

Aboriginal Language Names of the South West Goldfields 2013 Marlpa/ Ngadju/Ngadjumaya, Gabrun/Kaalamaya and Mirning

The linguistic work by the Ngalia Foundation on the languages of the south-west Goldfields region of WA commenced in 2011. Little contemporary data existed with which to unequivocally identify and accurately class the languages of the region into their family groups.

Native title bodies and claimant groups clearly defined three separate bodies of the area as being the Ngadju, Gabrun and Mirning groups, amongst others. There appeared to be contemporary sociological reasons for these groupings whilst the linguistic identifications remained hazy and unconfirmed.

The contemporary boundaries brought about through the native title process are not necessarily reflective of pre-contact language groupings, identities and boundaries. Nash¹ talks about 'language webs' which more accurately describes the actual pre-contact linguistic structure. Douglas² 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.

Contemporary times call for the use of contemporary language names and identification of place. This paper briefly identifies the data that has guided Ngalia Foundation in the identification and use of the three language names, Ngajumaya, Kaalamaya language of the Gubrun people, and Mirning language, for any linguistic work and publications produced by the organisation.

Language Names and Location Evidence

The number of documented sources of data verifying the language name with specific places is very small. However, what does exist correlates with present day speaker's understandings of their languages and places.

O'Grady (1966) *Languages of the World: Indo-Pacific Fascicle Six*, Indiana University 1966

O'Grady³ refers to the west and east Mirniny(sic) groups. West Mirniny being referred to as Marlpa. West Mirniny people were located in the vicinity of Norseman. Apparently these terms were introduced by W. Schmidt (1919) and retained by O'Grady.

O'Grady refers to Curr's list of 1886. *The Australian Race etc.* Melbourne Government Printer, 4 volumes

¹ David Nash, *Historical Linguistic Geography of South East Western Australia*, Australian National University and AIATSIS 2002.

² W.H. Douglas 1964 *An Introduction to the Western Desert Language*

³ *Languages of the World: Indo-Pacific Fascicle six*, Geoffrey N. O'Grady, C.F and F.M. Voegelin 1966

O'Grady states that West Mirniny was 27% cognate with the Wati languages and 29% cognate with Wadjuk (Noongar dialect).

A. W. Howitt (1904) *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*

Howitt in 1904 refers to the Mirning as, 'would seem to be more related to the tribes of central Western Australia, with whom they were in a relationship of wife exchange.' (p.257)

The Mirning or Yirkla-mirning (yirkla = Eucla, mirning = man) saw themselves as two groups, those who lived along the coast and those who lived inland on the limestone country. (p. 129)

Curr (1886) states that the Mirning, '...seldom ventures more than forty miles from the coast.'

Elkin (1931)

Reported that the Mirning as extinct and had associated with the Ngalea, Kukata and Pitjandjarra at missions at Ooldea.

Cane (1992)

Cane states that Mirning people live in Ceduna and Norseman.

Bates (1957) *The Passing of the Aborigines*, John Murray, London

States that, none of the Eucla (Mirniny) tribe, 'ever ventured far out on to the Nullabor Plain.' This was due to the belief that there was a large snake on the Nullabor that ate people. This belief corresponds with Curr's statement of the Mirniny (sic) staying close to the coastal region.

Bates, in an undated note, states, 'The last Eucla Mining (sic) (man) died at Albany S.W. Australia about 1918.' However, later accounts such as John Greenway's *Down among the Wild Men* (1972) recounts meeting a full Mirning woman at Cocklebidy. Greenway was accompanied by Norman Tindale who recalled meeting the woman when she was a child 27 years previously.

Oates (1970) *A Revised Linguistic Survey of Australia*, W.J. and L.F Oates

Classifies Ngadjunma (sic) as being from, 'Eyre's Sand Patch, Goddard Creek to Port Malcolm, to Fraser Range, to Naretha and Point Culver, at Mount Andrew, Russell Range and Balladonia, W.A.'

Other names for Ngajumaya are given as, 'Badonjunga (Wudjari term), Bardojunga, Ngadju, Ngadjunmaia, Ngadjumaja, Ngatjumay and Tchaakalaaga.

He states that, 'In A.R. there is a vocabulary listed under the name of 'Wonunda'. Douglas has recorded a little. Brandenstein has commenced study.'

In the Oates classification, he places Ngadjumaya as 55.1b, A25 (AIAS-A3) under the Mirniny subgroup of the Southwest Group of Pama-Nyungan Family.

Carl von Brandenstein (1970) *Linguistic Salvage Work*: Report on behalf of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research, No 12, 1970

Von Brandenstein suggest that there existed the following dialects of Ngadju:

1. Mirningj (sic) was located from 'Nullabor Station to Murnura Tank west of Madura; drawn to the west (1880s to 1914); now a handful of Jurgala informants from Eucla, mostly half-castes, scattered from South Australia to Cue in WA.' (p.47)
2. Marlba (sic) was located, 'rockholes and soaks around Balladonia, reaching north to Kopai Cliffs with the Murrundja as neighbours and south to Israelite Bay. The location given by Capell (1963) A25 is correct, 14 speakers of varying quality left.' (p.47)
3. 'Frazer Range people from Frazer Range to Balladonia; no name reported, 1 informant.'
4. 'Norseman people from Norseman to Frazer Range; no name reported, extinct but see Kallaagu.'
5. 'Windaga (?) Tribal name from Norseman to Peak Charles, extinct. Perhaps belonging to the Njagi-Njagi. (A dialect of Noongar is Nyaki Nyaki. It sees possible that this is the same group being referred to)
6. Kallaa, Kallaagu North of Norseman towards Coolgardie; extinct, according to O'Grady in Cappell (1963) A. 11 Gala:gu covers also the are under 4'

Von Brandenstein states, 'It will be difficult to extract the different dialectical components of the DS languages 1-6 from the mixed language now called Ngadju, which is spoken with varying degree of knowledge by 14 people living in the Norseman, Esperance, Coolgardie, Leonora, Gnowangerup, Kurrawang Mission and Yalata Mission (SA).' (p.49)

John Greenway (1972) *Down among the Wild Men*, Hutchinson of Australia

Greenway's account of travelling with Norman Tindale cites that there were a number of Mirning peoples; the Ngandatha Mirning, Wonunda Mirning and Jirkla (Eucla) Mirning.

Ljubomir H. Marun *The Mirning and their Predecessors on the Coastal Nullabor Plain*, unpublished thesis

Marun states that, 'The Mirning(sic) tribe apparently still consisted of some 21 local groups defined by their totems and rockholes at the turn of the (1900) century...' He has based this statement on the work of Bates 1912.

He states that there were four group entities.

The first being a coastal group (Wiljaru-um), sea people (Bilia-um), water people (Wailbi-um) and great diver people (Yau-um).

The second were plains people (Wini-um) and sand plain people (Koondana-um).

The third group was fourteen local coastal groups divided according to their home water sources of the Mirning tribe known to Daisy Bates. They were Nyumbuk/Yulbari, Ngura-um, Guyana-um, Kallanu Wommu, Nala-um, Ngaua-um, Kailga-um, Nadhuin-um, Kugurda-um, Birgala-um, Bungala-um, Kardala-um, Dhudhu-um, Kurdala-um, Kunjiri-um.

The final group was seven plains groups divided according to their plant or animal totems. Burdia-um, Kalgula-um, Wilba-um, Bongurrga-um, Bilda-um, Mulgara-um, Kalda-um and Darrbu-um.

Conclusion

The existing data points to a clear distinction between the Mirning and Ngaju peoples. That there may have been 6 dialects of Ngaju at the time of European settlement. Bates suggests that there were 21 Mirning groups. No evidence exists to suggest that these Mirning groups each spoke a different dialect.

Much of the archeological evidence demonstrates that food across the Nullabor to Eucla area was very scarce and this appears to have kept the Mirning people close to the coast where seafood was more abundant and formed a large part of the diet.

Data suggests the Ngaju people lived in the more habitable area north of the Nullabor through to Coolgardie.

Archaeological data also points to the use of tools specific to locations. The Mirning people using glassy flints obtained from sea cliffs and rarely using grinding stones. Where as the Ngaju people appeared to use these more extensively to process the grass seeds of the inland area.

Some evidence suggests that the Mirning were possibly somewhat isolated from their neighbours due to the lack of food and water around their coastal location which prevented them venturing out of their area other than for some trade purposes. This isolation may suggest the reason for the distinction between Mirning and Ngaju languages.

The data also suggests that there was widespread loss of life by Mirning and Ngaju people during the time of European settlement with very few people surviving. Populations were already low due to scarce food and water resources and it appears only a small handful of each group survived.

Male initiation ceremonies also appear to indicate a clear boundary between the two language groups as there were different practises and beliefs. Mythology and story also indicates a cultural boundary between these groups.

Waves of movement, dispossession due to mission and reserve movements, and intermarriage since European settlement has seen many Ngaju and Mirning people move to non-traditional land.

Nash (2002)⁴ refers to 'a 'dialect web' or 'family-like language' with three discernible clusterings. These clusters are determined according to the word for 'man'. The three groups are Mirniny, Marlba and Kabun (sic). Each of these language groups appears to have had a number of groups or possibly dialects. However, little data exists for these dialects to be discernable and the few remaining speakers are unable to provide any further dialectical evidence.

Hanson (2013) compared the phonemic inventory and lexical items of Ngajumaya and Kaburn languages to find 36.5% compatibility.⁵

For the purposes of further language study and for sociological group identification reasons, the three groups will be identified using now standardized orthographies as Mirning, Ngajumaya/Marlpa and Kaprun. Historical material and newly recorded speaker material will be classified according to one of the three languages.

Much more urgent work remains to be done on the recording, analysis and preservation of these three languages and the new data will shed more light on the level of cognate between these languages.

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⁴ David Nash, *Historical Linguistic Geography of South East Western Australia*, Australian National University and AIATSIS 2002.

⁵ Susan Hanson 2013 Goldfields Language Study