

Essential Tagalog Grammar

Second Edition

A Reference for Learners of Tagalog

Fiona De Vos

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Second Edition

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learningtagalog.com

team@learningtagalog.com

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To my husband, Fre

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Introduction

Essential Tagalog Grammar offers:

- clear, simple and concise explanations
- lots of practical examples focusing on everyday, informal Tagalog
- accurate definitions and translations
- pronunciation marks, with all long vowels (stress) and glottal stops indicated
- audio recordings of Tagalog sounds (downloadable from learningtagalog.com)
- extensive cross-referencing and a comprehensive index
- a simple well-organized format

Essential Tagalog Grammar includes:

- extensive alphabetical lists of noun, verb and adjective affixes with plenty of examples, useful for building vocabulary
- meanings of enclitic particles in context
- tables of markers and pronouns, question words, rules for indicating aspect, irregular verbs, numbers, time expressions and more
- lists of opening and closing particles and interjections
- clear explanations of the Point of Departure (the Tagalog “subject,” “topic” or “focus”) and the News (the Tagalog “predicate” or “comment”), markers and pronouns (Ang, Ng and Sa phrases), enclitic words and more

Essential Tagalog Grammar is recommended for:

- learners of Tagalog who want to understand how the language works and have a quick reference handy
- native speakers who want to gain insights into their own language
- anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of Tagalog grammar

Essential Tagalog Grammar is the ideal companion to *Learning Tagalog: A Complete Course with Audio*. The course is available at: learningtagalog.com

How to use this book

You can use this book purely as a reference, reading only the topics that interest you. The cross-references and the comprehensive index will guide you to related topics.

You can also read it from cover to cover, for instance, by doing one small section a day. After reading the book, you will have covered all the essential grammar points you need to speak and understand everyday Tagalog.

For a summary of the pronunciation symbols used in the book, see p. 24.

Exercises

After reading a section with one or more tables containing Tagalog and English phrases, you can do the following exercises:

- Cover up the column containing the English phrases and say the meaning of the Tagalog phrases.
- Cover up the Tagalog column, read the English phrases and say the Tagalog phrases.

What's new in this edition?

- improved explanations, definitions, translations and examples
- new example sentences and verb forms (aspects) added to all verb affixes
- new verb affixes, enclitic particle combinations and describing words
- a new section on the Tagalog POD vs. the English subject
- new example sentences added to some noun affixes and adjective affixes, and other topics
- new translations added to the chapters on pronunciation, forming and connecting words, and other topics
- new cross-references and index entries
- reorganized sections
- and more

Navigation tips for the ebook version

- In the Contents, click on a page number to go directly to a specific section.
- In the main text, click on a link or a page number to jump to a specific section.
- Click Alt+Left Arrow (Windows/Unix) or Command+Left Arrow (Mac OS) to return to the page you previously viewed.
- Click Ctrl+F/Command+F to search the ebook for a word or a phrase.

Contact

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, you can contact the author at:

team@learningtagalog.com

Maraming salamat po'!

Pronunciation

Note: Downloadable audio recordings of Tagalog sounds and the pronunciation of the Tagalog words included in this chapter are available at: learningtagalog.com

Vowels and consonants

Vowels

The following vowels are used in native Tagalog words. The underlined vowels are long vowels.

vowel	examples	corresponding sounds in English	IPA symbols
a	<u>a</u>ga	<i>palm, about</i>	[a], [ə]
e	<u>e</u>re	<i>wh<u>e</u>y, dress</i>	[e], [ɛ]
i	<u>i</u>gi	<i>happ<u>y</u>, kit</i>	[i], [ɪ]
o	<u>o</u>so	<i>row, th<u>o</u>ught</i>	[o], [ɔ]
u	<u>u</u>so, usa	<i>go<u>o</u>se, put</i>	[u], [ʊ]

Consonants

The following consonants are used in native Tagalog words.

consonant	corresponding sound in English
b	<i>but</i>
d	<i>do</i>
g	<i>go</i>
h	<i>ham</i>
k	<i>cat</i>
l	<i>left</i>
m	<i>man</i>
n	<i>no</i>
ng	<i>ringing</i> [IPA symbol: ŋ]
p	<i>tip</i>
r	<i>run</i>
s	<i>sea</i>
t	<i>store</i>
w	<i>we</i>
y	<i>yes</i>

Note:

1. /k/, /p/ and /t/ are not aspirated, that is, there is no puff of air after them.

To hear the difference between aspirated and unaspirated sounds, say *kill* and *skill* out loud. In most dialects of English, /k/ is aspirated in *kill* and unaspirated in *skill*. Similarly, /p/ and /t/ are aspirated in *pill* and *till* but not in *spill* and *still*.

2. /ng/ can also be found at the beginning of a word in Tagalog (e.g. **ngayon** – *today, now*). You can practise the initial /ng/ sound by saying *ringing, ri...nging*.

Extra consonants for loan words

Tagalog makes use of additional consonants for loan words and names, borrowed mainly from Spanish and English. These are **c, f, j, ñ, q, v, x** and **z**. Examples:

Quezon City, computer.

Together with these extra consonants, the Tagalog alphabet is made up of 28 letters, i.e. the same 26 letters of the English alphabet, plus two letters – **ng** and **ñ**.

Letter names

The two Tagalog letters that are not found in the English alphabet are called *en gee* (**ng**) and *en yeh* (**ñ**).

All the other letters have the same names as in English. Note that **z** is called *zee*, as in American English.

Diphthongs

diphthong	corresponding sound in English
ay	<i>wise</i>
ey	<i>why</i>
oy	<i>boy</i>
uy	<i>too young</i>
aw	<i>now</i>
ew	<i>yeah why</i>
iw	<i>kiwi</i>
ow	<i>row</i>

How to pronounce /ll/ and /ñ/

letter(s)	pronounced as	examples	pronounced as
ll	ly	Calle Villegas	<i>“Calye”</i> <i>“Vilyegas”</i>
ñ	ny (“gn” in <i>lasagna</i>)	El Niño Los Baños	<i>“El Ninyo”</i> <i>“Los Banyos”</i>

Long vowels (stress) and glottal stops

Native Tagalog words are generally pronounced as they are spelled. * The only things that are not represented in spelling are: (1) long vowels, and (2) glottal stops [IPA symbol: ʔ] at the end of words.

An example of a glottal stop found in English is the sound represented by the hyphen in *uh-oh!*

* Commonly-used exceptions to this are **ng** and **mga**, which are pronounced as “*nang*” and “*manga*,” respectively.

Long vowels (stress)

In Tagalog, stressed syllables have a long vowel, while unstressed syllables have a short vowel.

In this book, all syllables with a long vowel are underlined. Examples:

trab<u>a</u>ho	<i>work, job</i>
<u>a</u>so	<i>dog</i>
mak<u>a</u>ka<u>s</u>ama	<i>will be able to come along</i>

It is important to make a distinction between long vowels and short vowels to be clearly understood. For one thing, many words change meanings when their long vowels are not clearly audible. Examples:

<u>b</u>uhay	<i>life</i>
buhay	<i>alive</i>

mag-aaral	<i>will study</i>
mag-aaral	<i>student, pupil</i>

Optional long vowels

Vowels in syllables right before a pause, such as at the end of a sentence, may be made longer. Examples:

Kumusta?	<i>How are you? / How's it going?</i>
Kumusta <u>na</u>?	

These optional long vowels are not indicated in this book.

Final glottal stops

Some final vowels end with a glottal stop when followed by a pause (e.g. comma, period). When not followed by a pause, these vowels are elongated instead. In this book, these final glottal stops or long vowels are marked with the symbol //'. Examples:

<u>tama</u>'	<i>right, correct</i>
hindi'	<i>not</i>
naligo'	<i>took a shower or a bath, washed (one's body)</i>

Pronunciation when used in a sentence:

<u>Tama</u>', hindi siya <u>naligo</u>'.	<i>Right, he/she didn't wash.</i>
---	-----------------------------------

Note: When // is not followed by a space, it represents one or more omitted letters, instead of a glottal stop or a long vowel. Examples:

<u>b</u>awa't	<i>each, every</i>
siya'y	<i>he/she's</i>
'yan	<i>that (near you)*</i>

* See also: [Clarification: near me etc.](#) (p. 56)

Optional glottal stops

Technically, the following vowels begin with a glottal stop.

vowels	example	pronunciation	meaning
vowels at the beginning of a word	<u>a</u>so	“'aso”	<i>dog</i>
vowels following a hyphen	mag-<u>a</u>ral	“mag'aral”	<i>to study</i>
vowels following another vowel	ma<u>a</u>ga	“ma'aga”	<i>early</i>

However, these glottal stops usually disappear in rapid speech.

Optional final /h/ sound

Final vowels that do not end with a glottal stop may be followed by a slight /h/ sound before a pause. Example:

Ma<u>a</u>ga pa(h).	<i>It's still early.</i>
----------------------------	--------------------------

Summary of pronunciation symbols used

symbol	pronunciation
<u>underline</u>	long vowel
// not followed by a pause*	long vowel
// followed by a pause*	glottal stop

* pause – e.g. comma, period

Spelling system using diacritical marks

An official spelling system that uses diacritical marks for indicating long vowels and final glottal stops was introduced in 1939. Although it is used in some dictionaries and Tagalog learning materials, it has not been generally adopted by native speakers. The system is explained in [Appendix A](#) (p. 441).

Replaceable sounds

Replaceable vowel sounds

Some vowel sounds in native words can be replaced under certain conditions.

change	example	alternative pronunciation	meaning
from /i/ to /e/	lalaki	"la <u>l</u> ake"	man, male
from /e/ to /i/	sige na	"sigi na"	come on, please...
from /o/ to /u/	total	" <u>t</u> otal"	after all, anyway

When the changes usually occur:

1. From /i/ to /e/: when /i/ is in the final syllable of a native Tagalog word that is followed by a pause*

example	alternative pronunciation	meaning
Gabi.	"Gabe."	Evening.
Itlog.	—	Egg.
Abril.	—	April.
Gabi na.	—	It's already dark.

2. From /e/ to /i/: when /e/ is in the final syllable of a word that is not followed by a pause*

example	alternative pronunciation	meaning
Sige na.	" <i>Sigi</i> na."	<i>Come on, please.</i>
Sige .	—	OK.
<u>P</u>erlas.	—	<i>Pearl.</i>
<u>E</u>leksyon.	—	<i>Election.</i>

3. From /o/ to /u/: when /o/ is short (unstressed) and not followed by a pause*

example	alternative pronunciation	meaning
Ano pa?	" <i>Anu</i> pa?"	<i>What else?</i>
Botika '.	" <i>Butika</i> '."	<i>Drugstore.</i>
Biyolin .	" <i>Biyulin</i> ."	<i>Violin.</i>
Ano ?	—	<i>What?</i>
<u>B</u>ola.	—	<i>Ball.</i>

* pause – e.g. comma, period

Other replaceable sounds

sounds	may be replaced by	example(s)	alternative pronunciation(s)	meaning
ai	<i>ay, ey, e</i>	kailan	<i>“kaylan, keylan, kelan”</i>	<i>when</i>
au	<i>aw, o</i>	kaunti’	<i>“kawnti’, konti’”</i>	<i>a little</i>
ay	<i>ey, e</i>	may	<i>“mey, me”</i>	<i>there’s (a/some)...</i>
diy, dy	<i>j</i>	diyan, dyaryo	<i>“jan,” “jaryo”</i>	<i>there, newspaper</i>
niy	<i>ñ (ny)</i>	niyog	<i>“ñog (nyog)”</i>	<i>coconut</i>
siy, sy	<i>sh</i>	siya, masyado	<i>“sha,” “mashado”</i>	<i>he/she, too (much)</i>
tiy, ty	<i>ch</i>	tiyak, tyan	<i>“chak,” “chan”</i>	<i>doubtless, belly</i>
ts	<i>ch</i>	kotse, tsokolate	<i>“koche, “chokolate”</i>	<i>car, chocolate</i>