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


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 ‘stake’.
/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/.
/t/ as in warta ‘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.
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
tjaq mouth
kartiri 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
piripirra mangka chest hair
tjaaputu moustache
YARNANGU  The Body, A Person

WATI man
kata head
kultu/ngitinpa the thorax
taku shoulder
yalipiri/ngalpiri shoulder blade
nyiti/pirlpirpa chest
yipi/mimi breast and milk
nyuntjirnpa navel
yamirri the arm
mima upper arm
ngayanypa axilla
yamirri-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
munytjulpapa wrist
mara hand
miltji 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 ngarli little toe
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/tjiku  child

minyma  woman

ngalyayarla  dentist

diagnosist

doctor

mapartjarra  sorcerer

pikatjarra  a sick person
People 2

Culture Contact Terms

mitjiti
a white woman

walypala/walapala
pirnalpa
a non-Aboriginal,
a white man

puti/purlinyamanta
a policeman

tjita
a hospital sister

puurrpa
boss, station owner,
superintendent, LORD.

kapamanpa
Government officer

tukuta
doctor
Male Life Cycle

yirnarringkula  Becoming an elder.

1. tjitji pilyirrp
2. tjitji mara-mara
3. tjitji tjina-tjina
4. tjitji njumurr
5. tjitji murtilya/
kungkangkatja
6. tjitji nyirrnga
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-punkara - 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-punkara
upper arm throb indicates parents are thinking of one.

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

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

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

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

tjuni yurtura
a pushing feeling in the stomach indicates that a stranger is about.

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

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 pinninya The Constellations

tjirntu tjarrpa Sunset

Wilurarra West

parna lipirtu The Wide Earth

kakarrara East

Kirnara The Moon

kimara purli: 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 pinninya) 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 Kannytjarratja) 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

yutuwari rain clouds

waralpa virga
tjintu sun
tjurtirangu rainbow

kapi warla spring water

kapi pirmangu rainwater pool

kapi warnanpa flood waters

kapi kartalpa rockhole

karru creek bed

pili 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
Wanamta at Wanarn

-ngka/-(ta)/-la in, on, at, by.
ngurrangka in camp
kamaralta in winter
Yulurula at Ayers Rock
Yurltulytja at Ooldea
Wanamta at Wanarn
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

yirliltu
honey ant

tjirtu
fleas & lice

marapuulpa
trapdoor spider

tjintilyka
grasshopper

muungu  bush &
house flies

nitri-nitri
beetles (generally)

muungu bush &
house flies

kartilyka
blowfly &
maggots (gen.)

minga  black ants

warnka
hairy (processionary)
caterpillar

kanparrka
centipede

pula
termites & anthill

wanatarnpa  scorpion

warnka
hairy (processionary)
caterpillar

pula
termites & anthill

wanatarnpa  scorpion
Reptilia and Amphibia

(Rarely eaten)

ngaparla
the bearded dragon or
ejew lizard

papangawurrpa
The Gecko

kurrtji-kurrtji
tadpoles

nyinngi/lirru
venomous snakes
wamampi
water snake,
the mythological serpent

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

mutukalya
(grey, big head)

ngarnmalya/ngarnngi
frog

tjimpilyka
type of bicycle
lizard
Some Animals of the Desert

nani/rapita rabbit
papa dog
wilka wild domestic cat

patupiri bat
tjilkamarta echidna

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
Birds

tjitarti/tjurlpu birds (generally)

warlawurru wedgetailed eagle
(Aquila audax)

kaarnka crow
(Corvus orru)
kinturka pink galah
(Cacatua roseicapilla)
kuurr-kuurrpa owl
(The Boobook Owl)
kurrparu magpie
(Gymnorhina tibicen)
wiirlu curlew
(Burhinus magnirostris)

yarralaparlaripa crested pigeon
(Ocyphaps lophotes)
killary kaarka
crow
(Corvus orru)

kakalyalya white cockatoo
(Cacatua galerita)

kalykalya
crow
(Corvus orru)

kaarnka crow
(Corvus orru)

kinturka pink galah
(Cacatua roseicapilla)

kuurr-kuurrpa owl
(The Boobook Owl)

kurrparu magpie
(Gymnorhina tibicen)

wiirlu curlew
(Burhinus magnirostris)

Other Birds found in the Desert

warlawurru wedgetailed eagle
(Aquila audax)

kakalyalya white cockatoo
(Cacatua galerita)

karlaha/ tjukipiirri
emu
(Dromaius novaehollandiae)

killykilly karri
budgerigars
(Melopsittacus und.)

ngarnamarra mallee hen
(Leipoa ocellata)

murnpi the common bronzewing
(Phaps chalcoptera)

luurnpa the red-backed kingfisher
(Halcyon pyrrhopogia)

nyiinyi zebra finch
(Poephila guttata)

parn parmpalala
Central Australian bell bird
(Oreoica gutturalis)

piwi tawny frogmouth
(Podargus strigoides)

malpuntarri the little quail
(Turnix velox)
A Few Notable Plants

tjurngi parakeelya
(Calandrina balonensis)

wanaŋkarurru, palykunpa
two types of juicy edible roots

kurtyiriirri seeds of
wartarka used as beads

(kurtilyirri) seeds of
wartarrka used as beads

marulkurukuru
The Sturt Pea
(Clanithus formosus)

(kurtilyirri) seeds of
wartarrka used as beads

wartaŋka
edible grubs found
in its roots

kurutaamnpa
(Acacia burkittii)
Edible grubs found
in its roots

(kurtilyirri) seeds of
wartarrka used as beads

(kurtilyirri) seeds of
wartarrka used as beads

See also under:

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

kampurarrpa
a popular desert fruit

(kurtilyirri) seeds of
wartarrka used as beads

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.

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.

The two types mentioned here are probably
Triodia basedowii & Plectrachne melvillei respectively.
Some other Acacias:

ngarrkalya (Acacia dictyophleba) its roots used as spear shafts.
tjawu (Acacia sp.) Its roots also used for spear shafts.
Wirntalyka (Acacia tetragonophylla) 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, is also used for firelighting and as an ochre mixing bow 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

tjirrkari 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.

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.)

miru/lankurru the spearthrower

Method used to bind the thrower hook to its base.

pangkarlpa a one-piece barbless spear

kurlarta a barbed spear

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

the hole for the thrower hook.
waru fire

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

ngamuru/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 tililikitalu
using friction (by sawing with a spearthrower) to produce fire

warta waru firewood

puura blowing (into flame)

yukiri/warrkini
dry grass (used as tinder)

yurritjingara 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.

- 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
- nyarti goanna stomach fat
- timka 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 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.
- tjanmartja 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.

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

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
nyimirri 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 walanypa 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. (ie. the left and right from the butcher's point of view.)

The cook may claim the following parts:
tjuni stomach murturrka stomach fat
wipe 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 walanypa lower leg (shank)

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

warntu/miri/tjarnakatutja 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...

The directions: MAN → WOMAN → CHILD

KIN TERMS

Intermarrying groups =
Children of the marriage =
karlaya/tjakipirri
*It's an emu.*

mirriringu
*He/she/it is dead.*

ngiritiki
*Bardy grubs.*

kuwalla
*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)

hand gestures 2

papa
It's a dog.

wati yima
It's an old man.

watipitja.
Go across / Go back.

ngunytju
Mother
(For kapi water, touch both breasts)

wati
It's a man.

tijikiri
drinking

purikanya
It is big.

ngayuku
Me/Mine.