LESSON 8
Possession

In this lesson, we look at some possessive pronouns, at the marking of possession on nouns and adjectives, and at some of the complexities associated with the idea of possession.

Vocabulary

Play audio: GGU 8.1.mp3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garay</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>warraya</td>
<td>stand!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galiyaya!</td>
<td>climb!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngay</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nginu</td>
<td>your(s)(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngurungu</td>
<td>his/her(s)/its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gulaban</td>
<td>chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhuwadi</td>
<td>shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gayrr</td>
<td>name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malawil</td>
<td>shadow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yira</td>
<td>teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaamanda?</td>
<td>yaama nginda*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-gu *possessive/owning suffix (Dative)

*The phrase *yaama nginda* (question you(1)) is often abbreviated to *yaamanda*. It begins a question to which the answer is usually yes or no. Common translations include: ‘Are you? Do you? Did you? Will you?’ (see the Dictionary, p. 292). The abbreviated pronoun =nda occurs with
other sentence initial words such as dhalaa ‘where(at)’. =nda is common on words that finish with a and u and rarer with other words. Remember, the ‘=’ means this generally goes on the first word of the sentence or clause.

*The possessive suffix on standard nouns and pronouns is -gu. For the present always use that form. There is some variation in the form of this suffix in the sources. The proper name possessive is -ngu, but you do not need to use that.

Another name for this suffix is the Dative suffix. Dative has to do with ‘giving to’, and you will see this use of the suffix in later lessons.

This lesson has a limited amount of new material, and is a good opportunity to revise previous vocabulary and concepts. As well as using the new material in simple sentences incorporate it in negative (gamil) and question sentences.

Grammar

Simple possession

Play audio: GGU 8.2.mp3

This section has possessive pronouns (like English ‘my’ and ‘your’) and possessive nouns (like English ‘child’s’). Gamilaraay possessive words can, and mostly do, come after the noun, like adjectives. Here are some examples of possessive pronouns:

dhinawan ngay
emu my
my emu

wilbaarr nginu
car your(1 person)
your(1) car

gulaban ngurungu
chair his/her
her/his chair

Dhalaa dhinawan ngay?
Where is my emu?
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Gundhidha nginu.
house-at your(1)
At your house.

Yananga schoolgu ngurungu.
Go to her/his school.

Possessive nouns are formed by adding -gu to the basic noun.

Dhinawan giwiirr-gu.
The man's emu.

Wilbaarr miyay-gu.
The girl's car.

Possessive pronouns and nouns are like adjectives in that they most commonly follow immediately after the noun, but they can be separated from it, and occasionally occur before of the noun. Separation of the noun and possessive is common when a pronoun takes second position.

Gulabanda nginda guniigu ngarrinyi.
Chair-on you(1) mum-of sit-past.
‘You sat on mum’s chair.’

Possession is a complex and variable area of language – sometimes it is explicitly shown: my book, but at other times not: ‘Here comes mum’ (my/our mum). While these things vary subtly within languages, introductory courses necessarily take a fairly simple approach. Often Gamilaraay does not use possessives where English would (my hand, my mother). Sometimes the possessive pronoun is omitted entirely (Bayn mara (hand sore) = ‘My hand is sore’) or the simple pronoun is used (Bayn mara ngaya (hand sore I) = ‘my hand is sore’/‘I have a sore hand’).

For more information about pronouns, see the Dictionary, pp. 286ff.

Play audio: GGU 8.3.mp3

1. Wiyayl ngay.
   pen my
   My pen.

2(a). Nhalay wiyayl ngay.
   pen this my
   This is my pen.
Inalienable possession

This next section describes some patterns in GY about things that are ‘owned’ that are quite different from English. Linguists use the term ‘inalienable possession’ to describe the pattern, where possessive forms are not used indicate ‘ownership’.

Languages have complex rules about possession and how it is expressed. For instance, in English you can say:

‘The table leg is broken.’ ‘The car door is broken.’

But not: The boy leg is broken.

You say: ‘The boy’s leg is broken’.

‘Possession’ in Aboriginal languages, when talking of body parts, and in some other situations, often uses phrases like ‘table leg’, with no extra marker of possession. You say:
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ngaya mara (not mara ngay)
I hand
My hand

Apart from body parts, other important and personal things are ‘inalienable possessed’, for instance ‘name’ and ‘shadow’. (It was a serious offence traditionally to step on someone’s shadow.) Because of the limited GR records we do not know what else was traditionally inalienable possessed. This is an area where GR might look at other Australian languages to decide what it should do.

Hawaiian has extensive use of inalienable possession. It is similar to Australian inalienable possession but there are differences. Things you ride on/in, such as a car or horse are inalienably possessed, whereas your cow is not. Wikipedia has a long article on the topic.

More examples

ngaya gayrr
I name = my name

ngaya dhinggaa
I meat = my social section, meat

ngaya malawil
I shadow = my shadow

ngaya yira
I teeth = my teeth

Wangaaybuwan is closely related to Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay and has much more extensive records of the traditional language. From these we can get indications of what GY was like. In Wangaaybuwan, if you are wearing something, you treat it like a body part to show possession. The pattern, using Gamilaraay words, is:

ngaya dhuwadi
I shirt = my shirt

(when you are wearing it), but
**dhuwadi ngay**  
shirt my = my shirt  
(when you are **not** wearing it)  

And, if you have false teeth, sitting in a glass, you say:  

**yira ngay**  
teeth my = my teeth  

But, when the teeth, false or not, are in your mouth, you say:  

**ngaya yira**  

**Inalienable possession and ‘case’**  

In a phrase that uses inalienable possession, both elements must be the same case. For example:  

‘girl’s hand’ is **miyay mara**  

‘on the girl’s hand’ is **miyay-dha mara-ga** (with a place/Locative suffix on both).  

**Practice**  

Sit in a group, each holding an object, a **wiyayl** to start with.  

 الاقتصاد **Play audio:** GGU 8.5.mp3  

Point to each **wiyayl** and say:  

**Wiyayl ngay, wiyayl ngingu, wiyayl ngurungu.**  
My pen, your pen, his/her pen.  

Then use possessive nouns:  

**Wiyayl yinarrgu, wiyayl birraygu, wiyayl bubaagu, wiyayl Leegu, wiyayl maliyaagu.**  
The woman’s pen, the boy’s pen, dad’s pen, Lee’s pen, the friend’s pen.
Questions

Play audio: GGU 8.6.mp3

Intonation: hold a book and say:

A:  "Nguu nhalay nginu?  
   (Is) this your book?
B:  "Yawu, ngay nhama. Nguu nhama ngay.  
   Yes, it’s mine. That’s my book.

or
   No. It’s not mine. That is not mine.

Repeat, using *Yaama*:

A:  "Yaama nginu, nhalay ngu?  
   Is this book yours? / Is this your book?

A:  "Dhalaa yalduul ngay?  
   Where is my mobile?
   Here it is, in Lee’s bag.

Commands

Do not use body parts in this exercise – see next section.

Play audio: GGU 8.7.mp3

*Wiimala man.garr nginu man.gaga.*
Put your bag on the table.

*Dhiyamala ngu ngay, wiimala man.garra nginu.*
Pick up my book and put it in your bag.
A: *Banagaya man.garrgu ngay, warraya man.garra ngay.*
   Run to my bag and stand near my bag.

B: *Yawu, banagay ngaya man.garrgu nginu, warray man.garra.*
   Yes, I will run to your bag and stand near the bag.

   Good boy. You ran to my bag and stood near the bag.

Inalienable possession

Point to your body parts and name them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ngaya mil</th>
<th>my eyes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngaya mara</td>
<td>my hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do the same with other people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nginda mil</th>
<th>your eyes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nginda mara</td>
<td>your hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim bina</td>
<td>Kim’s ear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A (Points to own hand): *Minya nhalay?* What is this?
B: *Nginda mara.* Your hand.

We have not yet learnt place/Locative pronouns, i.e. how to say: ‘on me’, ‘on you’, etc., so we cannot say ‘on my hand’, but:

*Wiimala wiyayl, Bill-a mara-ga.*
Put the pen on/in Bill’s hand.

*Winangala, garay guwaala, yawala.*
Listen, say and read.

Play audio: GGU 8.8.mp3

1. *Giirr nhama gundhi ngay.*
   That is my house.
2. *Gamilbala nhama gundhi nginu.*
   That is not your(1) house.
3. *Dhalaa baawaa?*
   Where is (my) sister?

4. *Giirr gundhidha baawaa nginu.*
   Your sister is at home (at the house).

5. *Giirr gundhidha ngay, baawaa nginu.*
   Your sister is at my house.

6. *Dhalaa buruma ngurungu?*
   Where is his/her dog?

7. *Giirr nhama galigu banaganhi, buruma ngurungu.*
   His dog ran to the water.

The last sentence shows a common feature of Gamilaraay sentences: first a general term (e.g. it, there) and later in the sentence the specific information.

**Play audio:** GGU 8.9.mp3

8. *Ngaandi ngarrinyi, gulabanda ngay?*
   Who sat on my chair.

9. *Giirr Mary ngarrinyi, gulabanda nginu.*
   Mary sat on your(1) chair.

10. *Mary, yaamanda ngarrinyi gulabanda ngay?*
    Mary, did you sit on my chair?

11. *Gamil ngaya, Billybala gulabanda ngarrinyi.*
    Not me, it was Billy who sat on the chair.

12. *Shorty, dhalaa biibabiiba nginu?*
    Shorty, where is your book?

13. *Ngamila Irene, gulabanda nginu, biibabiiba ngay.*
    Look Irene, my book is on your chair.

14. *Joe, yaama nhama nginu, wilbaarr?*
    Shorty, is that car yours.

15. *Yawu, ngay nhama wilbaarr. Gaba nhama.*
    Yep, that is my car. It is a good one.

    *Ngarragaa nhama wilbaarr.*
    Look, that’s Mary, and that’s her car.
    It’s a hopeless car.
In the following, Gamilaraay uses *ngaya* ‘I’ or *nginda* ‘you’ where English uses the possessive ‘my’ or ‘your’.

17. *Bayn dhina ngaya.*
   I’ve got a sore foot.

18. *Cecil, bayn nginda mubal?*
    (or *Cecil, yaama=nda bayn mubal?*)
    Cecil, have you got a gut-ache? / 
    Is your stomach crook?

    No Trish. My stomach is good.

(There is still some question about the traditional position of the pronouns in such sentences.)
This text is taken from *Wiidhaa: An Introduction to Gamilaraay*, by John Giacon, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.