LESSON 11

L class verbs; transitivity;
doer.to/Ergative suffix

This lesson introduces some other forms of L class verbs, describes the
difference between transitive and intransitive verbs, and looks at some
of the forms of nouns, pronouns and adjectives used with transitive and
intransitive verbs. We will look at a range of sentences with transitive
and intransitive verbs and then summarise the rules for nouns,
pronouns and adjectives (collectively known as nominals).

There is a lot to learn in Lesson 11. Lesson 12 is considerably shorter.

A reminder: verbs can be thought of as ‘doing/being’ words (cook, run,
see, sleep, live). They can also be thought of as words that can be changed
to things like a past form (cooked, ran, saw, slept, lived) and a future
form (will cook, will run, will see, will sleep, will live) and generally lots
of other forms (is cooking, has cooked, will be cooking, and more).

Vocabulary

Below are the command forms of some new L class verbs.

Play audio: GGU 11.1.mp3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garay</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Transitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>baabila!</td>
<td>sleep/lie</td>
<td>intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurrula!</td>
<td>come, appear</td>
<td>intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bumala!</td>
<td>hit!</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garrala!</td>
<td>cut!</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhala!</td>
<td>eat!</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yiila!</td>
<td>bite!</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Gu</td>
<td>‘doer.to’</td>
<td>suffix (Ergative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
L class verbs already learnt include:

Winanga-la, ngamila, dhiyamala, wiimala, bawila, garay guwaala.

There are very few intransitive L class verbs. You need only remember baabila and dhurrala.

There are very few transitive Y class verbs.

Grammar

Transitive and intransitive verbs

The difference between transitive and intransitive verbs is not relevant for English or for the vast majority of languages people in Australia learn, so study it carefully and be prepared to take a while to get used to it. The division is relevant to many languages including the vast majority of Australian languages, many languages in New Guinea, Inuit, some Indian languages, Basque and more. An introductory approach is:

With intransitive verbs only one thing needs to be involved, an actor/doer:

I walked.

You slept.

The wind blew.

The Y class verbs in previous lessons are all intransitive. Most (but not all) L class verbs are transitive.

With transitive verbs two things are normally/mostly involved. For example, eat (eater and food), see (see-er and seen), drink:

I (actor/doer.to) ate (action) the meat (acted on/done.to).

Mum cooked the spaghetti.

The dog chased an emu.

A wind blew the house down.
The meaning of some verbs makes it obvious that they are transitive (eat, hit) or intransitive (sleep). Some verbs are not obvious. For example *bawi-li* ‘sing’ is transitive. The dictionary indicates which verbs are transitive (*tr*) and which intransitive (*int*).

In English the same form can be transitive and intransitive.

**I cooked the meat.** – transitive

**The meat cooked.** – intransitive

This does not happen in Gamilaraay – the verbs in those two sentences would be different.

Be careful to distinguish the core of the sentence from other bits. The core determines if a verb is transitive or intransitive. It is generally possible to add lots of other information to the sentence, but this does not change the core, the transitivity. The sentences above are now repeated, with more information that **does not** affect the transitivity.

**I cooked the meat yesterday afternoon, for everyone who came to the party.**

**The meat cooked while we were talking about the weather on the patio.**

**L class verbs**

The simple forms of the *L* class verbs – command, future and past – are set out in the table below. The English translation is given for a few verbs. You can work out the others by following the pattern.

You have met the concepts of a verb root, the bit that does not change; and endings or suffixes, the bits that change. So, for *baabila*! the root is *baabi-*-, and that must be followed by a suffix. The same suffixes or endings are used for all *L* class verbs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Command*</th>
<th>Future*</th>
<th>Past*</th>
<th>English, transitive/intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-la</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>-li</td>
<td>(Suffix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baabi-la</td>
<td>baabi-li</td>
<td>baabi-y</td>
<td>int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lie down!</td>
<td>will lie down</td>
<td>lay down</td>
<td>also ‘sleep’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhurra-la</td>
<td>dhurra-li</td>
<td>dhurra-y</td>
<td>int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come!</td>
<td>will come, appear</td>
<td>came, appeared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bumala!</td>
<td>bumali</td>
<td>bumay</td>
<td>tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit!beat/hit it!</td>
<td>will hit/beat</td>
<td>did beat/hit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhala!</td>
<td>dhali</td>
<td>dhay</td>
<td>tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat! eat it!</td>
<td>will eat</td>
<td>ate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yiila!</td>
<td>yiili</td>
<td>yiiy</td>
<td>bite, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhiyamala!</td>
<td>dhiyamali</td>
<td>dhiyamay</td>
<td>pick up, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wiimala!</td>
<td>wiimali</td>
<td>wiimay</td>
<td>put down, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngamila!</td>
<td>ngamili</td>
<td>ngamiy</td>
<td>see, look at, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winangala!</td>
<td>winangali</td>
<td>winangay</td>
<td>hear, listen, tr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garay guwaala!</td>
<td>garay guwaali</td>
<td>garay guwaay*</td>
<td>talk, tr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Command, or Imperative, is not actually a tense.

*The past tense has uses not found in English past tenses. It can be used for recent action that has current consequences, more commonly found in verbs of other classes, e.g. balu-nhi ‘it died/it is dead’.

*As noted previously, the GY future indicates something may happen, but with less certainty than the English future does. GY future could be translated ‘might X’.

**‘Talk’ in GR is a phrase, not one word. Garay is ‘word, language’ and guwaali something like ‘tell/say’. The pronunciation of guwaali/guwaay is somewhat different from expected. The aa in guwaali is like English ‘or’ and the guwaay sounds like ‘gwoi’. You can hear these words on Gayarragi, Winangali.
The next six sentences have transitive verbs and intransitive verbs and nothing surprising. The pronouns and nouns are just as you have been using them.

![Play audio: GGU 11.3.mp3](audio)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yananhi ngaya.</td>
<td>intransitive verb</td>
<td>went I went/walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yananhi nginda.</td>
<td>intransitive verb</td>
<td>went you(1 person) You(1) went/walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yananhi buruma.</td>
<td>intransitive verb</td>
<td>went dog The dog went/walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yananhi dhinawan.</td>
<td>intransitive verb</td>
<td>went emu The emu went/walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buruma ngaya ngamiy.</td>
<td>transitive verb</td>
<td>dog I saw I saw a dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buruma nginda ngamiy.</td>
<td>transitive verb</td>
<td>dog you(1 person) saw You(1) saw a dog.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may help to practise the verb forms, as set out in part 1 of Practice, before going onto the next part of the grammar.
The nouns and pronouns around transitive and intransitive verbs

It would be more accurate to say the nominals around these verbs, including other types of words such as adjectives and nominal demonstratives.

There is a range of terminology to refer to things involved with verbs, set out in the table below. Ignore the table if it is not helpful now. (This table sets out the Gamilaraay pattern, not the English.)

With Intransitive verbs there is fundamentally one thing involved. We will call it the doer, and say it is in Nominative case.

With Transitive verbs there are fundamentally two things involved. We will call one the doer.to, and say it is in Ergative case, the other is the done.to and it is in Accusative case.

There is other terminology used. In languages, such as English and Latin, where there is no difference between the doer and doer.to they can be called ‘subject’. The doer.to is sometimes called the ‘agent’. The done.to is commonly called the ‘object’.

The new rule you need to learn is when the doer.to with a transitive verb is represented by a noun – for instance, in the next two sentences – it must have the doer.to/Ergative suffix:

---

**Buruma-gu dhinawan ngamiy.**

dog-doer.to emu saw

*The dog saw an emu.*

**Dhinawan-du buruma ngamiy.**

emu-doer.to dog saw

*The emu saw a dog.*
In English, the ‘doer.to’ is the one that comes first in the sentence. Having a *doer.to/Ergative* suffix that shows who is doing the action means Gamilaraay can change the word order a lot, since the suffix, not the word order, *tells you who is acting*. This gives the language great flexibility to emphasise different things by putting them first in the sentence. The next five sentences can all have the same English translation, but have different emphases.

*Buruma-gu ngamiy dhinawan.*  
dog-doer.to saw emu  
**The dog** saw an emu.

*Dhinawan buruma-gu ngamiy.*  
emu dog-doer.to saw  
The dog saw **an emu**.

*Dhinawan ngamiy buruma-gu.*  
emu saw dog-doer.to  
The dog saw **an emu**.

*Ngamiy buruma-gu dhinawan.*  
saw dog-doer.to emu  
The dog **saw** an emu.

*Ngamiy dhinawan buruma-gu.*  
saw emu dog-doer.to  
The dog **saw** an emu.

**Ergative(doer.to) nouns**

**(Play audio: GGU 11.5.mp3)**

As with the place/Locative suffix, the actual shape or form of the *doer.to/Ergative* suffix varies, depending on the ending of the word it is attached to. Below is a list of words with the suffix. Remember, the *doer.to/Ergative* suffix is only used with transitive verbs.
The forms of the suffix is shown in the table below. Notice that the **doer/to/Ergative** suffix is the same as the **Locative** suffix, except that the final *a* is replaced by a *u*.

### Doer/to/Ergative and local suffixes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word endings</th>
<th>-Gu (doer/to)</th>
<th>-Ga (place)</th>
<th>-DHi (from)</th>
<th>-Gu (to)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>a, u</em></td>
<td>-gu</td>
<td>-ga</td>
<td>-dhi</td>
<td>-gu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>i, y</em></td>
<td>-dhu</td>
<td>-dha</td>
<td>-dhi</td>
<td>-gu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>n</em></td>
<td>-du</td>
<td>-da</td>
<td>-di</td>
<td>-gu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>rr, l</em></td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-gu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This is a slightly simplified version of GR. There are also so-called Y2 words, such as *yaraay* 'sun' and *bagay* 'creek' that form the Locative, Ablative and Ergative by dropping the *y* and adding *-dha/-dhi/dhu*: e.g. *yaraa-dha, yaraa-dhi, yaraa-dhu*. Only a few such words have been found in the GR sources, considerably more are found in the Yuwaalaraay sources. Irregular case forms include *minya-dhu* Ergative and *minya-dha* Locative: *minya* 'what?'

There are summary tables in the *Dictionary*, pp. 266, 340, and a more up-to-date table in the appendices.

With first person pronouns and second person pronouns the **doer/Nominative** and the **doer/to/Ergative** pronoun is the same, whether the verb is **intransitive** or **transitive**. (Third person pronoun pronouns are treated in a later lesson.)
Lesson 11. Class Verbs; Transitivity; Doer.To/Ergative Suffix

I went. I saw a friend.

With nouns the **doer/Nomina**tive noun (intransitive verb) has no suffix, and the **doer.to/Ergative** noun (transitive verb) has the suffix.

Yananhi birralii. Birraliidhu maliyaa ngamiy. / Maliyaa birraliidhu ngamiy.
The child went. The child saw a friend.

Below are a few more sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yanay gaayli.</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>will.walk child</td>
<td>The kid will walk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaayli-<strong>dbu</strong> bubaa ngamili.</th>
<th>transitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>child-doer.to dad will.see</td>
<td>The kid will see dad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaayli bubaa-<strong>gu</strong> ngamili.</th>
<th>transitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>child dad-doer.to will.see</td>
<td>Dad will see the child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baabili gunii.</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>will. sleep mum</td>
<td>Mum will sleep.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gunii-<strong>dbu</strong> bubaa ngamili.</th>
<th>transitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mum-doer.to dad will.see</td>
<td>Mum will see dad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gunii dhinawan-<strong>du</strong> ngamili.</th>
<th>transitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>child emu-doer.to will.see</td>
<td>The emu will see mum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

When the verb is transitive you need to decide the form of the doer.to (Ergative case) and the done.to (Accusative case).

The doer.to:

If the **doer.to** is ‘I’ or ‘you’ use the form you have already learnt, the same form that is used with intransitive verbs.

If the **doer.to** is a **noun** or **adjective**, you need to add a doer.to/Ergative suffix.

The **done.to** is the usual, simple form of the noun or adjective – no suffix.

Extension

Play audio: GGU 11.7.mp3

You may have noticed some areas we have avoided. What if I/you are the done.to? What if the doer.to is third person? These will be covered fully in later lessons, but some instances are given in the table and sentences below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>1st and 2nd person pronouns follow the pattern of ngaya</th>
<th>3rd person pronoun pattern</th>
<th>Other nominals marking</th>
<th>example</th>
<th>Special (only some given here)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative/doer</td>
<td>ngaya</td>
<td>=nha, nhama+</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>yinarr</td>
<td>minya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ergative/doer.to</td>
<td>ngaya</td>
<td>nguru</td>
<td>-Gu</td>
<td>yinarr-u</td>
<td>minya-dhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative/done.to</td>
<td>nganha</td>
<td>=nha, nhama+</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>yinarr</td>
<td>minya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 11. | Class Verbs; Transitivity; Doer.to/Ergative Suffix

**Yananhi=nha.**  
intransitive verb  
went \_he/she\_  
she/he went/walked.

**Dhinawan nguru ngamiy.**  
transitive verb  
emu \_he/she\_ saw  
She/he saw an emu.

Another approach

Another way of approaching this is:

When you are using a Gamilaraay verb **the first step** is to determine if the verb is **intransitive** or **transitive**.

**If the verb is intransitive** there is one thing that must be involved:

- I slept.  
  *Baabiy ngaya.*
- The rock fell.  
  *Yarral bundaanhi.*
- They walked.  
  *Yananhi ganunga.*
- The bird is flying.  
  *Barawaanha dhigaraa.*

The one thing can be called the **doer** (It is **Nominative** case).

**If the verb is transitive** there are generally two things involved: the **doer.to** (It is **Ergative** case.) and the **done.to** (It is **Accusative** case).

- I drank the water.  
  *Gali ngaya ngarunhi.*
- The rock broke the stick.  
  *Yarral-u dhulu gamay.*
- The bird heard the car.  
  *Dhigaraa-gu wilbaarr winangay.*

Sometimes there is no ‘done.to’ word, but since the verb is transitive the doer.to is **Ergative**.

- I sang.  
  *Bawiy ngaya.*
- The bird ate.  
  *Dhigaraa-gu dhay.*
Practice *maal/1 – with pronouns*

![Play audio: GGU 11.8.mp3](attachment:GGU%2011.8.mp3)

Use the simple *L* class verb forms with the actor being *ngaya* or *nginda*. Then make longer sentences using other material from previous lessons.

---

A: *Baabila!*
   Sleep!

B: *Baabili ngaya. Baabiy ngaya.*
   I will sleep. (sleeps) I slept.

---

With the next practice use the first two sections, then gradually extend the conversation.

A: *Wiyayl dhiyamala!*
   Pick up the pen!

B: *Yawu, dhiyamali ngaya wiyayl. Wiyayl ngaya dhiyamay.*
   I will pick up the pen. (does it) I picked up the pen.

A: *Birray gaba. Wiyayl nginda dhiyamay!*
   Good boy! You picked up the pen.

A: *Wiimala=bala=nga wiyayl nguuga!*
   Now put the pen on the book!

B: *Ngaayaybaay. Wiimali ngaya wiyayl nguuga. Wiyayl ngaya (nguuga) wiimay.*
   OK. I will put the pen down on the book. (does it) I put down the pen (on the book).

---

Start similar conversations with other phrases. A few examples are:

---

*Man.γa bumala.*  Hit the table.
*Miyay winangala.*  Listen to the girl.
*Ngamila birray.*  Look at the boy.

(Note: when translating listen *to* and look *at* you do not need any suffixes on the *done.to* in GY.)

![Play audio: GGU 11.9.mp3](attachment:GGU%2011.9.mp3)
Lesson 11. | Class Verbs; Transitivity; Doer/To/Ergative Suffix

Negatives

A:  Wiyayl dhiyamala!
    Pick up the pen!
B:  Gamilbala. Gamil ngaya wiyayl dhiyamali.
    No. I won’t pick up the pen.  (note: ngaya stays in second position)

B does something, A tells them not to.
A:  Garriya man.ga bumala!
    Don’t hit the table!

Questions

Intonation

A:  ?Wiyayl nginda dhiyamali?
    You will pick up the pen? Will you pick up the pen?
B:  Gamilbala. Gamil ngaya wiyayl dhiyamali.
    No. I won’t pick up the pen.

Or:

B:  Yawu. Giirr ngaya wiyayl dhiyamali.
    Yes. I will pick up the pen.  (note: ngaya stays in second position)
B:  Ngamila! Wiyayl ngaya dhiyamay.
    Look! I picked up the pen.

Or start with:

A:  ?Dhiyamali nginda wiyayl?
    You will pick up the pen? Will you pick up the pen?

Play audio: GGU 11.10.mp3
Questions with *Yaama/Minya*, etc.

A: **Yaama** nginda wilbaarr ngamiy? Yaama=nda wilbaarr ngamiy?
   Did you see the car?

A: **Minya** nginda dhali?
   What will you will eat?

B: *Ngamila.* Giirr ngaya apple dhali. … *Dhay ngaya apple.*
   Look. I will eat an apple. … I ate the apple.

A: **Dhalaa** ngaya man.garr wiimali?
   Where will I put the bag?

   On the table. Put the bag on the table.

Practice *bulaarr/2*: Nouns as doer, doer.to, done.to (Nominative, Ergative, Accusative)

It may help to label the role of all the nouns in this section: doer, doer.to, done.to.

Use the pattern below with the *L* class verbs you know.

A: **Baabila,** dbagaan!
   Sleep, brother!

B: *Baabili* dbagaan. *Baabiy* dbagaan.
   Brother will sleep. Brother slept.

With the next practice begin by just using the first two sentences, then gradually extend the conversation. You can then substitute other objects, or other verbs: *bumala, garrala, yiila, ngamila*, etc.

A: **Baawaa,** wiyayl dhiyamala!
   Sister, Pick up the pen!

B: *Ngamila,* wiyayl baawaa-gu dhiyamay.
   Look, sister picked up the pen.

A: **Baawaa,** wiimala=bala=nga wiyayl nguuga!
   Sister, now put the pen on the book!

B: *Ngamila,* wiimay baawaa-gu wiyayl nguuga.
   Look, sister put the pen down on the book.
Start similar conversations with other phrases. A few examples are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Gamilaraay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhagaan, man.ga bumala.</td>
<td>Brother, hit the table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyay winangala.</td>
<td>Listen to the girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngamila birray.</td>
<td>Look at the boy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Play audio: GGU 11.11.mp3

Negatives

Working in a group:

A Bdha: Gamilbala C-dhu dhinggaa dhali. C will not eat the meat.
B: Yawu, guniidhubala dhinggaa dhali. Yes, but mum will eat the meat.

_Bdha_ indicates A is talking to B; the Locative suffix has the form -dha because the letter B is said bee/be, ending with the same sound as Gamilaraay i/ii; so the suffix is -dha.

Questions

_ Intonation (working in groups)_

A: ?Wiyayl miyaydhu dhiyamali?
   Will the girl pick up the pen?
B: Gamilbala. Gamil miyaydhu wiyayl dhiyamali.
   No. The girl won’t pick up the pen.

Or

B: Yawu. Yinarru wiyayl dhiyamali.
   Yes. The woman will pick up the pen.
B: Ngamila! Wiyayl baawaagu dhiyamay.
   Look! Sister picked up the pen.
Or start with:

A:  ¿Dhiyamali nginda wiyayl?
You will **pick up** the pen? Will you **pick up** the pen?

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

Play audio: GGU 11.12.mp3

1.  Giirr ngaya birralii burrulaa winangay.
I heard a lot of kids.
2.  Giirr miyaydhu birralii burrulaa winangay.
The girl heard a lot of kids.
You picked up that bag of mine.
The boy picked up that bag of mine.
5.  Giirr ngaya man.garr wiimay.
I put the bag down.
Dad put the bag down.
7.  Dhimbagu biiba dhay.
The sheep ate the paper.
8.  Birralii yarraamandu ngamiy.
The horse saw the child.
The child saw the horse.
10. Dhurugu giwiirr yiiy, giwiirrubala gamil dhuru yiiy.
The snake bit the man, but the man did not bite the snake.
The black dog will bite the woman.
The woman will not bite the black dog.
Dad saw mum, but mum did not see dad.