

(Past tense of Verbs, the Verb-Noun.)

Kynsa Lyther Yann.

A Yowann Ker,

My re² dhegemmeras dha drigva dhiworth “K.D.L.” ha pur lowen ov vy dhe skrifa dhis. Pyskador ov vy hag yma genev gwreg, Anjela hy hanow, mab, Erwan y hanow, ha myrgh, Marie hy hanow. My a² dhysk Kernewek gans “K.D.L.” ha my a² wayt ty dhe² alloes konvedhes ow lyther. Ow mammyeth yw Bretonek, mes ny² allav kewsel Bretonek marnas gans ow³ howetha. Ow gwreg ha’n fleghes ny² gewsons saw Frynkek. Skrif dhymm yn skon, mar pleg.

Dhiso yn lel,

Yann le Bars.

Gerva.

A (Vocative particle, not translated)
 ker = dear
 my = I
 re² dhegemmeras = have received
 dha² = your.
 (pronounce as Eng. “the”)
 trigva (f) = address
 dhiworth = from
 ov vy = am
 skrifa = (to) write
 dhis = to you
 yma genev = I have
 a² wayt = hope
 ty = you

ty dhe² alloes = that you can
 konvedhes = (to) understand
 lyther = letter
 mes = but
 ny² allav = I cannot
 kewsel = (to) speak
 ha’n = and the
 fleghes = children
 skrif dhymm = write to me
 yn skon = soon
 mar pleg = please
 dhiso yn lel = yours sincerely
 ny² gewsons saw = (they) only speak

Govynnadow.

(Answer these questions in complete sentences as before. None of the answers can be “lifted” from the passage but in many cases you can base most of the wording on the questions.)

- 1) Piw a skrif an lyther?
- 2) Piw re ros (has given) trigva Yowann dhe Yann?
- 3) Prag (Why) yth yw Yann pur lowen?
- 4) Piw yw Anjela?
- 5) Piw yw Erwan?
- 6) Piw yw Marie?
- 7) Fatell² dhysk Yann Kernewek?
- 8) Py yeth a² gews Anjela? (What language does Anjela speak?)
- 9) P’eur kews Yann Bretonek?
- 10) Pyth yw hanow teylu Yann?

Gramasek.

Past Tense of Verbs. “My re² dhegemmeras” illustrates the common ending “-as” for the past tense of verbs. It can be used with the usual particle “a²”

e.g. My a² dhegemmeras = I received.

or with the perfect particle “re²”

e.g. My re² dhegemmeras = I have received.

Similarly for verbs we have met so far:

My a² drig = I live; My a² drigas = I lived; My re² drigas = I have lived.

My a² gews = I speak; My a² gewsis = I spoke; My re² gewsis = I have spoken;

My a skrif = I write; My a skrifas = I wrote; My re skrifas = I have written;

My a² werth = I sell; My a² werthas = I sold; My re² werthas = I have sold;

My a² dhannvon = I send; My a² dhannvonas = I sent;

My re² dhannvonas = I have sent.

My a² woer = I know. My a² wodhva = I knew; My re² wodhva = I have known.

(This verb is irregular)

A number of verbs end in “-is” instead of “-as” in the past tense:

e.g. My a² gewsis = I spoke; Yann a² gewsis = Yann spoke.

Remember these forms are used no matter what the subject is, so long as it starts the sentence to form a nominal sentence.

e.g. Ni re skrifas = We have written; Yowann a obras = John worked.

Exercise 1. Translate the following into Cornish, checking carefully with the above list.

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| 1) He speaks. | 6) Jenifer sent. |
| 2) She spoke. | 7) The Cornishman works. |
| 3) Marie has spoken. | 8) He has worked. |
| 4) He has written. | 9) Yann has lived in St. Malo. |
| 5) I have sent. | 10) She sold. |

The negative particle “ny²” is similarly used with the past tense and replaces both “a²” and “re²” to make the verb negative. There is no distinction in Cornish between the simple past and the perfect when the verb is negative so that:

e.g. Yann ny skrifas = “Yann did not write.” and also “Yann has not written.”
Ny² werthas Yann = “Yann did not sell.” and also “Yann has not sold.”

Negative sentences are not nominal but verbal, and usually emphasise the verb by putting it in front of the subject. Also, the verb ending alters to agree with the subject. This is why we have “gewsons” in the last but one line of the letter, because the subject (“Ow gwreg ha’n fleghes”) is plural. When the subject comes first in a verbal sentence it carries some degree of emphasis. However if a noun subject follows the verb, the verb stays singular. The last but one sentence could have been, “Ny gews ow gwreg ha’n fleghes saw Frynkek.”

Exercise 2. Translate into Cornish. Remember that both the “have not” and the “did not” sentences simply need “ny²” in front of the verb with the past tense ending, usually “-as”. Put the subject first (e.g. “Ev ny² gewsis = He did not speak”) in numbers 1 - 5, and after the verb (e.g. “Ny² dhannvonas hi = She did not send.”) in 6 - 10.

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| 1) Yann has not written. | 6) John has not sent. |
| 2) Anjela did not speak. | 7) Jenifer did not write. |
| 3) The friend did not send. | 8) The family has not written. |
| 4) The Breton has not spoken. | 9) The woman did not sell. |
| 5) The Cornishman did not speak. | 10) The sister has not spoken. |

(You will observe that in this exercise all the subjects are third person singular as this is the only verb ending we have so far learned.)

The Infinitive or Verb-Noun. (The term “infinitive” is the normal one in the grammar of English and most European languages, but “Verb-Noun” or “Verbal Noun” is frequently used in connection with Celtic languages.) In English this is the verb usually preceded by the particle “to” e.g. “to speak,” “to write,” etc. However this is not the case in the example in Yann’s letter. “Ny² allav kewsel” = “I cannot speak” shows the verb noun “kewsel” and the infinitive “speak” without its usual “to” though “I am able to speak.” is also possible in English.

The Cornish verb-noun forms for the verbs we have met so far are:

kewsel = to speak, skrifa = to write, oberi = to work,
bos = to be, triga = to dwell, gwertha = to sell,
mos = to go, degemmeres = to receive, dyski = to learn,
godhvos = to know, dannvon = to send.

We have learned above “Ny² allav,” the Cornish for “I cannot.” The Cornish for “I can” is “Y⁵ hallav” so with this information we can now do the following exercise:

Exercise 3. Translate into Cornish.

(e.g. I can go = Y⁵ hallav mos; I cannot work = Ny² allav oberi.)

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| 1) I can sell. | 6) I cannot write books. |
| 2) I cannot go. | 7) I can go to Brittany. |
| 3) I cannot send. | 8) I cannot be in Cornwall. |
| 4) I can live in Gt. Britain. | 9) I cannot live in France. |
| 5) I can write the letter. | 10) I can send the children. |

“Y⁵ hallav” implies that “I can” because I am physically able or because I am allowed. If “I can” implies that I have learned to do something it is more usual to use “Y⁵ hwonn,” or “My a² woer,” both of which mean literally “I know (how to).” “My a² woer” is nominal and emphasises “I.” In the case of the verbal expression “Y⁵ hwonn,” the emphasis is neutral.

e.g. Y⁵ hwonn lywyas karr tan = I can drive a car.
My a² woer lywyas karr tan = I can drive a car.

Exercise 4. Translate into Cornish using “Y⁵ hwonn,” or “My a² woer.”

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| 1) I can write English. | 6) I can speak Breton. |
| 2) I can speak Cornish. | 7) I can read French. |
| 3) I can read (redya) Breton. | 8) I can write Cornish. |
| 4) I can speak French. | 9) I can speak French. |
| 5) I can speak English. | 10) I can speak Cornish. |

The Verb-Noun is often used with an adjective (describing word)

e.g. I am sad to go. He is happy to stay.

In Cornish the verb-noun has the word “dhe²” in front of it in a sentence of this kind.

e.g. Lowen ov vy dhe skrifa dhis. = I am happy to write to you.
Trist yns i dhe² vos. = They are sad to go.

Exercise 5. Translate the following into Cornish. Don't forget that “dhe²” always causes second state mutation.

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| 1) I am happy to learn Cornish | 6) They are happy to work. |
| 2) I am sad to go away. | 7) I am happy to speak Cornish. |
| 3) They are happy to live in Truro. | 8) They are sad to write letters. |
| 4) They are sad to live in France. | 9) I am happy to go to Brittany. |
| 5) I am happy to sell books. | 10) They are happy to be in
Yowann's shop. |

(to go away = mos dhe² ves)