

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WESTERN DESERT LANGUAGE.

PART ONE.

PRONUNCIATION.

SECTION 1. THE ALPHABET.

In the Western Desert Language there are 17 consonants, symbolized thus: p,tj,t,ṭ,k,m,ny,n,ṇ,ng,ly,l,ḷ,r,ṛ,w,y.

And there are 6 vowels, three short: a,i,u, 3 long: a:,i:,u: .

This Alphabet has been adopted throughout the Western Desert and has been designed to simplify the teaching of reading to the native speakers of the language.

Beginners should understand that each symbol, whether a single letter (such as "p") or a digraph (such as "tj") stands for one sound which is significant to the native speaker. The letters do not necessarily carry their English sound values.

No.1 chart shows HOW and WHERE the sounds are produced.

CHART OF SOUNDS NO.1.

TYPE OF SOUND.		Lip Sounds	Tongue tip touch'g teeth	Tongue tip on Gum-ridge	Tongue tip turned back	Back of tongue on soft palate.
C O N S O N A N T S	AIR STREAM COMPLETELY STOPPED.	p	tj	t	ṭ	k
	AIR STREAM THROUGH NOSE.	m	ny	n	ṇ	ng
	AIR STREAM AROUND SIDES OF TONGUE.		ly	l	ḷ	
	AIR STREAM OVER CENTRE OF TONGUE.			r	ṛ	
	AIR STREAM UNRESTRICTED.	w		y		
V O W E L S	HIGH IN MOUTH.	short long.		i i:		u u:
	LOW IN MOUTH.	short long.			a a:	

This chart gives a brief technical description of the phonemes, the nearest English equivalents, and examples.

For a fuller technical description of the sounds of the Western Desert language see my "Phonology of the Australian Aboriginal Language Spoken at Ooldea", OCEANIA Vol. XXV No. 3. Mar. '57.

ABBREVIATIONS: vl.= voiceless. vd.=voiced. asp.= aspirated. unasp.= unaspirated. n/s.= non-syllabic. voc.= vocoid. unr.= unrounded. cl.= close.

ALPHA-BET.	TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PHONEMES.	NEAREST ENG. EQUIVALENT.	EXAMPLES FROM THE LANGUAGE.
p	vl.bilabial unasp.stop.	p as in Spin.	<u>papa</u> 'dog'
tj	vl.dental stop.	No Eng.Equiv.	<u>katja</u> 'son'
ṭ	vl.retroflex stop.	" " "	<u>waṭa</u> 'tree'
t	vl.alveolar unasp.stop.	t as in stay.	<u>kata</u> 'head'
k	vl.velar unasp.stop.	k as in Skin.	<u>kapi</u> 'water'
m	vd.bilabial nasal.	m as in Mat.	<u>mama</u> 'father'
ny	vd.dental nasal.	No Eng.Equiv.	<u>nyangu</u> 'saw'
n	vd.alveolar nasal.	n as in Nut.	<u>wanka</u> 'life'
ɲ	vd.retroflex nasal.	No Eng.Equiv.	<u>waṇka</u> 'caterpillr.'
ng	vd.velar nasal.	ng in Singer.	<u>wangka</u> 'talk'
ly	vd.dental lateral.	No Eng.Equiv.	<u>palya</u> 'good'
l	vd.alveolar lateral.	l as in Lot.	<u>pala</u> 'that'
ḷ	vd.retroflex lateral.	No Eng.Equiv.	<u>yala</u> 'hole'
r	vd.alveolar trill.	Scotch r	<u>waru</u> 'wallaby'
ṛ	vd.retroflex liquid.	r as in rake.	<u>waru</u> 'fire'
w	vd.labio-velar n/s voc.	w as in Wet.	<u>wiya</u> 'no'
y	vd.alveolar n/s.voc.	y as in Yet.	<u>yuwa</u> 'yes'
i	vd.high cl.front unr."	i as in Radio	<u>wiltja</u> 'shade'
i:	ditto, long vocoid.	Twice length	<u>wi:lyka</u> 'wildcat'
a	vd.low open central unr.vocoid.	a in Father	<u>nyaku</u> 'will see'
a:	ditto, long vocoid.	Twice length	<u>nya:ku</u> 'Why?'
u	vd.high open back rounded vocoid.	u as in Put.	<u>puni</u> 'horse'
u:	ditto, long vocoid.	Twice length	<u>pu:nu</u> 'blew'.

STRESS occurs on the first syllable, e.g. papa 'dog' = ['papa].

"norms" of the vowels (as shown on page 2.), he should CONCENTRATE ON THE PRODUCTION OF THE CONSONANTS. AS THE CORRECT TONGUE POSITIONS FOR THE CONSONANTS ARE MASTERED, IT WILL BE FOUND THAT THE VOWELS TEND TO ASSUME THEIR CORRECT POSITIONS AUTOMATICALLY.

### SECTION 3. STRESS OR ACCENT.

#### A. SYLLABLE STRESS.

The FIRST syllable of each word is stressed (or accented). E.g. kutjara 'two' is pronounced kú - tjara.

In words of more than three syllables the primary stress is still on the first syllable, but a secondary stress generally falls on the third syllable. E.g. yulparira 'south' is pronounced yulpa-'rira.

In certain compounds, where this rule does not apply, a hyphen is inserted. Each part of the compound then takes stress on the first syllable. E.g. kutjara-kutjara 'four.

#### B. SENTENCE STRESS.

Sentence stress is heavier (or louder) than syllable stress and occurs on items the speaker wishes to emphasise within sentences.

Interrogative particles (parts of speech standing for 'Who?', 'What?', 'Why?', 'How?', 'Where?' etc.) usually carry this heavier stress.

#### EXAMPLES

(These sentences will also supply useful pronunciation practice.)

The symbol (°) precedes the syllable which takes the heavier sentence stress in these examples.

#### 1. ITEMS TO WHICH THE SPEAKER WISHES TO DIRECT SPECIAL ATTENTION

##### a. ATTENTION ON SUBJECT.

°tjitji nyaranya. 'There is a CHILD there.'  
(child)(there)

##### b. ATTENTION ON DIRECT OBJECT.

watilu °manngu tjunu nyinangu. 'The man put up a BUSH  
(man) (nest) (put) (sat) CAMOUFLAGE and waited.'

##### c. ATTENTION ON ADVERB.

wati palanya °nganmanypalpi pitjangu.  
(man)(that) (at the first)(came)

'That man came at the beginning (or before others).'

##### d. ATTENTION ON VERB.

wipu kuramunu °nyawa. 'Look, look at my beautiful tail!  
(tail)(good) (see)

## 2. INTERROGATIVE PARTICLES ALWAYS CARRY SENTENCE STRESS

although another item (or items) also may be stressed in the same sentence.

### EXAMPLES.

- a. ongananya pitjangu? 'Who came?'  
(who) (came)
- b. nyuntulu owanytjakutu kuti-pitjaku? 'Where will you go?'  
(you) (where-to) (will-go)
- c. onya: pitingka tjarpangu? 'What went into the hole?'  
(what)(hole-into)(entered)
- d. ngankulu oya:ltjingalku? 'What shall I do?'  
( I ) (what-will do)
- e. onya: tjarpangu opitingka? 'What went into the HOLE?'  
(what)(entered) (hole-into)

## SECTION 4. INTONATION.

### A. SIGNIFICANCE OF INTONATION.

The rise and fall of the voice during the utterance of a sentence may change its shade of meaning. This is also a feature of English; recall the different ways that "YES" may be said during a telephone conversation. The sentence

"You are going to town to-day"

changes in intonation according to whether it is said with surprise, sarcastically, inquiringly, jovially, commandingly or with doubt.

The ATTITUDE of the speaker and the type of response he expects are revealed by the intonation of the Desert language.

Significant intonation contours (i.e. significant rising and falling of the pitch of the voice) usually begin at a stressed item in the sentence. (See note on SENTENCE STRESS.) Words preceding a stressed item, and therefore preceding a primary intonational contour, may be on a level pitch, or may vary in pitch slightly. A slight rising and falling of pitch on the "pre-contour" (as the intonation preceding a Primary Contour may be named) is not regarded as significant.

### EXAMPLE:

	1. _____	o nani	HIGH PITCH
Pitch	2. _____	pu-	
Levels	3. ngankuku tjitjilu	ng-	
	4. _____	u.	
	[ - PRECONTOUR - ] [ PRIMARY CONTOUR ]		LOW PITCH.

ngankuku tjitjilu nani pungu? 'Did my child hit a RABBIT?'  
(my) (child)(rabbit)(hit) (surprise).

Nine different and significant intonation contours have been identified in the Warburton Ranges dialect. These will now be described. For notes on the intonation of the Ooldea dialect see my article in Oceania Vol.XXV.No.3.

## B. DESCRIPTION OF THE NINE CONTOURS, WITH EXAMPLES.

### 1. METHOD OF DESCRIBING THE INTONATION CONTOURS.

There are four pitch levels, as illustrated above. High pitch is labelled "1", low pitch is "4". Most normal speech occurs on level "3", so that there are two pitch levels above and one below the normal level.

Significant contours will be labelled according to the pitch levels on which they occur. For example, SURPRISE is indicated by the "ONE-FOUR" contour, which means that the stressed item in the sentence begins on pitch level ONE, the highest pitch, and drops to pitch level FOUR, the lowest pitch.

Pitch levels are relative only, being identified in relation to the speaker's normal pitch level.

### 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTOURS.

#### THE "TWO-FOUR" CONTOUR.

In normal speech this usually indicates an authoritative attitude. When associated with loud, rapid speech it is indicative of angered authority. The Response expected is action or an explanation.

#### EXAMPLES:

(Note: The sign (°) indicates the onset of primary intonational stress, and also the beginning of a significant intonation contour. This may be preceded by a "pre-contour", usually on the normal speech level THREE.)

nyuntulu wanytjakutu kuti-pitjaku? 'Where will you go to?'  
3-                    °2-                    -4

pitja, kulila. 'Come here and listen to me (I mean it).'  
°2--4    °2--4

nyuntulu kulinu. 'You heard (therefore do something about it).'  
°2-                    -4

pa:la. 'Cook it.'  
°2--4

(Note: The pitch of the voice is lowered or raised step by step with the syllables of the words. It slurs, or glides, down only on Long Vowels; e.g. as in the last example above.)

#### THE "ONE-FOUR" CONTOUR:

This contour is associated with SURPRISE or INTEREST. It usually reveals that the speaker was ignorant of the fact which stimulated his remark, and the Response expected is Confirmation or further information.

mulapa? 'Is it true?' (Contrast this with a possible Response:-  
°1- -4

D. SUMMARY OF INTONATION CONTOURS.

PITCH	GENERAL ATTITUDE	EXPECTED RESPONSE.
2 - 4	Authority	Action or Explanation.
1 - 4	Interest, Surprise.	Confirmation, Information.
2 - 4 - 3	Deference.	Optional.
1 - 4 - 3	Detached Interest, Mild surprise.	Optional.
3 - 1	Excitement.	Positive Oral, or Action.
3 - 2	Derision, Sarcasm.	Negative or Consideration.
2 - 2	Eagerness, Fear.	Sympathetic attention.
2 - 3 - 2	Impatience.	Action.
1 - 2 - 1	Curiosity.	Information or explanation

SECTION 5. SOME PRONUNCIATION PITFALLS.

Below is a list of words which reveals the need to pronounce sounds correctly.

The English translation following some of the words covers only part of the full area of meaning.

A. WORDS CONTRASTING THE THREE SHORT VOWELS.

<u>witara</u>	'singeing'.	<u>witira</u>	'holding'.	<u>witura</u>	'sending'.
<u>kura</u>	'bad'.	<u>kuri</u>	'spouse'.	<u>kuru</u>	'pointing stick'

B. WORDS CONTRASTING LONG VOWELS.

<u>nyaku</u>	'will see'.	<u>pala</u>	'that'	<u>pu:nu</u>	'stick'(West).
<u>nya:ku</u>	'why?'	<u>pa:la</u>	'cook it.'	<u>pu:nu</u>	'blew it'.

C. WORDS CONTRASTING VARIOUS CONSONANTS.

<u>mirara</u>	'yelling'.	<u>patjara</u>	'biting it'	<u>pala</u>	'that'.
<u>mirara</u>	'gazing'.	<u>patara</u>	'dropping'.	<u>palya</u>	'right'.
<u>piti</u>	'wooden dish'	<u>waru</u>	'rock wallaby'	<u>kata</u>	'head'.
<u>piti</u>	'grave' 'hole'.	<u>waru</u>	'fire'.	<u>katja</u>	'son'.
<u>wanka</u>	'life' 'alive'.	<u>ngalyi</u>	'hillside'(S.W.)		
<u>wanka</u>	'hairy caterpillar'.	<u>ngali</u>	'we-two'.		
<u>wangka</u>	'talk' 'language'.	<u>ngali</u>	'little finger/toe'.		
<u>kaninu</u>	'yandied' 'winnowed'.	<u>yirinu</u>	'sharpened'.		
<u>kanyinu</u>	'kept'.	<u>yirinu</u>	'lined-up (for a dance)'.		
<u>yalta</u>	'cold'	<u>nganyiri</u>	'wild' 'untamed'.		
<u>yalta</u>	'charcoal'(E).	<u>nganiri</u>	'signature mark(on spear)		

SUMMARY OF PRONUNCIATION.A. SOUNDS HAVING ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS.

1. Those that are comparatively easy to produce.

m	as in "mat".	..... <u>mama</u>	'father'.
n	as in "nut".	..... <u>wana</u>	'digging stick'.
l	as in "lot".	..... <u>yalu</u>	'liver'. <u>palanya</u> 'that one'.
r	as in "rake".	..... <u>waru</u>	'fire'.
w	as in "wet".	..... <u>wiya</u>	'no'. <u>rawa</u> 'a long time'.
y	as in "yet".	..... <u>yuwa</u>	'yes'. <u>puyu</u> 'smoke'.
i	as in "radio".	..... <u>yiwara</u>	'road', 'track'.
a	as in "father".	..... <u>yalatja</u>	'walkabout'. <u>yapu</u> 'rock'.
u	as in "put".	..... <u>nguntju</u>	'mother'.

2. Those presenting difficulties.

p	as in "spike".	..... <u>papa</u>	'dog'.
t	as in "stake".	..... <u>kata</u>	'head'.
k	as in "skate".	..... <u>kapi</u>	'water'.
ng	as in "singer".	..... <u>ngura</u>	'camp'. <u>minga</u> 'ant'.
r.	as in "run"(Scotch).	..... <u>waru</u>	'rock wallaby'.

B. SOUNDS NOT HAVING ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS.

1. DENTALS.

tj	as in <u>katja</u>	'son'.
ny	as in <u>nyangu</u>	'saw'.
ly	as in <u>palya</u>	'right'.

2. LONG VOWELS.

i:	as in <u>wi:lyka</u>	'native cat.'
a:	as in <u>nya:ku?</u>	'What for?'
u:	as in <u>pu:nu</u>	'blew it.'

3. RETROFLEX CONSONANTS.

ṭ	as in <u>wata</u>	'tree', 'wood'.
ṇ	as in <u>pana</u>	'ground'.
ḷ	as in <u>malu</u>	'kangaroo'.

C. RULES.

THE DENTAL CONSONANTS: Tongue BETWEEN teeth before a and u.  
Tongue BEHIND teeth before i and preceding or following another non-dental consonant.

STRESS: Primary syllable stress always occurs on first syllable of the word.

NOTE: This page is especially intended for the Australian-English beginner,

Editors: A. Capell and S. Wurm

No. 4

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by

**W. H. DOUGLAS**

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A Pedagogical Description of  
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Published by the University of Sydney, Australia.

PRICE: Twelve Shillings & Sixpence

1958

University of Sydney, Australia.  
1957