being busy drawing canvas (up) to masts’
- b) *Cha robh Mac Iain Bhig ach a sàr-tharraing as Eachann, ...* ‘Mac Iain Bhig (Little Ian’s son) did nothing but kept teasing Hector ...’

To the contrary, with the nominally used *èisdeachd*, *sàr* has the meaning ‘noble’ again (not intensifier), in which case it functions similarly to preposed adjectives: ... *’S bheir cuachag na h-innis/ Sàr èisdeachd do iomairt mo rùin.* ‘... And the conch of the island will give excellent/noble audience to the play of my love.’

### 4.3 Orthography

Adjectives and participles are all hyphenated with only one exception (*sàr thoilichte* ‘extremely happy’), which may be due to their **intensifying function** (it would be worth investigating if the lack of hyphenation is related to equal stress). The same applies to abstract nouns (*sàr-urram* ‘great honour’, *sàr-ghasdachd* ‘great splendidence’ (from the adjective *gasda* ‘splendid’)), deadjectival nouns (*sàr-ionmhainn* ‘most beloved’; *sàr-eucoraich* ‘biggest sinners’). The hyphenation of the two tokens of the verbal noun *sàr(-)tharraing* ‘busy drawing/teasing’ is ambiguous, just as that of nouns are: I have encountered 40 nominal examples with hyphen (once even a compound: *sàr-fhear-ealain* ‘leading artist’), and 43 non-hyphenated tokens. (The noun *sàr èisdeachd* ‘excellent/noble audience’ is written without a hyphen.)

Besides intensifier phrases, **mental products** like *sàr-bhriathran* ‘noble words’, *sàr-fhacal* ‘noble or habitual word’?, or *sàrchleas* ‘great/biggest trick/act’ tend to be regarded as one orthographical unit. Similarly, **professions** are frequently hyphenated: *sàr-iasgair* (2) ‘an excellent/outstanding fisherman’, *sàr-chlachair* (1) ‘an excellent/outstanding stonemason’, *sàr-mharaiche* (*cuain*) ‘an excellent/outstanding seaman’ (BUT: *sàr mharaichean* ‘excellent seamen’); *sàr(-)bhà(i)rd* (2 of 5 tokens are non-hyphenated), *sàr-fhilidh* (1) ‘an excellent/leading poet’. *Sàr(-)dhuin(e)* ‘a great/excellent man’ is ambiguous, with 2 hyphenated and 3 non-hyphenated tokens; on the other hand, all 5 tokens for *sàr-fhear* (including *sàr-fhear-ealain* ‘an outstanding/leading artist’) occur with a hyphen. This may be due to its compound status – referring to a social rank, i.e. ‘nobleman’. *Sàr-mhac* ‘exceptional son’ may be hyphenated for the same reason (referring to Christ). *Sàr-chompanach*, meaning ‘main company’, has 2 hyphenated tokens, while the plural *sàr chompanaich* (from the same

source) carries no hyphen, referring to quality ('excellent companions') rather than selecting one person from a group; however, neither the 3 tokens for *sàr ghille* 'an exceptional guy/fellow', nor *sàr mhaighdean* 'an exceptional maid' are written with a hyphen (see examples below). It may refer to the moral qualities of the person, although it has to be noted that all 3 examples of *sàr ghille* occur in the same source. On the other hand, the two other tokens from this source are both hyphenated, being associated with artistic features: *sàr-bhàrd* 'an exceptional/leading poet' and *sàr-fhear-ealain* 'an outstanding/leading artist'. Another possible example for the reference to moral quality rather than actual social rank may be *sàr fhineachan* 'noble clans', again, without a hyphen.

**Example 20.**

*gach sàr ghille sunntach* 'every light-hearted great boy/fellow', *sàr ghillean calma* 'great valiant fellows', *sàr ghillean Leòdhais* 'great boys/fellows of Lewis'  
*sàr mhaighdean mhaiseach, mhòr* 'a big, graceful noble maid'

Words meaning 'hero' may often carry a hyphen after *sàr*: *gaisgeach* (1), *laoch* (1 with, 2 without), *curaidh* (1). **Compounds** always occur without a hyphen: *sàr dhuin'-uasal* 'an exceptional gentleman', *sàr bhean-uasal* 'an exceptional lady', *sàr luchd-ciùil* 'excellent/outstanding musicians', *sàr obair-ghrèis* 'excellent needlework'.

While objects are usually non-hyphenated: *sàr chlogaid* 'an excellent helmet', *sàr thea* 'excellent tea' (neither are abstract *sàr bhunait* 'an excellent/sure foundation' and figurative *sàr anail* "great/exceptional breath"), *obair* is ambiguous with 4 hyphenated and 4 non-hyphenated tokens. One abstract word is written as one with its intensifier *sàr* -: *sàrchleas* 'biggest act/trick' – it originates from the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century (when hyphenation was not wide-spread in the case of *sàr* (see next paragraph)) – thus it should be regarded as a compound due to its conventionalised status.

Although a firm observation cannot be made about different dialects, it might be suggested that the use of hyphenation has spread since the 1970s. Before that it appears to have been typical only in certain cases (e.g. *sàr-bhàrd* 'excellent/outstanding/leading bard', *sàr-obair* 'excellent/outstanding work', *sàr-fhear* 'excellent/great man', etc). In other phrases, however, despite my claim about intensifiers tending to have hyphens, there are plenty of examples among abstract nouns for the opposite: *ann an sàr òrdugh* 'in excellent/outstanding order', *sàr uaill* 'great/outstanding pride', *sàr mhisneach* 'great/exceptional courage', *sàr bheart* 'excellent equipment', *sàr chothrom* 'an excellent opportunity', *sàr dhòigh* 'excellent mood', *a' toirt sàr chunntas* 'giving an excellent account' (such expressions with hyphen have become more common in later sources).

## 5 SÌOR

Tokens	303
Relevant	274
Other	
plain adjective	8
predicative adverbial	or 3 (1+2)
adverb ( <i>gu sìor</i> )	17

Table 3.

A large number (274) of the 303 tokens for *sìor* has proved to be relevant: approximately 90% of all, which is much higher than any of the examined intensifier words above. There are 19 adverbial but only 1 predicative example of *sìor*: '*S ann aca bhios an lùchairt/ Bhios cùbhraidh, maireann, sìor, ...*' 'And there they will have the palace, will be redolent, everlasting, eternal, ...' (in a poetic work, from the 19th or early 20th century). In 8 cases it functions as a normal, postposed adjective, in phrases like *sòlas sìor* 'eternal solace', '*an cadal sìor* 'in their eternal sleep', etc. In *Thig an claidheamh sìor-mar-ur* 'The sword will come back again', it probably stands for *sìar* 'behind'<sup>5</sup> (lit. meaning "behind/back as new").

### 5.1 Statistics

*Sìor* principally intensifies actions, thus most tokens are encountered with verbal expressions. 231 of those in the corpus are verbal nouns, while 2 are root verbs (85.0%): *sìor mhealaidh* (*sìbh*) '(you) will always enjoy', *sìor iarraibh* (*i*) 'keep asking (for it)' (2<sup>nd</sup> pl., imperative). 37 of the tokens (13.5%) stand with nouns (including 3 hyphenated examples: *sìor thaigh-foghair* 'eternal autumn home', *sìor thaigh-geamhraidh* 'eternal winter home'; and the verbal *sìor iar-iargain* 'eternal back-lamenting'). However, there are only 4 adjectives intensified by *sìor* (*sìor-bhinn* 'ever sweet' (2) and *sìor-mhaireannach* 'everlasting' (2)), all 4 from early sources.

It is no surprise that the more frequent combinations are all verbal, except for *sìor-uisge* 'neverending/eternal rain', which, still, refer to an impersonal happening/action, i.e. 'raining', in addition, the frequent hyphenation (which is not usual for other words with *sìor*) indicates the conventionalised, fixed status of this phrase. The occurrences for more frequent combinations are listed below:

- 39 – *sìor(-)dhol* (13 with hyphen) 'constantly going'
- 17 – *sìor(-)chur* (5 with hyphen) 'constantly putting'
- 16 – *sìor(-)fhàs* (1 with hyphen) 'constantly growing/getting'
- 8 – *sìor(-)chaoineadh* (2 without hyphen) 'constantly wailing/weeping';  
*sìor(-)mheudachadh* (2 with hyphen, once written as *sìor-mhiadachadh*)  
 'constantly increasing'
- 7 – *sìor(-)thighinn* (2 with hyphen) 'constantly coming'
- 6 – *sìor(-)choimhead* (2 without hyphen) 'constantly watching'
- 5 – *sìor(-)iarraidh* (2 with hyphen) 'constantly/always wanting' + 1 *sìor iarraibh* 'keep asking (imp.)'; *sìor(-)thoirt* (1 with hyphen) 'constantly taking/bringing'
- 4 – *sìor thogail* (all without hyphen) 'constantly lifting'; *sìor-uisg(e)* (all with hyphen) 'eternal rain'

As we can see, *sìor* is commonly used with verbs of motion (*dol* 'going', *tighinn* 'coming') and change of place/position or state (e.g. amount) (*fàs* 'growing', *togail* 'lifting', *cur* 'putting', *toirt* 'taking/bringing', *meudachadh* 'increasing'). According to the list above, it is also reasonably frequent with *caoineadh* 'mourning, weeping', *coimhead* 'watching' and *iarraidh* 'wanting, longing'.

<sup>5</sup> Information gathered from source.

## 5.2 Meanings

*Sìor* inherently carries the meaning of continuity and durability. The verbal forms evidently gain an intensifier function by this. Here *sìor* can be translated as ‘without stopping, constantly’, or ‘forever’. It is not an intensifier in the sense as *fìor* ‘really’ or *sàr* ‘extremely, exceptionally’ are, as it emphasises the length of an action.

A wide range of meanings are intensified by *sìor*. It can refer to movement; change of state (e.g. *sìor-fhàs* ‘constantly growing’); feelings (e.g. *sìor mhiannachadh* ‘constantly longing’) or communication (*sìor luaidh air* ‘constantly referring to it’), often with negative connotation: *sìor-ghearan* ‘constantly complaining’, *sìor(-)chaoineadh* ‘constantly mourning/weeping’, *sìor chrònán* ‘constantly buzzing/murmuring’, *sìor-ghlaodhaich* ‘constantly crying/shouting’, *sìor-chogadh ri ’m nàdur fein* ‘constantly fighting with my own nature’, *sìor phianadh* ‘constantly torturing’ (or consider references to water: *sìor-uisge* ‘eternal rain’, *sìor dhòrtadh* ‘constantly pouring’, *sìor(-)shileadh* ‘constantly dripping/raining’, *sìor-onfhadh* ‘constant raging, fury’ (of the sea)). It can be connected with sounds (especially in relation with water: *sìor-cheòl* ‘constant music’ (of the sea), *sìor-ghuth* ‘constant voice’ (of a waterfall), *sìor-fhuam na mara* ‘the constant sound of the sea’, etc), light (*sìor losgadh* ‘constantly burning’, *sìor bhoillsgeadh* ‘constantly shining’), etc. It may even be used with repetitive actions as in *Bha e sìor choimhead air an uair, agus ma dheireadh cha robh e cur an uaireadair na phòc’ idir*. ‘He looked at the time again and again (lit. “he was constantly watching”), and in the end he didn’t put (lit. “wasn’t putting”) the watch in his pocket at all.’

Examples for verbal nouns intensified by *sìor* in the corpus can be found in Example 21:

### Example 21.

- a) **movement:** *tighinn* ‘coming’, *tionndadh* ‘turning’, *teicheadh* ‘withdrawing, escaping’, *leum* ‘jumping’, *dol* ‘going’, *ruith* ‘running’, *coiseachd* ‘walking’, *falbh* ‘leaving’, *màrsail* ‘marching’
- b) **change:** *teannadh* ‘beginning’, *crìonadh* ‘ending’, *atharrachadh* ‘changing’, *dlùthachadh* ‘approaching’, *fàs* ‘growing’, *losgadh* ‘burning’, *àrdachadh* ‘raising’, *dùmhachadh* ‘thickening’, *tuiteam* ‘falling’, *fàsghadh* ‘pressing’
- c) **communication:** *labhairt* ‘speaking’, *èigheach* ‘shouting’, *moladh* ‘praising’, *urnuigh* ‘praying’, *bruidhinn* ‘speaking’, *foighneachd* ‘asking’
- d) **of water:** *dòrtadh* ‘pouring’, *sruthadh* ‘flowing, streaming’
- e) **of light:** *losgadh* ‘burning’; in an abstract sense: *oighreachd a bha sìor bhoillsgeadh* ‘heritage that was constantly shining’

The clause ... *airson a bhi sìor cheothadh na pioba* ... ‘for constantly smoking the pipe’ is a rather visual example of the verbal usage. The two tokens for root verbs are as follows:

### Example 22.

- a) *Mar sin sìor mhealaidh sibh an tìr/ Is glòir na rìoghachd sin* ... ‘Accordingly you will always enjoy the land and glory of that kingdom ...’
- b) *O chàirdean gaoil, nach iarr sibh i./ Sìor iarraidh i gu bràth*, ... ‘Oh dear/loving friends (lit. “friends of love”), won’t you ask for it, keep asking for it forever, ...’

As nouns and verbal nouns are connected, many of the nominal tokens carry the same meaning as that we have seen with the verbs:

### Example 23.

- a) **of water:** *sìor-onfhadh nan tonn* ‘the constant rage of the waves’, *sìor-uisge* ‘eternal rain’, *sìor bhoinnealaich uisge* ‘constant drops of water’

- b) **sounds:** *an sìor-cheòl/ lomnochd a th' aig ar marannan* 'the **constant** bare/naked **music** that our seas have', *sìor-ghuth borb an easa* 'the **constant** barbaric/harsh **voice** of the waterfall', *sìor-fhuam na mara* 'the constant sound of the sea'; *sìor chròn nan caochan* 'the constant murmuring/humming of the streamlet'
- c) **communication:** *nì sìor-luadh* 'constantly make comments/talk', *sìor ràdh* 'always saying'
- d) **change:** *sìor phreasadh* 'constantly crumpling', *sìor phutadh (air aghart)* 'constantly pushing (forward)'
- e) **movement:** *sìor(-)ghluasad* 'constantly moving'; ... *no idir caisbheart mu 'n casan goirte le sìor-imeachd is coiseachd feadh gharbhlaichean* '... or any footwear at all on their foot hurt by the **constant pacing and walking** through the rugged country'; *Caithear spionnadh le sìor phlogadh fèithean a' chridhe* ... 'Energy is wasted by the **constant palpitation** of the muscles of the heart'
- f) **reference to emotions:** *sìor-ghaoil/sìor-ghràidh* 'eternal love'

Similar to the examples above, *sìor* gives the following nouns (as well as to example f above) the meaning of being 'permanent/constant' (note the negative connotation of *sìor-chunnart* 'constant danger' and *sìor chlaoidh* 'constant oppression/exhaustion'):

**Example 24.**

- a) *Le sìor-ghàir' air a' bhraoisgein* 'With constant laughter after giggle' (lit. "on the giggle")
- b) *Sìor Làthaireachd Dhé* 'The Constant Presence of God'
- c) *'na shìor-chunnart* 'in constant danger'
- d) *Bu leòr mo ghearain-sa [...], ach cha do mhair iad ach ùine ghoirid an taca ri sìor chlaoidh air a shineadh a-mach bho thùs gu éis, gun furtachd [...]* *a dh'aotromaicheadh an t-eallach dhaibh.* 'I had plenty of complaints myself [...], but they didn't last but for a short time compared to (the) **constant oppression** drawn out from beginning to end without any consolation [...] that would (have) eased their burden.'
- e) ... *ach gu bheil sìor-bheò aige anns a' mhór mhath.* '... but that it has **eternal life** to a great degree.'

To take a step even further away from the intensifier function that *sìor* typically lends verbs, with certain nouns *sìor* shows a meaning 'not changing' or, rather, 'everlasting', referring to the durability of a state, but without the sense of expanding an action or a feeling: *sìor-mhaighdeannas* 'eternal maidenhood/virginity'; see also *don t-sìor thaigh-geamhraidh, don t-sìor thaigh-foghair is earraich is samhraidh* 'to the eternal winter home, to the eternal autumn and spring and summer home' in a religious chant over a corpse, to facilitate the soul to leave the body:

*Tha thu dol dhachaigh an nochd don t-sìor thaigh-geamhraidh,  
don t-sìor thaigh-foghair is earraich is samhraidh,  
Thu dol dhachaigh an nochd air seirm nan canntair.*  
'Tonight you're going home to the eternal winter house,  
to the eternal autumn and spring and summer house,  
You're going home tonight on the melody of the chanters.'

In *sìor-mhaireannach* 'everlasting, perpetual' and in *gu sìor-mhaireannach* 'forever', as well, *maireannach* being 'durable, (long-)lasting, permanent', it intensifies the meaning of the adjective, giving a further emphasis to its (very similar) sense.

Finally, a combination of *sìor* with another intensifier, *fìor* 'really, truly', both accompanying verbal nouns, may shed some light on the relation of their meanings (connotations) and degrees. Moreover, the verbal nouns express two close emotional terms, which are common with both intensifiers:

*Cha b' ann a' fìor lùigeachdainn ach a' sìor mhiannachadh le uile chridhe* ... 'It's not that you really/truly wished for it, but that you were constantly longing for it with all your heart...'

### 5.3 Orthography

Non-verbal phrases containing *sìor* often occur with a hyphen (all 4 adjectival tokens and 23 out of 37 nouns (62%) are hyphenated (where 3 non-hyphenated forms are compounds)). Regarding verbs, however, only one-third of the verbal forms stand with a hyphen (77 out of 231 tokens, i.e. 33%), both of the root verbs are non-hyphenated. Since *sìor* normally intensifies verbs, it might be considered as a plain adverbial form in this case, without any compound meaning. The difference is even more significant when comparing newer sources (no hyphen) and earlier sources (with hyphen), although certain fixed phrases have remained compounded (e.g. *sìor-uisge* ‘eternal rain’).

A certain noun-verb distribution may apply to two sources from Lewis – both are from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which verbs tend to occur without hyphen, while nouns appear to be hyphenated: *gu bheil sìor-bheò aige* ‘that he has eternal life’; *sìor-fhuam na mara* ‘the constant sound of the sea’ vs *a’ sìor dhol* ‘constantly going’; *sìor dhòrtadh* ‘constantly pouring’. Another source from the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (dialect unknown), at first sight appears to show the opposite pattern: it contains the nominal example *le sìor phlosgadh féithean a’ chridhe* ‘the **constant palpitation** of the heart’s muscles’, while hyphenates all the verbal nouns (e.g. *a’ sìor-dhol*). However, the latter source serves as a good example for my argument above according to which compounding requires hyphenation as opposed to adverbial use: compare this example with the other nominal token from the same source (morphologically, all three are verbal nouns): *faodaidh sìor-fhàsgadh aon chluais air an adhartan a leigeil* ‘one ear may be **constantly pushed** on the pillows’ (which may be a conventionalised phrase). In early, traditional and acquired language<sup>6</sup> (hyphenation either typical or not), conventionality and phonological reasons (initial stress: hyphenated, equal stress or stress on second component: non-hyphenated) appear to play a part in orthography – cf the following pairs of examples from two different sources: (quasi-storytelling register; most tokens *with* hyphen) *an t-sìor-ghràidh* ‘of the eternal/everlasting love’ (normal usage) – but also *’na shìor shuain* ‘in his eternal slumber’ (probably indicates equal stress); (acquired language; most tokens *without* a hyphen) *Tha sìor bhoinnealaich uisge tighinn às a’ chreig am mullach na h-uaimh so.* ‘**Constant drops of water** comes (lit. “is coming”) from the cliff on top of this cave.’ (normal usage) vs ... *Le sìor-ghàir’ air a’ bhraoisgein ...* ‘With **constant laughter** after giggle’ (assumably a conventionalised phrase).

## 6 SEACHD

Tokens	477
Relevant	69
Other	
number	399
adverb	9

Table 4.

<sup>6</sup> in the description of the corpus refers to a source/text which was not produced by a native speaker of Scottish Gaelic

Out of the 477 tokens of the corpus in 399 cases *seachd* denotes the number 7 (occasionally functioning as a noun, as in *bus na seachd* ‘service 7’), and 69 function as intensifier (14.5%). In 9 tokens it stands for the adverb *seach~seachad* ‘past’ (*a’ dol seachd* ‘going past/passing’, *bha MacRath seachd mìle sgìth* ‘Macrae was tired **after a mile**’, twice for *cuir seachad* ‘spending (time)’ (in ‘*S iomadh uair a thìde chuir mi seachd aig ceàrdach* ‘I spent a lot of time at the smithy’ and ‘*A’ cur seachd mo réis* ‘spending my span/time’), twice in place of *thoir seachad* ‘give, provide, deliver’, once in the fixed expression *mu sheachd* in place of *mu seach* ‘alternately, in turn’, and twice in the expression *bho sheachd gu seachd*).

## 6.1 Statistics

The highest occurrence of *seachd* as an intensifier is not surprisingly with adjectives (47 (68.1%), 3 tokens of which are comparatives – *miosa* ‘worse’, *luaith(e)* (2) ‘faster’). Abstract nouns are also relatively frequent with this adverb (19 (27.5%)). On 2 occasions *seachd* intensifies adverbs: *seachd tràth* ‘more than early’, and the compound adverb *neo-(a)r-thaing* ‘of course, indeed, naturally’ in *seachd neo-r-thaing* ‘more than naturally’. Once it even combines with a verb in *seachd-chùm* ‘more than kept’.

The intensifier *seachd* most commonly occurs in the expressions *seachd sgìth* (13) ‘more than tired’ (twice even with the preposed adjective *seann-* ‘old’: *seachd seann sgìth* ‘sick and tired’) and *gu seachd sònraichte/sònruichte* (12) ‘most especially’ (there is one more token with a comma between *gu seachd* and *sònruichte*, which may be a typing error). Other examples of adjectives intensified by *seachd* include *àraidh* (4) ‘certain, special’ and *àraid* (3) ‘peculiar, particular’, often as *gu seachd àraidh* and *gu seachd àraid* ‘most especially/particularly’, (*a seachd fad fhéin* (4) ‘far/long enough’, *seachd searbh* (2) ‘most bitter/disgusted, well and truly disgusted’, *seachd marbh* (1) ‘absolutely dead/stone dead’. As we can see, *seachd* is mostly used as part of fixed expressions, and it usually relates to number, quantity, or degree.

### Example 25.

- a) *cabhag nan seachd cabhag* ‘hurry of the seven hurries’, i.e. ‘the biggest hurry’
- b) *cadal nan seachd cadal* ‘sleep of the seven sleeps’, i.e. ‘the deepest sleep/slumber’
- c) *an seachd leòr aca* ‘the full satiety of them’, i.e. ‘more than enough of them’
- d) ... *fhuaire mi mu dheireadh thall mo sheachd leòr dheth* ... ‘... in the end I got/had enough (lit. “my full satiety”) of it ...’
- e) ... *gu robh mi fhèin a sheachd mhiosad ris*. ‘... I myself was much/even worse (lit. “at more than badness/ beyond badness”) to him.’
- f) (or with adjective:) *gu ma sheachd miosa na sin* ‘may it be much/even worse than that’

## 6.2 Meanings

As an intensifier *seachd* may be connected with the adverb *seach/seachad* meaning ‘past, over, by’ or ‘beyond’. The adverbial examples (*a’ dol seachd*, *mu sheachd*, and *bho sheachd gu seachd*, etc) confirm this theory. In this sense it conveys the abstract ‘beyond + [quality]’ meaning. Besides adjectives, this may be observed in the case of nouns that refer to an abstract concept or quality (e.g. *seachd duilghead* ‘beyond difficulty’, *seachd sath* ‘beyond surfeit’, i.e. ‘more than enough’, *an/mo s(h)eachd leòr* ‘the/my full satiety’, *a sheachd cruaidhead agus a sheachd làidireachd* ‘at most/beyond hardness and at most/beyond strength’).

With other nouns (mainly countable nouns and those related to conditions, such as *beannachd* (5) ‘blessing’, *mallachd* ‘curse’, *gaol* ‘love’, *cabhag* ‘hurry’, and *cadal* ‘sleep’), there may be a different explanation for the use of *seachd*: in certain cases it appears to reflect a transition between a number and an intensifier (note the plural definite article in the examples with *mallachd*, *cabhag* and *cadal*). I here count those phrases of *seachd* which do not take the plural forms of the nouns (which might signify their quality as conventionalised, fixed expressions). However, consider the plural examples/tokens of abstract nouns in Example 26b, where I regarded *seachd* as a number.

**Example 26.**

- a) *a/mo sheachd beannachd* ‘his/my seven blessings’, *seachd beannachd do* ‘seven blessings to’  
*mo sheachd mallachd fhéin* ‘my own seven curses’  
*le guidhe nan seachd mallachd ’nan caraibh* ‘with prayer of the seven curses in their ways’  
*bairn mo sheachd gaoil – sùil mo chridhe – ’s nach robh duine riamh dha d’ leithid* ‘child of my  
seven loves – eye of my heart – not having ever been anyone of your kind’  
*cabhag nan seachd cabhag* ‘hurry of the seven hurries’  
*cadal nan seachd cadal* ‘sleep of the seven sleeps’  
(although note *fois nan seachd foisean* ‘peace/rest of the seven peaces/rests’ in the same sentence,  
whith a plural noun after the definite article: *ghuigh mi cadal nan seachd cadal dha is fois nan  
seachd foisean* ‘I wished him the deepest sleep and the deepest rest’)

Further evidence for this suggested origin of use is that most (9) tokens for *seachd* as a number are encountered in the expression *seachd seun* (1) /*sian* (8) ‘seven weathers’, in possessive phrases with various nouns, referring to weather or time: *sìth nan seachd seun* ‘peace of the seven weather’, *oidhche nan seachd sian* ‘night of the seven weather’, *latha nan seachd sian* ‘day of the seven weather’, *gaillion nan seachd sian* ‘storm/tempest/gale of the seven weather’, *Fèill-Brìghde nan seachd sian* ‘Candlemas (Feast of St Bridget) of the seven weather’, *sìde nan seachd sian* ‘weather of the seven weather’, i.e. ‘extremely rough weather’.

This expression might have encouraged the intensified usage of *seachd* as a number (see similar examples in Example 26b). This usage should not be surprising since *seven* is a mythological or philosophical number in various cultures, and it is common in figures of speech (cf the expression *seven seas* for instance).

**b) *seachd* as a number:**

- Thèid na seachd dunaiddh orra ...* ‘The seven disasters will come on them ...’  
*gheibh i seachd siubhal a’ bhaile* ‘she’ll get/make seven trips to the town (lit. “of the town”)’  
*oidhche nan seachd suipearan* ‘night of the seven suppers’ (fixed expression)  
*céile-phòsda nan seachd tràthan* ‘spouse of the seven seasons’  
*doinnean sheachd cinn* ‘storm/temper of seven peaks’, i.e. ‘seven-peaked temper’ – refers to the  
intensity of the storm  
*Thiodhlaic e an t-òr am fradharc sheachd tràghadan* ‘He buried the gold at seven shores’s sight  
(lit. “in the vision of seven shores”)’ – refers to distance  
*dh’fhalbh seachd is seachd blianna* ‘seven and seven years went by’ – emphasises length of time

In Example 26b a couple of phrases are listed where *seachd* forms fixed expressions. In the first example it combines with another abstract concept (*dunaiddh* ‘misfortune’), although grammatically it functions as a number (consider the definite article in this example). Other abstract examples are: *na seachd deamhain* (3) ‘the seven demons’, *na seachd diabhlán* (2) ‘the seven devils’. The exact number in these tokens still appears to be unimportant, rather it seems to refer to intensity, depth, distance or length of time. Compare with the phrase *seachd miannan* ‘seven desires’, which is found in a riddle, followed by a list of the seven desires it refers to, i.e. the number is not symbolic in this expression.

It is worth considering how frequently comparatives or contrastive contexts can be attested in phrases with *seachd* – see the examples below:

**Example 27.**

- a) ... *nam bu luath mo long a' falbh bho thir, bu sheachd luaithe' i na sin a' tilleadh ucasan.* '...if it was fast [how] my vessel [was] leaving (from the) land, it was much/even faster than that [how] it [was] returning from them.'
- b) *Ged is luath an t-each dubh./ Is seachd luaithe an t-each donn.* 'Although the black horse is fast/However fast the black horse is, the brown horse is much/even faster.'
- c) *Ach mas miosa na geasaibh a chuireas esan or'sa, gu ma sheachd miosa (na sin an fheadhainn a chuireas tus' airsan.)* 'But if the spells he casts (lit. "puts") on you are worse, may those that you cast (lit. "put") on him be much/even worse.'
- d) ... *is lom a maoidheadh, ach is seachd lom mo chuimhne.* '... its threat(ening) is bleak, but my memory is more than bleak.'
- e) ... *bidh iad a' dol a sheachd cruaidhead agus a sheachd làidireachd 's a bha iad riamh* '... they'll be going at more hardness and at more strength than they ever have (lit. "were")'
- f) ... *ma bha esan dona, gu robh mi fhèin a sheachd mhiosad ris.* '... if he was bad, I myself was much/even worse (lit. "beyond badness") to him.'
- g) *Ma bha meas agamsa sa cheud dhol-a-mach air siubhal air an subway, fhuair mi mu dheireadh thall mo sheachd leòr dheth fad na cóig bliadhna a thug mi a' teagasg san sgoil sin.* 'If I admired travelling on the subway at the outset, in the end I got/had enough (lit. "my full satiety") of it during the five years that I spent teaching in that school.'
- h) *nach robh uisge gu leòr ann [...] Bha a-nis an seachd leòr aca* 'that there wasn't enough rain [...]  
Now they had more than enough of them'
- i) *Bu mhath a là a bheireadh e fhèin às./ 'S bu sheachd mhath a' bhlianna bheireadh i fhèin às ...* 'It would be a good day that he would escape (lit. "took himself out")./ And it would be more than a good year that she would escape ...'
- j) *Mur do chùim, is mur do sheachd-chùim, esan r' a ghealladh ...* 'Unless he kept and "more than kept" his promise ...'

Examples a–c contain comparative adjectives explicitly, while example e involves comparison using deadjectival nouns. The same applies to example f. A similar contrastive, intensifying context can be observed in examples d and g without comparative adjectives. Examples i and j also convey intensification. In example h the wider context of the discourse provides the contrastive, intensifying quality.

In the examples above *seachd* clearly stands for the adverb *seach~seachad*, conveying the sense of 'beyond /that degree/'. Consider the token with the adverb *tràth* as well: *Chumadh iad seachd tràth gun éiridh.* 'They would stay more than early (or "beyond early") without rising/getting up.' (i.e. 'they would get up really early'). Another contrastive context can be observed in the following example: *Cuimhnichibh gur e cabhag air Eilidh [...] Ged a bhiodh cabhag nan seachd cabhag oirre ...* 'Remember that Eilidh is in a hurry [...] Even if she were in the biggest hurry (lit. "if there were the hurry of the seven hurries on her") ...'.

### 6.3 Orthography and lenition

In the following tokens for *seachd* in the corpus *seachd* functions as a number within a compound expression: *na seachd-siorrachdan* 'the seven counties', *seachd(-)fillt(e)* (5) 'seven-folded' (parasynthetic compound), *seachd oiseannach* 'of seven corners' (< 'seven' + 'angular'; parasynthetic compound – see section 3.5 for definition). In the former two this is indicated by hyphenation. *Seachd* is normally not followed by a hyphen. There are three exceptions in the corpus, which are the afore-mentioned *seachd(-)fillt(e)* (4 of its 5 tokens are hyphenated), and *na seachd-siorrachdan* (where the definite article indicates that it is to be

interpreted as an integrated meaning, i.e. a compound). Similarly, in *sheachd-chùm* ‘more than kept’ it forms part of a past tense verb, the compoundness of which is confirmed by the fact that the intensifier is placed between *do*, the dependent particle of past tense, and the actual verb. This is also underlied by the lenition, which is not normally caused by *seachd* either, except for three tokens in the corpus. The two other cases are as follows: *bu sheachd mhath a’ blianna* ‘the year would be more than good’ (with the copula), and *a sheachd mhiosad* ‘at more than badness’ (but not in *gu ma sheachd miosa* ‘may it be much/even worse’, where *seachd* combines with an adjective as opposed to the former). In *bu sheachd mhath* the lenition might be formed by analogy with *bu mhath* ‘it would be good’ (see Example 27i).

## 7 Summary

In this paper the Scottish Gaelic intensifiers *làn* ‘fully’, *sàr* ‘extremely, exceptionally’, *sìor* ‘constant, ever’, and *seachd* ‘beyond, more than, even’ have been introduced, based on a corpus study of twentieth-century texts from *Corpas na Gàidhlig*.

*Làn* can function as an adverb or noun in structures of quantity (‘full (of)’ or a ‘fill (of)’, respectively), followed by the preposition *de* or *le*, or the genitive case, or it can function as a preposed adjective meaning ‘full, fully-edged, veritable’. In certain cases it does function as an intensifier meaning ‘fully, [to an absolute degree]’, it often occurs with participles (such as *toilichte* ‘entirely happy’ and *riaraichte* ‘fully satisfied’). In a couple of cases it is even attested with verbs or verbal nouns: *làn-choisinn* ‘fully earned/deserved’, *làn(-)chreidsinn* ‘fully believing’, *làn thuigsinn* ‘fully understanding’, *air làn-fhosgladh* ‘fully/entirely opened’, *làn-chrìochnachadh* ‘fully/completely finishing’. In fixed expressions it may intensify nouns: e.g. *(ann) an/de ’n làn(-)bheachd* ‘fully/absolutely convinced’, *làn(-)d(h)ùil a bhith aig* ‘to fully expect/intend’, *làn fheum a bhith aig* ‘to absolutely/badly need’, *a’ dèanamh làn-oidhirp* ‘making full/all attempt’; see also *làn-aighear/lànaighear* ‘full delight/joy’, for instance. It may reflect a pragmatic usage in expressions such as *làn charaid* ‘a real friend’, *làn chridhe laoich* ‘a genuine heart of a hero’, and *làn fhear stuic* ‘a real/fully-fledged stockman (indeed)’, in that it may indicate confirmation of quality as answer to doubts, or emphasis.

Hyphenation after *làn* appears to be unpredictable. However, hyphenation is most frequent in certain cases: in intensifier meaning before preposed adjectives and verbs, and in abstract/figurative expressions and in structures of quantity (e.g. *làn-bhiadh* ‘full/nutritious food’, *làn-duine* ‘a grown-up man’; *làn-spàine* ‘spoonful’). Lenition may well indicate contrast between fixed expressions/compounds (i.e. more abstract or non-compositional meaning) and genitive structures (cf in the cases of *làn-bhiadh* ‘full/nutritious food’ and *làn-bhrìgh* ‘full sense’, as opposed to lack of lenition in structures of quantity (e.g. *làn bìdh* ‘full of food’). Dental consonants remain unlenited, as well as words beginning in /m/ in certain cases, due to the nasal environment (e.g. *làn maise* ‘full beauty’, *làn-marbh* ‘stone dead’, *làn(-)mathanas* ‘full forgiveness’).

*Sàr* as a noun and adjective relates to nobility and exceptionality. It shows connotations with arts and heroic qualities (it may have been influenced by the word *sàr(-)obair* ‘main work/opus’). It also frequently qualifies the Gaelic words for ‘hero’ (e.g. *sàr(-)lao(i)ch*, *sàr-ghaisgich* ‘great/outstanding hero’). As a noun it refers to a highly ranked person or chief, as an adjective it commonly occurs with nouns denoting people and professions (with the

meaning ‘noble, outstanding, leading, exceptional, excellent’). It may refer to high quality (e.g. *sàr thea* ‘excellent tea’).

It intensifies mainly adjectives (besides the connotation of nobility) (e.g. *sàr-chruaidh* ‘extremely hard’, *sàr-ìomraideach* ‘most well-known’, *sàr-chlis* ‘exceptionally clever/swift’, *sàr-mhaiseach* ‘exceptionally pretty/handsome’), often abstract nouns (e.g. *air a sàr dhòigh* ‘extremely happy’, *sàr-urram* ‘great honour’, *sàr mhisneach* ‘exceptional courage’) and a couple of deadjectival nouns (*sàr-ìonmhainn* ‘the most beloved’, *sàr-eucoraich* ‘biggest sinners’). Two tokens combines with the verbal noun *tarraing*: *sàr-tharraing* ‘keep teasing’, *sàr tharraing* ‘busy drawing/pulling’.

The intensifier *sàr* carries a hyphen before adjectives (except *sàr thoilichte* ‘extremely happy’) and before abstract nouns, such as mental products (e.g. *sàr-bhriathran* ‘noble words’), as well as professions (e.g. *sàr-iasgair* ‘an excellent/outstanding fisherman’). The rest of the nouns intensified by *sàr* show hyphenation in half of the tokens. Hyphenation with words such as *duine*, *companach* may indicate compoundhood (i.e. a more integrated meaning: *sàr-dhuine* ‘chief’, *sàr-chompanach* ‘main companion’) as opposed to a description of (moral/personal) quality: *sàr dhuine* ‘excellent man’, *sàr chompanaich* ‘excellent companions’. While certain combinations (compounds) tend to be written with a hyphen also in earlier sources (*sàr-bhàrd* ‘highbard’, *sàr-fhear* ‘nobleman’, *sàr-obair* ‘main work’), later sources show more hyphenation in general.

In the case of *sìor* most tokens intensified are verbs, apart from its meaning as a plain adjective (e.g. *sòlas sìor* ‘eternal solace’, *cadal sìor* ‘eternal sleep’ – in some cases preposed adjective or, rather, proper compounds<sup>7</sup>: *sìor thaigh-geamhraidh* ‘eternal winter home’, *sìor-uisge* ‘neverending rain’). As *sìor* intensifies the length of actions (i.e. continuity, durability), most tokens are encountered with verbal nouns (e.g. *sìor(-)dhol* ‘constantly going’, *sìor(-)fhàs* ‘constantly growing/getting’, *sìor(-)mheudachadh* ‘constantly increasing’). There are only 4 tokens in the corpus where *sìor* occurs with adjectives: *sìor-bhinn* (2) ‘ever sweet’, *sìor-mhaireannach* (2) ‘everlasting’.

Half of the nominal and all adjectival examples with *sìor* are hyphenated, which might indicate compounding, as *sìor* forms compounds with the adjectives and a number of nouns (e.g. *sìor-bheò* ‘eternal life’); while in verbal forms *sìor* functions as an adverbial, intensifying word, which seems to be proved by the lack of hyphenation these days; however, hyphenation is more widespread in earlier sources.

The last intensifier discussed is *seachd* ‘beyond, more than, even’. In most of its tokens it denotes a number, in some of them it stands for the adverb *seach*, *seachad* ‘past, beyond’. As an intensifier *seachd* may expand the latter meaning, often occurring in intensifying, comparative sentences or contexts; other cases appear to relate to a more abstract use of the number ‘seven’. *Sàr* and *sìor* lenite as intensifier, *làn* lenites in most cases but with exceptions, whereas *seachd* normally does not lenite the word it modifies.

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<sup>7</sup> where the specifier precedes the generic

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