

Languages and Dialects of the Goldfields Region

The Goldfields region of Western Australia is home to around 7,200 Aboriginal people who represent 12% of the region's population.¹ An estimated 2,900 people speak an Aboriginal language as a first language.² Many of the remaining Aboriginal population speak an Aboriginal language as a second or subsequent language, are a partial speaker, recaller and/or speak an Aboriginal dialect of English or speak Standard Australian English.

Identifying the languages and their dialects of the northern, western and southern districts of the region has proven to be difficult as there is meager historical linguistic material prior to 2011. Multiple forms of names are recorded in historical material and the relationships between the names needed to be investigated.

However, Ngaanyatjarra and dialects, and Yankunytjatjarra as well as Walpiri and Pintupi from the Northern Territory have been well documented. Speakers of each of these languages are found in the Goldfields region.

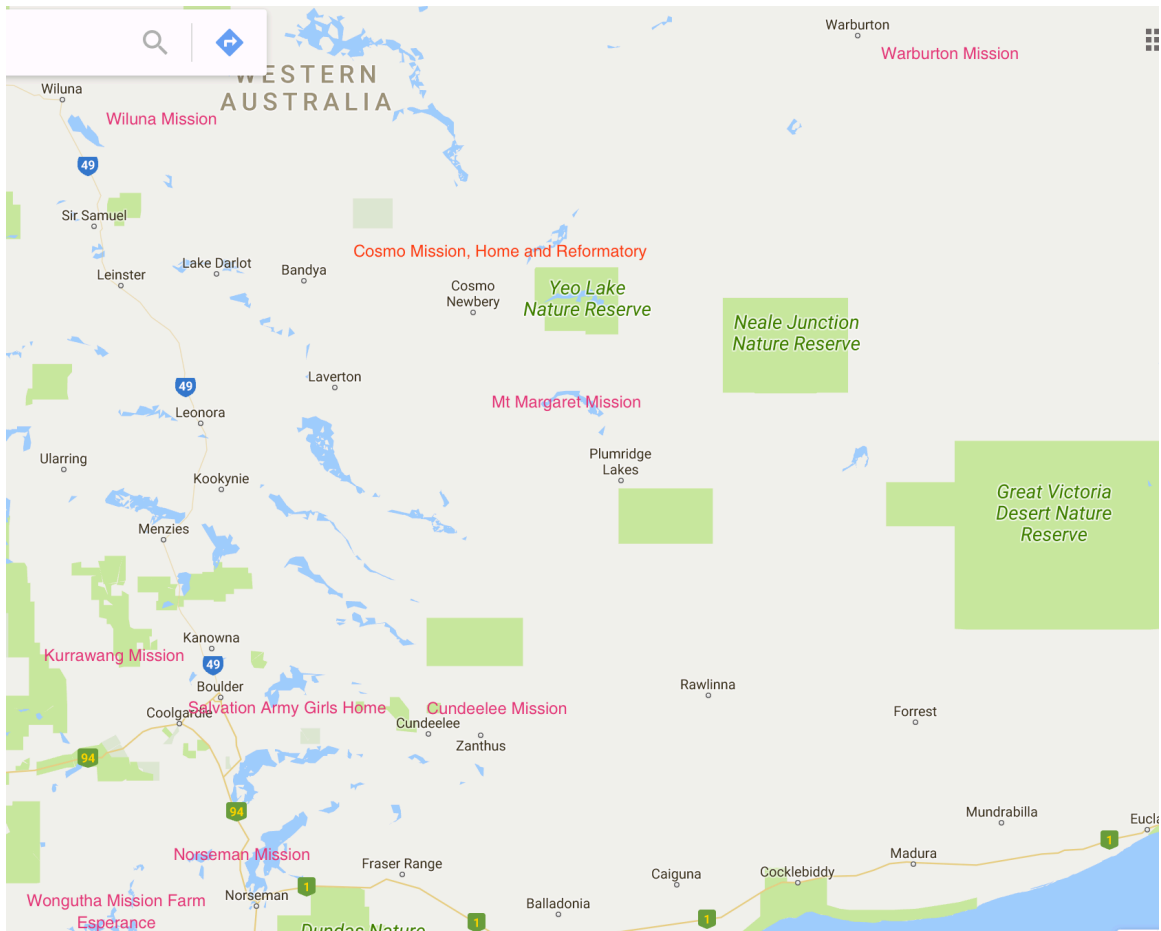
The southern and western Goldfields regions were heavily impacted during European settlement due to a number of mineral booms, in particular during initial gold rushes between 1890 and 1910. The region experienced an influx of around 20,000 people in a 2-year period during the first gold rushes at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. This boom decimated a number of Aboriginal populations through the spread of disease and starvation, competition for sparse water and food, and through massacres.

Most Aboriginal people who survived the first wave of European settlement were relocated to the nine missions established in the region or were sent to other missions outside the area such as Mogumber Mission near Perth. During this time there was an intense period of language dislocation.

This paper examines the relationships between the languages and dialects of the region based on linguistic data collected by Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre (GALC) linguists over the past 7 years. GALC's protocols are to release periodic papers which are comprehensible to language speakers as well as being of an academic nature.

¹ ABS 2016

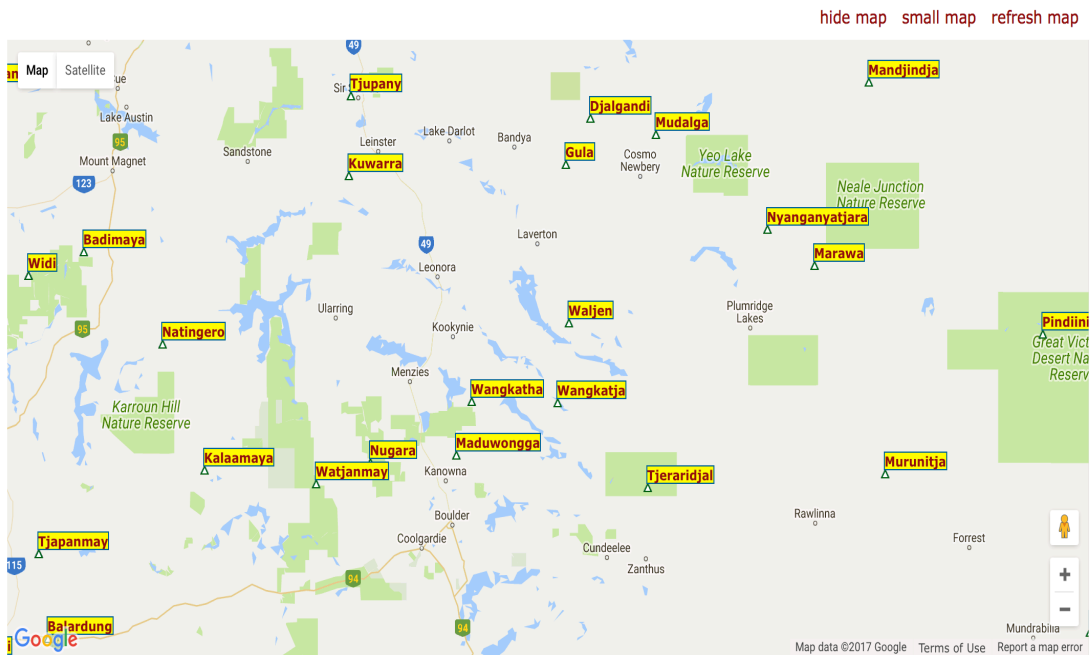
² Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre 2016



Missions in the Goldfields Region

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Goldfields languages on Austlang May 2017

Language Groups

There are two distinct language groupings in the Goldfields. The first group is composed of languages that are easily identifiable as western desert languages (WDL) and therefore members of the Wati family of languages. WDLs are mutually intelligible and share characteristics which include a similar phonemic system, agglutination, free and bound pronominal systems, 4 regular and one irregular verb class, post-positions and few adverbs and adjectives but very productive derivational processes.

The second group of languages is located in a rough triangle between Southern Cross to the west, midway along the Great Australian Bight to the east, and north of Esperance in the south. Some research had been undertaken on these languages with O'Grady, Klokeid, Voegelin, Bates, von Brandenstein, Nash and Marmion amongst the few to do some first wave language collection or analysis.

Research on the languages of the Goldfields region has been undertaken by:

Daisy Bates

Norman Tindale

Wilf Douglas

Carl von Brandenstein - *Ngaju*

O'Grady and Klokeid

Ken and Leslie Hansen - *Pintupi*

Amee Glass and Dorothy Hackett - *Ngaanyatjarra , Pitjantjatjara*

Jan Mountrey - *Ngaanyatjarra , Pitjantjatjara*

Noel Blyth and Herbert Howell - *Wangkatja*

Dawn and Brian Hadfield - *Cundeelee Wangka*

Cliff Goddard - *Yankunytjatjarra, Pitjantjatjara*

Silvano Fasolo - *Wangkatja*

Nick Thieberger

David Nash

Doug Marmion

O'Grady grouped the languages of this second group under the term 'Mirniny subgroup' however, this grouping does not reflect contemporary sociolinguistic identity by the speech communities which prefers to identify Ngaju, Mirniny and Kaalamaya as three separate language entities. The Kaalamaya lexicon is currently limited to 1,000 morphemes and around 100 sentences. This material places Kaalamaya's structure closer to Ngaju than to the WDLs.

Dr. Mullins, of GALC, will be undertaking a detailed study of the Mirniny language in 2018, as she undertook for Ngaju in 2017. This study will be undertaken with Mirniny speakers and in partnership with the Far West Language Centre of Ceduna. The study will enable a detailed comparison of Mirning and Ngaju and will draw conclusions on the historical and contemporary perspectives of their relationships based on linguistic data as well as social identity.

Brandenstein grouped Mirning, Ngaju and dialects under, 'Dundas District Dialects', which comprised of Mirniny, Marlpa, Fraser Range people, Norseman people, Windaga and Kallaargu/Kallaar. He stated, 'It will be difficult to extract the different dialectical components of the DS-dialects from the mixed language now called Ngaju.'³ Brandenstein's opinion of the Ngaju language was that it is what is now termed a communilect.

For now, the 'Mirniny subgroup' label is being avoided by GALC as it is not consistent with the identity of the current speakers and does not have historical data to support the conclusion that the language forms are of the same family or dialects as Mirniny.

Language Names

To make sense of the historical language names, GALC linguists have compared sets of historical and contemporary linguistic data, the historical names identified by Bates, Tindale, O'Grady, Klokeid, Brandenstein, Helms, Douglas, Hale, Glass, Hackett, Thieberger, Marmion and Nash and the names used by contemporary speakers.

GALC's work indicates that the names Mirniny, Ngaju and Kaalamaya are the language names current speakers identify with and best represent the speech communities. Although O'Grady refers to Marlpa/Kalaku as a language or dialect in this location, current speakers refer to Marlpa as a variety of Ngaju spoken on Balladonia Station. A partial speaker was very particular to specify that Marlpa is the language of Balladonia Station.⁴

In 2017, GALC linguist Dr. Marion Mullin, worked intensively with Ngaju speakers to record the language and to collate and compare existing records with contemporary speaker's knowledge in order to develop a lexical database, phonology and dictionary. The reader is directed to Mullin's paper, '*An Introduction to the Orthography and Grammatical Structure of Ngaju*', for further information on the Ngaju language work.

Historical records list the names 'Kaalamaya' and 'Gaburn' as two separate languages or dialects. Hanson has worked with Kaalamaya speakers since 2011 to record the language which is described by them as, 'the Kaalamaya language of Kaprun people'⁵. This explanation resolved the matter of these two historical language names.

Nyaki-nyaki was listed as a language of the Goldfields region by a number of historical linguists. The Nyaki-nyaki people of the town of Merredin clearly identify as Noongar ⁶ and the language spoken is a dialect of Noongar. This language will not be considered further under the Goldfields jurisdiction.

³ Brandenstein 1980

⁴ John Crocker 2017

⁵ Brian Champion 2011 recordings

⁶ Denise Smith-Ali 2016

The terms 'language' and 'dialect' do not adequately represent the distinctions and interconnectedness between the speech forms of the Goldfields region. Traditionally, people of the region would have been multilingual in order to speak with neighbours. It appears that speaking 5 to 9 languages or dialects of languages, was usual. However, each language form shares a large number of linguistic features with a direct neighbouring language form so that whilst there was distinction between the speech forms, there was a great deal of mutual comprehensibility.

Groups in the Western Desert area, according to Douglas⁷, were in the habit of nicknaming other groups according to the verb stem used for 'go' or 'to get'. Manyjilyjarra speakers use the verb stem *ma-* 'get', which Marsh states lead to the naming of this group as 'those having the verb stem *manji-* 'to get'.⁸

Alternative terms for the languages and dialects of the region are:

1. **Multigroups** – Ken and Lesley Hansen
2. **Language webs** – David Nash
3. **Communiects** – James Marsh
4. **Sociolects** – Ameer Glass
5. **Nicknames** – Wilf Douglas

Language Families

Reference is made to the languages and dialects in the Goldfields region as belonging to language families. For example, Austlang refers to Mirniny as a cover term (group name) for Mirniny, Kalaako, Ngajumaya and Kalaamaya, as based on O'Grady's material.

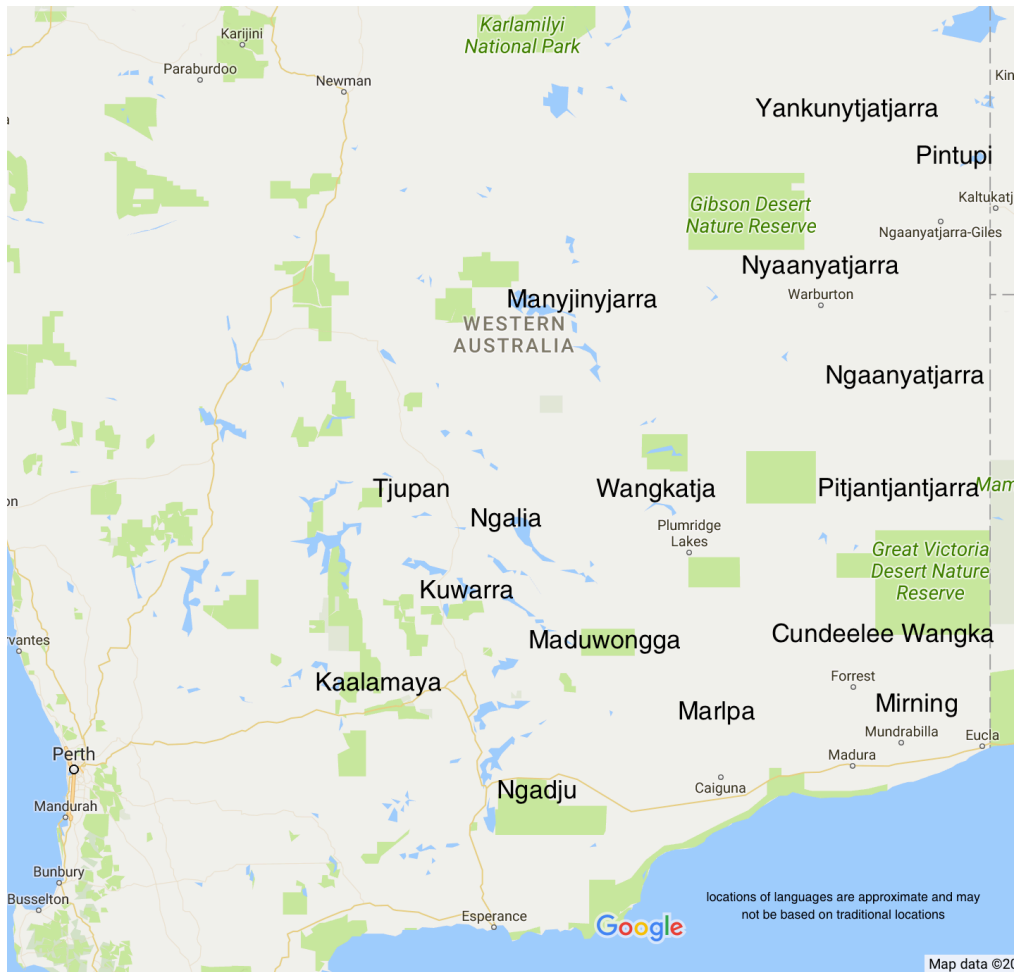
Brandenstein classified these language names, as stated previously in this paper, under the term, 'Dundas District Dialects' (DS) and stated that they formed a mixed language now called Ngaju.⁹

GALC has chosen to refer to each language form as a language, until research clearly indicates whether they are dialects of each other or component forms of the Ngaju or Mirniny languages. The difference between two language family names may be a synchronic versus diachronic matter. By using the O'Grady language family name, this may not reflect the current language and dialect situation and has caused angst amongst contemporary sociolectical groups.

⁷ Douglas 1964

⁸ Marsh 1976

⁹ Brandenstein 1980



Goldfields Languages 2017

Note: placement is approximant and may not be based on traditional locations

Communiects

The Goldfields language names are relative. Most groups used multiple naming depending on purpose, relationship to other groups, location, type of gathering and so on. Hansen refers to this multiple name use as 'multigroups'. Thieberger states, 'Multiple naming would have been the norm for most multigroups, resulting in a plethora of language names in the desert.'¹⁰

The contemporary boundaries brought about through the native title process are not necessarily reflective of pre-contact language groupings, identities and boundaries. Nash¹¹ talks about 'language webs', which more accurately describes the pre-contact linguistic structure. Douglas¹² describes language names as being nicknames or of a fleeting nature for a specific purpose. Therefore the job of labeling a specific language and identifying its locale means overlaying a western name and place system which may not reflect the actuality.

¹⁰ Thieberger 1996

¹¹ David Nash, 2002

¹² W.H. Douglas 1964 *An Introduction to the Western Desert Language*

Marsh¹³ refers to ‘communalects’ (sic) such as the Martu Wangka language found in Jigalong which, ‘...(is) not ‘mixed-up’ but drawing synonyms and linguistic variations from more than one source.’ Cundeelee Wangka and Wangkatja are considered to be communilects by Hadfield¹⁴ and Hanson¹⁵ respectively. The communilects may have existed prior to missions or have developed on Cundeelee Mission and Mount Margaret Mission. Hadfield describes the process of language change that occurred on Cundeelee Mission when people from several language groups were brought together, as a language homogenizing process.¹⁶

An attempt to correlate language names with specific locations in the region is futile not only because of the traditional multigroup namings but because of the impact of contemporary events such as the high degree of migration, intermarriage, homogenization of languages in missions, development of new communilects, self identity for native title purposes and the consequential development of contemporary sociolectal groups.

Nash¹⁷ covers the topic of determining location of languages in the south-east of Western Australia in his paper, ‘*Historical Linguistic Geography of South-East Western Australia*,’ and readers are directed to that paper for a much more informed discussion of the topic.

Whilst the linguistic identifications remain hazy and unconfirmed, the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre has adopted the contemporary sociolinguistic names, as put forward by speakers. In some instances, so little historical data exists that some linguistic distinctions may always remain unconfirmed.

Sociolects

It appears that there are some instances of language name shift in the last 30 years. For example, the language name Wangkatja is now used to indicate a group of people who speak a particular variety of a WDL closely related to Pitjantjatjara. Prior to this, ‘The people themselves use the term Wangkatja (meaning people who talk our talk) to distinguish themselves from others who talk completely unrelated languages (including English).’¹⁸ The language name, Wangkatja, has shifted from use as a phrase to indicate people who spoke a language the same as oneself to now function as a language name.

Until recent times, many Goldfields Aboriginal people referred to themselves as *Wongi* or *Wangkayi*. Amee Glass states in 1978 that the origin of the term *Wangkayi*, ‘...is now somewhat obscure. However it is mainly used by white people to refer to the Aborigines living in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia.’¹⁹ Therefore it appears that the term *Wangkayi* was coined by non-

¹³ James Marsh 1976

¹⁴ Hadfield 2014

¹⁵ S. Hanson 2014

¹⁶ Hadfield 2014

¹⁷ Nash 2002

¹⁸ Glass 1978

¹⁹ Glass 1978

Aboriginal people and adopted as a self-reference term by Aboriginal people of the region. Aboriginal people of the Goldfields, as of 2017 and in a native title environment, now prefer to self identify using a specific language name.

The role that native title plays in group identity and language naming has been very influential in this region and appears to have resulted in some contemporary redefining of names which has further obscured the identification of languages and dialects. In instances where historical data conflicts with contemporary Aboriginal language names, GALC linguists have deferred to the contemporary names on the understanding that languages are dynamic and group identity critical. Rather than defining languages and dialects, this process has resulted in the identification of contemporary sociolects.

Glass²⁰ in 1978 noted, ‘...the desert people formerly roamed the desert in small food-gathering groups. For this reason small speech differences can be noted from family to family.’ Speakers of each dialect can understand each other and often list words from other dialects to demonstrate how the pronunciation changes from place to place.

Indicators of Language Relationship

To identify language relationships in the region, GALC linguists compared the phonemic inventory of the languages and dialects, the word for ‘man’, word endings and followed the lead of Ameer Glass by comparing the words for ‘come’ and ‘go’ and ‘this’. Glass notes, ‘...Ngaanyatjarra has the word *ngaanya* for ‘this’ and Ngaatjatjarra has the word *ngaatja* for ‘this’, while Pitjanytjatjarra has the word *nyangatja* for ‘this’.²¹

The languages of the Goldfields region use a very similar phonemic system. The main phonemic difference is to be found in the dental stop, which is represented either as ‘tj’ or ‘th’, depending on whether the tongue is apical (tip of the tongue on the back of the teeth) or laminal (blade of the tongue on the back of the teeth). The interdental fricative is heard from speakers of two languages and is represented by ‘th’. However this is contentious as early linguistic writing of the dental stop was by use of the ‘th’ and speakers who use this sound are literate and/or very elderly with few teeth. The lack of teeth may have led to sound change that is now being passed down to younger speakers. It may also be possible that the interdental fricative is a contemporary phoneme arising from speakers seeing the words in the written form and hyper correcting.

A second phonemic difference found between the languages is in the use of the alveopalatal stop represented by ‘j’. Some languages contrast the alveopalatal stop ‘j’ and dental stop ‘tj’ where as others use only the dental stop.

The impact of learning a language through reading appears to have changed how some phonemes are expressed. For example, the ‘r’ is found to be retroflexed by first language speakers of all languages in the region. However where speakers

²⁰ Glass1978

²¹ Glass1978

have learnt to speak the language and read it at the same time, such as at a mission, there is a distinct lack of retroflexing. It may be that the written form of the language or English literacy learning has influenced the pronunciation.

Comparison of Goldfields Languages

The most prominent difference between Goldfields languages are with the words used for ‘coming’ and ‘going’²² and for ‘this’. I’ve also compared the prefixes used on ‘coming’ and ‘going’ and the word for ‘man’ in each language.

Language	come	go	prefixes	man	this
Pitjantjatjara ²³	pitja-	pitja-	kuti-, ma-, ngalya-, parra-, wati-	wati	nyanga-
Wangkatja ²⁴	pitja- ngalya-	pitja-	ngalya	wati puntu	nyanga-
Cundeelee Wangka ²⁵	pitja- ngalya-	pitja-	pitja-	wati puntu	nyanga-
Maduwongga ²⁶	pitja-	pitja-	ma- ngalya-	wati	nangana ²⁷
Yankunytjatjara	pitjanyi ²⁸	ya- ²⁹ yankuntja ³⁰		wati	nyanga-
Ngaanyatjarra ³¹	pitja-	ma-pitja- kuti-pitja-	ma- kuti-		ngaanya-
Ngaatatjara ³²					ngaatja
Nyanatjarra/Nyanganyatjara ³³					nyanga-
Pintupi ³⁴	pitja-	pitja- , ya-		wati	ngaanya ngaa nyanga
Ngalia ³⁵	pitja-	pitja-	kuti-	wati	ngaa-
Warlpiri ³⁶	yani-	yani-			nyampu
Martu Wangka ³⁷	ya-	ya-		martu puntu	ngaanga
Tjupan ³⁸	ya-	ya-		martu	ngaa-

²² Goddard 1992

²³ Glass 1978

²⁴ Silvano Fasolo 2008

²⁵ Dawn Hadfield 2014

²⁶ Milonas 2017

²⁷ Milonas 2017

²⁸ Goddard 1992

²⁹ Goddard 1992

³⁰ Glass 1978

³¹ Glass 1978

³² Glass 1978

³³ Glass 1978

³⁴ Hansen 1992

³⁵ Hanson 2014

³⁶ Hoogenraad 2012

³⁷ Burgman 2005

				wati yamanu	
Kuwarra ³⁹	ya-, thalka-	ya-		wati	ngaa-
Manyjilyjarr ⁴⁰	ya-	ya-		puntu	ngaanya
Kaalamaya ⁴¹	yan-	mamala- purta-		kaprun	minya
Ngaju ⁴²	ya- witjarnu yuulu	ya- witjarnu kuja/kuji uja/uji wuja/wija uja/ija		marlpa	nyaki nyaka
Mirniny ⁴³	ngarna-	ngarna-		mirniny	nhakartu
Marlpa ⁴⁴				marlpa	
Kaalako/Kalaako/Kaarlaaku				marlpa	

2. Word endings

Language	word ending	example
Pitjantjatjara	if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	marlany-pa 'kid brother or sister'
Yankunytjatjarra	can end in consonant	marlany 'kid brother or sister'
Ngaanyatjarra/ Ngaatatjara	all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i> ⁴⁵	kurluny-pa 'little' rabbit-pa
Pintupi	if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	tjinal-pa 'spinifex wax' ngayany-pa 'underarm hair'
Warlpiri	if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	majiyam-pa 'bush turkey nganpin-pa 'eyelash'
Martu Wangka	Almost all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	marlany-pa 'younger sibling' murtitikirl-pa 'camel'
Tjupan	Almost all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	jankurl-pa 'ant mound' yungun-pa
Ngalia	Almost all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	mankurr-pa 'three' lurrun-pa 'pupa shell'

³⁸ Hanson 2014

³⁹ Hanson 2014

⁴⁰ Milonas 2017

⁴¹ Hanson 2013

⁴² W. Douglas 1964

⁴³ O'Grady 1966

⁴⁴ Brandenstein 1980

⁴⁵ Glass 1978

Kuwarra	Almost all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	ngaparr-pa 'turn' puyunpuyun-pa 'smoke'
Wangkatja	Almost all end in vowel, if ends in consonant, add <i>-pa</i>	parrparr-pa rise' mirrpan-pa 'angry'
Ngaju	Usually ends in vowels but can end in consonant	tartiny - old man kulypirr - kangaroo

3. Contrasting Features Between Language Groups

Wati Languages	Ngaju	Noongar <i>*may be contemporary</i>
Distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs.	Transitivity doesn't appear to be marked (to date)	Transitive verb marked for direct object, intransitive verb not marked
Verbs in 4 conjugation classes, 5 th irregular class	Verbs in 3 classes, possibility of a 4th	One class of verbs
Free and bound pronominal system. Nominative-accusative	Free pronominal system (to date) Nominative-accusative	Free pronominal system (to date)
Smaller set of adverbs than adjectives, by half	Smaller set of adverbs than adjectives	Large set of adverbs
Small set of adjectives but derivational suffixes make adjectives out of nouns. Adjectives can be made into verbs with suffixing	Small set of adjectives. (to date)	Large set of adjectives
Verbs marked for tense and mood, some aspect	Verbs marked for tense and mood, some aspect	Verbs marked for aspect only
Nouns marked ergative/absolutive and pronouns marked nominative/accusative	Ergative marked and absolutive seems not be marked (to date). pronouns marked nominative/accusative.	Subject and object marking optional but when used, is significant
Dative and genitive suffix -ku ⁴⁶	Genitive -wanya Dative -ku	unknown
Large set of demonstratives	To date, 4 demonstratives	unknown
Largely suffixing languages but small set of prefixes possible	No prefixes to date	unknown

Research in 2018 will be undertaken on the Mirniny language and associated language forms to enable comparison with the Ngadju language in order to determine relationships between the forms. Marsh (1976) notes in reference to

⁴⁶ Jones 2011, 101

the homogenization of Manyjilyjarra and Kartujarra languages of the Pilbara region of Western Australia and the formation of the communilect Martu Wangka, 'Two areas which this homogenization process has not yet affected are the verbal suffixes and certain syllable shapes.' The research GALC undertakes in 2018 will provide much more information on the homogenizing processes and indicators of language association.

The Goldfields Language Family Dec 2017

Wati _____ Western Desert Languages (WDL)

Kuwarra
 Tjupan
 Wangkatja
 Ngalia
 Pitjantjantjarra
 Nganatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra, Nyanatjarra
 Cundeelee Wangka
 Manyilyjarr
 Maduwongga
 Wangkatja
 Yankunytjatjarra
 Pintupi

Ngarga _____

Warlpiri

Ngaju _____

Ngaju
 Kalaamaya language of the Kaprun people
 Mirning
 Marlpa

Nyungar _____

Nyakinyaki

Conclusion

The linguistic research undertaken over the last 7 years has indicated the relationships between the major languages of the Goldfields region as represented in the family tree. All languages belong to the Wati or Mirniny/⁴⁷Ngaju family. However, a number of language names from historical material still need to be investigated.

These names are:

1. Natingero
2. Nugara
3. Watjanmay

4. Tjapanmay
5. Gula
6. Djalgandi
7. Mudalga
8. Marawa
9. Tjeraridjal
10. Murunitja
11. Marawa
12. Kalaako, Kaalako
13. Nganta
14. Pindiini
15. Mudalga
16. Mankulatjarra
17. Tjalkatjarra

The Goldfields language family tree may change in time as additional languages and dialects are investigated and added to the structure.

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