

AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE WESTERN DESERT LANGUAGE.

FOREWORD

(Especially for the student of language)

1. Orientation Note.
2. Dialectical Variations and Their Indigenous Labellings.
3. Pedagogical Nature of the Written Grammar.
4. Implications of Language Knowledge.
5. Acknowledgments.

1. The Western Desert language is an Australian Aboriginal language spoken by an unknown number of people (possibly by a number in the low thousands) living in the, so-called, "desert areas" of South and Western Australia, including the Great Victoria Desert and the Gibson Desert, and in the central west of the Northern Territory.

This is an "agglutinative" type of language in which lateral morphemes, such as tense and aspect affixes, subject indicators, bound pronominal subjects and objects, various modifiers and inflectional formations, negatives and pluralizers, occur as SUFFIXES to the central, or stem, morphemes.

The suffixing of the lateral morphemes makes a present-day distinction between the Western Desert language and the majority of Kimberley and Arnhem Land languages, which are notably "prefixing" in nature. (See "A New Approach to Australian Linguistics" by Dr. A. Capell, especially noting "Summary of Results", p.95.)

This descriptive statement and pedagogical "grammar" of the Western Desert language is based on material gathered personally at the Warburton Ranges Mission, at Ooldea in South Australia, at Mount Margaret in Western Australia, and from various informants from places as widely separated as Jiggalong and Rawlinson Ranges (W.A.), Ernabella (S.A.), and Kalgoorlie (W.A.), during the period between early 1951 until the present time (1957). The Grammar is essentially an introduction to the Western Desert language THROUGH one of the dialects of that language spoken at Warburton Ranges, Western Australia.

2. There are a number of dialectical variations of the Western Desert language throughout the vast area in which it is spoken. These may be regarded as different manifestations of the same language, just as a number of allophones may be variant forms, in different environments, of the same phoneme.

There appears to be mutual intelligibility between language groups, step-by-step, all the way from Ooldea and Koonibba in South Australia to Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and from Oodnadatta in S.A. across

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to Meekatharra in W.A. Certain points within this area have become centres of dialectical groups, chiefly because of the establishment of mission stations, notably at Ernabella and Yalata (S.A.), Cundeelee, Mt. Margaret, Cosmo Newbery, Warburton Ranges, Jiggalong and Fitzroy Crossing (in W.A.), and at Yuendumu in the Northern Territory. Some groups still keep within the precincts of sacred ceremonial grounds, notably the "Pintupi" (north of the Rawlinson Ranges), a few of the "Kayili" group (from the sand-hill country north of the Warburton Ranges), and a remnant of the "Yuliya" group (around the Rawlinson Ranges). There is some evidence that a small number of the "Yapu Kiṭi mob" still roam the area of this range, two or three hundred miles north of Loongana, W.A. Some other groups have now concentrated around the towns, such as Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Wiluna.

Within the area from which the material for this grammar has been gathered, it has been found that the people do not have a specific name for their language. The general word for 'speech' or 'language' is wangka, and for the people the word wangkatja.

"Nicknames", however, are given to the various dialects according to their particular idiosyncrasies. For example the people of Warburton Ranges "nickname" a dialect found around Ernabella "wangka yankuntjatjara", 'The language having the word yankuntja (meaning 'came').' The Ernabella folk, on the other hand, label the Warburton Ranges dialect wangka pitjantjatjara, because they use pitjantja instead of yankuntja at the Ranges.

On the basis of the pitjantja / yankuntja distinction, the whole Western Desert could be divided into two major dialect groups. The pitjantjatjara speakers are found in the south and west (from Ooldea, or Yalata, through Kalgoorlie and Mt. Margaret to east of the Warburton Ranges). The yankuntjatjara, or ankuntjatjara, speakers are found in the east and north (roughly from Ernabella in S.A. to Jigalong and Fitzroy Crossing in W.A.).

While there may be certain geographical and religious features tending to bind the pitjantjatjara folk into a group separate from the yankuntjatjara, yet linguistically there are so many other overlapping features that a major division on the basis of this vocabulary difference would appear to be unreasonable.

Consideration of a few of the other variants will reveal something of the complexity of the dialectical overlappings and idiosyncrasies.

The word for 'man' (i.e. 'an initiated man') redivides the Western Desert area and gives rise to a new set of "nicknames". Ooldea, Ernabella, Warburton Ranges areas use wati, Mt. Margaret - Kalgoorlie area uses..... puntu, East of Jigalong the word used is maṭu.

To the people of the Kalgoorlie area, the Jigalong

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people are the wangka matutjara 'Those having the word matu ('man').', and piniritjara because they use the word piniri ('run'), a word which is not used in the south.

There are different forms of the word meaning 'to get', so speech variant groups are called, for example, wangka mantjintjatjara 'Those having the word mantjintja.', and wangka mankuntjatjara 'Those having the word mankuntja.' (Sometimes called mankulatjara, mankula being the present tense form of the verb 'to get'.)

Note also the variant forms of the word 'this' and the "overlapping" which makes dialectical boundaries indistinct.

Ooldea to Ernabella.....'this' = nyangatja.

Cundeelee to Mt.Margaret.....'this' = nyanganya.

Warburton Rg. to Jigalong.....'this' = nga:nya.

East of W.R. to Rawlinson Rg....'this' = nga:tja.

The custom of making "taboo" the names of the dead gives rise to a number of variant forms. For example, throughout the lower Desert area the stem of the 'first person singular pronoun' is ngayu- ['ṅayu-]. At Warburton Ranges, however, owing to the death of a person named Ngayunya, a new stem has come into everyday use. This is nganku- ['ṅanku-], a form borrowed from the, so-called, "mother-in-law speech" (a special form of speech used in taboo situations, such as when the mother-in-law is being addressed or during initiation ceremonies).

Dialectical variations within the Western Desert area cover all layers of language composition.

Pronunciation differences may be illustrated by the change in tongue position for the production of the Dental consonants. In the West, i.e. around Mt.Margaret especially, the dentals (symbolized by the digraphs /tj/, /ny/, and /ly/) are Interdental before all vowels. In the East, i.e. around Ernabella, they are, what may be termed, "alveolarized dentals" preceding all vowels. At Ooldea and Warburton Ranges, on the mid-way line, the same phonemes are interdental before the vowels /a/ and /u/, but are "alveolarized dentals" when preceding the vowel /i/.

A pronunciation difference which affects syllable structure is the Eastern dialect possibility of beginning words with a vowel, contrasting with the Western demand for initial consonant for all words. For example:

East, <u>apu</u> ,	West <u>yapu</u>	'rock',
<u>uwa</u> ,	<u>yuwa</u>	'yes',
<u>ala</u> ,	<u>yala</u>	'hole',
<u>inka</u> ,	<u>yinka</u>	'sing'.

Vocabulary differences have been referred to already.

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Of all the differences between dialects vocabulary changes are, by the statistical score, in the lead. It may be pointed out that most groups are acquainted with the vocabulary differences of other groups. When meeting together, however, it is regarded as being more polite for each man to speak his own dialect.

Although syntactical differences are rare, there are a few significant grammatical variations from dialect to dialect. The most notable of these in the lower part of the Western Desert area are the differing forms of the "Subject Indicator" (or "Agentive", as it has been named elsewhere) and the use or non-use of the "pronominal suffixes". There are also variant forms of certain of the lateral morphemes.

This Grammar is an attempt to introduce the student to any of the dialects of the Western Desert language through one of its many manifestations, namely wangka nga:nyatjara 'The speech having the word nga:nya for 'this'.', a dialect spoken in the Warburton Ranges area.

As the Grammar is intended to be of use to the beginner, it would be confusing to attempt the inclusion of the many variant forms of the language. It would appear to be more profitable, at this stage, to present separate descriptions of each of the dialects, and leave the preparation of a Composite Grammar and the reconstruction of the "basic" or "original" form of the language to the Comparative Linguist.

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by

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based on the dialect spoken at
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