

## Wangkatja Verb Suffixes II

By Gizem Milonas Edited Sue Hanson. March 2025

### Introduction

In this paper Wangkatja serial verb suffixes (SER\_VERB), purposive (PURP), desirative (DES), characteristic (CHAR), causative (CAUS), negation (NEG), directional (towards), and continuous (CONT) are analysed and described. The analysis is based on the compilation of a large corpus of historical data dating between the 1920s and 2020s. Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal Corporation (GALCAC) has been collecting data for over two decades from numerous speakers residing in various parts of the Goldfields region, Western Australia, including Laverton, Leonora, Menzies, and Kalgoorlie.

Wangkatja is a member of the Wati language family, a subgroup of the Pama-Nyugan family of Australian languages. Its AIATIS code is A103 and it closely relates to Ngaanyatjarra, AIATIS code A38. The data suggests that the name of the speech form comes from the word wangka meaning *speech* and *language* and other derivations of the word exist such as Wangkayi or Wangkatja, *a First Nations person*; wangka- *to talk, to speak*. Amee Glass and Dorothy Hackett, the compilers of *Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra to English Dictionary 2003*, noted Wangkatja as a linguistic form:

*‘I am often asked the question “What about Wangkayi (Wongi)? Aren’t the Warburton people Wangkayi?” 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. 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).*

*The language, of course, had no written form. It was first scientifically studied by Wilfrid Douglas, a linguist of the United Aborigines Mission, in the early 1950’s. He devised the alphabet for the language and published several books about it.’*

Into Another World, Amee Glass, 1978

*‘You may have heard the Ngaanyatjarra language referred to as “Wangkayi” (‘Wongi’). White people, especially use this term to refer to the language of the Aboriginal people of the Eastern Goldfields and beyond (although these Aboriginal people prefer to call themselves and their language ‘Wangkatja’).*

Ngaanyatjarra & Ngaatjatjarra to English Dictionary, Amee Glass, Dorothy Hackett, 2003

It appears that Wangkatja might have emerged as a creole<sup>1</sup> in a similar way as Cundelee Wangka, Cundelee, Western Australia and Martu Wangka, Northwest Western Australia. The

---

<sup>1</sup> A Creole is “A term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a pidgin language which has become the mother-tongue of a speech community ... The process of creolization expands the structural and stylistic range of the pidginized language, so that the creolized language becomes comparable in formal and functional complexity to other languages.”

lexical data collected by GALCAC contains variants in glossing, spelling, sentence structure, tense suffixes, contemporary phrases, and word formation as historical material was collected by a variety of people and non-linguists who used their own spelling system. This indicates that the corpus may contain more than one variant of the same speech form.

1. **Serial verbs** are formed where more than one verb is used in a single verb phrase. In Wangkatja it is marked with the **suffix -ra** which indicates serial actions.

1.1. Palu	kulira	‘Ngayu	wuurlalku
palu	kuli+ra	ngayu	wuurla+lku
3SG	think+SER_VERB	1SG	jump+FUT

tjalpangku	ngula	wiputjarra	warungka’.
tjalpa+ngku	ngula	wipu+tjarra	waru+ngka
thigh+INST	then	tail+INST	fire+LOC

*It thought, ‘I’ll jump with thighs, then, with tail through the fire’.*  
(Why the Kangaroo Hops)

1.2. Tjukurrpa	watjanu	Kaarnkalu	tirtu	yarltira
tjukurrpa	watja+nu	kaarnka+lu	tirtu	yarlti+ra
creation_story	say+PAST	crow+ERG	bird	call+SER_VERB

watjara	‘Nyaku	nyurra	nyaarru’.
watja+ra	nya+ku	nyurra	nyaarru
say+PRES	see+FUT	2SG	sorry

*As the story told, since then, the Crow calls saying, ‘Have pity on me’.*  
(Why the Crow Asks For Forgiveness)

## 2. Purposive suffixes

### 2.1 -tjaku

2.1.1. Kaparli,	tjitji	pirni	wana	manu
kaparli	tjitji	pirni	wana	ma+nu
grandma	child	many	digging_stick	grab+PAST

maku	tjawaltjaku.
maku	tjawa+l+tjaku
grub	dig+EPTH+PURP

*The grandmother and the grandchildren grabbed digging sticks to dig for witchetty grubs.* (Weldon, 2018)

2.1.2. Tjamu	yarlingu,	'Tjitji	pirni	marra	purnu
tjamu	yarlti+ngu	tjitji	pirni	mara	purnu
grandfather	call+PAST	child	many	grab	stick

waru	kutjala	kuka	marlu	paalkutjaku!"
waru	kutja+la	kuka	marlu	paa+lku+tjaku
fire	prepare+IMP	meat	red_kangaroo	cook+FUT+PURP

---

A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, David Crystal, 2008.

*The grandfather called, 'Kids, grab some sticks and prepare the fire to cook the red kangaroo!' (Weldon, 2018)*

- 2.1.3. Marntilu      pulpakutu      pitjalanyi,      kuliltjaku.  
marnti+lu      pulpa+kutu      pitja+lanyi      kuli+l+tjaku  
boy+ERG      cave+ALL      move+PRES      think+EPTH+PURP  
*The boy goes to a cave to think. (KLCA)*

## 2.2. -kitja

- 2.2.1. Ngayululatju      pitjangu      tjukurpa      kulikitja.  
ngayu+lu+latju      pitja+ngu      tjukurpa      kuli+kitja  
1PL+ERG+we\_all      move+PAST      creation\_story      hear+PURP  
*We all came to hear a story. (Spurling and Jones, 2015)*

## 3. Desirative

### 3.1. -tjaku

- 3.1.1. Nyinatjaku.  
nyina+tjaku  
sit+DES  
*Wants to sit down.*
- 3.1.2. Ngalkutjaku.  
nga+lku+tjaku  
eat+FUT+DES  
*Wants to eat.*
- 3.1.3. Nyakutjaku.  
nya+ku+tjaku  
see+FUT+DES  
*Wants to see. (KLCA, 2008)*
- 3.1.4. Chainsaw-nya      tirtu      nyinakutjaku  
Chainsaw\_nya      tirtu      nyina+ku+tjaku  
Chainsaw\_focus-marker      long\_time      live+FUT+DES  
  
ngurrangka      Jones      tawarra.  
ngurra+ngka      Jones      tawarra  
home+LOC      Jones      together  
*Chainsaw wants to live at the house of Jones forever.*  
(Gordon, 2007)
- 3.1.5. Palu ngurlurringu,      ngurraku      pitjatjaku.  
palu ngurlu+rri+ngu      ngurra+ku      pitja+tjaku  
3SG      frightened+verbalizer+PAST      camp+DAT      move+DES  
*She became frightened and wanted to go home. (Polak, 2008)*

### 3.2. -nyu

#### 3.2.1. Kun-kunyu.

kun\_kun+nyu  
sleep+DES  
*Wished to sleep.*

#### 3.2.2. Walkarrinyu.

walkarri+nyu  
paint+DES  
*Wished to paint.* (Fasola, 2010)

#### 3.2.3. Tjirta tjungkurni pirni kamarrarinyu ngula

tjirta tjungkurni pirni kamarra+rri+nyu ngula  
bird small many want+IMP+DES NEG

paarpungku ngurlu karlayalu yuntjulku  
paarrpu+ngku ngurlu karlaya+lu yuntju+lku  
fly+FUT fearful emu+ERG to\_be\_angry+FUT

pika warlparlalku parnangka.  
pika warlparla+lku parna+ngka  
hurt fall\_down+FUT ground+LOC

*The small birds didn't want to fly, they were afraid of the Emu to be angry and upset and cause them to fall down on the ground.* (Why the Emu Can't Fly)

## 4. Characteristic

### 4.1. -payi

#### 4.1.1. Walkapayi.

walka+payi  
paint+CHAR  
*Characteristically paints.*

#### 4.1.2. Puwapayi.

pu+wa+payi  
hit+IMP+CHAR  
*Characteristically hits.*

#### 4.1.3. Yulapayi.

yula+payi  
cry+CHAR  
*Characteristically cries.* (KLCA, 2008)

## 5. Causative

### 5.1. -ma-

- 5.1.1. Mayi palunya pukurl**manu**.  
mayi palu+nya pukurl+ma+nu  
food 3SG+focus\_marker happy+CAUS+PAST  
*The food caused him to be happy.* (Spurling and Jones, 2015)

### 5.2. -ka-

- 5.2.1. Pikak**arnu**.  
pika+ka+rnu  
unwell+CAUS+PAST  
*It caused [him/her/it] to be unwell.*

- 5.2.2. Pikak**alku**.  
pika+ka+lku  
unwell+CAUS+FUT  
*It will cause [him/her/it] to be unwell.*

- 5.2.3. Lipik**ala**!  
lipi+ka+la  
wide+CAUS+IMP  
*Cause it to extend!* (KLCA, 2008)

- 5.2.4. Palu winyunarnu Yilpakutu,  
palu winyuna+rnu yilpa+kutu  
3SG run+PAST goanna+ALL

ma-warrkirnu, pungkulanyi tawarra,  
ma\_warrki+rnu pu+ngku+lanyi tawarra  
away\_throw+PAST hit+FUT+PRES together

"Ngayulu nyurraku kultu  
ngayu+lu nyurra+ku kultu  
1SG+SUBJ 2SG+POSS back

karpinya nyuwari palyarnu, wala nyurra  
karpi+nya nyuwari palya+rnu wala nyurra  
nice+focus\_marker pretty paint+PAST again 2SG

ngayuku kultu kuyarn**karnu**!"  
ngayu+ku kultu kuyarn+ka+rnu  
1SG+POSS back bad+CAUS+PAST  
*He rushed to the Goanna throwing himself around and having a tantrum, "I painted your back beautifully and you caused my back to be horrible!"* (Lizard and Goanna)

5.2.5.	Rawa nyinangu rawa_nyinangu after_long_time	Kaarnkalu kaarnka+lu crow+ERG	watjanu watja+nu say+PAST
	Kurrrpartukutu, kurrrpartu+kutu magpie+ALL	"Nyurra nyurra 2SG	ngali talypu ngali talypu 1DU sick_of
	nyakulanyi nya+ku+lanyi see+FUT+PRES	Warlawurrunya warlawurra+nya eagle+focus_marker	karnpiranyi. karnpi+ranyi fix+PRES
	Nyurra nyurra 2SG	ngali kurntakala ngali kurnta+ka+la 1DU shame+CAUS+IMP	palunya". palu+nya 3SG_focus_marker

After a while, the Crow said to the Magpie "We are sick of seeing the Eagle fixing everything. Let us cause him to be shamed". (The Magpie and The Crow)

### 5.3. -tjinga

- 5.3.1. Yulat**tjinga**!  
yula+tjinga+la  
cry+CAUS+IMP  
*Cause someone to cry!*
- 5.3.2. Wangkat**tjinga**.  
wangka+tjinga  
talk+CAUS  
*Cause someone to talk!*
- 5.3.3. Wiyalt**tjinga**.  
wiya+l+tjinga  
none+EPTH+CAUS  
*Cause it to disappear!*
- 5.3.4. Mirrungkapa                      wakarnu              punkat**tjingarnu**.  
mirru+ngka+pa                      waka+rnu              punka+tjinga+rnu  
spearthrower+INST+AUGM      spear+PAST      fall\_down+PAST  
*With the spear thrower, he speared him and caused him to fall over.* (Wangkatja Dictionary)
- 5.3.5. Watingku              yurrit**tjingarnu**.  
wati+ngku              yurri+tjinga+rnu  
man+ERG              move+CAUS+PAST  
*The man caused it to move.*

- 5.3.6. Ngaaly**tjingala** palunya!  
 ngaaly+tjinga+la palunya  
 breath+CAUS+IMP 3SG\_focus\_marker  
*Cause him to breathe!* (WNTAC)

#### 5.4. -tju

- 5.4.1. Murtipup**atju**.  
 murti+pupa+tju  
 knee+kneel+CAUS  
*Cause someone to kneel!*

- 5.4.2. Ngalkal**atju**.  
 ngalka+la+tju  
 hurry+IMP+CAUS  
*Cause someone to hurry!*

- 5.4.3. Tjiwarr**tju**.  
 tjiwarr+tju  
 slip+CAUS  
*Cause someone to slip over!*

- 5.4.4. Tjirta tjungkurni pirni kanmarr  
 tjirta tjungkurni pirni kanmarr  
 bird small many quiet

nyangu pukurltu nyarlpi  
 nya+ngu pukurl+tu nyarlpi  
 see+PAST happy+ERG wings

warat**junu** yikarringu wala  
 wara+tju+nu yikarri+ngu wala  
 long+CAUS+PAST laugh+PAST again

yingkangu tjana wala pukurl  
 yingka+ngu tjana wala pukurl  
 sing+PAST 3PL again happy

katungka yungarra paarpungku.  
 katu+ngka yungara paarpu+ngku  
 high+LOC oneself fly+FUT

*The small birds were quiet and happy to see their wings were caused to be long, they laughed and sang again and since then they are happy to fly in the sky flying on their own.*

(Why The Emu Can't Fly)

## 6. Negation

### 6.1. -munu

6.1.1. Kulimunu wanti!  
kuli+munu wanti  
listen+NEG leave  
*Don't listen to it, leave it!*

6.1.2. Parltjamunurna.  
parltja+munu+rna  
full+NEG+1SG  
*I'm not full.* (Speaker 1)

## 7. Directional

### 7.1. -kati

-kati is glossed as verb suffix *towards*.

7.1.1. Nyinakati                      ngayula                      tawarra.  
nyina+kati                      ngayula                      tawarra  
sit+towards                      1SG                      together  
*Sit down towards me.*

## 8. Continuous

### 8.1. -ma

8.1.1. Ma-kukurrma.  
ma\_kukurr+ma  
away\_travel+CONT  
*To travel continuously.*

8.1.2. Ngaalyma.  
ngaaly+ma  
breathe+CONT  
*To breathe continuously.* (KLCA, 2008)



**Table of Wangkatja Verb suffixes\***

<b>Imperative</b>	-la	-wa	-rri/-rra	null class ∅	
<b>Past tense suffixes</b>	-nu	-ngu	-rnu	-kati	
<b>Present tense suffixes</b>	-nanyi -rra class	-nganyi -wa class	-ranyi, -rranyi -la class	-nyi	-rni
<b>Present continuous tense suffixes</b>	-ngkulanyi	-kulanyi	-lanyi		
<b>Future tense suffixes</b>	-ku	-nku	-lku	-ngku	
<b>Future tense demonstrators</b>	kujurnu	kurtu			
<b>Serial</b>	-ra				
<b>Purposive</b>	-kitja	-tjaku			
<b>Desirative</b>	-tjaku				
<b>Habitual</b>	-payi				
<b>Negation</b>	-munu				
<b>Causative</b>	-ma-	-tjinga	-ka	-tju	
<b>Continuous</b>	-ma				
<b>Prefixes</b>	ma- <i>away from the speaker</i>	marlarr- <i>behind</i>	parra- <i>around, about</i>	wati- <i>across</i>	
<b>Verbalisers</b>	-ma	-rri / -arri			

\* This table does not indicate the verb classes of the verb suffixes.

## Conclusion

The Wangkatja 2025 corpus does not have sufficient data to determine the verb classes for Serial, Purposive, Desirative, Characteristic, Negation, Causative, Directional, and Continuous verb suffixes. Further analysis is needed to identify other possible conjugations and variants.

## References

Wangkatja Dictionary, Jaqueline Spurling and Lola Jones, 2015

Shaneane Weldon, A Day Out Bush With Grandmother and Grandfather, Women's Book Project, 2018

Nancy Gordon, Chainsawnya, 2007

Basic Wangkatja Grammar, Karlkurla Language & Culture Aboriginal Corporation, (KLCA), 2008

Wapurti Victor Polak, Kupi-Kupi Purilkanya, 2008

Tjukurrpa, Why The Emu Can't Fly

Tjukurrpa, Why The Goanna and The Lizard Are Not Talking to Each Other Today

Tjukurrpa, The Magpie and The Crow

Tjukurrpa, Why the Kangaroo Hops

Tjukurrpa, Why the Crow Asks For Forgiveness

Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta Aboriginal Corporation (WNTAC), intransitive verb classes.

Speaker 1