

Kam Pirngu Relayening Torch

Text

Ndaak punnu nawa-mang ka ti-ram Tiranat ta nuppa ruk Nittjanuttju. Ramba ti-nawa Tarut Kutti tam-mang miwak nggarngawi nuppa ti-mit mbi, ku pambam num ti-ramba nua ti-mama ngiwa-wir

Ti-mamaak-kir nanawa kir ri ruk piu-mang nua ti-rikki rakki tamut. Pam kirra muttau-mang kunngur tak rakki tamut, ku nanamu ri ti-rikki. Puppurrat ti-mama-wir ku ririmat kirrak rundi tinik nggirau-mang. Ka ti-wa, ti-rinikkak nggirappak taak kunggun niri-mang, kw angur Tarut Kutti ku ti-mama-wir. Ti-naak kaawaa ti-rinik nggirap, ku tak ti-wak-kirra pupurrat ti-rakki tamut tittikki.

Tarut Kattu kangam ri ti-mamma-wir, "Ndaraak tikki rakki tamut nua min?"

Ti-mama-wir kangam ri kir, "Kam ik ti-wi! Pam nik ndara ri ti-mama ngiwa-nara ka ti-rikki rakki tamut!"

Rin ti-wa, kirrak tittikki rakki tamut tak pikkat ta. Tak ti-rikki, pam ranuk Tarut Kattu ti-nawa tinik nggirap ku ti-nawa mama ngiwa.

Smooth English

I'm spinning a story from the many Tiranat people in the land of Nittjanuttju. Hear the story of Tarut Kutti, who was a great person in the far past, and who learned to respect her ancestor.

Her mother lead her to a forest to pick blueberries. They saw a bush that was heavy with blueberries, and started gathering. Her mother fell and accidentally broke a beehive. From this, the bees formed a cloud and, like a wave crashing over a ship, overwhelmed Tarut Kutti and her mother. The pair left the bees, and with their flight the gathered blueberries fell.

Tarut Kattu said to her mother, "Why do we pick blueberries?"

Her mother said to her, "Don't say that! We are bound to our ancestor by the blueberry picking!"

After this, they picked blueberries for many days. With the picking, Tarut Kattu was taught the story of the bees and the story of the ancestor.

Phonology and Romanization

The romanization of Kam Pirngu is equivalent to the IPA, with the exception of the *ng* family.

$ng = [ŋ]$, $ngg = [ŋg]$, $nng = [ŋŋ]$

There's plenty I could go on about (and have!) regarding allophony and dialectal variation, but for the purposes of this relay you don't need to know anything more.

Also clitics are indicated with a hyphen.

Mutation

Several pieces of grammar trigger lenition and assimilation in Kam Pirngu. Most relevant here is that plain stops become sonorants and prenasalized stops become nasals between voiced segments. This is a mostly predictable process, but there are some irregularities from historical mergers, so all the entries in the glossary have variations listed.

Grammar

Syntax and Volition

Kam Pirngu is a primarily head-initial language with ergative-absolutive morphology and split-S syntax. The default word order is Verb-Subject or Agent-Verb-Patient, however the subject comes before the verb if it has volition, and the verb comes before the agent if the agent does not have volition¹.

Here's a pair of examples that show the volition order flip with intransitive verbs.

- *Mbaru-mang niruk* — “A seal swims” (with volition)
- *Nggarwi mbaru-mang* — “A seal floats” (without volition)

As shown in these two examples, one verb can be used with both volitional and nonvolitional arguments:

- *Kirrak purrat ti-rakki* — “She drops the fruit” (on purpose)
- *Purrat kirrak ti-rakki* — “She drops the fruit” (on accident)

Adjectives follow nouns, prepositions precede nouns, possessors follow possessees, and lexical verbs follow auxiliary verbs.

Agent/Patient and Experiencer/Stimulus

There are two broad classes of transitive verbs in Kam Pirngu. The majority are agent/patient (A/P) verbs, where the agent (A) is marked with the ergative suffix *-*hak*, and the patient (P) is unmarked absolutive. The agent can come before or after the verb, depending on its volition, but it is always before the patient.

Verbs concerning emotions and sensations are experiencer/stimulus (E/ST) verbs. Here the experiencer (E) is unmarked like P, but comes in the first argument position, where the stimulus (ST) is marked with *-*hak* and comes in the second argument position. Because E is a very low volition entity, it will almost always come after the verb.

¹ Alternatively, the default word order is VS or VAP and any argument with volition is fronted.

Past Tense

The past tense of a verb is formed by reduplicating the verb's first syllable. Like the mutation caused by clitics, this is mostly but not entirely regular, so past tense forms are always listed in the glossary.

Zero Changes

Kam Pirngu loves changing words without marking them. Nearly any given root can be used as a verb, noun, or adjective, and unless it's marked with a part-of-speech-specific marking you just need to use order and context to determine the part of speech. Valency can also be changed without auxiliaries, by either doing **causative alternation**, **stimulus alternation**, or **recipient insertion** (which isn't discussed because it doesn't appear in the text). Essentially, in most cases a transitive verb can lose its marked argument (A, ST) without issue, but it needs a construction to promote a marked argument to an unmarked position. A verb's available arguments are marked in its glossary entry, where optional arguments are in parentheses and mandatory arguments are not.

| | |
|--|---|
| purrat - <i>v.</i> (a)/(r)/p. to drop, fall | mandatory patient, optional agent and recipient |
| kun - <i>v.</i> a/(r)/p. to do, make | mandatory patient and agent, optional recipient |
| ramba - <i>v.</i> e/(st). to hear, listen | mandatory experiencer, optional stimulus |

Causative Alternation

Most transitive A/P verbs can drop the agent, which is the marked argument, and become an intransitive verb with the patient as their only argument. Another way to think about this is that if the subject of an intransitive verb is a semantic patient, then an agent in the ergative case can be added.

- *Kirrak purrat ti-rakki* — “She drops the fruit”
- *Purrat ti-rakki* — “The fruit drops”

Stimulus Alternation

In the same way that an A/P verb can drop A (the marked argument) to have an intransitive verb with P as its only argument, an E/ST verb can drop ST (the marked argument) to have an intransitive verb with E as its only argument

- *Pam nda ti-rakkjak* — “I see the fruit”
- *Pam nda* — “I see”

Passive

The agent of a verb is removed when the passive is used, and the valency of the verb is reduced by one. The verb *pam* “to see” is used as the passive auxiliary, and the lexical verb is placed after as a modifier of *pam*.

- *Ti-marwak makka kuram-mang* — “The seal eats a fish”
- *Pam makka kuram-mang* — “A fish is eaten”

The chômeur (deleted old subject) can be reintroduced with the preposition *ka* “from”.

- *Pam makka kuram-mang ka mbaru-mang* — “The fish is eaten by a seal”

Imperative

Any verb can be made imperative by simply omitting the argument which is being addressed.

Negation

Verbs are negated with the particle *ik*, which simply follows the verb that it negates. I originally had a more complicated negation strategy, but it felt clunky and confusing, so I have switched to this more simple form.

Definiteness

Nouns and noun phrases are marked as definite using the definite article *ti-*, which is a pro-clitic that triggers intervocalic lenition. When a number isn't specified, the definite article implies a singular number, but that's not rigid, especially with nouns that can be mass nouns. The definite article frequently co-occurs with possessive pronoun clitics and deixis markers.

The definite article *ti-* is also used to nominalize verbs, turning them into nouns of an instance of that verb, which are then used like a gerund or infinitive or other non-finite verb form would be used in another language.

Singular nouns and noun phrases are marked with the indefinite article *-mang*, an enclitic that comes at the end of the noun phrase and triggers pre-nasal mutation. The indefinite article comes from “one”, so it follows the noun phrase, and it can co-occur with possessive pronoun clitics and deixis markers.

Plural nouns and noun phrases take *ta* “many”, which also comes at the end of a noun phrase, but unlike *-mang* and *ti-* it doesn't trigger any kind of mutation².

Case

Kam Pirngu has one marked case, the ergative, which takes the suffix *-(:)ak*. The ergative is used to mark the agent of the verb, as well as the stimulus. This evolved from a suffix meaning something like “tool” or otherwise implying instrumentality. The unmarked form of the noun is used for the absolutive, and for everything else nouns do too.

Here are some examples of how *-ak* affects the stem. It lengthens consonants and leaves hiatus. Also don't worry about the specifics, the ergative form is listed in the glossary entry if it's more than just gemination of the final consonant.

- Consonant doubling: *kimbir* > *kimbirrak*, *ndat* > *ndattak*
- Vowel gliding (only non-initial high vowels): *mbaru* > *mbarwak*, *tindi* > *tindjak*
- No changes: *nggu* > *ngguak*, *tunda* > *tundaak*

² As I say that I'm tempted to make it another clitic, I don't have any enclitics that start with a stop, but in the version of the language presented in this document at least the word *ta* “many” does not trigger any mutation.

Prepositions

I don't think Kam Pirngu does anything weird with prepositions, they just behave like you'd expect. There are several constructions and turns of phrase that use them, but those have explanations elsewhere.

Adjectives

There are two types of adjectives in Kam Pirngu: denominal and deverbal. Denominal adjectives are simply nouns that follow the head noun, and agree in case when the head noun is ergative. The indefinite article *-mang* cliticizes to the end of the noun phrase, so it follows denominal adjectives.

Deverbal adjectives are actually stative verbs in relative clauses, and since they're outside of the noun phrase they come after *-mang* and don't take ergative agreement.

Relative Clauses

Like other modifiers, relative clauses follow the noun or noun phrase they modify. They are not explicitly marked with complementizers or relative pronouns. Relative clauses are also used in deverbal adjective constructions, where the adjective is a stative verb in a relative clause. In typical speech they are unreduced and a gap is left where the shared noun or noun phrase would be. In the relative clause, the shared noun phrase can be any argument of a verb (the subject, agent, patient, recipient, experiencer, or stimulus), or the complement of a preposition.

Pronouns

Here are the Kam Pirngu personal pronouns:

- *nda* (1SG), *ndaak* (1SG.ERG), *ndara* (1PL), *ndaraak* (1PL.ERG)
- *ut* (2SG), *uttak* (2SG.ERG), *unda* (2PL), *undaak* (2PL.ERG)
- *kir* (3SG), *kirrak* (3SG.ERG), *kirra* (3PL), *kirrak* (3PL.ERG)

There's no gender or anything else marked on the pronouns, and the plural forms are transparently derived from the singular forms. Aside from doing normal pronoun-y stuff, they also cliticize to nouns and noun phrases to mark possession, and in doing so can trigger lenition in both the host and the clitic.

- *Ti-rakki* — “The fruit”
- *Ti-rakki-wir* — “Her fruit”
- *Ti-mut* — “The plant”
- *Ti-mur-na* — “Her plant”

Kam Pirngu forms WH questions with the interrogative pronoun *min*, which simply takes the place of the argument being asked about. Like the other pronouns it can cliticize to noun phrases as a possessor, which triggers lenition.

- *min* (INT), *minnak* (INT.ERG)
- *Ti-rakki-min?* — “What fruit?”

- *Ti-mur-min?* — “What plant?”
- *Pam kir minnak?* — “What does she see?”
- *Nggarwi nda nua min?* — “I float for what?”, “Why do I float?”

Deixis

Kam Pirngu distinguishes three levels of spatial deixis: proximal *pa* (near the speaker), medial *ki* (near the listener), and distal *mbi* (far from either one). These act as adverbs and adjectives and follow what they modify. To fill the function of demonstratives, they simply follow a definite noun. These spatial deixis markers can also just act as generic place nouns.

Glossary

Extra forms in parentheses are shown if there are lenitions or nontrivial reduplication results.

angur - *v. a/p.* to drench, overwhelm, to exceed, surpass, to act or fill with water like a wave crashing over a ship

ik - *negative particle*

ka - *prep.* from

kaa (*past. kaawaa*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to leave

kam (*def. ti-wam, past. kangam*) - *n.* mouth, *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to speak, tell

kir (*erg. sg. kirrak, abs. pl. kirra, erg. pl. kirraak*) - *3rd person pronoun, lenites to -wir after vowels and r*

ku - *conj.* and, can join phrases or clauses like English “and”, becomes *kw* before vowels

kun (*def. ti-wun, past. kunggun*) - *v. a/(r)/p.* to do, make

kunngur (*def. ti-wungur, past. kunggunngur*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to be heavy, full, to fill, weigh down

mama - *n.* mother, mom

mang - *indefinite article, triggers lenition, v. p.* to be alone, *num.* one

mbi (*def. ti-mi*) - *distal deixis marker, adj.* yon, *n.* over there

min - *interrogative pronoun, used like English “what, which”*

mit (*indef. mir-mang*) - *n.* stern, behind, rear, the past

miwak (*indef. miwau-mang*) - *n.* strength, ability, *v. (a)/p.* to be strong, able

mut (*indef. mur-mang*) - *n.* plant, shrub, bush, herb

na - *num.* two, *n.* pair

namu - *v. p.* to dance, play, jump, leap, to start (with enthusiasm)

nawa - *n.* a length of rope, a story (with **punnu**), *v. a/(r)/p.* to stretch, pull, drag, lead

nda (*erg. ndaak, pl. ndara, pl. erg. ndaraak*) - *1st person pronoun, lenites to -na as a clitic*

nggarwi (*erg. nggarwjak, def. ti-ngarwi, past. nggarngarwi*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to float, to exist, to live

nggirap (*def. ti-ngirap, indef. nggirau-mang, past. nggingirap*) - *n.* sugar, honey, *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to be sweet

ngiwa - *n.* elder, ancestor (with **mama**), *v. (a)/p.* to be old, to age

nik (*indef. niu-mang, past. niunik*) - *n.* tie, knot, *v. a/(r)/p.* to tie, bind,

niri (*erg. nirjak*) - *n.* cloud, smoke

Nittjanuttju - *prop. n.* the name of a settlement

nua - *prep.* for

num (*past. nummun*) - *v. (a)/p.* to be clever, smart, to teach
nuppa - *prep.* in
pa (*def. ti-wa*) - *proximal deixis marker, adj./n.* here
pak (*def. ti-wak, indef. pau-mang, past. pappak*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to fly, to throw, to move quickly
pam (*def. ti-wam, past. pambam*) - *v. e/(st).* to look, see, *passive auxiliary*
pikkat (*def. ti-wikkat, indef. pikkar-mang*) - *n.* day, sun
pip (*def. ti-wip, indef. piu-mang*) - *n.* tree (terrestrial)
punnu (*def. ti-wunnu, past. pumbunnu*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to spin, to tell (a story)
purrat (*def. ti-wurrat, past. puppurat*) - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to drop, fall, stumble, let go
rakki (*erg. rakkjak*)- *n.* fruit
ramba (*past. randamba*) - *v. e/(st).* to hear, heed, listen, obey, respect
ri - *prep.* to
rimat - *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to break
rin - *prep.* in front of, after, *n.* bow, prow, beak, nose, snout, future
ranuk (*indef. ranuu-mang*)- *n.* gift, *v. a/r/p.* to give
ruk (*indef. ruu-mang*) - *n.* land, place, area
rundi (*erg. rundjak, past. rundundi*)- *n.* hiding space, shelter, *v. (a)/(r)/p.* to hide, shelter
ta (*def. ti-ra*) - *adj.* many, *n.* crowd, multitude, population
tak - *prep.* with, against
tam (*def. ti-ram*) - *n.* person, body
tamut - *adj.* a dark deep cool color, dark green to blue to purple to black
Tarut Kutti - *prop. n.* the name of a person
ti - *definite article, triggers lenition, nominalizes verbs for a meaning like English “-ing”*
tikki (*def. ti-rikki, past. tittikki*) - *v. a/(r)/p.* to pluck, pinch, pick
tinik (*def. ti-rinik, past. tirinik*)- *n.* a thorn, spine, a stinging animal, *v. a/(r)/p.* to pierce, poke, sting
tinik nggirap - *n.* bee, *lit.* “sweet sting”
Tiranat - *prop. n.* the name of an ethnic group