2001

Illustrated topical dictionary of the Western Desert language : based on the Ngaanyatjarra dialect

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ILLUSTRATED

Topical Dictionary
of the
Western Desert Language

FOURTH EDITION
Revised 2001

W.H. Douglas
This new edition of the *Illustrated Topical Dictionary of the Western Desert Language* comes as a result of further demands for copies of the dictionary both from the field and from various members of the public.

Previous publishers of the work are no longer in operation and I am indebted to my friend and colleague, Dr C.D. (Toby) Metcalfe, for very generously taking over the responsibility of handling the publishing of this 2001 edition.

The dictionary is based on the Ngaanyatjarra dialect of the Western Desert Language. It was designed originally to bridge the gap between my description of the grammar of the Western Desert Language (*Oceanic Linguistic Monographs, No 4 Revised 1964*) and the anticipated comprehensive dictionary which has been submitted by Misses A Glass and D Hackett for publication in Alice Springs this year. Some spelling alterations have been made in this edition to be consistent with those in the Glass and Hackett work.

Acknowledgements have been made in three previous editions of the work, but I must reiterate that my life has been enriched by the friendship, the culture and language of the Central Desert people of Western Australia. My wife, Beth, has been my encouragement for over 54 years, and, of course, it has been the grace of God which has sustained us both through many experiences in a difficult field.

Wilf Douglas  
Mandurah, WA 2001
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Pronunciation


1 Sounds having English equivalents

Vowels: /a/ as in 'father', /i/ as in 'radio', /u/ as in 'put'.

Consonants: /m/ as in 'mat', /n/ as in 'nut', /l/ as in 'let'.
/w/ as in 'wet', /y/ as in 'yet', /ng/ as in 'singer'.
/p/ unaspirated as in 'spike', not as in 'pike'.
/t/ unaspirated as in 'stake', not as in 'take'.
/k/ unaspirated as in 'spike', not as in 'Kate'.
/r/ (the 'Irish r') retroflexed as in 'rake'. Written /r/.  
/r/ (the 'Scottish r') lightly flapped as in 'sporran'. Written /rr/.  

(Note that /ng/ occurs at the beginning of words in the Western Desert language. Try saying 'singer' without 'si'.)

2 Sounds not having English equivalents

Dentals: The tongue just shows between the teeth when these consonants occur before the vowels /a/ and /u/, but behind the teeth before the vowel /i/. Listen to native pronunciation of /ti/ as in katja 'son', tjina 'foot', tjuni 'stomach'. /ny/ as in nyangu 'saw', nyinati 'sit', nyuma 'bread'. /ly/ as in palya 'good', walyku 'bad'.

Retroflexed consonants: The tongue turned up towards the roof of the mouth.
/r/ (see above) is also a retroflexed consonant. Written /r/.
/l/ as in warta 'tree'. Written /rl/.
/p/ as in parna 'ground'. Written /rn/.
/l/ as in marlu 'red kangaroo'. Written /rl/.

Long vowels: These are double the length of the short vowels. In the Dictionary, lengthened vowels are indicated by two identical vowels. In other material produced earlier, a colon was used to indicate length.
/i:/ or /ii/ as in wi:lyka/wiilyka 'wild cat'. Written /ii/.
/a:/ or /aa/ as in nya:ku?/nyaaku? 'Why? Written /aa/.
/u:/ or /uu/ as in pu:rnu/puurnu 'blew (it)'. Written /uu/.  

Accent (stress) falls on the first syllable of each word.
Body Parts 1

KATA The Head

tjuny-tjunypa/ngukunypa brains
pina ear
nyinpinpa eyebrow
raka-raka jaw
mulya-yarla nostril
muni lips
tjarlinypa tongue
kantja chin, beard
ngurnti/nyanka neck, back of the neck
pirni bend of the neck
lirri throat
tarrka bone
wirta saliva
karnpi fat

mangka hair of the head
pitilyirri temple
yiiku face
ngalya forehead
kuru eye
mulya nose
tjaa mouth
kartirti teeth
nguku cheek
taku shoulder
wirrinpirri collarbone
kata tarrka the skull
kuurti/kurrumpa spirit

TYPES OF HAIR:
mangka hair of the head
ngirlunpa underarm hair
nyanyi mangka pubic hair
purmu fur, body hair (gen.)
ngarnkurra beard, whiskers
pirlipirra mangka chest hair
tjaaputu moustache
YARNANGU  The Body, A Person

WATI  man
kata  head
taku  shoulder
yali-piri/ngalpiri  shoulder blade
nyiti/pirlpirpa  chest
yipi/mimi  breast and milk
nyuntjirpa  navel
yamiri  the arm
mirra  upper arm
ngayanya  axilla
yamiri-yankarla  lower arm
wirtapi  the back
karilpa  lower back
marna  the buttock
kuna  yapla  anus
yangkarpa  hip, hip bone
tjarlpa  the leg
parnta  the groin
tjunta  the thigh
murti  the knee
tjina  the foot, footprint

MINYMA  woman
yilytjampi  flesh
kiri-kiri  lungs
kurturtu  heart
kapurartji  kidney
yalu  liver
nyimiri  ribs
nyiku  elbow
munytyulpia  wrist
mara  hand
milji  the nails, (also claws)
tjuni  the stomach, the abdomen
pirlintji  intestines
tirti  pelvic ridge
ngaminpa  vulva
nyira  vagina
karlu  penis
paarlpa  sinew and small blood vessels
yirrami  blood
mata  inner side knee
tarta  heel
tari  ankle bone
tjina  pirtu  big toe
tjina  ngarti  little toe
People 1

yarnangu pinninya

wati yirna *an elderly man*

minyma pampa *an elderly woman*

maliki *stranger*

kungka *girl*

kungkawara *young woman*

minarli *boy*

tjitji/tjilku *child*

minyma *woman*

ngalyayarla *diagnosticist*

doctor*

maparnjara *sorcerer*

pikatjarra *a sick person*
mitjiji
*a white woman*

walypala/walapala
pirntalpa
*a non-Aboriginal, a white man*

tjitja
*a hospital sister*

mitjiti
*a white woman*

puurrpa
*boss, station owner, superintendent, LORD.*

puti/purlnymanta
*a policeman*

kapamanpa
*Government officer*

**People 2**

*Culture Contact Terms*
Male Life Cycle

yirnarringkula Becoming an elder.

1. tjitji pilyirrp
2. tjitji mara-mara
3. tjitji tjina-tjina
4. tjitji tjirramk
5. tjitji murtilya/kungkangkatja
6. tjitji nyirrk
7. wati minu
8. wati yirna
9. wati kurritjarra
10. wati yakirri-tjarra

1. The Infant. 2. The Crawling Child. 3. The Newly Walking Child. 4. The Child beginning to show signs of manhood. (Note: tjikku is a substitute for tjitji for certain bereaved families). 5. The Adolescent, at the beginning of initiation into manhood. 6. The Young Initiate when his nasal septum is pierced. 7. The Initiate, also called Nyiwayi pukurtitarra, because he now wears a hair bun at the beginning of his seclusion period. 8. A Fully-initiated Man, now wearing the headband, the symbol of manhood. 9. The Married Man. He has called and taken his promised wife. 10. An Elder.
Telaesthesia and Predictive Powers

**punka-punkara** - significant throbbing which indicates that a relative is thinking of one.

- **nirkatira**
  a whistling in the ears
  indicating that elder brother
  is thinking of one.

- **takalarrara**
  a crackling in the nose
  indicating the coming of a
  visitor or special event.

- **mirna punka-punkara**
  upper arm throb
  indicates parents are
  thinking of one.

- **kurturtu punka-punkara**
  maternal uncle or father's
  sister is thinking of the person.

- **nyi pi punka-punkara**
  the nipple throbbing
  indicates that son or daughter
  is thinking of the person.

- **yangkarpa punka-punkara**
  ngalungku kulira
  (i.e. one of the same age
  is thinking of the person)
  Also grandparents may be
  thinking of the person.

- **tjuni yurntura**
  a pushing feeling in the stomach
  indicates that a stranger is about.

- **parnta, tjunta punka-punkara**
  a throbbing in the groin
  or thigh means that one's spouse
  is thinking of the person.

- **murnngu punka-punkara**
  a throbbing in the calf of leg
  means that elder sister or brother
  are concerned for the person.
The Story of the Sun and the Night Sky

Tjukurpa Tjirntu, Munga.

(An attempt to portray the Western Desert concept of the movement of the celestial bodies including the passage of the sun and the night sky through the subterranean tunnel from West to East.)

munga The Night Sky

yilkari The Day Sky

Kirnara The Moon

tjirntu tjarrpa Sunset

pirntirri pirninya The Constellations

Wilurarra West

parma lipirtu The Wide Earth

kakarrara East

kimara purika: The Full Moon. kimara mawul-mawulp: New Moon. munga: The Night Sky, is regarded as a "black spirit stuff" which rises from the subterranean passage as the sun sets.

THE CONSTELLATIONS (pirntirri pirninya) are regarded in the Desert as the spirits of the great Creation Beings of the Tjukurpa (The Dreaming). As they move across the sky in their seasons they continue their exploits. Some of these star spirits are regarded as below the Munga (Munga Kaninytjarratja) and many of them are above the Munga (the Munga Katungkatjanya). Among these are the Kungkarrangkalpa (also called Kurrpulurrpulu) 'The Pleiades' ("Seven Sisters"), Warlawurru 'Eaglehawk' (The Southern Cross), and many others.
Religious View of Nature

YAPU TJUKURRTATJA: A rock associated with the dreaming (the Tjukurpa) or, in other words, the petrified remains of a great creation being whose spirit is now one of the heavenly bodies, a planet, a star or a constellation.

munga katungkatjanya the spirit beings above the night sky

TJUKURRPAPA: May be translated 'Dream' or 'Story', but for Western Desert people it embraces their whole philosophy of living; it is the totality of Desert myth and legend; it is the origin of and the sanction for every law and custom; it explains the relationship between person and person and that which exists between the people and the land; it also shows the kinship of human beings with other living beings in the land. It has been translated as "The Dreamtime" or "The Dreaming"; but to the people it is the ultimate reality.
Water
KAPI

- kapingkatja: aquatic
- kapi yirli: dripping rain
- kapi yarrka: drizzling rain
- kapi punkara: rain falling
- kapi palyku: salt water
- kapi tjirratja: thirsty

- yutuwari: rain clouds
- tjirnu: sun
- waralpa: virga

- tjurtirangu: rainbow
- kapi warla: spring water

- kapi pirmangu: rainwater pool
- karru: creek bed
- kapi warnanpa: flood waters
- kapi kartalpa: rockhole
- piki: mud
THE THREE SEASONS: The Desert people distinguish three seasons in the year:
kurli, the hot season, summer, also 'year'.
pirriya-pirriya, the windy season (beginning about September).
kamaralpa, the cold season, winter, also 'frost', 'ice'. An alternative form is nyinnga
See also under the heading "WATER"
Location and Direction

Directives with verbs:
- parra - around
- wati - across
- ma - away from (speaker)
- ngalya - towards (speaker)

Direction suffixes on Nouns:
- -kutu to, towards
- -nguru from, away from

Location Suffixes with Nouns/N.P.:
- -ngka/-ta/-la in, on, at, by.
- ngurrangka in camp
- kamaralta in winter
- Yulurula at Ayers Rock
- Yurltulytja at Ooldea
- Wanarnta at Wanarn

- katu above
- kantilytja beside, at the side of
- yapungka on the rock
- marlarrku behind, at the back of
- munkarra beyond
- tiwa afar, at a distance
- ngaangku this side of
- ngaangka on this
- ngaatja here
- palatja there (mid)
- ngururrpa-ngururr
- kutjarra between
- kanintyjarra beneath, inside
- yonner
- yonner
- in front of
- ngantjarrpa-ngantjarrpa on both sides of, at the ends
Insects and Arachnids

ngiriki/maku
the edible grub
("bardy grub")

lunki a large
type of grub

kiwinyi mosquito

yirl-yirlpa
hornets & wasps

pinta-pinta
moths & butterflies

yirlitlu
honey ant

muungu bush &
house flies

marapuulpa
trapdoor spider

tjirtu
fleas & lice

tjintilyka
grasshopper

mungu bush &
house flies

pula
termites & anthill

wanatarnpa scorpion

warnka
hairy (processionary)
caterpillar

kartilyka blowfly
& maggots (gen.)

minga black ants

kanparrka centipede
Reptilia and Amphibia

(Rarely eaten)

ngaparla
the bearded dragon or
jew lizard

papangawurrpa
The Gecko

kurrtji-kurrtji
tadpoles

nyinngi/lirru
venomous snakes

warnampi
water snake,
the mythical serpent

murluny-murlunypa
(colour: silvery flesh)

murtinika
(brown with cream stripes)

mutukalya
(grey, big head)

ngarnmalya/ngarnngi
frog

tjimpilyka
(type of bicycle lizard)
Some Animals of the Desert

nani/raapita rabbit
papa dog
wiilyka wild domestic cat

tjilkamarta echidna

patupirri bat

papa ngupanu dingo

yirtarrutju marsupial mole

wayurta possum

warru rock wallaby

marlu red kangaroo
kurlpirpa grey kangaroo
kanyarla euro

ninu bandicoot

parrtjarta native cat (Dasyurus)
wartu wombat

walpurti banded anteater
Other Birds found in the Desert

- **tjitali/tjurlpu birds** (generally)
  - waurlawurru wedgetailed eagle (Aquila audax)
  - karlARRYa/ tjakuirri emu (Dromaius novaehollandiae)
  - ngarulparpilparpa crested pigeon (Ocyphaps lophotes)
  - gilygilykarri budgerigahs (Melopsittacus und.)
  - ngarurluri/kipara bustard, wild turkey (Ardeotis australis)
  - marnpi the common bronzewing (Phaps chalcoptera)
  - luurupa the red-backed kingfisher ( Halecyon pyrrhopygia)
  - ngamarra mallee hen (Leipoa ocellata)
  - nyinyi zebra finch (Poephila guttata)
  - parn-pampalala Central Australian bell bird (Oreoica gutturalis)
  - piwi tawny frogmouth (Podargus strigoides)
  - malpuntarri the little quail (Turnix velox)
A Few Notable Plants

**tjurngni** parakeelya  
*(Calandrina balonensis)*

**wanarnkaruru, palykunpa**  
two types of juicy edible roots

**kurtilyirri** seeds of  
wartarrka used as beads

**marlukurukuru**  
The Sturt Pea  
*(Clinthius formosus)*

**kurutaarnpa**  
*(Acacia burkittii)*  
Edible grubs found in its roots

**wartarrka**  
edible grubs found in its roots

**marlukurukuru**  
The Sturt Pea  
*(Clinthius formosus)*

**kurutaarnpa**  
*(Acacia burkittii)*  
Edible grubs found in its roots

**See also under DESERT DIET**  
other types of food in the Desert, seeds, berries and fruits, etc.

**kampurarrpa**  
a popular desert fruit

**tjarraimta** bush onion, bulb of the flax lily. *(Cyperus bulbosus)*

**pila** spinifex plain

**tjanpi** grass (gen.)

**nyanturra** mulga or silver grass

**yawila/kuparu** species of spinifex grass.

**kirti** resin or spinifex gum is extracted from certain types of this grass.

*The two types mentioned here are probably Triodia basedowii & Plectrachne melvillei respectively.*
The Tree

WARTA

warta/purnu tree, wood.

wanari Mulga tree (Acacia aneura)

yamirri/yankarla
arm or branch

nyirri seed pod

likarra dry outer
bark used for firelighting

tarrulka An edible gall
(the so-called "mulga apple")

warrah a tree stump

katarru a small stump or wedge

nyarpi broad leaves

tripa spiny leaves

marrpuri roots (generally)

Some other Acacias:

ngarrkalya (Acacia dictyophleba) its roots used as spear shafts.
tjawu (Acacia sp.) Its roots also used for spear shafts.
wirntalyka (Acacia tetrogonophylla) bears edible seeds.
wintalyka (Acacia linophylla) bears edible fruit.
minyura a broad-leaved variety of Acacia aneura with a very stringy grain.

(See next page for some other varieties of trees.)
Trees

1. Desert Kurrajong (Brachychiton gregorii).
2. Eucalypt Nut.
3. Mallee (Eucalyptus pyroformis and other Eucalypts).
4. Native Pine (Callitris sp.).
5. Blood Gum (Eucalyptus sp. and loosely applied to gum trees generally).
6. Fig (Ficus platypoda).
7. The Ghost Gum (Euc. papuana).
8. Corkwood (Hakea sp.).
9. Quandong (Santalum acuminatum).
10. Sandalwood (Santalum spicatum).
11. Mulga (Acacia aneura etc.).
12. Grass Tree (Xanthorrhoea thorotonii).

WARTA PIRNI

1. ngaita
2. tartu
3. yalpirri
4. kurlilypurru
5. tjuta
6. yirli
7. pirlpira
8. witjinti
9. walku/wayarnu
10. tartjanpa
11. wanari
12. kartukultu
The spearthrower, is also used for firelighting and as an ochre mixing bowl for painting, the flint knife is used to gut game and to sharpen spears, food also may be passed to taboo in-laws by means of the implement.
yiri point

tjirrkarli spearhead

mukulpa barb

pulyku sinew from the leg of a kangaroo. Used for binding.

ngarrkalya the root of an Acacia straightened by heat and pegging for use as the spear shaft.

ngitipna short piece bound to end of spear. Acts as brake when 'roo speared.

A hook or barb (gen.) mukulpa/narnngu

pulyku binding sinew

kantilypa the side of the mirru

wanari mulga wood

ngamirri decorative identification marks regarded as 'good luck' tokens by the hunter.

warla-warla handle (lit. ankle)

kirti/tjaparu spinifex gum used to fasten a flint.

kanti/tjimarri flint flake or knife.

yapu rock or flint (gen.)

pangkarlp a one-piece barbless spear

kurlarta a barbed spear

nyintji a child's barbless spear, spear (gen.)

the hole for the thrower hook.

mirru/lankurru the spear thrower

Method used to bind the thrower hook to its base.
waru fire

waru kurkaltjunkuya
they would heap up a big fire (ready for cooking a kangaroo or other game)

ngamurru/purrku/munyurtu
alternative words for 'charcoal'

yirlintji matches
(originally 'reeds')

tjaarrarnu it has caught alight

likarra
dry bark for firelighting

kawumpa/kurku/tjunpu
alternative words for white ash for mixing with native tobacco

warta rungkara tililiktiyalu
using friction (by sawing with a spearthrower) to produce fire

tili flame, light

puyu smoke
tjangi firestick

warta waru firewood

puura blowing (into flame)
yukiri/warrkini
dry grass (used as tinder)
yurrirringara pirriyalu rungkaltjaku
waving it so that the breeze will fan it into flame

katarru wedge
(to hold open the log)

warta paralypa a split log

yukiri and marlu kuna
dry grass and kangaroo dung used as tinder in the split log
KUKA MEAT, all game food.

karangi fat (generally)
kunyia carpet snake
marlu red kangaroo
murturrka stomach fat
nani/raapita rabbit
ngampu egg
nganurti/kipara wild turkey
ngirntaka perentie
ngartinpa kangaroo fat
nyirti goanna stomach fat
tirnka a popular goanna
tjakipirri/karluya emu
yirlpa another goanna type
yilytjanpa steak, flesh.

MIRRKA ALL VEGETABLE FOODS
(Alternatives mayi/kunangu)

karlkula wild pear
(Leichhardtia australis)

kalpari edible seeds of the
scented herb Dysphania kalpari.
kampurarrpa fruit of the
Solanum centrale.
nyuma cake of ground seed
ngaturnpa Acacia victoriae which
bears edible seeds.
ngirriki edible grubs.
parrka-parrka a wild mistletoe
bearing red edible berries.
tjantu yellow fruit of Solanum orbiculatum.
tjannarta edible bulb of the
Cyperus bulbosis.
tjurratja honey, flower nectar
walku quandong fruit Santalum acuminatum.
wangurnu yurninypa seeds of the
woollybutt grass Eragrostis eriopoda.
Some Edible Reptiles

Reptiles such as these listed on this page are usually cooked whole in the hot ashes.

ngiyari/mingarri

The Mountain Devil (Moloch horridus)

lungkarta

Blue-tongued or Banded Sleepy lizard

tjitari The Banded Rock Python (Aspidites ramsayi)

kuniya The Carpet Snake (Morelia spilota)

ngirntaka

The Perentie Goanna

kurrkarti

pirurpa

milparli

tirnka

Various types of goannas
**Distribution of Kangaroo Meat**

**kuka marlu yitjilyinkula** Dividing kangaroo meat for distribution.

- **kuka marlu** kangaroo meat
- **kataraka/katawara** head for younger siblings
- **yamirri** forelegs ("arms") for the children
- **nyimiri** ribs and breast for mother and second elder bro.
- **yintirinypa** flaps, for anybody
- **wilurrutjunta** thigh
  - For elder brother first, then for younger siblings.
- **tjunta walanyypa** lower leg (shank) for elder brother and elder sister.
- **kalipi/yangkarlpa** hip portion (this side) for those who cut the meat
- **marnakurlu** hip portion (other side) for wife and husband.

**Note:** When the meat is being cut up, the central cut must pass on the left side of the breast bone and on the right side of the skewer (tipinyupa) then on the left of the vent. (ie. the left and right from the butcher's point of view.)

The cook may claim the following parts:
- **tjuni** stomach
- **murturrka** stomach fat
- **wipu** the tail which may also be shared with wife's elder brother.

The grandparents have the soft portions:
- **kapurarrtji** kidneys
- **yalu** liver
- **kurturtu** heart

**mulurrutjuna charred parts** (kata and warupuyu)

The hunter may have meat from the kata, nyimiri, yangkarlpa.

**yamirri** foreleg for siblings

**mulurrutjuna** hip portion (kata and warupuyu)

**warnutjuna** skin, given to the dogs.

**wirtapi** loin portion, for father-in-law and mother-in-law or to elder brother with two wives and many children.
Skin Groups and Kin Terms

(For details as to the operation of the skin grouping system and of the social organization of the Western Desert people, see ... “Into Another World” by Amee Glass or “An Introduction to the Western Desert Language” by W. H. Douglas, Revised edition 1964.)

If the man belongs to the Panaka group...

his mother is Purungu
his father is Karimarra
he is Panaka and so are his brothers/sisters

Intermarrying groups =
Children of the marriage =
The directions: MAN ➔ WOMAN ➔ CHILD

KIN TERMS

tjama X kaparli
FF [fm] [km]

kurntili
fs

mama
MB

ngunytju
ms/wfs

mama
F

marlanya
YB/yB

tjurtu
es

kutta
EB

EGO
X
KURRI
me
my wife
us
WB

kurra
PB/UB

kurru
PB/UB

kurri

tjuwari X (marlanya)
WB

yurntalpa X waputju
D

katja X mingkayi
S

tjama
Ss

tjama

kaparli
sd

kaparli
dd

yurtu
kurri

my EB

whp.
Hand Gestures 1

karlaya/tjakipirri
It's an emu.

mirriringu
He/she/it is dead.

ngirriki
Bardy grubs.

kuwarra. Wait!

kungka
It's a female.

tjitji/tjilku
It's a child.

walykumunu
That's good.

marlu
It's a kangaroo.

Nyaaku?
What for?
What's going on?
Hand Gestures 2

yulara
(Somebody) is crying.

papa
It's a dog.

ngunytju
Mother
(For kapi water, touch both breasts)

wati yirna
It's an old man.

watipitja.
Go across / Go back.

ngayuku
Me/Mine.

tjiikira
drinking

wati
It's a man.

purkanya
It is big.