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Elements of Pelawan Grammar

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# Introduction

Dear fellow learner,

Welcome to the Pelawan language![[1]](#footnote-1)

[Purpose of this document, how to use it (and how not to use it), general philosophy of language learning, etc.]

# Alphabet and Phonics

While precolonial inhabitants of what is now the Philippines had their own systems of writing, the Spaniards did a thorough job of replacing it with their own. Today Pelawan is written with a 19-letter variant of the Latin alphabet, as follows:

A a B b K k D d E e G g H h I i L l M m N n Ng ng U u P p R r S s T t W w Y y

A backtick (`) is used to represent the glottal stop, as discussed below. Note that *Ng* is a single letter.

## Vowels and Dipthongs

The vowels are pronounced approximately as follows:

* A: “a” as in some pronunciations of *father* (IPA [a])
* E: “u” as in *up* (IPA [ʌ] or [ə])
* I: “ee” as in *beet* (IPA [i])
* U: “oo” as in *boot* (IPA [u])

These are general guidelines. Pelawan has more than just these four vowel sounds. *I* is sometimes pronounced as in “in” in certain positions (IPA [ɪ]). *E* probably has the most variation, all the way from an open “o” (I think the IPA transcription would be somewhere around [ɔ] or [o]) to a sound almost like that of *a* (IPA [ɐ] or [a]). *U* can also drift toward an [o] sound.

When spoken by a native, especially rapidly, *a* and *e* can sound almost identical to foreign ears (I still have trouble hearing the right one sometimes). I think this is because both vowels tend to drift toward a more central [ɐ] sound. But they are different. Say the wrong one, and you might mix up someone’s kneecap (*aleb*) and lover (*eleb*). Don’t ask how I know. Complicating the matter is the fact that *a* often becomes *e* when a word is conjugated, so it can take special care to tell what the vowel is in root form.

The sounds listed above are also the names of the letters in the Pelawan alphabet. The names of the consonant letters are simply their respective sounds followed by *a*. So a recitation of the alphabet sounds like “Ah, bah, kah, dah, uh, gah, hah …”

Dipthongs (one vowel that “glides” into another) are not written as such in Pelawan. Two vowels written next to each other automatically have a glottal stop between them (see “Consonants”), though it is sometimes omitted in writing. So sometimes you may see *lein* or *metuug*, while with a more meticulous writer (like this one) you’ll see *le`in* or *metu`ug*. In either case, a glottal stop exists between the two adjacent vowels, meaning such a combination cannot be used to express a dipthong.[[2]](#footnote-2)

To express dipthongs, the letters *y* and *w* are used either after a vowel or between two vowels. A *-y* dipthong starts with the vowel, then the mouth glides into the *i* position. A *-w* dipthong is similar, but ends in the *u* position. In other words:

* ay = “aye” (IPA [ai])
* ey sounds similar to ay, but is spoken with the jaw slightly more closed (IPA [ʌi])
* uy = “oo-ee” (IPA [ui])
* aw = “ah-oh” (IPA [au])
* ew sounds similar to aw, but is spoken with the jaw slightly more closed (IPA [ʌu])
* iw = “eew”

*W* and *y* can also be placed between two vowels to create a smooth transition between them: *tulduwi`*, *meretiyan*.

## Consonants

Most of the consonants are pronounced similarly to English, though some have subtle differences. If you have a good ear, you’ll pick up on the distinctions. I’ll discuss the most important differences in this section.

### The Glottal Stop

This is the sound most often ignored by English speakers, but in Pelawan it is an important consonant. While English does not have a standard way of representing the glottal stop, we do use the sound. One example is in the middle of “uh-oh”—say it now and feel how the sound is literally stopped by the constriction of the glottis. It would sound weird to say “uhhhhoh” without the stop, and that’s how it is when the sound is ignored while speaking Pelawan. It can also change the meaning of a word. For example, while *egsa* is the word for cousin, *egsa`* is a type of leech. Even if your cousin is a leech, you may want to avoid saying so.

To the English ear listening to a native Pelawan speaker, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish a glottal stop from a soft final *t*. This is something that just takes practice and careful listening.

The glottal stop is typically represented with a backtick after the vowel it follows: *badyu`*, *e`nga*. You will often see this written as a straight or even right-slanting mark (' or ’), but it’s best to stick with the backtick to avoid confusion with an apostrophe. Sometimes the mark may be placed directly above the vowel it follows: *badyù*, *ènga*. In this manual, I will use the backtick after the vowel.

### R and Ng

*R* is a “flap.” Something like the one-tap version of the “trill” found in Spanish, this involves the tongue briefly touching the alveolar ridge as the speaker exhales.

After the glottal stop, the “ng” sound is the one that tends to give English speakers the most trouble. We have the sound in words such as *ring* and *singing*. The difference is that in Pelawan, *ng* can come at the beginning of a syllable, not just at the end. Note that this sound is not, nor does it contain, either *n* nor *g*. It is a nasal sound, like *n*, articulated near the back of the mouth, like *g*.

### Digraphs

The sound equivalent to the English *j* is represented in Pelawan as *dy* or *diy*. The *sy* or *siy* combination is sometimes pronounced distinctly and sometimes pronounced as “sh.” Similarly, *ty* or *tiy* can sometimes sound like “ch.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

# The Root + Affix System

As in English, Pelawan creates new words by modifying a root word, or *pu`un beres* (literally “source word” or “foundation word”). In Pelawan, however, this is much more systematized. Given a root word, you can use it as is (root words are often, though not always, nouns) or conjugate it as a noun, verb, or modifier. This is done with affixes. English speakers are already familiar with prefixes and suffixes. In addition to these, Pelawan uses infixes, which are inserted into the root word, and circumfixes, which consist of both a prefix and a suffix. Words can also change form via *reduplication*, or repetition of sounds found in the root.

Affixes can often change the form of the root they modify. Being able to mentally “strip away” the affixes and identify the *pu`un beres* is a valuable skill for language learning—often, you’ll find that a “new” word shares a root with one you already know, enabling you to deduce its meaning.

A few examples will help to illustrate.

Pu`un beres: sugid thing that is said

 Megsugid to say or to tell

 Sinugid what was said

 Sugira` say (imperative)

Pu`un beres: sala` wrong

 Megsala` to do wrong

Kesala` the reason for something going wrong or not as intended (can also be just a reason for something happening, negative or not)

Kesela`an sin

Pu`un beres: kela` big

 dekla` size (becomes the base for the following words)

 dumekla` to grow, to become larger

 iperekla` to increase the size of something

Pu`un beres: biri` root word for things having to do with seeing

 mebiri` to see

 memiri` to watch or look at

 birinen to look at or inspect

 mekebiri` to be able to see

 ipebiri` to show

 pebi`biri` hypocrite (one whose actions are only for show)

Pu`un beres: sunu` contents

isunu` to put in

susunuwan container

Notice the ways in which affixes change the roots they join to:

* A *d* that ends up between two vowels becomes an *r*. Examples: ipe- + dekla` = iperekla`; sugid + -en = sugiren.
* An *a* in a root can become an *e*. Examples: ke--an + sala` = kesela`an
* An *e* in a root disappears if its syllable is right next to the affix. Examples: me- + telang = metlang; ke--an + ribeng = keribngan
* If the root has two adjacent vowels, they can merge into one or into a dipthong if followed by a suffix. Examples: ke--en + ka`an = kekanen; peg- + te`ew + -en = pegtewen; me--an + se`ud = mesewran

When affixes place two vowels next to each other, one of three things can happen:

* Some vowel combinations can be dipthongized with *y* or *w*. Examples: me- + init = meynit; ipe- + lebi + -a` = ipelbiya`; tuldu` + -i` = tulduwi`
* For suffixes, an *n* or *m* is sometimes placed between the two vowels. Examples: biri` + -en = birinen; ke--an + nunga = kenunganan; ke--an + laya` = keleyaman.
* Otherwise, the vowels are separated by a glottal stop. Examples: ke--an + sala` = kesela`an; me- + asin = me`asin

Other root changes occur with the *meng-* prefix. Those will be covered in the “Verbs” section.

# Verbs

Verbs are the backbone of Pelawan grammar. Understanding a verb, particularly its focus, is key to constructing or interpreting the rest of the sentence. Verbs are also versatile: in many cases they can function as adjectives or even nouns. A good grasp of verb basics, then, is vital for anyone wanting to speak the language correctly.

In English and other European languages, verbs are conjugated based on tense and on who and how many are performing the action. Pelawan verbs also have tense of a sort, but there is no need to concern oneself with separate verb forms for each person and number. Instead, Pelawan verbs have other interests: aspect and focus. These exist in some form in English as well, but have a new level of importance in Pelawan.

Verb focus indicates what is the primary topic of the sentence or phrase containing the verb. A verb can have focus on the actor or initiator of action, on the object or recipient of action, or on the action itself. The focus of the verb affects the case of the nouns and pronouns used with it (see the “Nouns and Pronouns” section).

Verb aspect has to do with the quality of the action. In English, for example, the simple present and present progressive tenses can be thought of as two different aspects: *I walk* and *I am walking* convey slightly different ideas. Pelawan has many more aspects than English, and the distinctions between them are often more subtle.

One facet of aspect is whether or not the action has been completed. Verbs in a completed aspect are something like past tense verbs in English, while those in uncompleted aspects correspond to present or future tense. Note, however, that Pelawan does not treat tense in the same way as English. While an English speaker will normally use the present time as a reference frame for all verb conjugations, the Pelawan time reference frame shifts to whatever time has been established as the setting.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Verb affixes can show qualities of the action that in English would typically require extra words or different words. In addition to doing a thing, one can *be able to* do the thing, or *make someone else* do the thing—or the thing can be done to him or her. These can all be expressed with verb affixes in Pelawan. In English, when one person *borrows* something, the other person *lends* it. In Pelawan, the lender literally *makes it to be borrowed*—but the verb prefix gives a much more economical expression of that thought.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The following sections describe some of the more common verb affixes. I have listed each one under its uncompleted (present or future) form. For all prefixes beginning with *m*, forming the completed (past) form is simple: change the *m* to *n*. For the rest, I have included the completed form, if it exists, in the description.

## Meg-

*Meg* is one of the most commonly used verb prefixes. Practically any concept can, at least in theory, be turned into a verb using either *meg-* or *meng-* (see the next subsection).

panew (walk) → megpanew (to walk)

benwa (house) → megbenwa (to build a house)

keradiya (work, job) → megkeradiya (to work)

Even roots borrowed from other languages can be conjugated as Pelawan verbs with *meg-*.

megkempiyutir (to use a computer)

megmiting (to have a meeting)

*Meg-* is an actor-focused verb maker, meaning the clause in which it appears is mainly about the one performing the action.

*Meg-* verbs occasionally display a fun feature of Pelawan: reduplication. The verb gets an extra syllable formed with sounds from its root. The simplest form of reduplication involves doubling the first syllable of the root. This is used to show an action that is currently ongoing. One example is something I hear sometimes from children watching a dog mark his territory. They exclaim, “*Megsisibu ya!*” “He’s peeing!” *Megsibu*, without doubling, could describe the same action, but *megsisibu* has a stronger sense of “it’s-happening-right-now!”

Another form of repetition shows that more than one actor is involved. Here, the extra syllable comes from the beginning and ending sounds of the root. Take, for example, *tabang*, the root word for “help”. The typical actor-focused verb form is *menabang*, “to help” (see “Meng-”), but there’s a special form for when multiple people are helping or cooperating. The new syllable comes from the beginning sound, *ta* (which becomes *te*), plus the final consonant, *ng*. Add a *meg-*, and we have *megtengtabang*—“to cooperate”.

## Meng-

The prefix *meng-* denotes an actor-focused action, similar to *meg-*. I have not yet figured out exactly how it differs from *meg-*, nor have I found a consistent pattern for which one to use. For some words, one form or the other is always used: you will always hear *megiga`* for “sleep” and *menga`an* for “eat”, never *mengiga`* or *megka`an*. But I have heard both *mengali* and *megkali* for “dig”. There seems to be a subtle difference in connotation between the two, but it’s not yet clear enough to me to explain. In time, you’ll get somewhat of a feel for when to use each one. When in doubt, just pick one—I tend to go with *meg-*. People will understand you, and maybe someone will correct you if you guessed wrong.

The *meng-* prefix can change form depending on the first letter of the root word it modifies. Use the following rules.

1. For roots starting with *k*: The *ng* “absorbs” the *k*. Examples: meng + ka`an = menga`an; meng + kali = mengali.
2. For roots starting with *b* or *p*: The *ng* becomes *m* and absorbs the first letter of the root. Examples: meng + biri` = memiri`; meng + pili` = memili`.
3. For roots starting with *s* or *t*: The *ng* becomes *n* and absorbs the first letter of the root. Examples: meng + serwak = menerwak; meng + tahak = menahak.
4. For other roots: The *meng-* and the root both remain unchanged. Examples: meng + ririk = mengririk; meng + isi` = mengisi`

The *meng-* aspect of an action is the one used to form the noun for a person who performs that action. See “Nouns and Pronouns: Doers” for details.

## -um-

Another way to form an actor-focused verb is with the infix *-um-*. Pelawan infixes are inserted before the first vowel of the root.

duntin (there) → dumuntin (to go to a place)

For a completed action, use -*imin*-: *diminuntin*

To me, *-um-* seems to have a bit of an “intransitive” quality compared to *meg-*. That is, an *-um-* verb is more about what one is doing with oneself, while *meg-* can be more about what one is doing that has external effects. This is not a sharp grammatical distinction. There are plenty of purely intransitive *meg-* verbs (*megpanew*, to walk) as well as transitive *-um-* verbs (I thought I had some examples, but can’t remember at the moment what they are). But that general connotation seems to hold for most verbs I’ve observed.

## M-

Some words can become verbs simply by taking *m-* at the beginning. This *m-* replaces the existing initial consonant, if present. These verbs are actor-focused, and sometimes have similar meaning to a *meg-* or *meng-* form. One could use either *marung* or *megarung* for “to sit”, or *manew* or *megpanew* for “to walk” (they may have slightly different qualities, but in many cases are largely interchangeable). Sometimes the *m-* form is used almost exclusively, as in *muli`* for “to return” or *maya`* for “to go with”. Sometimes the different forms have different meanings: the root *patey*, “dead”, becomes *matey* for “to die” and *mematey* for the actor-focused form of “to kill”.

## -en

The *-en* suffix is the object-focused counterpart of *meg-*. Use it to express interest in the recipient of the action. For a completed action, use the infix *-in­-*.

Tulusen ke ni Indu`. Mother is looking for you. (Or “You are sought by Mother.”)

Bina`al et Empu ituweng dunya`. God made this world. (This world was made by God.)

Note that you can think of actor- and object-focused verbs similarly to active and passive verbs in English. Pelawan, however, makes much more extensive use of object focus than English does of the passive voice. In English, while technically grammatical, the question “What was eaten by you last night?” sounds awkward, and nearly all English teachers would correct it to “What did you eat last night?” The Pelawan equivalent of the first question, “Enu kina`an mu kegebi?” not only sounds natural but is actually the preferred construction, rather than attempting to ask the same question with an actor-focused verb.

## -an

While *-en* shows direct-object focus, *-an* indicates a focus on the indirect object.

Begeyan dye aku et badyu`. They give me a shirt.

For completed action, insert *-in-* in addition to the suffix.

Binggeyan dye aku et badyu`.[[6]](#footnote-6) They gave me a shirt.

## I-

Like *-en*, *i-* is object-focused. It often—though not always—has the role of expressing an action that can have both a direct and an indirect or prepositional object, even if only one of them is stated explicitly. If present, the direct object will have direct (topic) case and the indirect object will have dative case (see “Nouns and Pronouns”).

Isunu` ku atin dut ambag. I’ll put that in [my] bag.

Iratun siyu lang dut datag. We’ll just put [it] on the floor.

Ibgey kay kenye. We give to him.

Iluwak ye mge` punti. He’s planting bananas.

As you can see, the last example has no obvious indirect or prepositional object.

This is a good time to look at how an action can be expressed with a variety of foci. Consider, for example, the root *begey*, or gift. To express the idea of giving something, one can use *memgey* (actor focus), *ibgey* (direct object focus), or *begeyan* (indirect object focus).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Memgey ku et pirak dimu. (or “dut dimu”) I give money to you. (Focus on *I*)

Ibgey ku pirak (dut) dimu. I give money to you. (Focus on *money*)

Begeyan ku ikew et pirak. I give you money. (Focus on *you*)

## Me-

The *me-* prefix is used for an action performed on one object by another. It functions as object-focused but is more “active” than *-en* in that it can have a slightly stronger interest in the actor. It often—though not always—shows an action that does not involve a change to the object itself.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Nebiri` mu si Nunuy? Did you see Nunuy?

Kaya meretiyan[[9]](#footnote-9) ku atin. I don’t understand that.

Nekingeg ye ating beres. He heard the voice.

Metuman ating bahum et Empu`. God’s plan will be/is being fulfilled. (Or “made to be done.”)

*Me-* is also an adjective prefix (see the “Modifiers” section).

## Meke-

The *meke-* prefix denotes possibility.

Mekepanew si Rasil? Can Rasil walk?

*Meke-* can be either actor- or object-focused.

Mekebiri` ke? Can you see?

Mekebiri` mu aku? Can you see me?

The completed aspect, *neke-*, can function like the present perfect tense in English.

Nekeke`an ke’t lebanus? Have you eaten soursop?

## Megpe-

Use *megpe-* to prefix a quality or state that the actor gives to the object.

Megperibuwat siyu et keremut. We raise [our] hands.

*Megpe + dibuwat We give to [our] hands the quality of being up.*

Megpeselamat kay Dimu. We give thanks to You.

Negpe`abar si Pidru. Peter preached. *Peter caused [the gospel] to become “newsed”.*

## Ipe-

*Ipe-* is the object-focused counterpart of *megpe-*.

Iperibuwat siyu keremut. We raise [our] hands. *[Our] hands are raised by us.*

Anday iperinek. Don’t reduce [make smaller].

Ipebiri` dye parey dye dut kenye. They show [make to be seen] their rice[[10]](#footnote-10) [by] him/her.

In the completed aspect, *ipe-* becomes *pine-*.

Pinebibit ku ne pirak mu. I sent [“made to be carried”] your money.

## Peg-

Many verb prefixes begin with *p*, indicating an emphasis on the action. The various forms roughly correspond to those of *m*. *Peg-*, the action-focused form of *meg-*, can be used similarly in a sentence:

Pegkeradya dye. They work.

*Peg-* and *peng-*, when used in this way, take the same pronouns an actor-focused verb would. They convey more of a sense of habitual or ongoing action than *meg-* and *meng-*. Each *p-* prefix also has another, more specialized use. *Peg-* verbs can be used as gerunds (the noun-like form of an action word).

Selamat et peglutu` miyu! Thanks for cooking! (Lit. “Thanks for your [act of] cooking!”)

Dut pegatu` ku, dingga pe mependey ku megpelawan.

At my arrival [“here-ing”], I was not yet skilled in speaking Pelawan.

## Peng-

*Peng-* changes forms in the same way as *meng*. As with *meg-* and *peg-*, *peng-* creates the action-focused form of a *meng-* verb.

 Penga`an ke et sera`? Do you eat fish?

Note the shift in meaning. If the speaker had begun the question with *menga`an*, it would refer to a specific instance of the action: Are you eating/going to eat fish right now? *Penga`an*, however, refers to a general disposition to eating fish. A vegetarian would answer no to both questions; a carnivore would answer yes to *penga`an* but could well say no to a specific instance of *menga`an*. [But *peng-* can also refer to actions happening at the present moment…]

*Peng-* has another use, that of inviting someone to perform an action.

Pengisi` lang. Help yourself. (Lit. “Just take.”)

## Imperatives

Commands are not always given with a specific imperative form. Sometimes the unconjugated root is used as a command, as in *Tagey!* for “Wait!” Sometimes a command has the same form as a declarative sentence but is understood as imperative: *Mengilamun kew.* “You (plur.) [will] weed.” As discussed in the previous subsection, *peng-* verbs can have an invitation-like quality. There are two verb affixes, however, that explicitly create imperatives: *-a`* and *-i`*.

These suffixes are object-focused: *-a`* corresponds to *-en*, and *-i`* to *-an*.

Tulusa` atin. Look for it.

Tebangi` kay! Help us!

Isiya`. Take [it, one, some, etc.]

Isi`i` ku. Get [some for] me.

If the command is given to more than one person, *miyu* follows the verb (see Nouns and Pronouns).

Tulusa` miyu atin. Y’all look for it.

## Affixless Verbs

Some special verbs require no affix at all. One of these is *ga`ay*, “to want”. It functions as object-focused.

Ga`ay mu umpayas? Do you want papayas?

Enu ga`ay ye? What does he/she want?

One can almost think of *ga`ay* as a noun, so that the second sentence could be translated as “What is his/her want?” In some ways, it’s a bit of a hybrid word. But even true verbs can function as nouns (see “Nouns: Verbs as Nouns”), and *ga`ay* has a true noun form (*kega`ayan*), so I’ll keep *ga`ay* here as a verb, albeit irregular. It can sometimes take an *-in-* to show that it refers to a past time.

Gina`ey ku teyen keyne, segwa` kaya ne tiban. I wanted to earlier, but not anymore.

*Se`ud*, “to know”, functions similarly to *ga`ay*. It can also have noun-like qualities, but usually acts like an object-focused verb. It sometimes appears in other verb forms such as *mesewran*[[11]](#footnote-11), which stresses more the act of knowing or coming to know something.

### Maya

The verb *maya* deserves some special attention. Pelawan does not have an equivalent to the English *to be*, nor does it have a word that functions exactly like *to have*. The role of *maya* overlaps with both these concepts—and illustrates the danger of relying on translations.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In its most basic role, *maya* means “to exist”.

Maya danum dut sesapa`. There is water in the creek.

Its use to denote possession can be thought of as an extension of this role.

Maya tukew ku. I have a bolo.[[13]](#footnote-13)

To see the connection, think of this sentence as saying, “There exists a *tukew* that belongs to me.” In a sense, then, we could see *maya* as having the same meaning in both sentences. This turns out to be a little too simplistic, however. Compare the following two sentences:

Maya begas i Tisi.

Si Tisi maya begas.

Both sentences can translate to “Tisi has rice.” But the second one doesn’t fit the interpretation “There exists rice belonging to Tisi.” A better explanation here is that *maya* actually means “to have”. In the first sentence, it is object-focused.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the second, where the owner has been moved to the beginning of the sentence for emphasis, *maya* has somewhat of a dual focus—on both the possessor and the thing possessed.

In summary, then, *maya* encompasses both existence and possession. Sometimes it’s clearly one or the other; sometimes it could reasonably be interpreted either way. But perhaps the most important thing to realize is that *maya* is a Pelawan word, and so is not obligated to fit neatly into English categories.

## Summary

Table : Verb affixes

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Uncompleted** | **Completed** | **Focus** | **Notes** |
| meg- | neg- | actor | Occuring action |
| meng- | neng- | actor | Can change form depending on root |
| -um- | -imin- | actor | “Intransitive” |
| m- | n- | actor |  |
| -en | -in- | direct object |  |
| -an | -in--an | indirect object |  |
| i- | -in- | direct object |  |
| me- | ne- | object |  |
| meke- | neke- | actor or object | Denotes possibility |
| megpe- | negpe- | actor | The actor gives the object the quality or state of being |
| ipe- | pine- | object | Object-focused counterpart of *megpe*- |
| peg- | -- | action | Can be used as gerund |
| peng- |  | action | Can be used as invitationHas same form changes as *meng-* |
| a` | -- | direct object | Imperative |
| i` | -- | indirect object | Imperative |

Pelawan has many other verb affixes I have not listed here. These include *megke-*, *pe-*, *ipeg-*, *mengin-*, *megsi-*, and more. Affixes with similar form often have similar meaning.

# Nouns and Pronouns

Compared to verbs, nouns are simple. The majority of nouns are already nouns in their root form: *ireng* (dog), *punti* (banana), *benwa* (house). Pronouns can be a bit trickier, but understanding cases, discussed in this chapter, will clear up most confusion. There are just a couple of general points I want to make about Pelawan nouns before getting into cases.

First, Pelawan nouns do not change form in the plural. To show a plural, add the word *menge`* (often abbreviated *mge`*) before the noun: *ireng* = “dog”; *menge` ireng* = “dogs”. *Menge`* can often be omitted when the plurality of the noun is already clear, especially when a number is given: *telung ireng* = “three dogs”—not *telung menge` ireng*. If *menge`* is used with a number, it typically indicates that the number is approximate: *menge` sempulung kusing* = “ten or so cats”. For more on numbers, see Appendix A.

Another point to keep in mind is that personal names always have a name marker when used in a sentence. No one says, “*Meyseg Maykil*”; it’s always “*Meyseg si Maykil*”—“Michael is angry.”[[15]](#footnote-15) The name marker will be *si*, *i* (or *ni*), or *ki*, depending on the case (see Table 2).

## Cases

If you’ve done much serious study of grammar, you’re familiar with the concept of cases. If not, don’t worry. The concept is not as hard as some make it sound. The case of a noun or pronoun simply means the grammatical position it fills in a sentence. In English, we rely mostly on word order to indicate who is doing what; hence “Dog bites man” and “man bites dog” have opposite meanings. While English has lost most of its old case system, remnants of it still show up in pronouns. In the sentence “She bites him”, *she* indicates the subject of the sentence, and *him* the object—that’s why we wouldn’t say, “Her bites he.”

Like English, Pelawan makes case distinctions in its pronouns by changing their forms. Nouns have the same cases, but they are indicated with additional modifying words rather than changes in form. The case system allows for some flexibility in word order. While there is typically a preferred syntax, one can often change the positions of nouns and pronouns without affecting the meaning.

Pelawan uses three cases, which I will refer to as *direct*, *indirect*, and *oblique*.[[16]](#footnote-16) The oblique case could be split into two separate cases, but they are connected enough that it’s simpler to keep them together. Pronouns show case by changing their form; nouns, with additional words that precede them. For example, a Pelawan version of “Dog bites man” could read like this:

 Mengaget ireng et ta`aw.

*Ireng*, lacking a case marker, has direct case. In other words, it is the topic of the sentence and the actor for the verb *mengaget*. The *et* before *ta`aw* indicates oblique case, here indicating the recipient of the action.

I will explain each case in turn, but first, here’s a table showing pronouns for each case as well as the linkers used with nouns in each case.

Table : Noun and Pronoun Cases

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Person | **Direct (Topic)** | Indirect | *Oblique* |
| 1st singular | **aku, ku** | ku | *daken* |
| 1st dual | **kite, te** | te | *--* |
| 1st plural exclusive | **kami, kay** | kay | *damen* |
| 1st plural inclusive | **kisiyu, siyu** | siyu | *kisiyu* |
| 2nd singular | **ikew, ke** | mu | *dimu* |
| 2nd plural | **kemiyu, kew** | miyu | *dimiyu* |
| 3rd singular | **ya** | ye | *kenye* |
| 3rd plural | **dye** | dye | *kedye* |
| Interrogative | **sinu (who), enu (what)** | -- | *kinu (whose)* |
| Name of person | **si [name]** | i [name] OR ni [name][[17]](#footnote-17) | *ki [name]* |
| Names of people | **de [names][[18]](#footnote-18)** | de [names] | *kere [names]* |
| Name of object | **[name] OR ating [name]** | et [name] | *et [name]* |
| Name of plural object | **mge` [name] OR ating mge` [name]** | et mge` [name] | *et mge` [name]* |

Notice that some words, such as *ku*, appear more than once. In the example sentences that follow, I will use bold, underlining, or highlighting as appropriate to emphasize which grammatical case the noun or pronoun has.

Before going on, I want to emphasize a feature of Pelawan that English speakers often trip over. The first person plural is more precise than in English in that it specifies whether or not the speaker means to include the person he’s talking to. Use *kisiyu* to mean “all of us, including you.” Use *kami* to mean “us, not including you.” *Kite* is rarer. It’s like *kisiyu*, but used to include only two people: the speaker and the person he’s talking to. So “Menga`an te ne” means “Let’s [you and I] eat now.”

The difference between *kami* and *kisiyu* is not trivial. Pelawan are often surprised to learn that English uses *we* for both forms. Still, because English speakers are not used to making the distinction, they often use the wrong pronoun. I have heard people in prayer asking God to forgive His own sins. Remembering the inclusive/exclusive distinction will help avoid such unintended blasphemies.

English speakers will also notice the lack of gender in Pelawan pronouns.

### Direct Case

The direct, or topic, case indicates the focus of the sentence or phrase in which it appears. In other words, use a direct pronoun …

* … to indicate a person or object without phrasal context.
* … to indicate the actor of an actor-focused verb.
* … to indicate the recipient of the action for an object-focused verb.

Refer to Table 2. For pairs of words in the Direct column, first and second person, the first word is how the pronoun appears alone, before the predicate, or separated from the predicate. The second word is how the pronoun appears immediately after the predicate.

Examples:

 Mengisi` **ke**. You (sing.) take.

 **Ikew** mengisi`. You (sing.) take. (Emphasis on *you* as opposed to someone else)

 Sinu memasa`? **Aku**. Who [will] wash? I [will].

 **Kemiyu** binibit. You [plur.] were carried.

 Binibit **kew**. You [plur.] were carried.

 Mependey **si Niksun**. Niksun is good [skilled].

### Indirect Case

The indirect case indicates the possessor of an object or the source of an action. In other words, use a indirect pronoun …

* … to indicate possession with emphasis on the object possessed.
* … to indicate the actor of an object-focused verb or an action-focused verb used as a gerund.

In both cases, the pronoun follows the word it refers to.

Examples:

 **Mata** mu. Your eyes. (See peribasa section)

 **Enu** kina`an mu? What did you eat? (Literally “what was eaten by you?”)

 Selamat et **peglutu`** miyu. Thanks for your [act of] cooking.[[19]](#footnote-19)

 Benwa ye **atin**. That’s his [or her] house.

 Kinaget **ya** et ireng. He [or she] was bitten by a dog.

 Embe **uma** i Mityun? Where’s Mityun’s field?

### Oblique Case

This case is the most interesting. Use an oblique pronoun …

* … to indicate possession with emphasis on the owner.
* … to indicate the recipient of the action of an actor-focused verb.
* … to indicate an indirect object or object of a preposition for an actor- or direct object-focused verb.

Examples:

 Mengisi` **ke** *et kekanen.* You take food.

 *Dimu* **ituwe**. This is yours.

 Embe *daken*? Where’s mine?

 Linisan siyu *kisiyung* **benwa**.[[20]](#footnote-20) Let’s clean our house.

Menulus **ku** *ki Diksun*. I’m looking for Diksun.

Sometimes the oblique combines with another pronoun for emphasis, similar to a reflexive or intensive pronoun in English:

 Kuwantin **arat** diye *kediye*. That’s how their culture is (for them).

Muli` **ku** ne *daken*. I (myself) am going home now.

When denoting an indirect or prepositional object, replace *et* with the appropriate preposition, usually *dut*. *Dut* may be either included or omitted before a pronoun or personal name, but is always included with common nouns.

 Dumuntin **ku** *dut benwa ku*. I’m going to my house.

**Ituwe** ibgey ku *(dut) dimu*. I give (to) you this.

See “Structural Words: Prepositions” for more examples of prepositions.

To see the basic patterns of how the various pronouns work by themselves and with others, study the following examples. The verb in each example comes from *bantug*, the root word for praise. The first four use an object-focused conjugation; the last four, actor-focused.

Bentugen **Ke**. You are praised.

Bentugen kay **Ikew**. We praise You. (Literally “You are praised by us.”)

Bentugen **kay.** We are praised.

Bentugen mu **kami**. You praise us (“We are praised by you.”)

Megbantug **kay.** We praise.

Megbantug **kay** *Dimu*. We praise You.

Megbantug **ke.** You praise.

Megbantug **ke** *damen*. You praise us.

## Ke or Mu?

An understanding of cases will help clear up another common point of confusion. As shown in Table 2, most of the direct pronouns for use immediately after the predicate have the same form as the corresponding indirect pronouns. The three exceptions are *ke/mu*, *kew/miyu*, and *ya/ye*. Given that the same pronoun occurs in, for example, *menga`an ku* and *dut benwa ku*, many beginners don’t realize that *ku* has a different case in each phrase. This leads to confusion and saying things like *menga`an mu*, using the same pronoun as in *dut benwa mu*. But with the recognition that the actor for an actor-focused verb needs to have direct case, it becomes clear that the correct phrase is *menga`an ke*.

Correctly identifying the case of a pronoun is essential to speaking correctly. Occasionally, however, what is “correct” may be ambiguous. For example, I have heard both *Yaya mu* and *Yaya ke* (“You’re by yourself”) from native speakers. *Ke* fits better with the way I understand things to work, but it seems both are considered “correct” by many natives. I suspect this is similar to how native English speakers will say, “It’s me,” even though “It is I” is technically more grammatical. Sometimes what sounds more natural takes precedence over what fits the “rules” better.

## Noun Makers

The affix *-an* can create a noun, often with the doubling of the first syllable of the root. This kind of noun designates an object or location associated with a specific activity.

te`ey (feces) → teteyan (“pooping place”—outhouse in developed areas; designated outdoor location elsewhere)

ririk (root word for clearing land for planting) → ririkan (land being cleared for planting)

tahag (command) → tetehagan (servant)

da`ak (send) → dere`akan (one who is sent; used for angels)

Many words can become nouns, or their “nounness” can be modified or intensified, with the circumfix *ke--an*.

tinep (peace) → ketinepan (peace, peacefulness)

lelaki (male, man, boy) → kelelakiyan (the males in a group, collectively)

ga`ay (to want, to like) → kege`ayan (desire)

rikut (messiness) → kerikutan (untamed vegetation)

## Doers

In English, we often form the name for the doer of a task from the verb for that task: *baker*, *writer*, *driver*, etc. Pelawan has a similar feature. The doer noun is created from the *meng-* verb form for the action (see “Nouns and Pronouns: Meng-”). To create the doer noun, add an additional syllable whose form depends on the word. The new syllable comes between the prefix and the root or modified root.

* If a vowel immediately follows the prefix, including when the prefix has “absorbed” an initial consonant, the new syllable consists of the first vowel of the root followed by the last consonant of the prefix (*m*, *n*, or *ng*). Examples: uma → menguma → mengunguma; tuldu` → menuldu` → menunuldu`; bawi` → memawi` → mememawi`
* If a consonant immediately follows the prefix, simply double the first syllable of the root. Examples: lutu` → menglutu` → menglulutu`[[21]](#footnote-21); lekat → menglekat → menglelkat[[22]](#footnote-22)

## Verbs as Nouns

An actor-focused verb can stand alone to represent the person or thing currently performing the action. Similarly, an object-focused verb can stand for the recipient of the action.

Embe ating megsilu` in? Where is the [thing that is] shining a light?

Maya isiyen ku duntin. I have to get something there. (Lit. “There is [something] to be gotten by me there.”)

A stronger form of the last example uses the circumfix *peg--en*. The result looks something like an action-focused verb, but grammatically behaves like a noun or an object-focused verb.

Pegisgen dye ikew. They are angry with you (Lit. “[The object of] anger of them [is] you.)

Enu pegtulusen mu? What are you looking for? (Lit. “What [is] [the thing] looked for by you?)

# Modifiers

Some words function as modifiers in their root form. Examples include *biyag*, *baha*, *kela`*, and more. To use other words as modifiers, add *me-* to the beginning of the root.

Ramig Root word for cold → Meramig Adjective form of cold

Tikas Speed → Metikas Fast or quickly

Daki Filth → Meraki Dirty

Occasionally you will see what looks like a modifier starting with *ne-*, such as *nepwek*, one of many words to describe something broken. The way I make sense of this is to remember that *me-* is also a verb prefix, and sometimes the line between verb and modifier can blur. In the English sentence “It’s broken,” *broken* clearly functions as a modifier. But one could also use the same word as a passive verb to describe the same object: “It’s been broken.” So if you’re describing the same object in Pelawan and say, “Nepwek ne,” the *ne-* prefix indicates that the current state of being is the result of a past (completed) event.

As mentioned elsewhere in this manual, the modifier can be used as the predicate of a sentence.

Metikas ke. You are fast.

Frequently, however, you will want to modify a noun directly. To do this, place the modifier before the noun and add a linker. The linker will be a separate word, *neng*, if the modifier ends with a consonant. If it ends in a vowel, the linker becomes *-ng* and is added to the end of the word.

Meynit neng eldew Hot day

Mekasing rupa Happy face

For words ending in a glottal stop, either *neng* or *-ng* may serve as the connecter. So for example, you’ll hear *kela`* become either *kelang* or *kela` neng*; *metigna`* may become either *metignang* or *metigna` neng*. In my observation, the *-ng* form is more common, especially for short words (*kelang*, for example). For words ending in *n*, the *n* can sometimes simply become *ng*.

Pronouns from the last column of Table 2 can be used as modifiers to show possession.

Kenyeng ama` His/her father.

Daken neng[[23]](#footnote-23) sepukan. My blowgun.

Occassionally the adjective may appear after the noun. This gives emphasis to the adjective. One common use of this order is specifying the gender of a person, since most words to describe people are genderless in Pelawan.

Tipused neng lelaki Brother (male sibling)

Upu` neng libun Grandmother (female grandparent)

Many words used as adjectives can also function as adverbs. They can follow the verb they modify. When they do, they may sometimes take the linker *et* in between:

Megsurat dye et metikas. They write quickly.

Used in this way, the modifier refers specifically to a particular instance of the action. The modifier may also start the sentence, followed by the subject and finally the action:

Metikas dye megsurat. They write quickly. (They are fast at writing)

Mependey ke megpelawan. You speak Pelawan well. (You are good at “Pelawan-ing”)

This gives more of a sense that the adjective describes how the subject performs the action in general, not just in a particular instance.

## Verbs as Adjectives

Verbs can function as modifiers.

Megburbur neng danum Running water

Pinetu`ug neng kekanen Dried food

# Structural Words

This section is mainly a list of words used to enhance the grammatical and logical structure of the language.

## Conjunctions

Here are some common Pelawan conjunctions. Where two words are listed with the same English translation, the first is the one I have observed more in everyday speech.

Beke` And

Sampay And[[24]](#footnote-24)

Segwa` But

Temed But

Etawa Or

Empang So that

Supaya So that

Engkansa So then/therefore

Bagu Then

Indyari Then

Be` diki But (rather)

Erapun But (rather)

## Prepositions

The most basic Pelawan preposition is *et*. Its usage often overlaps with that of the English *of*. Often, however, *et* fills a role for which English does not use a preposition. As explained in the “Nouns and Pronouns” section, it often functions as a case marker.

Another common preposition is *dut*. Its meaning overlaps with *in*, *to*, *at*, and more. It often functions in conjunction with other words to form other prepositions.

Here are a few more common prepositions. Several require *dut* or *et* as a “helping preposition”. In many cases, the *dut* or *et* will be contracted into a *’t*.

Para For

Iba With

Mura Before

Pegketbes After

Pelitlibut Around

Mawa From

Tihad From, since

Seked Until

Lembus Past, beyond

Pesurung Toward

Pebiya` Through, by

Sama[[25]](#footnote-25) Like, as

## Negation

The most common negative word is *kaya*, “no” or “not”.

Kaya se`ud ku. I don’t know.

Kaya meliyut ituwe. This isn’t hard.

Another word is *diki*. While it has some overlap with *kaya*, *diki* cannot necessarily be used anywhere *kaya* can. One common use of *diki* is to negate possibility.

Diki kediyari. Not possible. It can’t be.

Diki mekeysi` ku. I can’t get it.

*Le`in* is used to make negative statements about something’s identity. A common variant is *de`in*.

Le`in Pelawan aku. I’m not Pelawan.

Ating tabla le`in kisiyu. Those boards are not ours.

Ituwe? De`in. This? (Is this what you’re looking for/talking about?) No.

*Anday*, *kas*, and *kasi* are negative imperatives, each with a slightly different usage.

## Other Words

E`nga Yes

# Simple Sentence Structure

This section will provide a brief look at how the verbs, nouns, and function words fit together. As in the “Nouns and Pronouns” section, I will use bold, underlining, and highlighting to indicate the **direct**, indirect, and *oblique* cases in example sentences.

A simple Pelawan sentence consists of a topic and a predicate. The usual order is predicate-topic:

Mengisi` **ku**. I take. (“Take I.”)

Note the *meng-* prefix on the verb, whose root is *isi`*. This prefix creates an actor-focused verb (see the “Verbs” section). In other words, the main topic of this sentence is the one performing the action. Hence, the noun or pronoun representing the actor must be in direct case.

A direct object follows the actor. In an actor-focused sentence, the direct object must be in oblique case. For a common noun, this usually means it is preceded by the linker *et*[[26]](#footnote-26):

Mengisi` **ku** *et danum*. I take water/I get water.

The linker may be absorbed into a contraction:

Mengisi` **ku***’t danum*.

If present, an indirect or prepositional object will follow the direct object:

Mengisi` **ku** *et danum para dimu*. I’ll get water for you.

I have added underlining to the prepositional object to distinguish it from the direct object.

A verb can also be object-focused or “passive.”

Isiyen ku **danum**. I take water (Water is taken by me.)

Note the lack of the *et* linker for *danum*. This is because *danum* is the topic of the sentence, not *ku* as in the previous example. Because the grammatical function is indicated more by inflection than by position, adding *et* here would technically change the case and reverse the meaning:

Isiyen **ku** et danum. I am taken by water.

I say “technically” because it is not uncommon to hear an extraneous *et* in such positions, even from native speakers. Generally this is not a problem, as the context makes clear what is meant. But if there were Pelawan grammar police, this would probably be one of their pet peeves.

With an object-focused sentence, the order of the actor and recipient depends on whether nouns or pronouns are being used. If referring to one with a noun and the other with a pronoun, put the pronoun first. If using pronouns for both, put the actor first. If using nouns for both, either order is acceptable, though the emphasis may shift slightly.

Bina`al mu **aku**. You made me.

Bina`al mu **si Bubit.** You made Bubit.

Bina`al **ku** i Empu`. God made me.

Bina`al i Empu **si Bubit**. God made Bubit.

Bina`al **si Bubit** i Empu`. God made Bubit.

These rules are not absolute. Word order can have a great deal of flexibility, provided the case of each noun or pronoun remains clear. One of the most common word-order variations involves putting topic before the predicate to give emphasis.

**Aku** mengisi` *et danum*. I [as opposed to someone else] am getting/will get water.

 or

 I’m volunteering for the task of getting water.

**Ikew** bina`al i Empu`. God made you.

In English, all predicates contain some kind of verb. Even a sentence such as “I am cold,” which does not describe an action, requires the linking verb *am*. Pelawan does not have such linking verbs, so an adjective can stand alone as the predicate of a sentence:

Meramig **ku**. I am cold.­

As in other sentences, the topic can come first for emphasis:

**Aku** meramig.

There are several words that can be used to give nuance to a sentence. These words occupy specific positions in relation to each other and the other words in the sentence. I’ll illustrate using *ne* and *banar*.

*Ne* roughly means “now” or “already”, depending on the context. It shows that an action or state of being is true at the present time or the immediate future, in contrast to a time in the past. In many cases, no equivalent would normally appear in the English version of the sentence. *Ne* immediately follows the predicate or the pronoun immediately following the predicate, if present. If a noun follows the predicate, *ne* comes between them.

Menga`an siyu ne. Let’s eat.

Nenga`an siyu ne. We have eaten.

Nenga`an ne si Nartis. Nartis has eaten.

*Banar* has a range of related meanings: “true”, “truly”, “really”, “very”. It can be used as an adjective, or it can stand alone as a response to a statement (*Banar?* “Really?”). When used as an intensifier like “very”, *banar* comes in the same position as *ne* would—or if both are present, right after *ne*.

Meyseg diye banar. They are very angry.

Mependey ke ne banar! You are [now] very skilled!

Other words that can occupy the *ne* position include *nga* “still”, *pe* “yet/still” and *lew* (no exact translation). Other words that can take the *banar* position include *taku`* (question word), *lagi* “already”, and *sengkerit* “a little”. Words from both groups can appear together, but usually no more than one word from each group.

# Questions

Pelawan questions are easier to form than their English counterparts. A yes-or-no question has the same form as its parallel statement, the only difference being that it is inflected and punctuated as a question.

Nenga`an ke ne. You ate already. / You‘ve already eaten.

Nenga`an ke ne? Did you eat already? / Have you eaten yet?

Optionally, you can add the word *taku`* to emphasize that you’re asking a question. In a yes-or-no question, *taku`* occupies the same position as *banar* would (see “Simple Sentence Structure”).

Nenga`an ke ne taku`?

You can use *diki be* similarly to the English *isn’t it*, *aren’t they*, etc.

Nenga`an ke ne, diki be? You’ve eaten already, haven’t you?

You can use question words for more open-ended queries:

Enu What Enu ituwe? What is this?

Sinu Who Sinu nema`al? Who made it?

 Sinu ngaran mu?[[27]](#footnote-27) What’s your name?

Kinu Whose Kinu ating badyu`? Whose is that shirt?

Embe Where Embe lungsud miyu? Where is your place?

Empe` Why Empe` meniwang ke? Why are you so skinny?

Ngiyan When Ngiyan muli` dye? When will they return?

Senu How much/how many Senu kew megtipused? How many siblings are you all?

 Senu umur mu? How old are you?

 (How much is your age?)

Enukuwan How Enukuwan mengisi`? How to get it?

Any of the examples above can also take a *taku`*. The *taku`* will immediately follow the question word, or, if present, the pronoun immediately following the question word.

Embe taku` lungsud miyu?

Senu kew taku` megtipused?

*Empe`* is sometimes followed by *ga*:

Empe` ga sinugid mu atin? Why did you say that?

When asking a question that in English would use *which*, you can often use *enu*. But use *sinu* if you’re asking to specify a person, and *embe* for a place. These will all take a *-ng* ending, since they directly modify a noun.

Enung bebresan? Which (or what) language?

Sinung menunuldu`? Which teacher?

Embeng tampa` ? Which direction?

*Kinu* and *senu* will also take *-ng* when they function as modifiers:

Kinung badyu` atin? Whose shirt is that?

Senung ta`aw diminuntin? How many people went?

Sometimes in English we use question words as qualifiers: “Those who are tall can sit” or, equivalently, “Whoever is tall can sit.” In Pelawan, such a sentence takes *be`* before the question word:

Be` sinu melayug, kedyari megarung.

Kaya sewd ku be` embe surungan ku. I don’t know where I’m going.

# Appendix A: Numbers

## Cardinal Numbers

1 isa

2 duwa

3 telu

4 epat

5 lima

6 enem

7 pitu

8 walu

9 siyam

10 sempulu`

11 sempulu` isa

12 sempulu` duwa

13 sempulu` telu

20 duwang pulu`

21 duwang pulu` isa

30 telung pulu`

40 epat neng pulu`

50 limang pulu`

60 enem neng pulu`

70 pitung pulu`

80 walung pulu`

90 siyam neng pulu`

100 senggatus

111 senggatus sempulu` isa

200 duwang gatus

300 telung gatus

400 epat neng gatus

1000 seng ribu

1111 seng ribu seng gatus sempulu` isa

2000 duwang ribu

10,000 sempulung ribu

100,000 seng gatus neng ribu

1,000,000 seng miliyun

It is also helpful to know Spanish numbers. Tagalog uses them for time and for trade, and some Pelawan speakers do, too.

## Ordinal Numbers

1st una, ikewna

2nd ikeduwa, ikeruwa or pengeduwa

3rd iketlu or pengetlu

4th ikepat or pengepat

5th ikelima or penglima

etc.

## How Many Times

Once kasa seng bisis (borrowed word)

Twice keduwa or duwang bisis

Thrice ketlu or telung bisis bisis

Four times kepat or epat neng bisis

Five times kelima or limang bisis

 etc.

# Appendix B: Borrowed and Shared Words

## English

## Tagalog and Spanish

# Glossary (Incomplete)

The following is a list of the Pelawan words used in this manual, along with their pronunciations and (sometimes approximate) English translations. Note that words are listed in alphabetical order according to the Pelawan alphabet. I have ignored the glottal stop (`) for alphabetization purposes, except where it is the only difference between two words. Also keep in mind that pronunciations may vary depending on many factors, including place, speaker, and the intonation of the overall sentence.

Aku I, me

Aleb Knee(cap)

Arat Character, culture

Badyu` Shirt, clothing

Bawi` Safe

Binibit Was carried

Kaya No, not

Kami We, us (exclusive)

Kay Us, our (exclusive)

Ke You (singular)

Kedye Theirs, to them

Kemiyu You (plural)

Kenye His, to him, hers, to her, to it

Kisiyu We, us, ours, to us (inclusive)

Kite You and I, you and me

Ku I, me, my

Danum Water

Daken Mine, to me

Damen Ours, to us (exclusive)

Diki No, not

Dimiyu Yours, to you (plural)

Dimu Yours, to you (singular)

Dingga pe` Not yet

Dye They, them, their

E` Yes

Egsa Cousin

Egsa` Swamp-dwelling leech

Eleb Girlfriend or boyfriend

E`nga Yes

Et Of

Isiyen To be taken

Ikew You (singular)

Likud Back

Le`in Not

Lekat Redemption

Lutu` Cooked

Mata Eye

Meglutu` To cook

Memawi` To save

Mememawi` Savior

Menuldu` To teach

Menunuldu` Teacher

Menge` Makes the next word plural

Menglekat To redeem

Menglelkat Redeemer

Menglulutu` Cook (chef)

Menguma To farm

Mengunguma Farmer

Meretiyan To understand

Mge` Abbreviation of *menge*`

Memasa` To wash

Mengisi` To take

Metu`ug Dry

Miyu You, your (plural)

Mu You, your (singular)

Uma Field

Siyu We, us, our (inclusive)

Te We, our (dual)

Tuldu` Finger, a teaching (something “pointed out”)

Tulduwi` Teach (imperative)

Ya He, him, she, her, it

Ye He, his, she, her, it, its

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# Bibliography

George, Timothy. *Beginner’s Guide to Southwestern Pelawan Grammar*. Self-published Word document, 2008.

1. In English, the name of the island is Palawan. Outsiders refer to the native people and their language as “Palawano” or “Palawiño,” and I have heard even more grotesque corruptions. The people native to the mountains around Brooke’s Point refer to themselves, their place, and their language as *Pelawan* (pə.ˈlau.wan), which I will use in this manual. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It’s worth noting here that in rapid speech, technically distinct vowels can blend. Instead of *pe`is*, for example, you may hear *peys*. In some cases the “faster” version occurs often enough to be a full-fledged variant: educated natives have told me that both *se`ud* and *sewd* are correct. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Whether or not to include the *i* in these combinations seems to be largely a matter of personal preference. The same goes for *u* in *-uw-* occurences where the *u* is not distinctly pronounced, such as *ituwe* or *itwe*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Timothy George, *Beginner’s Guide to Southwestern Pelawan Grammar*, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In case you’re wondering, the words are *menglimbas* or *limbasan* for borrow, and *megpelimbas* or *ipelimbas* for lend. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note that the *-in-* infix becomes *-ing-* when it precedes a *g*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. You will sometimes see and hear *ibgey* with the adjacent consonants reversed, giving *igbey*. As far as I can tell, both are correct. I personally prefer to stick with *ibgey*, so I will in this manual, but don’t get confused by the variant. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At least classically. I doubt the Pelawan mind thinks in terms of quantum mechanics. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is actually an instance of the *me--an* circumfix, which I will not discuss in detail here. The usage in this case, however, is quite similar. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vocabulary note: Pelawan has three distinct words for “rice”: *parey*, rice standing in the field or harvested but not yet processed; *begas*, processed but uncooked rice; and *emey*, cooked rice. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Another *me--an* verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. During my first few days in Pelawan, I learned that *maya* means “to have”. What I didn’t yet realize, however, was how much its use differs from the English verb. One day after a week or so in the mountains, I was visiting a local home to practice the language. Seeing a large basket, or *tabig*, in the corner, I pointed to its carrying strap and asked what it was called.

“*Kebley*”, the man answered.

I decided to try using this new word in a sentence—maybe “The basket has a strap.” Armed with my limited grasp of sentence structure and the knowledge that *maya* means “to have”, I bravely stated, “*Maya tabig et kebley.”*

Between the ensuing howls of laughter from my host as he rolled on the floor, he choked out enough words for me to piece together that I had said it backwards: “The strap has a basket.” I learned two important lessons that day: 1) translations are traps, and 2) *maya* is special. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Machete* is a more familiar word to Americans, but the American concept of *machete* does not overlap perfectly with the range of knives described by *tukew*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Though the word order of a sentence like “*Maya tukew ku*” differs slightly from the typical syntax of an object-focused sentence—see “Simple Sentence Structure”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Not that anyone would actually say that about me, of course. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I took these terms from the Wikipedia article on Tagalog grammar. While Tagalog is a distinct language, its three-case system parallels that of Pelawan. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For “purer” Pelawan, stick with *i*—*ni* is Tagalog. Nevertheless, Pelawan speakers frequently use *ni*, especially when it makes for smoother speech, such as after a vowel. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Often only one name is mentioned to indicate a group. For example, *de Pidli* means “Pidli and the group associated with him.” What group is meant—family, traveling companions, co-workers, people who just happen to be in the same place—will typically be clear from context. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See “Verbs: Peg-.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In this example, *kisiyu* functions as a modifier of *benwa*, and so requires a connecting *-ng*. See “Modifiers” for further explanation. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Note that in this example, one would typically not use the *meng-* aspect for the action itself: one says *meglutu`*, not *menglutu`*. Nevertheless, the noun for “one who cooks” comes from this aspect. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Another case of a disappearing *e*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Or *dakeng*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Beke`* and *sampay*, while interchangeable to some degree, have slightly different connotations. *Beke`* is a simple *and*, while *sampay* has more of an emphasis on “this *as well as* that.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This nearly always occurs with *et* in contracted form: *sama’t*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For some verbs, *dut* is more appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Use *sinu* to ask for a person’s name, but *enu* to ask the name of an object or location. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)