**Aboriginal Language of the Darlot Area in 1895: Mason word list**

**June 2015**

**Background**

A ‘Native Vocabulary’ written in 1895 by Arthur Mason in the Darlot locality lists 104 words and phrases. This list of words appears to be the earliest written recording of Aboriginal language of the region.

The list is very consistent in spelling and the words are easily recognizable.

The list was compared to the words and phrases spoken by current day Kuwarra speakers, who have affiliation with the Darlot region, in order to attempt to identify the language group that Mason had consulted.

**Results**

Of the 104 items on the list:

1. 67 items correspond directly with present day Kuwarra words

and phrases 64%

2. 24 items were recognised by Kuwarra speakers and used

interchangeably with items considered to be current Kuwarra or

were glossed incorrectly but recognisable 23%

3. 6 items on the list are unreadable 6%

4. 7 items are not recognized by current day Kuwarra speakers 7%

Of the 24 words used interchangeably by Kuwarra speakers, 5 had a single phonemic difference with Kuwarra words. This may indicate that the words was transcribed incorrectly, that the word had undergone phonemic change since 1895 or was, indeed, from another language but of the same language family.

Of the 24 words used interchangeably, 3 words appeared to be incorrectly glossed such as ‘gnarlgoo’ which was glossed as ‘food’ but is more likely to be *ngalku* ‘eating’.

**Conclusion**

Of the 104 items on the list, present day Kuwarra speakers identify 64% as being present in the Kuwarra language and 23% as being used interchangeably with Kuwarra words. Therefore a total of 87% of the items are identified as being in the modern Kuwarra lexicon.

It must be noted that a large number of the items are used by the Wati family of languages, which included Kuwarra, and are considered generic to Western Desert Languages (WDL).

The high level of correspondence with current day Kuwarra suggests that the speakers Mason recorded the list with were most probably Kuwarra or linguistically very closely linked to the Kuwarra speakers.

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