

# Mirniny: bibliography, documentation and orthography comparison 2022

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*Wangka kanyira ngalipirniku*  
PRESERVING OUR LANGUAGES FOR ALL OF US

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## Introduction

As of November 2019, the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal Corporation (GALCACAC) commenced work on the documentation of the Mirniny language.

Mirniny is a language that has proved difficult to classify. It was originally placed within the Western Desert family of languages (Wati), but this was later shown to be inaccurate. Von Brandenstein included the language, along with Ngadju and Kaalamaya, in his Dundas District Dialect, whereas O’Grady placed it within the Mirniny subgroup. The Mirniny subgroup is a label avoided by GALCAC because it is not consistent with how speakers identify. The languages under this family instead prefer to be known by their individual language names (Hanson, 2017). To date, the work completed by GALCAC indicates the names Mirniny, Ngaju (Ngadju) and Kapurn/Kaalamaya are the terms preferred by language speakers, and as such, are the labels that will be used by GALCAC linguists until such time as research can provide more accurate group names.

The first step of the documentation process being carried out by GALCAC is to collate and list historical documents and verify the information found therein, which is used to develop a draft contemporary orthography for the language. This orthography may change as work is undertaken on recording words and sentences with Mirniny speakers.

This bibliography comprises historical documents stored in the GALCAC archives, including maps of the Goldfields region, wordlists compiled by linguists and missionaries who were known to have worked with Aboriginal groups in the region including: O’Grady & O’Grady; Curr; Douglas; Von Brandenstein and Klokeid, as well as contemporary research papers that have been completed for native title purposes. Linguists have examined each paper and verified their accuracy through a process of triangulation. The documents that appear to be of, or include verified sources of the Mirniny language, are listed in section II, along with comments on their authenticity.

The final section in this paper contains a comparison table of the orthographies used by the authors of the authenticated wordlists. The draft contemporary orthography compiled from this information will be used to create a sketch grammar of the Mirniny language, which will be released at a later date.

This is the fifth edition of the Mirniny Orthography, updated in December 2022.

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## I. List of Historical Source Documents of Mirniny Language

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Bates, D., (1985). *The native tribes of Western Australia*, edited by Isobel White, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Bates, D.M. (n.d.). *The West Australian Aborigines: their marriage laws and some peculiar customs*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0001467

Bates, D.M. (n.d.). *Waterholes, etc: Eucla and Central Areas (taken from notebooks)*. Retrieved from <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au>

Burgoyne, I.Y.K. (2000). *The Mirniny: we are the whales*. Broome: Magabala Books.

Capell, A. (1963). *Linguistic survey of Australia*. Prepared for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, University of Sydney.

Curr, E.M. (1886-1887). *The Australian race: its origin, languages, customs, place of landing in Australia and the routes by which it spread itself over that continent*. London: Trubner.

Curr, E.M. (1881-1887). *Papers re: An Australian Aborigines comparative vocabulary*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0001465

Hanson, S. (2017). Languages and Dialects of the Goldfields Region. Retrieved from [www.wangka.com.au](http://www.wangka.com.au)

Hanson, S. (various dates) *Weekly linguistic work reports*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000054.

Howitt, A.W., (1996). *Native tribes of South-East Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Maps: various. Goldfields region. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000419.

*Meeting notice: Mirniny Native Title Claim Group*. Kalgoorlie Miner. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0001356.

Mirniny Research Report Summary: *Geographical Distribution and Organisation of the Mirniny People*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #

Naessan, P.A. (2013). *A Sketch Analysis of Geoff O'Grady's Mirniny material (from the Far West Coast of South Australia and locations in Western Australia) for use in the development of Mirniny language resources and language workshops*. Australian Government Indigenous Languages Support: Linguistics Discipline, University of Adelaide.

Native Title Tribunal. (2003). *Research report – Central Goldfields Regional Report*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0001363.

Native Title Tribunal. (n.d.). *Research report – Mirniny: Area/Identity*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0001364

O'Grady, G.N., & O'Grady, A. (1959-1968). *Word list of the Mirning language: extracted from notes by Geoff O'Grady & Alix O'Grady*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #529.

O'Grady, G.N., & Curr, E.M., (1886) *Mirniny wordlist*. Retrieved from <http://aiatsis.gov.au>

O'Grady, G.N., & Klokeid, T.J. (1969). *Australian Linguistic Classification: a plea for coordination of effort*. In Languages of the world: Indo-Pacific fascicle six. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000701.

Oates, W.J. & Oates, L.F. (1970). *West Coast of Western Australia: Pama-Nyungan family*. In A revised linguistic survey of Australia. Retrieved from GALCAC archives.

Pretty, G.L., & Gallus, S.A. (1967). The anthropology and archaeology of the Nullarbor Plain. In J.T. Dunkley and T.M.L. Wigley (Eds.), *Caves of the Nullarbor: a review of speleological investigations in the Nullarbor Plain* (pp. 47-61). University of Sydney.

Reid, N., (1979). *Mirning: a grammar*. Retrieved from. [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au)

Ribi, J. (2000). *Research report on the Mirniny language*. Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta Aboriginal Language Center. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000883.

Roberts, S.P. (n.d.). *A sketch grammar of Kalaaku*. Department of linguistics, Comparative Australian languages. University of Western Australia.

Saar, K. (1934). *Native vocabulary of the south coast of Western Australia*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000107.

Sutherland Davidson, D. (1938). *A preliminary register of Australian tribes and hordes*. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical society.

Thieberger, N. (1993). *Handbook of Western Australian Aboriginal languages south of the Kimberley region*. Canberra: Australian National University.

Thieberger, N. 2017. *Digital Daisy Bates*. Web resource. <http://bates.org.au>.

Tindale, N.B. (1940). Distribution of Australian Aboriginal tribes: a field survey. *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*. 64(1): 140-231.

Tindale, N.B. (1974). *Aboriginal tribes of Australia: their terrain, environmental controls, distribution, limits and proper names*. Berkley and Canberra: University of California Press.

Velichová-Rebelos, M. (2005). *Word List of the Mirning (Mirniny) Language: Extracted from Notes by Geoff O'Grady & Alix O'Grady, 1959/1968*. Australia, Adelaide: Discipline of Linguistics, School of Humanities. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000529

Von Brandenstein, C.G. (1970). Linguistic Salvage Work on the Eastern Goldfields. *Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research*, 12, 45-58.

Von Brandenstein, C.G., & Thomas, A. P. (1975). *Taruru: Aboriginal song poetry from the Pilbara*. University Press of Hawaii: Honolulu.

Von Brandenstein, C. G. (n.d.) 88 Grammar text sheets, *Extract. Mirniny and Ngadjumaia*. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #0000284.

## II. Verified documents.

Section II provides a list of historical documents. Initial investigation has shown similarities in the data across authors and through time. Many of the linguists listed below have referenced work by each other, and triangulation of records and maps indicates the linguistic material is most likely Mirniny. These papers will be carefully analysed and used by the linguist in the process of language recovery.

### **Burgoyne. Mirning: We are the whales.**

- Biography of a Mirniny-Kokatha woman.
- Burgoyne identifies as both Mirniny and Kokatha, as such the words contained within the wordlist at the back of the book may belong to either language. Any information taken from this resource needs to be carefully analysed to ascertain the true language group.

### **Curr, The Australian race: its origin, languages, customs, place of landing in Australia and the routes by which it spread itself over the continent.**

- Latitude and longitude coordinates, place names and labels used to self-identify satisfy GALCAC that his wordlists for Eyre's Sand Patch (Wonunda Meening tribe), and Eucla (Yircla Meening tribe) are in agreement with other maps and wordlists collected from Daisy Bates online.
- Words found in the document match others found in the Bates online collection (listed below).
- Orthographies in Curr's wordlists align with those of his contemporaries.

### **Howitt. The Native Tribes of South-east Australia.**

- Provides a small amount of information regarding locations of Mirniny tribes, in particular the coastal tribe.
- This is only a small mention; a couple of lines. Nevertheless, this document can be used to further support others that have given the same locations for Mirniny.

### **Mirniny research report summary.**

- References to locations and names by which Mirniny have been known
- Breakdown of two groups; coastal and plains Mirniny.

### **National native title tribunal. Research report- Central Goldfields regional report.**

- Government department report for the native title claim for Goldfields region.

- Extensive discussion and reference to all the documents listed above.
- Valuable in the sense that repeated reference to historical documents and research completed provides validation to all works listed.
- Serves to validate these papers and justifies their use in the GALCAC research and documentation of Mirniny

**National native title tribunal. Research report – Mirniny: area/identity.**

- Government department report for the Mirniny native title.
- Extensive discussion and reference to all the documents listed above.
- Valuable in the sense that repeated reference to historical documents and research completed provides validation to all works listed.
- Serves to validate documents listed in section I and justifies their use in the GALCAC research and documentation of Mirniny.

**Native title meeting notice for Mirniny (Kalgoorlie Miner).**

- This is an official meeting and easy to verify through freedom of information.
- Contains a list of family names (claimants) which may provide an avenue for language workers at a later date.

**Oates and Oates. A revised linguistic survey of Australia.**

- Provides more reference materials regarding location of Mirniny and classification of language.

**O’Grady & Curr. Mirniny wordlist, retrieved from <http://aiatsis.gov.au>**

- Document retrieved from a government website, whose accuracy is accepted.
- Compared to other wordlists and checked for similarities.

**O’Grady and Klokeid. Australian linguistic classification: a plea for coordinated effort.**

- Contains a wordlist of Mirniny, comparing it to nearby languages.
- Similarities between this orthography and orthographies of other linguists in this list.
- Breaks down the linguistic classification of the language and compares to nearby tribes.

**Pretty and Gallus. The anthropology and archaeology of the Nullarbor Plain.**

- References Tindale and Howitt.
- Can be used to cross reference what we have from the linguists listed above.



**Ribi. Research report on the Mirniny language.**

- Research report carried out by Dr Ribi for the Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta
- Extensive reference to work by Brandenstein.
- Detailed explanation on Mirniny lands and location
- Explanation of relationship to Nadju and surrounding tribes
- List of informants and known Mirniny speakers, useful to follow up.
- List of further historical documents and recordings of Mirniny language.

**Thieberger. Handbook of Western Australian Aboriginal languages south of the Kimberley region.**

- Contains a list of references to other materials that could prove useful.
- List of names by which Mirniny has also been known.
- Information on location that is useful and is in agreement with locations given in other documents (Curr, O'Grady and Capell).
- Contains a short list of known speakers. This is somewhat old, but could be worth searching for descendants.

**Various maps retrieved from GALCAC archives.**

- Extremely useful for verifying locations and movements of tribes.
- Provides information useful for following language change, patterns and movement.

**Velichová-Rebelos. Word list of the Mirning language. Retrieved from GALCAC archives #529**

- Extracted from Geoff & Alix O'Grady, two well-known Australianists.
- Published through the University of Adelaide School of Linguistics
- Initial investigation shows words listed to be similar to those lexemes found in other documents.
- Serves to act as another verified document.

**von Brandenstein. Linguistic salvage work on the Eastern Goldfields**

- Contains some good anthropological information about tribes, including differentiation of groups.
- Listing of locations of tribal lands on maps. This will be useful for comparison to other locations mentioned above.
- A couple of words and paragraphs detailing practices like water storage and message sticks.
- Comparisons to nearby tribes.

- Long reference list that can be used to source further information.

**Wordlists from <http://bates.org.au> including: #49 (Point Culver); #54, #122 (Cocklebidy & Nuytsland Nature Reserve); #213, #216, #256 (Eyre's Sand Patch); #163, #61, #78 (Eucla)**

- Documents considered valid, as they come from the Daisy Bates online website
- Maps verify the positioning of tribes and wordlists contained therein.
- Words contained within the documents are similar to those found in wordlists compiled by Bates, Curr, Howitt and O'Grady.
- Historical papers show Mirninny lived at or around Eyre's Sand Patch, along the south coast of South Australia to Eucla (for GALCAC purposes we are only researching Mirninny to the SA border). These wordlists align with known movements of Eyre, and other explorers.

III. Mirniny Orthography: comparison of styles used in referenced documents.

Phoneme	Curr 1886/1887	Velichova- Rebelos, 2005	O'Grady & Klokeid	Von Brandenstein n.d.	Curr & O'Grady AIATSIS	Bates (Digital Daisy Bates)	2022 Contemporary Phone
<b>Vowels</b>							
/a/	/a/ waddoo (eye)	/a/ wartu (eye)	/a/ wartu (eye)	/a/ min,aga (tomorrow morning)	/a/ wardu (eye)	/a/ wardu (eye)	/a/ wartu minyaka
/aa/	no data	/aa/ maarra (cloud, type of)	no data	no data	no data	/ā/ mātu	/aa/ maarra maatu
/i/	/i/ jindoo (foot)	/i/ kari (arm)  mirra (hole)	/i/ kuliya (ear)  mirniny (man)	/i/ mirnin, (man)	/i/ kuliya (ear)  mirniny (man)	/i/ kari (arm)  mira (hole)	/i/ tjirntu kari kuliya mirniny mirra
/ii/	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	/e/ mel (eye)	/ii/ miil
/u/	/oo/ ngalgoo (food)	/u/ thuthu (dog)  umpara	/u/ tjutju (dog)  ngamu	/o/ ko'ana! (listen)  wamugga	/u/ kuwarna (hear/listen)	/u/ d'udu (dog)	/u/ ngalku tjutju kuwarna umpara

		(fly, insect)	(food that is not meat)	(camp, at )	umpara (fly, insect)		wamuka
/uu/	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	
<b>Consonants</b>							
/k/	/k/ koojal (two)  boolga (old woman)	/k/ kuthal (two)  maka (no)	/k/ kutjal (two)  parlka (head)	/g/ min,aga (tomorrow morning)  kalla (fire)	/k/ kuthal (two)  maka	/k/ maka (no)  kabarli (grandmother)	/k/ kutjal minyaka maka purlka parlka karla kaparli
/j/	/j/ jena (foot)  jindoo (sun)	/c/ cina (foot)  cirntu (sun)	/ty/ tyina (foot)  tyirntu (sun)	[th] patha- (use mouth, to)	/j/ jina (foot)  jirntu (sun)	/j/ jina (foot)  jindu (sun)	/tj/ tjina patja- tjirntu
/l/	/l/ yalgatta (three)  majilba chera (old man)  moola (nose)	/l/ yalkarta (three)  curntal (fog)	/l/ ngarntulu (who)  kuliya (ear)	/l/ ņaandulu ngarntulu (who)  Palatun,a (Balladonia)	/l/ yalkarta (three)  jurntal (fog)	/l/ yalgarda (three)  mulu (nose)	/l/ yalkarta ngarntulu matjilpa tjira tjurntal kuliya Balladonia mulya
[ly]	[ly] walyee	[ly] karralyka	[ly] tjilya	no data	[ly] karralyka	[ly] walyu	[ly] walyi

	(bad)	(tree bark)	(leaf)		(tree bark)	(rabbit)	karralyka tjilya walyu yarlkulya
		yarlkulya (blood)	yarlkulya (blood)		yarlkulya (blood)		
/m/	/m/ marra (hand)  magooroo (wind)	/m/ mara (hand)  makuru (wind)	/m/ mara (hand)  ngamu (food)	/m/ manu (get+past)  mm wammugga (camp, at)	/m/ mara (hand)  makuru (wind)	/m/ mara (hand)  ngamu (food)	/m/ mara manu wamuka makuru
/n/	/n/ candan (chin)  bindan (lightning)	/n/ kantan (chin)  nanpa (hair string)	/n/ wanti- (climb, to)  nyina- (sit, to)	/n/ nangu (see+past)	/n/ kantan (chin)  nanpa (hair string)	/n/ karndarn (chin)  jina (foot)	/n/ kantan wanti- nangu pintan nanpa tjina nyina-
[ng]	[ng] ngambin (eyebrows)  ngana- (go, to)	[ng] ngamu (food)  nganha- (go, to)	[ng] ngamu (food)  ngarna- (go, to)	[ŋ] ŋadu (1SG)  puju (hit+PAST)	[ng] ngamu (food)  ngana- (go, to)	[ng] ngambin (eyebrow)  ngalba (dead)	[ng] ngampin ngamu ngatju ngana- pungu ngalpa
[ny]	[ny] minyaka	[ny] mirniny (man)	[ny] mirniny (man)	[n,] mirnin, mirniny	[ny] mirniny (man)	[ny] wanya (girl)	[ny] minyaka mirniny

	(tomorrow morning)	warany (long)	warany (long)	(man)	warany (long)  nyina- (sit, to)		wanya nyinarn warany nyina-
/p/	/b/ walby (water)  kambo (bone)	/p/ warlpi (water)  kampu (bone)	/p/ warlpi (water)  kampu (bone)	/p/ pana (3sg)  puju (hit+past)	/p/ warlpi (water)  kampu (bone)	/b/ warlbi (water)  kambu (bone)	/p/ warlpi pana kampu pungu
/r/	/r/ koorilla (south)  boory (stone)	/r/ kurila (south)	/r/ kurila (south)	/r/ puri (stone)	/r/ kurila (south)	/r/ buri (stone)	/r/ kurila puri
[rr]	/r/ kokkara (east)	[rr] kakarra (east)  puparr (hungry)	[rr] kakarra (east)  puparr (hungry)	[r,] madar,i (3sg+ALL)  ɲundun̩ar,i (2PL)	[rr] kakarra (east)  puparr (hungry)	/r/ Pidili (pearl shell)	[rr] kakarra matjarri pirrili puparr nyuntungarri
[rl]	[ll] kalla (fire)	[rl] karla (fire)	[rl] karla (fire)	[ll] kalla (fire)	[rl] karla (fire)	/l/ kala (fire)	[rl] karla karlaya

	kalleya (emu)  youla (ground)	yuparla (thigh)	yuparla (thigh)	yullu (this way)		kalea (emu)	yuparla yurlu yurla
[rn]	[rn] murna (plenty)	[rn] marntarra (we)  yurntarn (nape)	[rn] tjangkarn (mouth)  yurntarn (nape)	[rn] warndi (child/boy)	[rn] marntarra (we)  yurntarn (nape)	[rn] ngarngur (beard)  madarn (aunty)	[rn] marna marntarra tjangkarn warnti ngarnkurr yurntarn matarn
[rt]	[rd]/[dd] kardiddy (teeth)  yadda (eaglehawk)	[rt] kartirti (tooth)  yarta (eaglehawk)	[rt] kartirti (tooth)  yarta (eaglehawk)	[rd] warddaggi (stick, with)  wardugu (eye, with)	[rt] kartirti (tooth)  yarta (eaglehawk)	[rd] kadidi (tooth)  yarda (eaglehawk)	[rt] kartirti wartaku yarta wartuku
/t/	/d/ moody (fish)	/t/ muti (fish)	/t/ wanti- (climb, to)	/t/ Palatun,a (Balladonia)	/t/ muti (fish)	/d/ jida (bird, generic)	/t/ muti wanti- Balladonia tjita
[tj]	/j/ booja	[th] putha	[th] putha	[d] ɲadu	[th] putha	/d/ kudal	[tj] putja

	(later) koojal (two)	(later, by and by) kuthal (two)	(later, by and by) kutjal (two)	(1SG) tunu (tell+PAST)	(by and by, later) kuthal (two)	(two)	ngatju kutjal tjunu
/w/	/w/ waddoo (eye)  weea (wife)	/w/ wartu (eye)  kuwarna (hear, listen)	/w/ wartu (eye)  kuwarna (hear, listen)	/w/ warlirnuu (boomerang)  ko'ana (hear, listen)	/w/ wartu (eye)  kuwarna (hear, listen)	/w/ wardu (eye)	/w/ wartu warlinu wiya kuwarna
/y/	/y/ yoolga (grass)	/y/ yurlka (grass)  yayi (now)	/y/ yayi (now)	/y/ yullu (this way)	/y/ yurlka (grass)  yayi (now)	/y/ yulga (grass)  yayi (now)	/y/ yurlka yayi



## Conclusion

Careful examination of documents stored in GALCACAC archives, enabled the linguist to verify the accuracy of information contained in the wordlists of O'Grady & O'Grady, von Brandenstein, Curr, Curr & O'Grady and O'Grady & Klokeid. Detailed analysis of data has provided GALCACAC with the means to create a draft orthography. Once completed, the next step for linguists is to meet with Mirniny elders and other speakers, who are interested in recovering and documenting language.

As research continues, and with more clarity on language use and sounds, this draft orthography will be revised and updated.

## References

Simpson, J. (n.d.) A Key to the Spelling of Ngadjumaya used by von Brandenstein. Retrieved from GALCACAC archives, #0000285

Simpson, J. (n.d.) Basic Sound System. Retrieved from GALCACAC archives, #0000413

von Brandenstein, C.,G. & Thomas, A., P. (1974). Taruru: Aboriginal Song Poetry in the Pilbara. Rigby, University of California.