



TROY REYNOLDS - GALCAC

THE NGADJU VERB: A FRESH APPROACH



Goldfields
Aboriginal Language Centre

Wangka kanyira ngalipirniku
PRESERVING OUR LANGUAGES FOR ALL OF US

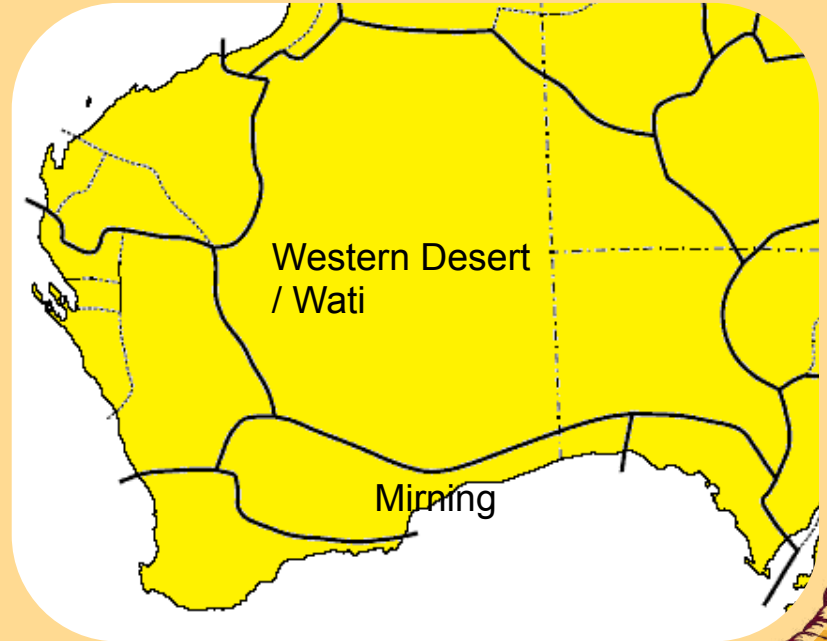
FIRST NATION LANGUAGE
CONFERENCE

LANGUAGE 21 - 23
SOVEREIGNTY OCT 2025



Ngadju

- Language and people of the Southern Goldfields of Western Australia
- From the Mirning Language Family
- Related to Kaalamaya and Mirniny





Ngadju Verb-Forms

yankun

wijanu

nangunta

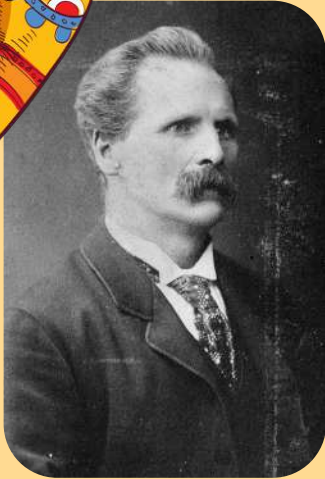
Three Ngadju Sentences

Purtayi	ngaju	kunirti	kuyanarti	wijanu.
purtayi	ngaju	kuni+rti	kuyana+rti	wijanu
	1SG	DIST+ALL	berry_sp+ALL	move_quickly+?

Jurrka	ngajungarri	kanka	yuulurti	yankun.
jurrka	ngaju+ngarri	kanka	yuulu+rti	yankun
south	1SG+PL		here+ALL	go+?

Ngaju	pala	nyinanangukin	wartu-wartu	matali	nyinalpan	nangukarran.
ngaju	pala	nyina+nangukin	wartu+wartu	mata+li	nyinalpan	nangukarran
1SG		sit+see+?	eye+eye	3+PL	sit+?	see+?

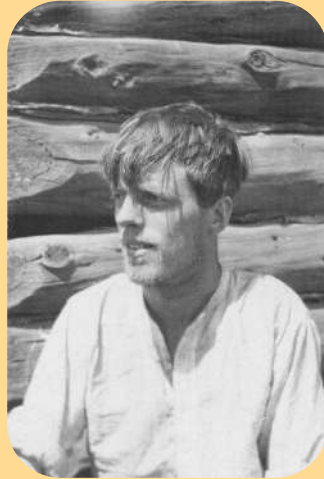
Early Research



1896
Richard
Helms



Early c20th
Daisy
Bates



1940
Norman
Tindale

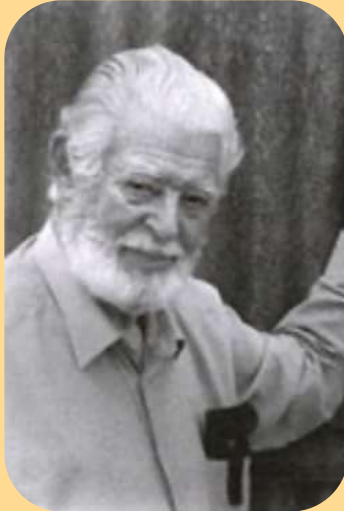


1957
Geoff
O'Grady



1968
Wilf
Douglas

Major Research



1970
Carl-Georg von
Brandenstein

➤ 1980
Grammar and wordlist

➤ 1982
88 sentences



Von Brandenstein's Participle

Present: **Nguntu yankun**

You go
'You going one'

Future: **Nguntu jila yankun**

You will go
'You eventually going one'

Past: **Nguntu kumpa yankun**

You went
'You already going one'

Potential: **Nguntu purta yankun**

You intend to go / You might go
'You soon/later going one'



Von Brandenstein's Participle

Singular:	-ki-	ngaju yanku <u>kin</u>	<i>I go</i>
Dual:	-pi-	ngajuwuja yanku <u>pin</u>	<i>We two go</i>
Trial:	-pirri-	ngajupin yanku <u>pirrin</u>	<i>We three go</i>
Plural:	-karra-, -ngarra-, -jarra-, -lpa-	ngajungarri yanku <u>karran</u> ngajungarri nyinalpan	<i>We all go</i> <i>We all go</i>

von Brandenstein's Participle System



Purtayi	ngaju	kunirti	kuyanarti	wijanu.
purtayi	ngaju	kuni+rti	kuyana+rti	wija+nu
soon	1SG	DIST+ALL	berry_sp+ALL	move_quickly+PART

Soon I drive to these kuyan-berries

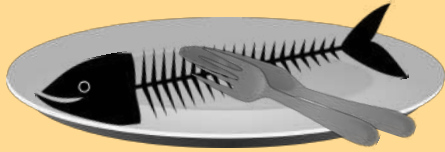
Jurrka	ngajungarri	kanka	yuulurti	yankun.
jurrka	ngaju+ngarri	kanka	yuulu+rti	yanku+n
south	1SG+PL	recent	here+ALL	go+PART

We came south here recently.

Ngaju	pala	nyinanangukin	wartu-wartu	matali	nyinalpan	nangukarran.
ngaju	pala	nyina+nangu+ki+n	wartu+wartu	mata+li	nyina+lpa+n	nangu+karra+n
1SG		sit+see+SG+PART	eye+eye	3+PL	sit+PL+PART	see+PL+PART

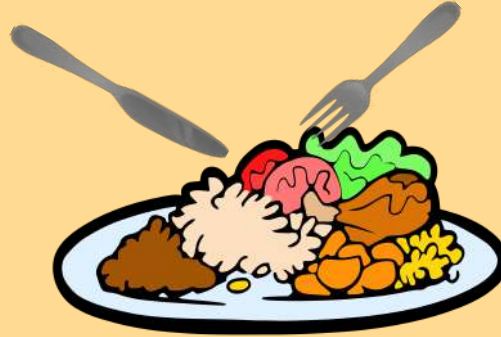
I just watch watchfully as they sit and look.

Tense



I ate

Past



I am eating

Present



I will eat

Future

before now



now



after now

Western Desert Tenses

ya- *to go*



yanu

Past

before now



yankula

Present

now



yanku

Future

after now



Aspect

I ate dinner

Perfect

Suggests a beginning or end of the action

Perfect

I ate dinner

Imperfect

I was eating dinner

I was eating dinner

Imperfect

Focuses on the middle of the action

~~X~~ and I am still eating now

✓ and I am still eating now

Aspect vs Tense

Imperfect

Past

I was eating

Present

I am eating

Future

I will be eating

before
now



now



after
now

Perfect

Past

I ate

Present

I eat

Future

I will eat

I will be eating

Devious Doppelgängers

Ngadju verb root	English	hypothetical morphemic breakdown	hypothetical morphemic gloss
junu-	<i>talk, speak, tell</i>	*ju+nu	*talk+PAST
nangu-	<i>see</i>	*na+ngu	*see+PAST
kuwana-	<i>hear, listen, understand</i>	*kuwa+na	*hear+PRES
nyina-	<i>sit, be, live</i>	*nyi+na	*sit+PRES
ngarlku-	<i>eat</i>	*ngarl+ku	*eat+FUT
yanku-	<i>go, come</i>	*yan+ku	*go+FUT

Western Desert Bound Pronouns

First

-rna

yankurna

I will go

Second

-n

yankun

You will go

Second

-nta

nangunta

will see you

Third

-

yanku

It/she/he will goes

First

-la

yankula

We will go

Third

-ya

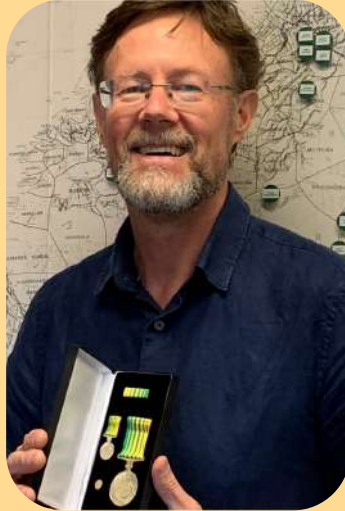
yankuya

They will go

Devious Doppelgängers

Ngadju verb-form	hypothetical morphemic breakdown	hypothetical morphemic gloss	hypothetical English translation
junun	*ju+nu+n	*talk+PAST+2SG_SBJ	<i>You talked, spoke, told</i>
nangun	*na+ngu+n	*see+PAST+2SG_SBJ	<i>You saw</i>
kuwanan	*kuwa+na+n	*hear+PRES+2SG_SBJ	<i>You hear, listen, understand</i>
nyinan	*nyi+na+n	*sit+PRES+2SG_SBJ	<i>You sit, are, live</i>
ngarlkun	*ngarl+ku+n	*eat+FUT+2SG_SBJ	<i>You ate</i>
yankun	*yan+ku+n	*go+FUT+2SG_SBJ	<i>You went, came</i>

Major Research



n.d.

Steven Powell

➤ n.d. Critical review

2008

Mr. Graham and
Doug Marmion

➤ 2008 Grammar notes

Graham, Marmion, and Roberts' Tense System

Purtayi	ngaju	kunirti	kuyanarti	wijanu.
purtayi	ngaju	kuni+rti	kuyana+rti	wija+nu
1SG		DIST+ALL	berry_sp+ALL	move_quickly+PST

I went to those Wild cucumbers.

Jurrka	ngajungarri	kanka	yuulurti	yankun.
jurrka	ngaju+ngarri	kanka	yuulu+rti	yanku+n
south	1SG+PL		here+ALL	go+N_PST

We come south here.

Ngaju	pala	nyinanangukin	wartu-wartu	matali	nyinalpan	nangukarran.
ngaju	pala	nyina+nangu+ki+n	wartu+wartu	mata+li	nyina+lpa+n	nangu+karra+n
1SG		sit+see+?+N_PST	eye+eye	3+PL	sit+?+N_PST	see+?+N_PST

I sit/sat and watch/watched them intently as they sit/sat and look/looked around.

The Aspect Solution

Purtayi	ngaju	kunirti	kuyanarti	wijanu.
purtayi	ngaju	kuni+rti	kuyana+rti	wija+nu
PROSP	1SG	DIST+ALL	berry_sp+ALL	move_quickly+PFV

Soon I will go to those Wild cucumbers.

Jurrka	ngajungarri	kanka	yuulurti	yankun.
jurrka	ngaju+ngarri	kanka	yuulu+rti	yanku+n
south	1SG+PL	REC	here+ALL	go+PFV

We came here to the south recently.

Ngaju	pala	nyinanangukin	wartu-wartu	matali	nyinalpan	nangukarran.
ngaju	pala	nyina+nangu+kin	wartu+wartu	mata+li	nyina+lpan	nangu+karran
1SG	just	sit+see+SG_IPFV	eye+eye	3+PL	sit+PL_IPFV	see+PL_IPFV

I was just watching them intently as they were sitting and looking around.

Ngadju Verbal Classes

	<u>Class</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Tokens</u>
➤	N-Class Vast majority of verbs, yanku- , nangu- , etc	-n	124
➤	NU-Class Small class of three verbs: wija- , paja- , wuuna-	-nu	23
➤	NG-Class Small class of three verbs: kati- , katarri- , marni-	-ng	9



The Ngadju Relative Tense suffix **-nta**

Ngaju nyakinya munta ngaju nyinnta munta kalurru yurrkakin.

After sitting here I'm really shivering with the cold.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970

Ngaju too purta mantarlpungu munta, jujupanya nyinnta purlpa yaanjan.

I am really tired too, because I have no dogs and no rifle here.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970

Manjali ngarlkunta munta purta nyinanu wamu ngarrin kurpalyu.

After eating and sitting here in camp I will lie down and then sleep.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970



The Importance of Temporal Descriptors

Ngaju	yayi	yankun	yarna	don't want to.
Ngaju	yayi	yanku+n	yarna	don't want to.
1SG	now	go+PFV	NEG	don't want to

I am not going right now, I don't want to.

Nguntu	kanka	muju	yankun.
Nguntu	kanka	muju	yanku+n
2SG	recent	away	go+PFV

You went there recently.

Matayi	yaparti	yurlu	yankun.
mata+yi	yaparti	yurlu	yanku+n
3+SBJ	tomorrow	herego+PFV	

It will come here tomorrow.

Ngadju Time Descriptors

mawun

Discontinuous Past, *used to*

Ngaju mawun kajaku paaru ngaju ngalpa nyaki nyinajunukin maya.

I was little back then, but now I am an adult and just sit and say this.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970b



Ngadju Time Descriptors

kumpa

Perfect Aspect, *already*

Ngaju nyinanangukin, tuuka yuulu kumpa kanka.

I was sitting and watching on the hill here recently.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970b

Ngadju Time Descriptors

kanka

Recent Past, *the other day, a short while ago, recently, yesterday, before*

Kumpa ngaju kanka mijalta yankun wangaralayi yamurti wangara ngalpa yaalykin.
The other day I went down close to the water where the sea was roaring.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970



Ngadju Time Descriptors

yayi

*now, these days,
today, present*

Purta ngaju kuwanakin junku nyakinya yayi.

Later I will listen back to what I say now.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970





purta

Prospective Aspect, *soon afterwards, later on, then*

Purta matayi nguntuwarti parrunu jila junukin.
Later it will be saying it again to you.

Ngurni (Dick Donaldson), Coolgardie, W.A., 21st of July 1970

Ngadju Time Descriptors

karra

Remote past, *a long time ago*

Wanti kaja karra junukin nurrutan matayi ngarnka ngalpa.

Long ago a little boy was telling me that he saw them there on a big cliff.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970b

Ngadju Time Descriptors

yaparti

tomorrow

Purta ngaju junku, juntikin yaparti.

Later I will talk about it, I will have to talk about it tomorrow.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970

Ngadju Time Descriptors

jila

Desiderative Mood, *wishes
and desires*

Ngaju wanna naku all julayangarrinya nanjarr yapurru Warnarntarrala kuninyala jula ngarlkun yapurru paninya.

I want to visit all the penguins down in Warnarntarra and eat the meat that is down there.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970

Ngadju Time Descriptors

purta mawun

Prospective Discontinuous Past,
*was going to happen but did not,
and is no longer relevant.*

Purta mawun ngaju marnu purlpakatalu ngawurrkin.

I was going to look for them and get them with a rifle.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970b

Ngadju Time Descriptors

kumpa

Remote Discontinuous Past,
*was going to happen but did not,
and is no longer relevant.*

Karra mawun ngalpurru kaja ngalpurru paru yaanjan.

A long time ago there used to be a lot of children, but not anymore.

Gerdie Newman, Esperance, W.A., 6th of August 1970b

Three Ngadju Sentences

Purtayi ngaju kunirti kuyanarti wijanu.
purtayi ngaju kuni+rti kuyana+rti wija+nu
PROSP 1SG DIST+ALL berry_sp+ALL move_quickly+PFV
Soon I will go to those Wild cucumbers.

Jurrka ngajungarri kanka yuulurti yankun.
jurrka ngaju+ngarri kanka yuulu+rti yanku+n
south 1SG+PL REC here+ALL go+PFV
We came here to the south recently.

Ngaju pala nyinanangukin wartu-wartu matali nyinalpan nangukarran.
ngaju pala nyina+nangu+kin wartu+wartu mata+li nyina+lpan nangu+karran
1SG just sit+see+SG_IPFV eye+eye 3+PL sit+PL_IPFV see+PL_IPFV
I was just watching them intently as they were sitting and looking around.

In Summary

Perfective	-n	yankun <i>gone</i>
	-nu	pajanu <i>bitten</i>
	-ng	kaning <i>gone</i>
Single Imperfective	-kin	nangukin <i>one looking</i>
Dual Imperfective	-pin	nyinapin <i>two sitting</i>
Trial Imperfective	-pirrin	yankupirrin <i>three going</i>
Plural Imperfective	-karran	wijakarran <i>many running</i>
	-ngarran	nangungarran <i>many looking</i>
	-ngarrin	kartakalngarrin <i>many cut off from</i>
	-lpan	nyinalpan <i>many sitting</i>
PRIOR	-nta	ngarlkunta <i>after eating</i>



THANK YOU

Troy Reynolds

LINGUIST2@WANGKA.COM.AU

Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal Corporation

www.wangka.com.au

(08) 9021 3788



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