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
PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

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


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 /tj/ 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/.
/I/ as in yarta ‘tree’. Written /rt/.
/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.
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
pitalyirri temple
yiiku face
ngalya forehead
kuru eye
mulya nose
tjaa mouth
kartirti teeth
nguku cheek
taku shoulder
wirrinpirri collarbone
kata tarrka the skull
kuurti/kurrurnpa spirit

TYPES OF HAIR:
mangka hair of the head
ngirlunpa underarm hair
nyanyi mangka pubic hair
purmu fur, body hair (gen.)
ngarnkurrpa beard, whiskers
piripirrpa mangka chest hair
tjaaputu moustache
Body Parts 2

YARNANGU The Body, A Person

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

MINYMA woman
yilytjanpa flesh
kiri-kiri lungs
kurturtu heart
kapurartji kidney
yalu liver
nyimiri ribs
nyiku elbow
munytylupa wrist
mara hand
mitji the nails, (also claws)
tjuni the stomach, the abdomen
pirlintji intestines
tiri 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 ngarl little toe

waku right

 tjampu left
People 1

yarnangu pirninya

wati yirna  an elderly man

minyma pampa  an elderly woman

maliki  stranger

kungka  girl

kungkawara  young woman

minarli  boy

kurri  spouse (husband or wife)

tjitji/tjilku  child

minyma  woman

ngalyayarla  diagnostist

doctor

mapartjarra  sorcerer

pikatjarra  a sick person
People 2

Culture Contact Terms

mitjiti
a white woman

walypala/walapala
pirntalpa
a non-Aboriginal,
a whiteman

tjitja
a hospital sister

mitjiti
a white woman

puurupa
boss, station owner,
superintendent, LORD.

puti/purlinymanta
a policeman

kapamanpa
Government officer
Male Life Cycle

yirmerringkula Becoming an elder.

1. tjitji pilyirpa
2. tjitji mara-mara
3. tjitji tjina-tjina
4. tjitji nyiirmka
5. tjitji murtilya/kungkangkatja
6. tjitji nyiirmka
7. wati minu
8. wati yakirritjarra
9. wati kurritjarra
10. wati yirna

1. The Infant. 2. The Crawling Child. 3. The Newly Walking Child. 4. The Child beginning to show signs of manhood. (Note: tjilku 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 pukurtitjarra, 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-punktara** - significant throbbing which indicates that a relative is thinking of one.

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

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

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

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

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

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

-nyipi punka-punktara
- **the nipple throbbing** indicates that son or daughter is thinking of the person.

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

-murnngu punka-punktara
- **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

Tjukurrpa 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

Kirmara The Moon

pirntirri pirninya The Constellations

tjirntu tjarrpa Sunset

kirmara purlika: The Full Moon. kirmara mawul-mawulpa: 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 Tjukurrpa (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 Kaniyatjarratja) 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

TJUKURRPA: 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

yutuwarri rain clouds
tjurtirangu rainbow
waralpa virga

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). kamalarla, 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
Wanamta at Wanarn

diagram.png
Insects and Arachnids

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

lunki  a large
type of grub

kiwinyi  mosquito

yiirl-yiirlpa
h Hornets & wasps

pinta-pinta
moths & butterflies

yirlitutu
honey ant

muungu  bush &
house flies

tjirtu
fleas & lice

niiri-niiri
beetles (generally)

marapuulpa
trapdoor spider

tjintilyka
grasshopper

kartilyka  blowfly &
maggots (gen.)

pula
termite & anthill

wanatarnpa  scorpion

minga  black ants

warnka
hairy (processionary)
caterpillar

kanparrka
centipede
Reptilia and Amphibia

(Rarely eaten)

ngaparla
the bearded dragon or
jew lizard

papangawurrpa
The Gecko

kurrtji-kurrtji
tadpoles

nyinngi/lirru
venomous snakes

wamampi
water snake,
the mythological serpent

SMALL LIZARDS

murluny-murlunypa
(colour: silvery flesh)
murtirnka
(brown with cream stripes)

mutukalya
(grey, big head)

ngarmalya/ngarnngi
frog

tjimplyka
type of bicycle
lizard
Some Animals of the Desert

nani/raapita rabbit
papa dog
wiilyka wild domestic cat

tjilkamarta echidna

papa ngupanu dingo

wayurta possum

warru rock wallaby

marlu red kangaroo
kurlpirpa grey kangaroo
kanyarla euro

ninu bandicoot

parrtjarta native cat (Dasyurus)
wartu wombat

patupirri bat

yirtarrutju marsupial mole
tarrkawara jerboa/rat
mingkiri mouse

walpurti banded anteater

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**Birds**

**tjitarti/tjurlpu birds (generally)**

- **warlawurru** wedge-tailed eagle *(Aquila audax)*
- **kakalyalya** white cockatoo *(Cacatua galerita)*
- **karlaya/tjakipirri emu (Dromaius novaehollandiae)*
- **kinturrka** pink galah *(Cacatua roseicapilla)*
- **kurrparu** magpie *(Gymnorhina tibicen)*
- **wiirlu** curlew *(Burhinus magnirostris)*

**Other Birds found in the Desert**

- **yarralaparparpa** crested pigeon *(Ocyphaps lophotes)*
- **kilykilykarri** budgerygah *(Melopsittacus und.)*
- **nganurti/kipara** bustard, wild turkey *(Ardeotis australis)*
- **marnpi** the common bronzewing *(Phaps chalcoptera)*
- **luurnpa** the red-backed kingfisher *(Halcyon pyrrhopygia)*
- **ngarmamarra** mallee hen *(Leipoa ocellata)*
- **nyiinyii** zebra finch *(Poephila guttata)*
- **pam-pampalala** Central Australian bell bird *(Oreoica gutturalis)*
- **piwi** tawny frogmouth *(Podargus striigoides)*
- **malpuntarri** the little quail *(Turnix velox)*
A Few Notable Plants

**tjurngi parakeelya**
*(Calandrina balonensis)*

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

**kurtilyirri** seeds of
**wartarrka** used as beads

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

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

**wartarrka**
edible grubs found in its roots

**kurutaarrrpa**
*(Solanum centrale)*
a popular desert fruit

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

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

**pila** spinifex plain

**tjanpi** grass (gen.)

**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.

**nyanturra** mulga or silver grass
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")

warrkula spiny leaves

nyarlpí broad leaves

scar where a mirru (spear thrower) or tjara (shield) has been split off.

kumpunungu dark hardwood

yilyirirri the light coloured outer wood of the mulga.

marrpuri roots (generally)

Some other Acacias:

ngarrkalja (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.)
The spearthrower, in addition to being 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.
The Spear and Spearthrower

KURLARTA  MIRRU

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 spearshaft.

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

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.

Yapu  rock or flint (gen.)

Pangkarlpa  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 spearthrower

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')
jjaarraru it has caught alight
likarra dry bark for firelighting

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

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

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

ktarru wedge (to hold open the log)
yukiri and marlu kuna dry grass and kangaroo dung used as tinder in the split log
KUKA MEAT, all game food.

karnpi fat (generally)
kuniya carpet snake
marlu red kangaroo
murturka stomach fat
nani/raapita rabbit
ngampu egg
nganurti/kipara wild turkey
ngirntaka perentie
ngartinpa kangaroo fat
nyirti goanna stomach fat
tirmka a popular goanna
tjakipirri/karlaya 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 Dysphenia 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.
tjanmarta edible bulb of the Cyperus bulbosis.
tjurratja honey, flower nectar
walku quandong fruit Santalum acuminatum.
wangurnu yurninypa seeds of the woollybutt grass Eragrostis eriopoda.

Winnowing wangurnu seeds.
Some Edible Reptiles

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

The Mountain Devil (Moloch horridus)  Blue-tongued or Banded Sleepy lizard

tjiteri The Banded Rock Python (Aspidites ramsayi)
kuniya The Carpet Snake (Morelia spilota)

ngirntaka
The Perentie Goanna

kurkarti  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
wilurru/tjunta thigh
For elder brother first,
then for younger siblings.
tjunta walanyupa
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.
murtuny-murtunypa
a portion or cut

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 (tipinypa) then on the left of the vent. (i.e. the left and right from the butcher's point of view.)

The cook may claim the following parts:
tjuni stomach
mururrka 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

purrmu fur is singed off
pirlintji viscera, for the dogs
tjunta walanyupa lower leg (shank)

mulurru charred parts
(kata and warupuyu)
The hunter may have meat from the kata, nyimiri, yangkarlpa.
yamirri foreleg for siblings

warntu/minitjamakatutja 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 Ameo 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.
- He is Panaka and so are his brothers/sisters.
- His father is Karimarra.
- His wife is Tjarurru.

Intermarrying groups =

Children of the marriage =

The directions: MAN ←→ WOMAN →→ CHILD

**KIN TERMS**

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kurrti</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>marlanya</td>
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<tr>
<td>nguntju</td>
<td>F/m</td>
<td>mumu</td>
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<td>waputju</td>
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<td>ss</td>
<td></td>
<td>tjamu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25
karlaya/tjakipirri
It's an emu.

mirrirringu
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?
yulara
(Somebody) is crying.

ngunytju
Mother
(For kapi water, touch both breasts)

papa
It's a dog.

Hand Gestures 2

wati yirna
It's an old man.

watipitja.
Go across / Go back.

ngayuku
Me/Mine.

tjikira
drinking

wati
It's a man.

purikanya
It is big.