

Garay Guwaala • Talk the Language

Lesson 1: Greetings, statements, questions

Each lesson begins with a vocabulary section. It may take you a while to learn how to interpret the letters in Gamilaraay words if you are only used to reading English. Practise by reading the vocabulary words below as you listen to the accompanying **GarayGuwaala1.1** audio file (1MB mp3).

<i>ngamila!</i>	look!	<i>yawu</i>	yes
<i>winangala!</i>	listen!	<i>gamil</i>	no / not [3]
<i>garay guwaala!</i> [1]	speak!	<i>gaba</i>	good
<i>yaama</i>	hello	<i>bigibila</i>	echidna
<i>yaama</i>	question word [2]	<i>dhinawan</i>	emu
<i>yaluu</i>	goodbye	<i>biiba</i>	paper
<i>maliyaa</i>	friend	<i>baadhal</i>	bottle
<i>dhagaan</i>	brother	<i>bina</i>	ear
<i>baawaa</i>	sister	<i>mil</i>	eye
<i>minya?</i>	what?	<i>mara</i>	hand
<i>nhalay</i>	this	<i>dhina</i>	foot
<i>nhama</i>	that		

[1] *guwaala* by itself means 'tell' or 'say'; *garay* is 'word'

[2] Quite often, single words in one language do not translate into single words in another. *Yaama* is one such word, with at least two translations in English. The word *nhama* is most commonly 'that', as in the wordlist above, but is also translated as 'it, he, she, him, her' and in other ways. For more information see the GYY dictionary entries for each word.

[3] The word *gamil* translates the English word 'no', but only in some circumstances. At other times it translates the English 'not'. Thus: *gamil* = 'no' in answer to a question, e.g. 'Are you well?' 'No.' *gamil* = 'not' to negate a statement, e.g. 'I did not go.' It is not used to translate 'no' in 'no + noun' phrases, e.g. 'no money', 'no water'.

Greetings

In traditional Aboriginal societies the sorts of greetings and farewells used today were not common; however, as people moved into different social settings greetings and farewells have been developed. Below are some simple ones.

When meeting people

Yaama maliyaa. Hello friend / mate.

Yaama baawaa. Hello sister.

Yaama dhagaan. Hello brother.

When leaving

Yaluu maliyaa. Goodbye friend / mate.

Yaluu baawaa. Goodbye sister.

Yaluu dhagaan. Goodbye brother.

You can listen to these greetings on [GarayGuwaala1.2](#) (0.5MB mp3). Try to practise these words with people who can reply, or even with babies or your pets. Another good exercise is to listen to the Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay stories in the [Guwaabal](#) section of this website; each story can be heard whole or broken down into individual sentences, with GY and English transcriptions.

Statements: 'this / that' ('these / those')

Look at the examples below and listen to audio file [GarayGuwaala1.3](#) (0.8MB mp3).

nhalay this

nhama that

Dhinawan nhalay. This is an emu. These are emus.

Mil nhalay. This is an eye. These are eyes.

Biiba nhama. That is paper. Those are papers.

Ngamila! Bigibila nhama. Look! That is an porcupine (echidna). Those are porcupines (echidnas).

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Winangala!

Listen! That is an emu. Those are emus.

Dhinawan nhama.

Note that the *nhalay* / *nhama* comes second. Also, there is usually no distinction in Gamilaraay between singular and plural words, which is why *nhalay* can mean 'this' or 'these', *nhama* can mean 'that' or 'those' and *dhinawan* can mean 'emu' or 'emus'.

Use *nhalay* 'this' for things that are close to you and *nhama* 'that' for anything else. As you point to your own eye you would say *Mil nhalay* 'This is an eye', but if you point to someone else's eye you would say *Mil nhama* 'That is an eye' (also 'Those are eyes').

The traditional rules for the use of *nhama* are actually much more complex. Some of the more complex rules are understood, some will be worked out as study of the Gamilaraay historical material continues, but some may never be known because of the limited amount of historical material we have and because of the long-term decline in the use of Gamilaraay.

To practise your Gamilaraay you might like to combine English words with the Gamilaraay structures that you know (car *nhama*, house *nhama* etc.). As you learn more Gamilaraay words you can start using less English.

Questions and answers

There are two basic types of questions: the 'content' or 'information' question, which (in this lesson) all begin with *minya?* 'what?'; and the 'yes' / 'no' question. As with English, many Aboriginal languages ask 'yes' / 'no' questions through the tone of voice. For instance, in English you can say 'You had lunch' as a statement or as a question.

Here are two *minya* questions. Remember the structure of the answers: the *nhalay* or *nhama* comes second. Listen to the sound file [GarayGuwaala1.4](#) (0.3MB mp3)

Minya nhalay?

What's this? What are these? (Asking about things next to or on you.)

Minya nhama?

What's that? What are those? (Asking about things not on or next to you.)

Mil nhalay.

This is an eye. These are eyes.

Biiba nhama.

That is paper. Those are papers.

Don't forget: when you say *minya* remember to position your tongue with the tip on the bottom teeth with the tongue pushed forward. Also, the tongue position for the *nh* sound is for the tongue tip to be between the teeth, with the top of the tongue against the teeth.

Conversations

Below is one longer conversation. There are others on the sound and transcript files. Listen to the sound file [GarayGuwaala1.5](#) (0.6MB mp3) and read the text.

Yaama dhagaan.

G'day brother.

Yaama baawaa.

Hello sister. G'day sis.

Minya nhama, Bobby?

What is that, Bobby?

Biibabiiba nhalay, Matilda.

This is a book.

Yawu. Yaluu Bobby.

Yep. See ya Bobby.

Yaluu Matilda.

Bye Matilda.

It is great if you can use Gamilaraay in new situations. However, be aware that the patterns of Gamilaraay are often very different from the patterns of English, and since what most learners know is English they often put English patterns into their Gamilaraay. This can happen with pronunciation: it is easy to say *n* when you should say *nh*; and it is very easy to shorten the second part of *yaluu* and say *yalu*, with the stress on the *ya*.

Sentences can also mistakenly follow English pattern, so it is not uncommon to hear learners say *Nhama mil* for 'That is an eye' when they mean *Mil nhama*. In future lessons you will see many examples where the English pattern is different, and it is important to keep reminding yourself of the Gamilaraay patterns.

A note on language revival

Many Aboriginal languages began declining in use soon after their land was invaded. People are now attempting to revive some of those languages, Gamilaraay included. With a living language like Japanese learners get information about the language from fluent Japanese speakers, sometimes via the books and materials they produce. And if the learners talk poor Japanese it does not have any great impact. However, with Gamilaraay the situation is very different. Gamilaraay is being rebuilt. Speakers only know a little of the language. It is easy for speakers to incorporate a lot of English into their Gamilaraay. As Gamilaraay is rebuilt it can be more true to traditional Gamilaraay if:

- there is ongoing research into traditional Gamilaraay, so that we understand it better
- people learn from this research
- people work together to improve their Gamilaraay