

# The iPhone's Siri doesn't seem so smart in Scotland

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D'ye want me tae spaek more clearly, Siri? Aye, ye would.

The Scottish have long been accustomed to ridicule and bafflement over their accents from their fellow Brits, who strain to decipher words like "cannae" and "daftie" (for the record: "can't" and "fool"). But you'd think that Siri, the voice-activated virtual assistant in Apple's latest [iPhone](#), would take a nice Scottish brogue in its stride.

Think again. Since the phone debuted in October, many of the Scots who

rushed to buy it have discovered that their new "smart" gadget can't understand them. This is true despite the fact that their phones are set to "English (United Kingdom)" under the "language" setting for Siri, which doesn't seem to take the distinctive Scottish burr into much account.

"What's the weather like today?" Darren Lillie said hopefully into his iPhone recently here in the Scottish capital, in a demonstration for an American reporter.

Lillie, 25, is Edinburgh born and bred, and his thick accent shows it.

Siri thought for a moment, then decided it best to repeat what it thought it heard.

"What's available in Labor Day?" it asked.

Lillie shook his head. "I don't even know what Labor Day is," he said ruefully to the American, who told him.

Such [misunderstandings](#) haven't prevented the new iPhone from being the top seller in the cellphone store where Lillie works. But talking up the benefits of a virtual assistant is a wee bit harder when the assistant virtually has no idea what you're telling it to do.

Even in the U.S. and in England, where Siri recognizes speech patterns better, the system is far from flawless. That's because the program is, in effect, still being tested and fine-tuned. Apple encourages customers to persevere, because the more use the system gets, the more information it has to draw on next time.

In other words, practice helps make Siri perfect.

"Once you've been using it for a while, it should pick up your accent,"

Lillie said, then paused.

"But if you've got a broad accent, you've got no chance."

A number of Scots have found this out already, and given up in frustration. Others have grumbled loudly on Internet forums.

A few amused and befuddled users have posted videos of themselves to show the world what happens when irresistible accent meets immovable assistant.

In one, a bearded young Scotsman, eyes dancing and Rs rolling, tries repeatedly to get Siri to "create a reminder," only to receive in puzzled reply, "James, I don't understand," or "I don't know what you mean by 'create Alamain.' " (Does anyone?)

Finally, after multiple failures, James' most deliberate and emphatic attempt ("Create. A. Reminder.") yields something close: "Create our remainder." No one breaks out the whiskey.

In other clips, "Can you dance with me?" gets misinterpreted as "Can you Dutch women?" and the question "How many miles are there in 10 kilometers?" elicits the helpful, if irrelevant, response: "I don't see any email for yesterday."

Lillie admits to adjusting his speech patterns to get Siri to understand him.

"I find I speak slower. It's like when I speak to tourists," he said to the American reporter, who felt at once both patronized and relieved.

To be fair, not all the blame for the verbal miscues ought to fall on Siri's cold electronic shoulders. Even their fellow Scots complain of being

mystified by people from Glasgow, whose brogues can be as thick and impenetrable as a highland fog.

At Hector Russell, a traditional kilt-maker along Edinburgh's Royal Mile, manager Mark Cassidy, a friendly Glaswegian, gamely gave Siri a go.

"Can I make you a kilt?" he offered, twice.

"I don't know what you mean by 'Telemedia kilt,' " Siri answered politely, both times.

Ella Bendall, an Edinburgh native, said she finds her thumbs more reliable than getting Siri to obey her. "I don't even bother using it because I'd have to speak even more slowly," said Bendall, 18. "It's quicker typing."

An attempt to reach Apple Inc. for comment was unsuccessful.

But it also turned out to be unnecessary, since it was possible to go straight to the source.

Reporter: "Siri, why do you have trouble understanding Scottish people?"

Siri: "Let me check on that. ... I don't know that. Would you like to search the Web for it?"

Nah.

Reporter: "Do you like Scottish people?"

Siri: "This is about you, not me."

Clever.

Reporter: "Are you deliberately trying to annoy people from Scotland?"

Siri: "No comment."

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