A quick reference guide to the grammar of Victorian Aboriginal Languages

Foundation to Level 10

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Purpose

This guide has been designed as a reference tool to assist Aboriginal language teams and individuals who may want to more deeply explore grammatical aspects of their language and introduce particular grammatical concepts in their teaching using a step-by-step scaffolding approach. It provides a brief description of the grammatical categories, features and constructions found in Australian Aboriginal Languages in general.

We hope that this guide assists language teams and individuals in understanding and analysing language found in old (historical) records, and in using linguistic texts such as sketch grammars. It does not replace community language knowledge and expertise, contemporary language use, or a community grammar of the target language of reclamation. As the [Victorian Curriculum F–10 – Victorian Aboriginal Languages](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/languages/victorian-aboriginal-languages/introduction/rationale-and-aims) and all of the other resources on this site state, all language used in the classroom must be provided by the community and school-based language teams should be mindful of this, and be guided also by community process and practice.

Some grammatical features may not be new to students, as the [Victorian Curriculum F–10 – English](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/english/english/introduction/rationale-and-aims) requires that students acquire specific grammatical features at each level. For example, at Level 1 in English, which is roughly equivalent to Year 1, students should ‘Explore differences in words that represent people, places and things (nouns, including pronouns), happenings and states (verbs), qualities (adjectives) and details such as when, where and how (adverbs)’. Hence, students may already be familiar with these concepts.

Layout

In this guide grammatical features are grouped into categories, with each grammatical feature in a separate, numbered row. The categories are designed to assist with a scaffolding approach to teaching the language. (See below for more details on a scaffolding approach.)

The layout comprises four columns.

The **first column** contains

* the formal name of the grammatical feature
* the abbreviation used for the grammatical feature within the examples, and
* a very brief, plain English interpretation of the grammatical feature’s name.

Language Team members can use the formal terminology to search for more information on that grammatical feature if they wish to do so. In a few instances, more formal terminology is also provided in the last column to assist in your search. For example, ‘demonstratives’ in this guide are also discussed under the term ‘deixis’ in some textbooks.

The **second column** contains examples of the grammatical feature under discussion. Examples in the table are from the *Wergaia* language. The general layout of these examples is:

I hit the dog. The example in **English**.

*Dakan gal* The Aboriginal words as they would be **written** in a text.

Dak-a-an gal A **breakdown of the morphemes** in each word of the example.

Hit-PRES-I dog A **translation or label** for each grammatical unit or morpheme in the breakdown.

The **third column** is provided to allow Language Team members to enter examples from the target language into the guide. This would ideally be done as a group as it is a good learning opportunity for Language Team members.

The **fourth column** is for Comments and has three sub-headings in each numbered row.

* The ‘Background concepts’ are grammatical concepts with which students should be familiar before the language teacher begins teaching the grammatical feature in that row.
* The ‘General’ sub-heading has informal information about the grammatical feature.
* Finally, the ‘Grammatical’ sub-heading contains information about the use of the grammatical feature under discussion.

The grammatical features are placed into recommended categories based on a presumed relative degree of difficulty for the learner. However, this is not prescriptive, and Language Teams can choose to study these grammatical features in whatever order is appropriate or suitable, depending on the information available on the target language of reclamation and students’ knowledge and the purpose of the lesson.

Generally speaking, students will need a thorough understanding of the grammatical features in category one before moving to category two and so on, but this may vary. This allows students to build on their knowledge in a logical way.

However, the ‘Background concepts’ for each grammatical feature will assist teachers should they decide to teach a particular feature from one of the more difficult categories by ensuring that the students have the basic concepts required to understand the grammatical feature in that row. For example, should a teacher wish to teach verbs indicating a continuous action (Row 18), such as *I am running, he is running,* or *the children were digging for yams*, their students need to have an understanding of what constitutes a verb (Row 3), what tense means and how it is shown in the target Language (Rows 12, 14 and 16), and the functions of subjects (Row 7) and objects (Row 17).

Linguistic explanations

A [glossary of linguistic terminology](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/pdf-documents/) is available for download on the Australian Curriculum website.

Citation forms

When using a grammar or dictionary containing words from the target language, it is important to establish what form the dictionary entry takes. For example, the form used for verbs could be the base form only, that is, the ‘meaning’ morpheme without any other markers, or it might be the base form plus a tense marker, such as the present tense. It would be inappropriate to add the tense if it is already there, or to leave the present tense on the base form and then add the past tense to it.

Teaching languages (scaffolding)

When learning any language, students need to understand the patterns of that language. When children learned their mother-tongue they made mistakes, for example, and using English to illustrate: ‘I is tired’ or ‘the sheeps is in the paddock’, and were corrected, but students have to learn in a class setting, which is quite different. Teachers need to guide and show students new language patterns and how they work. As a starting point, it is important to gradually learn the terminology used to describe grammatical features. What is a verb, a tense, a noun, a case…? A common understanding of the terminology used in the classroom is helpful.

Why consider a scaffolding approach? Just as a scaffold supports a building under construction, so scaffolding promotes learning. This may include the use of resources, tasks, templates, pictures and modelling, as well as teacher guidance. Once students are confident at a given level, they can then move on to the next, more difficult level, and may create language sentences themselves.

To demonstrate this using the concept of ownership or possession:

* Aboriginal Languages have a very rich set of suffixes (endings) for showing ownership, far more than English does. In English, a book can belong to one person, or an unspecified number of people: my book, your book, his/her/its book (one person); our books, your books, their books (two, ten, 3 million people, we don’t know how many). In Aboriginal Languages, there can be as many as 11 different ways to show ownership. It is valuable to use a scaffolding approach, as described below, in order to teach this complex aspect of grammar, rather than introduce it all at once.
* **Background concepts**. Before students can begin to learn the possessive suffixes (ownership), they need to understand another concept altogether. In Aboriginal Languages, there are generally two versions of each suffix (ending):
* one of these forms begins with a vowel and is used when the last sound in the word is a consonant
* the other form begins with a consonant and is used when the last sound in the word is a vowel.

In order to learn about possessive suffixes, students need to understand when to use each form of the suffix. This is what we call a ‘background concept’.

* Once students understand any background concepts, the teacher can begin by introducing the notion or idea of possession, that is, how the owner of something is shown in English, e.g. my dog, your dog, the boy’s dog etc. – that is, by the use of *my* (possessive pronoun) or *apostrophe s* (possessive suffix).
* Once the teacher is sure that the students understand the concept of possession, the simplest form in the target language can be introduced – such as, the first person singular (my) form.
* Once it is clear that students understand and can use the first person singular, the teacher would introduce the second (your) and third (his/her/its) person singular forms in Language. However, it is not recommended that teachers introduce the dual, trial and plural forms just yet, nor the inclusive/exclusive distinction, because they can be tricky to understand without a thorough understanding of possessive pronouns.
* Later on, the teacher might introduce the plural forms, but still not the inclusive/exclusive distinction. The teacher might choose to use only the inclusive form at this point, without saying that it is inclusive.
* Once the students are confident with all of the forms already taught, the teacher could introduce the dual (two) and trial (three) forms.
* Finally, the teacher could introduce the inclusive/exclusive distinction and the appropriate forms in the target language, pointing out any patterns that might be found, for example, the exclusive form may be marked by an additional suffix on the inclusive form.

As you can see from the steps above, students learn the singular forms, then build on these with the plural forms, then more building occurs with the introduction of the dual and trial forms, and the inclusive/exclusive distinction.

Continuity, consistency, repetition and planned progression are essential. As Victorian Aboriginal Languages are in various stages of reclamation, the categories in this reference guide offer advice on the possible order of acquisition. Each group will need to choose what they introduce and in what order, in line with the Language material available at the time.

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1. Stative verbs

| **Grammatical feature** | **Example (in *Wergaia)*** | **Your Language** **(to be completed by the Language Team)** | **Comments** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category 1** |
| 1. **Imperative** **(IMP)** verbs –

orders, commands, directives | Sit down!*Ngengi*Ngeng-iSit - IMP | Sit!Sit-IMP | **Background concepts**: Nil**General**: * Instructional words for everyday use in the classroom, e.g. ‘listen’, ‘say’, ‘sit’, ‘come’, ‘go’.
* No need to explain how these verbs are formed, teach them through action, gesture and repetition.

**Grammatical**: * Usually formed by adding a particular suffix to the stem, (used for instructions, orders etc.) known as the **imperative** suffix
* Some languages have different suffixes (endings) for transitive and intransitive verbs and inflect for number. (See 18.)
 |
| 1. **Nouns** –

names of things, people, places | *Gal* ‘dog’*Wutyu* ‘man’*Laiurruk* ‘woman’*Galk* ‘stick’Reduplication:*Yalum* ‘waterhole’*Yalum yalum* ‘a chain of ponds’*Buletyi gulgurn* ‘two young men’*Gityauwil gurra* ‘a big mob (many) of kangaroos*Badyip gurra* ‘a few kangaroos’ | egDog: Man: Woman: Stick: Reduplication:Child/offspring: Brood: A couple of men: Several men: Two men: | **Background concepts**: Nil**General**: * Plural is not marked on nouns.
* You can say *buletyi gal* ‘two dog’.

**Grammatical**: * There is generally no plural morpheme in Aboriginal Languages, i.e. no equivalent to English plural ‘s’ as in ‘dog/dogs’.
* With some nouns, such as ‘waterhole’, plural can be indicated by reduplication, that is, repeating or duplicating the stem word itself. This sometimes applies to inanimate objects only.
* You can indicate more than one by using numbers, ‘a few’, or ‘many’.
 |
| 1. **Verbs** – verbs are words that describe an action (to hit),

a state (to love) or a process (to think) | *Dak*- ‘to hit’*Barrap*- ‘to run’*Warrip*- ‘to dance’*Gumb*- ‘to sleep’ | Hit: Run: Dance: Sleep:  | **Background concepts:** Nil**General:*** Verbs describe actions (to run, to sit, to speak), states (to believe, to love, to dream) or processes (to hear, to think, to memorise).
* Using English as an example, verbs can occur with ‘to’ or the suffixes –ed, -ing, -s, as in to walk, walked, walking, (she) walks.
* Not all verbs are regular. This means that it does not follow the normal pattern, e.g. in English unlike the regular verb ‘to walk’, the verb ‘to be’ is irregular, i.e. am, is, are, was, were.
* Most actions have a do-er – that is, most verbs have a subject, i.e. the person or thing carrying out the action described by the verb. In the sentences ‘I ran, I danced’ and ‘I slept’, the subject is ‘I’, the person saying the sentence. The imperative form has an understood subject, that is, ‘you’, e.g. (you) run!

**Grammatical:*** In Aboriginal Languages, the verb is the base onto which suffixes (endings) are added to show tense (time), subject (the do-er), object, and possibly several other categories.
* The dash on the end of the **base form** of the verbs in column two indicates that the verb has no tense or subject on it.
 |
| 1. **Consonant versus vowel final stems** – alternating suffixes
 | My dog*galek*gal- ekdog-my (consonant final noun- vowel initial suffix)My hip*Mulangek*Mula-ngekHip- my(Vowel final noun-consonant initial suffix) | My [consonant final noun]My [vowel final noun] | **Background concepts:** Consonants and vowels, understanding morphemes**General:** * Almost all suffixes in Victorian Aboriginal Languages have alternating forms that depend on whether the stem is consonant final or vowel final.

**Grammatical:** * Consonant final stems take vowel initial suffixes.
* Vowel final stems take consonant initial suffixes.
 |
| 1. **Possessive (poss) suffix on nouns**: **1st person singular**

(my) – nouns belonging to me | My dog*galek*gal- ekdog-my  | My dog | **Background concepts**: Understanding morphemes; first person (I), second person (you) and third person (he, she, it); singular number **General**: * This is the introduction to possessive suffixes on nouns.
* Reinforce that possessive suffixes attach to nouns, not verbs.
* You could start with the first person singular only, that is, ‘my’, as in ‘my dog’, to introduce possession.

**Grammatical**: * Morphemes should be clearly identified.
* Possession is shown by the addition of a suffix to the end of the **noun that is owned**, not to the owner.
* In English, we use a separate word, i.e. ‘my’ (see example in column 2).
 |
| 1. **Demonstratives** – words that point things out
 | Here, close by: *gimba*Here, a little further: *nyua*There, close: *giyu*There, some distance: *mainyuk*There, out of sight: *maluk*There, a very long way: *maiuk*This, close: *ginga*This, near here: *nyinya*That: *ginyu, malu* | Demonstratives: | **Background concepts:** nil**General:*** Demonstratives are words that point things out, e.g. this, that, here, there. This is sometimes referred to as deixis.
* Aboriginal Languages make finer distinctions in demonstratives than English does.
* They generally express distances in space and time.
* Demonstrative pronouns are often used in place of the 3rd person pronouns he, she or it.

**Grammatical:*** Demonstrative pronouns might have an object form in your Language.
* Demonstratives might have dual and plural forms.
* Demonstratives might be marked for person and number.
 |
| **Category 2** |
| 1. **Singular subject (subj) pronouns** – pronouns are words that substitute for nouns

(I, you, he, she, it) | **Bound Pronouns**:I hit*dakan*dak-a-anHit-PRES-IYou hit*Dakangin*Dak-a-nginHit-PRES- youHe hits*Daka*Dak-a–øHit-PRES-he**Free standing pronouns**:I – yurrwekYou – yurrwinHe/she/it – yurruk | Bound pronouns:I hitYou hitHe hits**Free standing pronouns:**I –You –He/she/it -  | **Background concepts**: Identifying nouns and pronouns, verbs**General**: * The subject is the person or thing carrying out the action of the verb. E.g. in the sentence, *The man hit the dog* – *the man* did the hitting so he is the subject of the verb *hit*.
* Singular means one person, i.e. I or you or she/he/it.
* Pronouns are words that are used in place of nouns, e.g. I, you, he, me, them, they etc.
* Aboriginal Languages have a much more complex pronoun system than English.
* There are both bound pronouns, those that are affixed or added to words, and free-standing pronouns, which are separate words.
* The bound forms are more commonly used.

**Grammatical**: * Perhaps begin with singular (sg) subjects.
* Dual and trial forms, where they exist, can be introduced later.
* Third person singular subjects (she, he, it) are generally not marked on the verb in Aboriginal Languages, i.e. there is no suffix. This is sometimes shown as –ø in grammar texts and in the example in column 2.
* Therefore, a tensed verb without a subject pronoun is understood to be third person singular (he/she/it).
* In Victoria, it is common for the free-standing pronouns to be formed using a common base, such as *yurrw*- in the examples.
 |
| 1. **Plural (pl) subject pronouns** – words that substitute for nouns (we, you, they)
 | **Bound pronouns**:We hit*Dakangu*Dak-a-nguHit-PRES-weYou hit*Dakangat*Dak-a-ngatHit-PRES-youThey hit*Dakanyaty*Dak-a-nyatyHit-PRES-they**Free standing pronouns**:We – *Yurrwangengurruk*You – *Yurrwangutak*They - *Yurrwanganak* | **Bound pronouns**:**Free standing pronouns**: | **Background concepts**: singular subjects**General**: * There is an inclusive (speaker and addressee (I and you)) versus exclusive (speaker and another person but not the addressee (I and he)) distinction in the first person pronouns that will be addressed later. (See 34.)
* Subjects can be nouns or pronouns.

**Grammatical**: * Use subject pronouns, possibly using only the inclusive form where there is an inclusive/exclusive distinction.
* Notice that the free-standing pronouns in column 2 are formed using the base *yurrw*- in the examples.
 |
| 1. **Possessive (poss) suffix on nouns: 2nd and 3rd person singular –**

(your, his, her, its noun) – nouns belonging to someone other than the speaker | Your dog*Galin*Gal-inDog-yourHer dog*Galuk*Gal-ukDog-her | Your dogHer dog | **Background concepts**: nouns, first person possessed nouns**General**: * An extension of the first person singular possessive suffix my.

**Grammatical**: * The owner of a noun is marked by a suffix on the thing that is owned.
 |
| 1. **Adjectives (adj)** – describing words (big, black, old, blunt)
 | Big - *gurrung*Black – *wurrkirrim*Black dog – *wurrkirrimi gal* | Big - Black - Black dog –  | **Background concepts**: nouns**General**: * In Victorian Aboriginal Languages, true adjectives are generally only found for inherent qualities like size and colour.
* There are other constructions for temporary states like being hot, and these will be introduced later.

**Grammatical**: * An adjective can take the same suffixes as the noun it modifies, but this varies from language to language.
* The suffix –i is used on the end of the adjective in eg. Wergaia, Woiwurrung and Wathaurung to link the adjective to the noun it describes. We will call it ‘linking –i’.
* The limited use of linking –i shows variation across languages. However, -i may have been used in other Languages, but was not recorded.
 |
| 1. **Having suffix** – a way to create new words
 | *Yula* – spike (noun)*Yulawil* – echidna (spike-having) (noun)Yulawil – spiky, spiked (adjective)*Lia* – tooth (noun)*Liawil* – sharp, pointed (adjective)*Liawil* – a type of club (noun)*Ngulu* – like, as (preposition?)*Ngulwil*- to pretend (verb)*Guli* – anger (noun)*Guliwil* – poison (noun) |  | **Background concepts:** morphemes, nouns, verbs, adjectives**General:*** Sometimes recognising the connection between the original word and the ‘–having’ word can be difficult. It may require the ability to adapt to a different view of the world around us.

**Grammatical:** * Almost all Australian Aboriginal Languages have a ‘having suffix’ which can be attached to words, usually nouns, to create new words.
* In many Victorian Aboriginal Languages it has the form *–wil, -pil, -mil* or –*kil*.
 |
| **Category 3** |
| 1. **Present tense** **(PRES)** – indicating now
 | I run*Barrapan*Barrap-a-anRun-PRES-IYou run*Barraparr*Barrap-a-arrRun-PRES-youHe runs*Barrapa*Barrap-a–øRun-PRES-he | I runYou runHe runs | **Background concepts**: Understanding the use of subject pronouns on verbs**General**: * Tense is only added to verbs.
* In Aboriginal Languages, one word can equal a sentence on its own.
* It can be a verb with the subject indicated by a bound pronoun, the equivalent of the English sentence ‘I slept’.
* It is important to use only subject **pronouns** at this point in time because a special case marker is required with some subject nouns (See 21). This will be introduced later.
* Ensure that you don’t use irregular verbs for these examples, as irregular verbs may confuse students.
* There is a different construction for sentences like ‘I am running, you are running, he is running’. (See 17)

**Grammatical**: * Tense refers to time. In English we make a three-way distinction:
	+ Present tense is used to represent events that happen now.
	+ Past tense is used to represent events that happened before now.
	+ Future tense is used to represent events that will happen after now.
	+ Some Languages make a two-way distinction with tense, not a three way distinction as in English. It can be past/non-past or future/non-future.
* The various morphemes can be clearly identified.
* The morphemes are added in a set order.
* Generally, the tense will be the first morpheme added to the stem.
* Begin with the present tense, using the subject pronouns learned earlier.
 |
| 1. **Sentences without verbs**
 | My older sister is tall. *Dyadyek dyuwerrung gurrk*Dyady-ek dyuwerrung gurrk.Older sister-my long woman.My older brother has a long arm.*Wawek dyuwerrung datyuk.*Waw-ek dyuwerrung datyukOlder brother-my long arm. | My older sister is tall.My older brother has a long arm. | **Background concepts**: sentences, nouns, adjectives and possessive suffixes**General**: * Unlike English, in an Aboriginal Language, sentences can be formed without a verb. They need only a subject and something to say about that subject (see examples).
* There is generally no verb ‘to be’ in Aboriginal Languages.
* These sentences are not usually time dependent, i.e. my older sister is tall now, was in the past and will continue to be so in the future.

**Grammatical**:* The noun and its modifier/s (adjectives or other nouns that add more information about the main noun) are simply placed side by side. This is called juxtaposition.
* There may be a preferred word order in your Language, i.e. noun then modifier, or, modifier then noun. In the examples, the noun comes first, followed by the modifier.
 |
| 1. **Past tense –** indicating before now
 | I run.*Barrapan*Barrap-a-anRun-PRES-II ran.*Barrapinan*Barrap-in-anRun-PAST-IYou ran.*Barrapinarr*Barrap-in-arrRun-PAST-youShe ran.*Barrapin*Barrap-in–øRun-PAST-she | I run.I ran.You ran.She ran. | **Background concepts:** Present tense**General:*** Revise present tense
* Revise singular subject suffixes, in particular, the fact that the third person singular (he/she/it) is unmarked (i.e., no suffix) in most Aboriginal Languages.

**Grammatical:*** The past tense marker replaces the present tense marker.
 |
| 1. **Sentences with verbs**
 | I slept.*gumbinan*Gumb-in-anSleep-PAST-IYou will run.*Barrapinyarr*Barrap-iny-arrRun-FUT-youHe danced.*Warripin*Warrip-in–øDance-PAST-he | I sleptYou will run.He danced. | **Background concepts**: sentences, verbs, subject pronouns, tense, adjectives**General**:* Revise verbs, subject pronouns and tense.
* Revise consonant/vowel alternation.
* This is an introduction to simple sentences with verbs.

**Grammatical**:* In Aboriginal Languages, a verb can be a sentence on its own, usually with a subject pronoun on the end.
* Your Language will have a set order for the addition of suffixes like tense and subject.
 |
| 1. **Future tense** – indicating after now
 | I run.*Barrapan*Barrap-a-anRun-PRES-II ran.*Barrapinan*Barrap-in-anRun-PAST-II will run.*Barrapinyan*Barrap-iny-anRun-FUTURE-IYou will run.*Barrapinyarr*Barrap-iny-arrRun-FUTURE-youIt will run.*Barrapiny*Barrap-iny–øRun-FUTURE-it | I run.I ran.I will run.You will run.It will run. | **Background concepts:** Present tense, past tense**General:*** Revise present tense and past tense.
* Revise singular subject suffixes, in particular, the fact that the third person singular (he/she/it) is unmarked (i.e., no suffix) in most Aboriginal Languages.

**Grammatical:*** The future tense marker replaces the present or past tense marker.
 |
| **Category 4** |
| 1. **Objects (obj)** – the things the action of the verb affects
 | I hit you.*Dakinanuna*Dak-in-an-unaHit-PAST-I-youI hit the dog.*Dakan gal*Dak-a-an galHit-PRES-I dog | I hit you.I hit the dog. | **Background concepts**: nouns, subject**General**: * While subjects carry out the action of the verb, objects represent the person or thing that the action of the verb affects.
* For example, in the sentence ‘You hit me’, ‘you’ carried out the action of hitting and ‘me’ was the person affected by the hitting. ‘Me’ is the object.
* In the sentence ‘I saw the dog’, ‘I’ carried out the action of seeing and ‘the dog’ was the thing that was seen. ‘Dog’ is the object.
* Only a limited number of object pronouns were recorded in Victorian Languages.

**Grammatical**:* Objects can be pronouns (‘you’ in ‘I hit you’) or nouns (‘the dog’ in ‘I hit the dog’).
* The order of the suffixes may be different in your Language.
* In the examples, the base has the tense added to it, then the subject, and finally the object.
 |
| 1. **Continuative (CONT) suffix on verbs** – indicating that an action is ongoing or continuing
 | I am hitting.*Dakangan*Dak-a- ang -anHit-PRES-CONT-IA man was watching.*Nyagutinang wutyu*.Nyagut-in-ang wutyu watch-PAST-CONT man | I am hitting.A man was watching. | **Background concepts**: verb, tense, subject**General:*** In English, an ongoing or continuing action is indicated by using the verb ‘to be’ and adding the –ing suffix to the verb that carries the meaning (i.e., the lexical verb), e.g.,

He is sleeping.I am writing.They were eating.*Subject* - *verb ‘to be’* - *lexical verb+ing** There will be a specific order in which the suffixes must be attached. You will need to find the order for your Language.
* In column 2, the continuative suffix occurs after the tense.

**Grammatical:*** Ensure that the order of the suffixes is correct.
 |
| 1. **Transitivity** – a property of some verbs
 | In English:I hit you.Subj-verb-obj In Language:I hit you.*Dakinanuna*Dak-in-an-unaHit-PAST-I-youVerb-TENSE-subj-objYou hit me.*Dakinarriny*Dak -in -arr -inyHit-PAST-you-meVerb-TENSE-subj-objI hit the dog.*Dakan gal*Dak-a-an galHit-PRES-I dogVerb-TENSE-subj obj | I hit you.You hit me.I hit the dog. | **Background concepts**: verbs, subject, object**General**:* Some verbs are transitive and some are intransitive (not transitive).
* ‘Trans-’ in the word ‘transitive’ means across, as it does in words like ‘translate’ and ‘transfer’.
* ‘In-’ in the word ‘intransitive’ means not, as it does in words like ‘incomplete’ and ‘incompatible’.
* Transitivity relates to whether or not there is an object (noun or pronoun) relating to the verb.
* If there is an object, then the verb is transitive, e.g. ‘you’ is the object in the first example in column 2, so the verb ‘to hit’ is transitive.
* If there is no object, then the verb is intransitive, e.g. there is no object in the sentence ‘He slept’, so the verb ‘to sleep’ is intransitive.
* Note that, unless you have already explained ergativity, you should continue to use a pronoun subject in your examples.

**Grammatical**:* Transitive verbs need both a subject to do the action and an object, to which the action happens.
* For example, in the sentence ‘Jason kissed Amy’, Jason carried out the action of kissing, so he is the subject, and Amy received the kiss from Jason, so she is the object.
* In English, if we reverse the order of the words and say ‘Amy kissed Jason’, then Amy becomes the subject and Jason becomes the object of the action.
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| 1. **Word order** – in sentences
 | I hit the dog.*Dakan gal*Dak-a-an galHit-PAST-I dogVerb-tense-subj obj (VSO)(bound pronoun subject, noun object)The boy slept.*Gumbin gulgurn.*Gumb-in gulgurnSleep-PAST boyVerb subj (VS)(noun subject)I hit you.*Dakinanuna*Dak-in-an-unaHit-PAST-I-youVerb-subj-obj (VSO)(bound pronoun subject and object) | I hit the dog(bound pronoun subject, noun object)The boy slept.(noun subject)I hit you.(bound pronoun subject and object) | **Background concepts**: nouns, verbs, subject, object, adjectives**General**:* Many languages have a set order for words in sentences. For instance, when you change the order of the words in an English sentence, you change the meaning of the sentence, e.g. ‘Jason kissed Amy’ is not the same as ‘Amy kissed Jason’.
* Some languages have more flexibility in the order of the words, because they utilise special grammatical markers like suffixes instead of word order as English does. Aboriginal Languages have flexible word order.
* Despite being flexible in relation to the order of the words, most Languages still have a ‘default’, or ‘more common’ word order.
* The more sentences you have to examine, the more likely you are to discover the possible word order(s) for sentences in your language.
* The possible combinations are:
	+ Subject-verb-object (SVO)
	+ Verb-subject-object (VSO)
	+ Verb-object-subject (VOS)
	+ Subject-object-verb (SOV)
	+ Object-subject-verb (OSV)
	+ Object-verb-subject (OVS)
* Noun subjects of the transitive verb ‘to hit’ have been deliberately omitted from the examples. These will be covered under ergative case. (See 21)

**Grammatical**:* Word order is described in terms of the position of the subject (S), verb (V) and object (O) in the sentence.
* The subject can be a bound pronoun on the verb or a separate noun.
* The object can be a bound pronoun on the verb or a separate noun.
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| **Category 5** |
| 1. **Case**
 | **English Pronouns**:**Nominative (subject)** – I, you, he, she, it, we, they**Accusative (object)** – me, you, him, her, it, us, them**Genitive** **(possession)**– my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs |  | **Background concepts**: subject, object, possession**General**:* Case is a marker indicating the relationship of a noun or pronoun to the other words in a sentence. The noun might be the subject or the object.
* In English, case is not marked on nouns, but it is marked on pronouns.
* In English, the case of nouns is indicated by their function in a sentence:
	+ The subject is in nominative (sometimes called subjective) case.
	+ The object is in accusative (sometimes called objective) case.
	+ Genitive case indicates possession or ownership, and is marked by *‘s* on nouns (e.g., John’s mother) or “of” (in the ‘mother of John’).
* The English pronoun system is marked for case:
	+ Nominative case: I, you, he, she, it, we, they (the subject pronouns)
	+ Accusative case: me, you, him, her, it, us, them (the object pronouns)
	+ Genitive case (possession): my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs
* Case classifications will vary from one language to the next.
* Unlike English, Aboriginal Languages use two case systems, one for nouns and another for pronouns.

**Grammatical**:* In Aboriginal Languages, case is marked by suffixes on nouns and adjectives.
* A thorough understanding of case in English will assist students to understand case in the target Language.
 |
| 1. **Ergative (ERG) case** – is used on a noun when it is the subject of a transitive verb
 | The man hit the boy.*Dakin wutyuku wirrindity*.Dak-in wutyu-**ku** wirrindityHit-PAST man-ERG boy (vowel final noun)The old man hit the boy.*Dakin ngarrambinu wirrindity*Dak-in ngarrambin-**u** wirrindityHit-PAST old man-ERG boy (consonant final noun) | The [vowel final noun] hit the boy.The [consonant final noun] hit the boy. | **Background concepts**: case in English, subjects, objects, transitivity **General**: * Ergative case is used when the person or thing (a noun) is responsible for the action of the verb affecting someone or something else (a noun or a pronoun). The subject must be a noun, not a pronoun, i.e. ergative case is only ever used on nouns. You also need a different noun or a pronoun to be present in the sentence as the object.
* Revise transitivity (see 17) before teaching the ergative case.
* The case system used on nouns is called an Ergative/Absolutive system.
* There is no need to teach the term ‘absolutive’. It is given here for your research purposes only.
* Nouns in the absolutive case, i.e. the subject of an **in**transitive verb or the object of a transitive verb, are **not** marked by a suffix.
* Ergative case is only used on nouns. It does not occur with pronouns, because they use a different case system.

**Grammatical**: * **Ergative case is only used on a noun that is the subject of a transitive verb, as in the examples in column 2.**
* Object nouns are not marked for case.
* Nouns that are the subject of an **in**transitive verb are not marked for case.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.
 |
| 1. **Instrumental (INSTR) case** – is used on a noun to show that it is the instrument used by the subject to achieve the action of the verb
 | The man hit the boy with a stick.*Dakin wutyuku wirrindity galku*.Dak-in wutyu-ku wirrindity galk-uHit-PASt man-ERG boy stick-INSTR Give me one stone!*Wukakiny gaiyap gutyupu*.Wuk-ak-iny gaiyap gutyup-uGive-IMP-me one stone-INSTR | The man hit the boy with a [consonant final noun]. | **Background concepts**: case in English, ergative case**General**:* Instrumental case is used to mark the instrument or thing used to carry out an action. In the examples in column 2 the man uses a stick to hit the boy, and the stone is used to carry out the action of giving.
* In English, the preposition ‘with’ often marks the instrument.
* Instrumental case is used on the gift in a giving construction in some languages.

**Grammatical**:* Instrumental case is often identical to ergative case. This is not surprising because both the subject of the transitive verb and the instrument used participate in the action of the verb. In the example, the man uses the stick to hit.
* Instrumental case is also put on the gift in a giving construction. Like the instrument, both the subject of the transitive verb ‘give’ and the gift itself participate in the action of giving.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.
 |
| 1. **Allative (ALL) case** – signifies movement towards a noun
 | To(wards) the tree (consonant final noun):*Galka* Galk-a, tree-toTo(wards) the man (vowel final noun)*Wutyuka*wutyu-ka man-towards  | To(wards) the [consonant final noun]:To(wards) the [vowel final noun] | **Background concepts:** Case, ergative and instrumental case**Genera**l: * The allative and locative cases can be introduced without detailed explanation.
* Locative case follows in 25.

**Grammatical**: * Allative signifies movement ‘to, towards’ something or someone – it involves motion in a particular direction.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.
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| 1. **Locative (LOC) case** – signifies a noun being in the vicinity of another noun
 | In the vicinity of the box tree (consonant final noun)*Bulutyata*Buluty-ata Box tree-at At the bull oak tree (vowel final noun)*Ngarrikata*ngarri-kataBull oak tree-at  | In the vicinity of [consonant final noun]At the [vowel final noun] | **Background concepts**: Case**General**:* The location is not specific, that is, the locative case marker gives a general location, e.g. in the vicinity of the river, but it could be in the river, on the river, beside the river etc.
* No motion is involved.

**Grammatical**:* The locative case signifies general location (in, on, at) – no motion is involved.
* In some Languages, the term ‘**oblique**’ **(OBL)** case is used to indicate both movement towards (allative) and location in the vicinity of (locative).
* In different languages, oblique case can appear on nouns that are objects, owners, etc., but **not** on nouns that are the subject.
* If specific information on location is required, adpositions, that is, prepositions (which come before the word, like English ‘in, on, up, down, near’ etc.) or postpositions (which come after the word) can be used, e.g. *ngita bulutyata,* ‘beside the box tree’.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.
 |
| 1. **Ablative (ABL) case** – signifies motion away from a noun
 | From the tree (consonant final noun)*galkang*Galk-angTree-fromFrom the oak tree (vowel final noun)*ngarrikang*ngarri-kangoak tree-fromHe walked from the camp. *Yanggin larrang*.Yangg-in larr-angWalk-PAST camp-fromI came from Melbourne.*Wartinan Melbournang.*Wart-in-an Melbourne-angCome-PAST-I Melbourne-ABL |  | **Background concepts**: Case**General**:**Grammatical**:* Ablative signifies movement away from a noun, such as movement from a place.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.

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| 1. **Dative (DAT) case** – signifies purpose or beneficiary
 | Wood for a boomerang (consonant final noun)*Galk gatim-gatimal*Galk gatim-gatim-al Wood boomerang-for A boomerang for the man (vowel final noun)*Gatim-gatim wutyukal*Gatim-gatim wutyu-kalBoomerang man-for | Wood for [consonant final noun]A boomerang for the [vowel final noun] | **Background concepts**: case **General**: * Generally glossed as ‘for’, the dative case is often used to indicate the purpose or beneficiary of something.
* The dative may overlap with other case markers.

**Grammatical**:* The dative can signify the beneficiary (‘for John’) or the purpose (‘for eating’).
* This is glossed as ‘for’ in the examples in column 2.
* The form of the suffix changes depending on whether the noun is consonant final or vowel final.
 |
| 1. **Vocative (VOC)** **case** – used to address someone
 | Mother!Bapi!Bap-iMother-VOC |  | **Background concepts**: case**General**:* The vocative case is put on names and/or kinship nouns when calling out to someone

**Grammatical**: * The vocative is used to call out to someone.
* The vocative is **not** used in sentences. It stands alone.
 |
| **Category 6** |
| 1. **Genitive (GEN) case and genitive construction**– signifies ownership
 | Man’s boomerang (vowel final noun owner)*Wutyukitj gatim-gatimuk*Wutyu-kitj gatim-gatim-ukMan-**GEN** boomerang-**poss**Woman’s yamstick (consonant final noun owner)*Laiurrukitj berrkaninyuk*Laiurruk-itj berrrkani-nyukWoman-**GEN** yamstick-**poss** | [vowel final noun]’s boomerang[consonant final noun]’s yamstick | **Background concepts**: case, possessive suffixes**General**:* The genitive case is suffixed to the noun that owns something, shown in English by ’s, e.g. man’s hat.
* However, in Victorian Aboriginal Languages, the expression of ownership is more complex.
* The noun signifying the owner is marked by the genitive case suffix **and** the noun that is owned is marked by the appropriate possessive suffix learned earlier in 5 and 9.
* The possessive suffix must agree with the noun, that is, if ‘I’ am the owner, the possessive suffix must be the equivalent of ‘my’; if ‘you’ are the owner, the possessive suffix must be ‘your’; and if ‘she’ is the owner, the possessive suffix must be ‘her’.

**Grammatical**:* Genitive case indicates ownership. The genitive case marker/suffix is attached to the noun denoting the owner.
* However, a genitive construction is ‘double-marked’, that is, the owner has the genitive case suffix attached and the thing owned has the appropriate possessive suffix attached. In English, this would be the equivalent of ‘the man’s his hat’.
 |
| 1. **Other expressions of ownership** – **inalienable possession**
 | **Inalienable possession**:Possum’s tail*Berrki wile*Berrk-i wileTail-of possum**Juxtaposition to describe body parts**:*Dyang* ‘chest’*Dyina* ‘foot’*Dyang dyina* ‘sole of the foot’, literally ‘chest of the foot’.**New words:***Mirrk* ‘egg’*-uk* ‘its’*Mirrguk* ‘nit of a louse’ literally ‘its egg’.*Murt* ‘blunt’*Mirnuk* ‘his eye/s’*Murt mirnuk* ‘blind’ |  | **Background concepts**: possession, juxtaposition (see sentences without verbs)**General**:* Inalienable possession is when the owner and the noun owned cannot be separated, e.g. the possum’s tail, the man’s arm, boy’s mother. They have an inherent connection that cannot be changed.
* Alienable possession is used when the owner and the noun owned can be separated, e.g. the man’s trousers, the woman’s dress.
* Sometimes the name of a body part will be two juxtaposed nouns denoting a similar relationship. For example, the sole of the foot might be called the ‘chest of the foot’, that is, *dyang dyina*, literally ‘chest (of) foot’ because the sole is to the foot as the chest is to the body; the big toe might be called *bap dyina*, literally ‘mother (of) foot’. This is a different way of viewing the world to the way English speakers do. However, these juxtaposed nouns are in a type of inalienable relationship in so much as your mother is a part of you and your chest is a part of your body.
* A possessive suffix can be affixed to a noun to create a new noun, such as, *mirrguk* ‘nit of a louse’, literally ‘its egg’ (egg-its). Similarly, the word for centipede might be *dyinewarruk*, literally ‘feet-a lot-his’.

**Grammatical**:* Inalienable possession is a type of part/whole relationship where the part cannot be physically separated from the whole, for example, the ‘man’s nose’ or ‘girl’s brother’. You cannot give away your nose or your brother.
* This contrasts with alienable possession, where one entity (a noun) possesses another, separate entity (noun), such as the ‘man’s car’. The possessed entity can be given away.
* In many Aboriginal Languages inalienable possession is indicated by a different construction, for example, in column 2, the part (the tail) has –i added to the end and then it is juxtaposed with the whole (the possum). You could think of this as another use of ‘linking –i', i.e. it links the part to the whole.
* Some possessed nouns are used to create a new word. If someone is blind, their eyes don’t work, in the same way that a blunt knife or stone won’t cut. So, to describe someone who is blind, Aboriginal Languages might use the possessive construction ‘his blunt eye/s’.
 |
| 1. **Causative (CAUS) suffix** –causing a change in state, or causing someone or something to do something
 | *Dalk* – good (adjective)*Dalguna* – to cure (verb)Lovely meat! (adjective)*Dalki yauwirr!*Dalk-i yauwirrGood-linking i meatI cured you. (verb)*Dalkuninanuna*.Dalk -un -in -an -unaGood-CAUS-PAST I you*Birnngga* – to come out, to rise (the sun) (intransitive verb)*Birnngguna* – to dodge, to make (oneself) get away (transitive verb)The sun came out.*Birnnggin nyauwi*.Birnngg-in nyauwiCome out-PAST sunI dodged the spear.*Birnngguninan ngarrimbal*.Birnngg -un -in -an ngarrimbalGet away-CAUS-PAST I spear |  | **Background concepts:** noun, verb, adjective, morphemes, transitivity**General:*** The causative suffix is used to form verbs that entail someone or something causing a change in someone or something else. Therefore, it creates a transitive verb which requires a subject and object.
* The causative suffix can be used to create new words.

**Grammatical:*** A causative suffix can be added to an intransitive verb to form a transitive verb with a causative meaning. For example, the intransitive verb ‘to stand’ would become ‘cause to stand, to make something stand up’.
* A causative suffix can be added to an adjective or noun to create a transitive verb. For example, the word for ‘well’ or ‘healthy’ would become ‘to cure’, i.e. to make or cause someone to be well or healthy.
* A verb derived through the use of a causative suffix can take all of the verbal suffixes, e.g. tense, subject, object.
* The causative suffix always precedes the tense, subject, and object suffixes.
 |
| 1. **Negation**
 | I did not hit your dog.*Werrkan dakin galin*.Werrka-an dak-in gal-in.Not-I hit-PAST dog-yourI did not hit you.*Werrkanuna dakin*.Werrka-an-una dak-in.Not -I -you hit-PAST | I did not hit your dog.I did not hit you. | **Background concepts**: morpheme, subject, object, pronouns**General**:* The bound subjects and objects discussed in sections 5, 6 and 15, are technically not inflections, but enclitics.
* **Inflections** are suffixes that occur only on one class of words, such as only nouns (e.g. plural s in English) or verbs (e.g. –ed in English).
* Like an inflection, a **clitic** (or enclitic because they attach to the end of the word) cannot be an independent word.
* However, an enclitic behaves like a word, as a pronoun does when acting as subject or object in a sentence.
* Clitics must be attached to a word, but it does **not** have to be only one class of word, such as noun.
* In most Victorian Aboriginal Languages they attach to the first word in a sentence. In the sentences you have studied so far, the first word has always been a verb.
* We are now going to look at other words that can be the first word in a sentence and hence take the subject and object suffixes.
* In many Victorian Languages the word for ‘no’ in that Language is part of the Language’s name. For example, *yorta* in Yorta Yorta means ‘no’, as does *wemba* in Wemba Wemba, *ladji* in Ladji Ladji and *werkaiya* in Wergaia.
* Sometime these words, or variations of them, also mean ‘not’.

**Grammatical**:* In most Victorian Languages, when the negator or negative word like ‘not’ is present in a sentence, it comes first, before the verb.
* Because the subject and object pronouns are in fact clitics in many Victorian Languages, they attach to the negative word and not the verb. Only the tense remains on the verb.
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| 1. **Questions using interrogative words** – how, what, when, where, which, who, why
 | What?*Nyanya?*Where are you two?*Windyawul?*Windya-wulWhere-you twoWhere is my dog?*Windya galek*Windya gal-ekWhere dog-myWhat are you going to do?*Nyanyarr gunginy*?Nyanya-arr gung-inyWhat-you do-FUTURE | What?Where? | **Background concepts:** negation, clitics, subject, object**General**:* The simplest way to ask a question is to use a rising tone on the end of the sentence, as we do in English, e.g. He went home?
* Interrogative words, i.e. who, what, when, where, how, why, which, are like negators in that they appear first in the sentence and take the subject and object clitics.

**Grammatical**:* Interrogatives are question words.
* Interrogative sentences usually begin with an interrogative or question word.
* The subject and object clitics are attached to the interrogative word but the tense remains on the verb.
* Interrogative words can be used on their own.
 |
| 1. **Sentences with demonstratives** – here, this
 | He is here.*Gimba.*Gimba–øHere-heThis one is my father.*Nyua mamek*.Nyua mam-ek.This one father-my | He is here. | **Background concepts:** demonstratives, clitics, negation**General:*** Demonstrative pronouns like ‘this’ or ‘that’ are often used in place of the 3rd person pronoun.
* Demonstrative pronouns may have an object form in your Language.
* Demonstratives may have dual and plural forms.
* Demonstratives may be marked for person and number.

**Grammatical:*** Demonstratives, like negators and interrogatives, appear first in the sentence and take the subject and object clitics.
* Tense remains on the verb.
 |
| 1. **Dual pronouns** – pronouns denoting two and other ways of marking two
 | You two slept.*Gumbinawul*.Gumb-in-awulSleep-PAST-you twoThose two slept.*Gumbinbulang*Gumb-in-bulangSleep-PAST-those two (subject)I hit those two.*Dakinanbulan.*Dak-in-an-bulanHit-PAST-I-those two (object)‘Those two’:Subject: *yurrbulang*Object: *Nyuwalang*Possessive: *Yurrwangbulang**Gulgurn* ‘young man’*Gulgurnbula* ‘two young men’*Buletyi gulgurn* ‘two young men’ | You two slept.Those two slept. | **Background**: singular pronouns, plural pronouns, subject pronouns, object pronouns**General**:* Dual pronouns denote two people or things.

**Grammatical**:* There may be both bound and free dual pronouns,
* There may be subject, object and possessive forms of dual pronouns.
* A suffix can be added to a noun to form the dual, e.g. -*bula.*
* The number two can be used to indicate dual.
 |
| 1. **Inclusive and exclusive first person pronouns** – including and excluding the addressee, that is, the person spoken to
 | You and I slept. (dual inclusive)*Gumbinangul*Gumb-in-angulSleep-PAST-you and IShe and I slept. (dual exclusive)*Gumbinangulung*Gumb-in-angulungSleep-PAST-I and sheYou all and I slept. (plural inclusive)*Gumbinangu*Gumb-in-anguSleep-PAST-you all and IThey all and I slept.(plural exclusive)*Gumbinandang*Gumb-in-andangSleep-PAST-they all and I | You and I slept. (dual inclusive)She and I slept. (dual exclusive)You all and I slept. (plural inclusive)They all and I slept. (plural exclusive) | **Background concepts**: pronouns, dual, person**General**:* In Aboriginal Languages speakers can indicate grammatically whether or not the person they are speaking to is included in ’we’.
* The addressee is the person being spoken to.

**Grammatical**:* If the addressee is **included** in ‘we’, the first person dual **inclusive** pronoun is used, i.e. it includes the addressee.
* If the addressee is **excluded** from ‘we’, the first person dual **exclusive** pronoun is used, i.e. it excludes the addressee.
* The inclusive/exclusive distinction also applies to first person plural pronouns.
* Inclusive and exclusive forms can only occur with first person.
 |
| 1. **Trial pronouns** – pronouns denoting three
 | You two and I (inclusive): *-(a)ngu gulik*Those two and I (exclusive);*-(ny)andang gulik*You three: *-(ng/ny)at gulik*Those three: *-(ny)aty / (ny)ity gulik* | You two and I: (trial inclusive)Those two and I: (trial exclusive)You three:Those three: | **Background concepts**: singular, dual, plural, inclusive and exclusive**General**:* Some Languages have trial (sometimes called ‘paucal’) pronouns.
* Trial pronouns denote three.

**Grammatical**:* Trial pronouns refer to three people or things.
* Only a few Languages have records of a trial form.
* In the examples, the word *gulik* is added to the plural form to create a trial form.
* The inclusive/exclusive distinction applies to trial pronouns as well.
 |
| 1. **Reciprocal (RECIP) suffix** – doing something to each other or yourself
 | You are talking to yourself.*Wurrektyerrangarr.*Wurrek-tyerrang-arrTalk -RECIP -youThose two are hitting each other.*Daktyerrangbulang*Dak-tyerrang-bulangHit -RECIP -those two | Hit:Fight: (i.e., hit each other)You are talking to yourself.Those two are hitting each other. | **Background concepts**: verb, subject, object, dual**General**:* In English we distinguish reflexive (myself, yourself, himself) and reciprocal (each other).
* There may or may not be the same distinction in the Language you are learning.

**Grammatical**:* You will need to ascertain where the reciprocal and/or reflexive suffix occurs on the verb and whether or not it replaces the tense marker.
* Reciprocity may be marked by a word rather than a suffix.
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| **Category 7** |
| 1. **Stative verbs** – an alternative to adjectives, a state of being
 | I am hungry.*Wikan.* Wik -a -anTo be hungry-PRES-IIt is smelly.*Buangga*.Buangg-aTo be smelly-PRES-unmarked 3 sg subject**Stative suffix: -aia** *Dalk* – good (adjective)Dalkaia – to be well (verb)I am well.*Dalkaiangan*.Dalk -aia -a -nganGood-STATIVE-PRES-IHe is bad.*Yatyanggaia.* Yatyang-aia -a –øBad –STATIVE-PRES-he | I am hungry.It is smelly. | **Background concepts**: adjectives, verbs, transitivity**General**:* Many English adjectives are expressed by stative verbs in Victorian Aboriginal Languages.
* Stative verbs generally describe transient or temporary states of being, e.g. being hot, being hungry, being smelly.
* They are often translated as ‘to be X’.
* They behave in the same way as other verbs, that is, they take tense and a subject.
* A stative suffix is found in Western Kulin Languages. This can be used on adjectives to create a verb.

**Grammatical**:* Stative verbs take the same suffixes as other verbs, that is, tense and subject.
* In some Languages, a stative suffix can be used to convert a noun or adjective into an intransitive stative verb, as in the examples column 2.
 |