



## Yarnuping 10 – Language

Language is an often-researched topic at the Aboriginal Heritage Office (AHO). Many requests come in to provide bush tucker names, names for corporate buildings and rooms, names for parks and reserves, gardens, sporting comps, school buildings, playgrounds and school houses. Often the requests will ask for direct translations.

One fact that we must remember is that the Sydney Aboriginal Language is a finite collection of words and sometimes there are no words that reflect your request.

Please watch this Black Comedy episode to reflect in a fun way on this fact.

**Black Comedy Series 2 Episode 5 Starts 8:35 mins in**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-EQ\\_DSWiRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-EQ_DSWiRc)

## Captain Watkin Tench – reflecting on Language

*How easily people, unused to speak the same language, mistake each other, everyone knows. We had lived almost three years at Port Jackson (for more than half of which period natives had resided with us) before we knew that the word 'beeal', signified 'no', and not 'good', in which latter sense we had always used it without suspecting that we were wrong; and even without being corrected by those with whom we talked daily. The cause of our error was this. The epithet 'weeree', signifying 'bad', we knew; and as the use of this word and its opposite afford the most simple form of denoting consent or disapprobation to uninstructed Indians, in order to find out their word for 'good', when Arabanoo was first brought among us, we used jokingly to say that any thing, which he liked was 'weeree', in order to provoke him to tell us that it was good. When we said 'weeree', he answered 'beeal', which we translated and adopted for 'good'; whereas he meant no more than simply to deny our inference, and say 'no'--it is not bad. After this, it cannot be thought extraordinary that the little vocabulary inserted in Mr. Cook's account of this part of the world should appear defective--even were we not to take in the great probability of the dialects at Endeavour River and Van Diemen's land differing from that spoken at Port Jackson. And it remains to be proved that the animal called here 'patagaram' is not there called 'kangaroo'.*

**Captain Watkin Tench, *The Explorers* Tim Flannery page 68 – 69**

It is a great responsibility to provide language to Council, Community, Schools and Businesses. That is why the AHO relies on one of our most valuable resources.

## Jakelin Troy – The Sydney Language



Jakelin Troy Sydney University

PhD(ANU); BAHons(1st class)(Sydney); GradDipEducation(Canberra)

*Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*

*Research Portfolio*

*“My research interests are currently focussed on documenting, describing and reviving Indigenous languages. I have a new focus on the Indigenous languages of Pakistan, including Saraiki of the Punjab and Torwali of Swat. I have two Australian Research Council Discovery Projects one with Prof John Maynard on the history of Aboriginal missions and reserves in eastern Australia and the history of Aboriginal people who were not institutionalised. The other DP is about the practise of 'corroboree' by Aboriginal people in the 'assimilation period' of the mid C20 in Australia. I am interested in the use of Indigenous research methodologies and community engaged research practises. I am Aboriginal Australian and my community is Ngarigu of the Snowy Mountains in south eastern Australia.”*

Jakelin has researched the Sydney Language and all its resources for many years.  
Below are some of the facts about our Sydney Language.

### Language Collection

When the First Fleet arrived in Port Jackson they wished to learn the language to aid communication with the Aboriginal people to facilitate their invasion and occupation of the country. They conducted the kidnapping of Arabanoo, Bennelong and Colebee for this aim. The word lists they created, especially from Lieutenant Dawes, are what remains of the Sydney Language. The next 40 years brought disease, death, war, displacement, genocide and the near total control of introduced social policies that followed included the prohibition of the speaking and teaching of Language. By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century many people were speaking pidgin English.

*"By slow degrees we began mutually to be pleased with, and to understand each other. Language, indeed, is out of the question; but at the time of writing this nothing but a barbarous mixture of English with Port Jackson dialect is spoken by either party; and it must be added, that even in this the natives have the advantage, comprehending with much greater aptness than we can pretend to, every thing they hear us say".....*

**Captain David Collins 1796 *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Volume 2* pp. 543 - 544**

In her research on the Sydney Language Jakelin collected and analysed the Sydney Language from the writings of many people.

*"The Sydney Language is rarely mentioned by any writers other than the officers of the First Fleet. It is very likely that given a choice between using the more easily acquired New South Wales Pidgin or the complex Sydney Language colonists chose the easy option. No researcher turned their attention to the Sydney Language again until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the language is likely to have been functionally dead"*

**Jakelin Troy *The Sydney Language* pp 18**

### **Key Suppliers of The Sydney Language and their wordlists (analysed by Jakelin Troy)**

**William Dawes**, Officer of the British Marines, age 25

Anonymous Sources probably -

**Arthur Phillip**, Governor of the Colony, age 49

**John Hunter**, Second Captain of the *Sirius*, a Scotsman, age 50

**David Collins**, Captain of the Marines, age 31

**Phillip Gidley King**, Second Lieutenant of the *Sirius*, age 29

Lists in King's journal for which he gave as the source **Collins**,

**Phillip and Hunter**

**Ralph Clark**, Second Lieutenant of the Marines, age 33

**Newton Fowell**, Midshipman on the *Sirius*, 19 years old

**John Hunter** - *The Hunter sketchbook*

**Richard Johnson**, Chaplain to the colony, age 32

**William Dawes** on his wordlists. - words are attributed to Johnson

**R.H. Mathews** – ethnographic research published in 1903

**Anon 'An Officer'** (1789)

**Daniel Paine**, The journal of Daniel Paine, 1794-1797

**William Ridley**, using as a source John Rowley, 1875 *Language of the Georges River, Cowpasture*

**John Rowley**, Scots Church Minister – Source – *Report of a Journey Along the Condamine, Barwan and Namoi Rivers*, in 1856 published *Gurre Kamilaroi: or Kamilaroi Sayings*.

**James Edward Smith** (1804-5) Botanist, collected Botanical works from Banks and others.

**Daniel Southwell**, Masters Mate, Word List from Port Jackson.

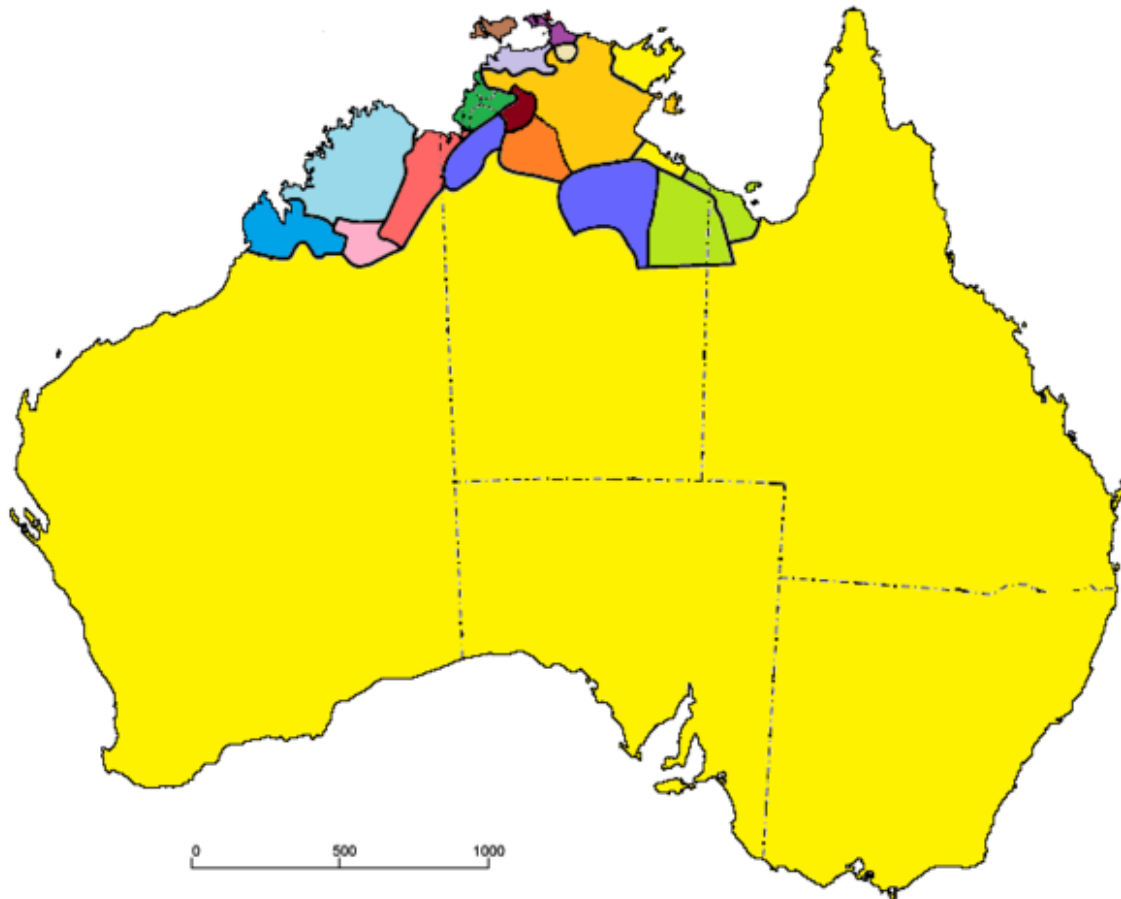
**Watkin Tench**, Captain Lieutenant of the Marines, 30 years old, wordlists

**Thomas Watling**, Convict and Artist, Scotsman, 25 years old.



William Dawes Notebook

Most Australian languages belong to the Pama–Nyungan family, a family accepted by most linguists. There exists a small group of languages, in the Top End of Australia, who have no relationship with any other language. They are simply called the "Non-Pama–Nyungan" languages.



Pama- Nyungan Languages in Yellow

## Learning the Sydney Language

William Dawes wrote the '*William Dawes Notebooks*'. This is an invaluable resource. In these *Notebooks* he designed his own orthographic table for the Sydney Language. He also learnt much of his language from the young Aboriginal woman Patyegarang. His Notebooks are very helpful as it gives us tense, grammar and structure of language.

[https://www.dnathan.com/eprints/dnathan\\_et al\\_2009\\_dawes.pdf](https://www.dnathan.com/eprints/dnathan_et al_2009_dawes.pdf)

Jakelin gives us some grammatical notes. The root words can have 'suffixes' added, that is, a word added to the end of the root word.

Eg: gamai-birung – a wound from a spear

Wadi-birung – a wound from a stick

## Language – Connection to Country, story, song and dance

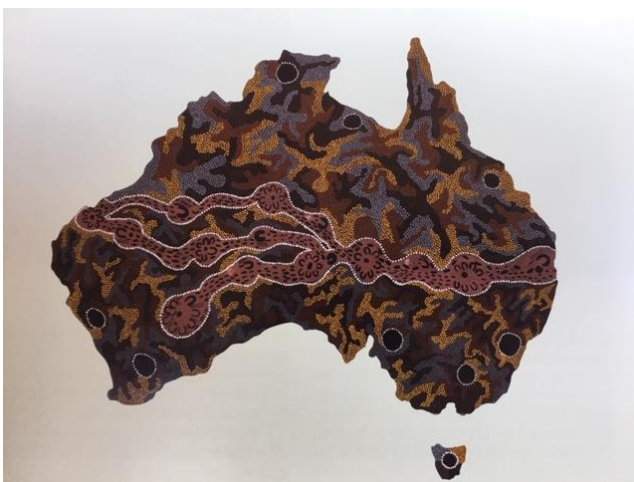
Language is connected to Country, to story, song and dance, this connection was not seen by the First Fleet. With the taking of the Language we also had our song-lines and our spiritual connection to the ancestors' dreamtime stories taken. Many times I am asked for the dreamtime stories of Sydney. Most stories we have in Sydney found their way here from other community and language groups who made Sydney their home. When I go to the Libraries in the schools and look at their Aboriginal book collection, most books are the dreamtime stories of the Top End. Although not wrong, it is important to state the Country where the books come from and who wrote the story. When a story is told outside of the Country it belongs too, then it is respected as an Aboriginal Dreaming Story from that area, however within its Country it remains a significant, sacred Dreaming story. It is important to give recognition to the origins of the Dreaming Story. Stories not acknowledged in books should be questioned for their authenticity.

Some stories recorded by non-Aboriginal people over the years have lost their full translations. In some early books crude representations of stories were attempted to be transcribed. Some of these contained information dealing with sacred cultural practices. If in doubt seek advice from the Aboriginal people the story is relevant to.

### Seven Sisters Dreaming

I had the good fortune to see the *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters Exhibition*. This was an exhibition that came from the language groups; the Martu, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjara and Yakunytjatjara.

This was an Aboriginal-led exhibition that took visitors on a journey along the epic Seven Sisters Dreaming tracks, through art, Indigenous voices and language, multimedia and other immersive displays. The Songlines track the Seven Sisters journey along the Ancestral routes of the Seven Sisters as, pursued relentlessly by a sorcerer, they fled across deserts and the landscape where they left their songs, dances, special language, geographical landforms and water resources.



Seven Sisters Songline 1994 by  
Josephine Mick Ninuku Arts

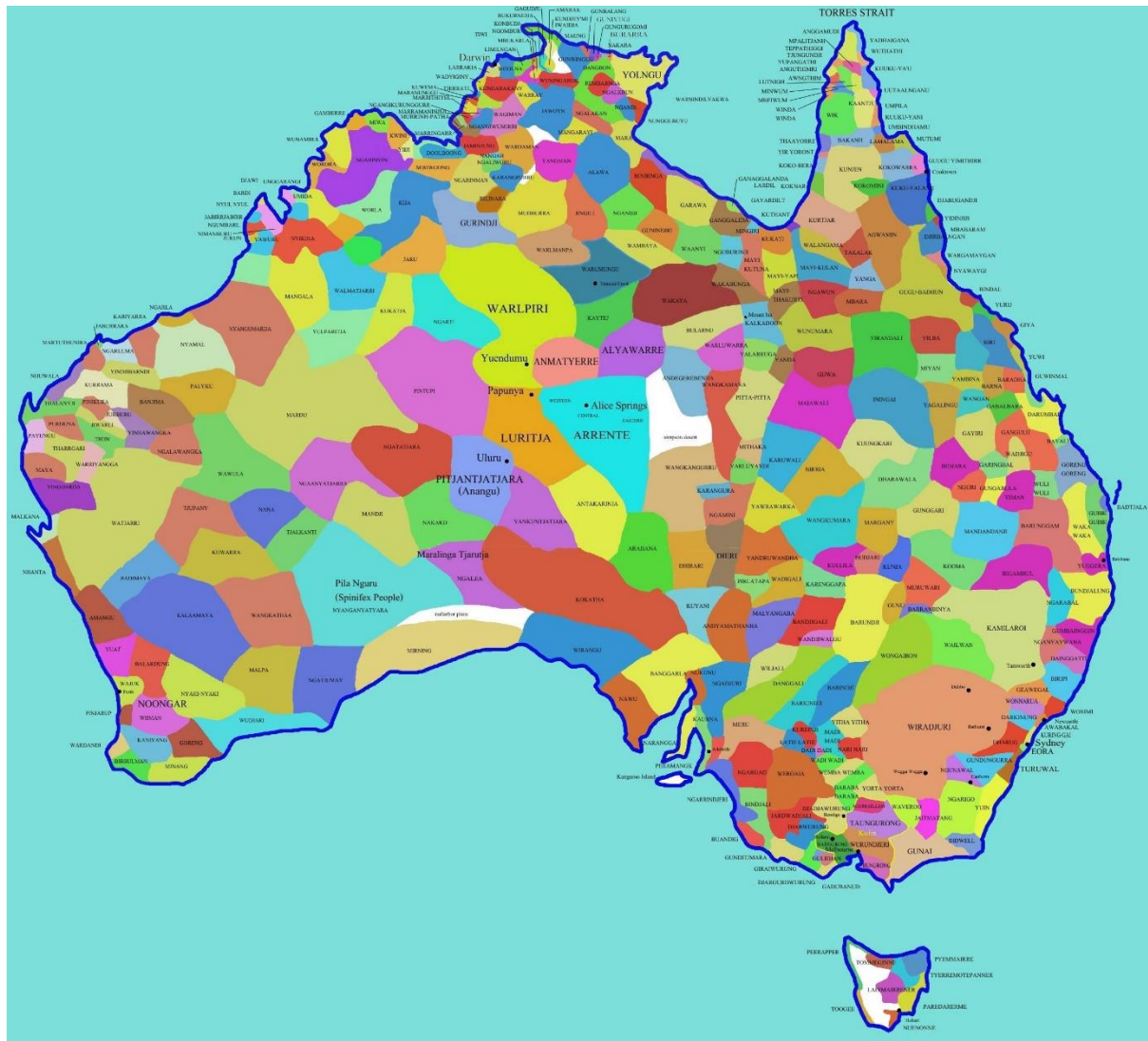
*"The Seven Sisters Tjukupa, our Dreaming creation law, is very important to us, we hold it strongly and teach it to the generations that come after us. This Tjukurpa travels through many peoples Country: the Martu, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjara and Yakunytjatjara lands. This really big Tjukurpa belongs to many people in the north, east, south and west and the centre. Many people tell this story in different languages."*

**Inawinytji Williamson** Senior law woman and traditional owner of the Seven Sisters songline, Pitjantjara and Yakunytjatjara lands.



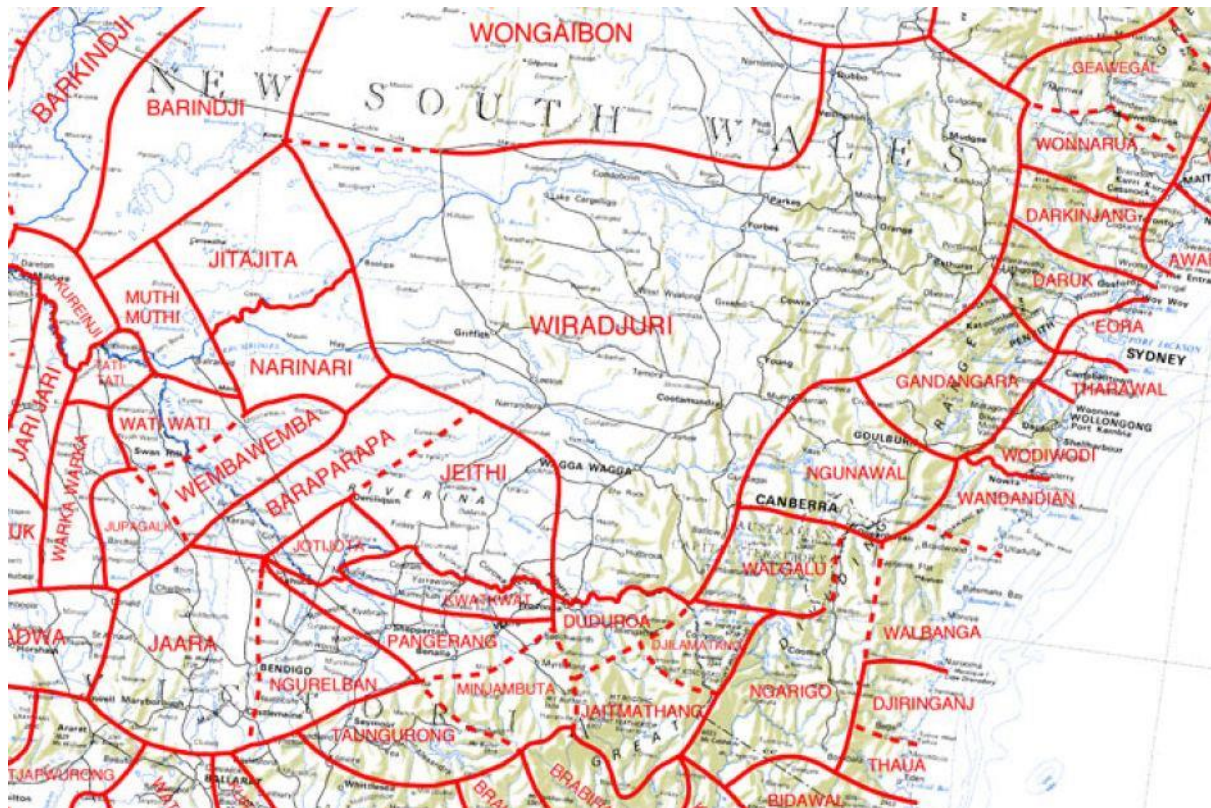
Jakelin Troy's research has led to the number of Aboriginal languages. She has said there are 400 Languages and thousands of dialects

Below is a map from AIATSIS. There are other maps eg; Norman Tindale's 1974 map. They all differ, with many errors, but following colonization this is the best guess we can have. The Language names of Sydney were found to be created by historians as no name was ever given to the language. See 'Filling a Void' at the end of this Yarningup.



AIATSIS MAP: Languages groups that are in Australia.  
Maps are never perfect and are the best idea we have

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>



Tindale's 1974 map of the NSW area

The AHO has compiled a research document on the use of the word Kuringgai / Guringai / Ku-ring-gai to denote a Language group. This is a good document to read to just how colonization affected the Language names of Sydney.

<https://www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/filling-a-void-history-of-word-guringai/>

## Conclusions from 'Filling a Void'

*In terms of northern Sydney, it seems clear from the available evidence that the early Europeans did not record a discrete and widely understood name for the language or tribe of the area nor for other parts of the region. The first use of the word 'Guringai' is over a hundred years after the arrival of the First Fleet. Kuringgai was a term created by Fraser in 1892 to define a super-tribe that he claimed stretched from the Macleay River to south of Sydney. This 'Kuringgai' actually encompassed a number of subordinate groups – smaller, more appropriate divisions of the Aboriginal clan structure and language, including the Gringai (Guringay) tribe in the Hunter River area. Fraser's initial definition was rejected by later researchers such as Tindale (1974). Tindale divided the area up into groups which were named with words coined by 19th century anthropologists (e.g. Daruk) or modified from their original meaning (e.g. Eora). Capell adopted the term Kuringgai 80 years after Fraser to identify an Aboriginal group which he defined as extending from as far north as Brisbane Waters to the north shore of Port Jackson. More recent research suggests that this language group was more localised to the Broken Bay district and should more appropriately be defined as Karikal or Garigal. The Aboriginal people on the north shore of Sydney towards*

*Broken Bay were most likely speakers of the Sydney language. There is a move away from using words like Eora, Dharug, Guringai among some of those involved but still a sense by others that these words now represent a part of Aboriginal culture in the 21st century. It seems clear that with each new piece of research the issue remains confusing with layer upon layer of interpretation based on the same lack of original information. This is exacerbated where writers make up names for their own problem-solving convenience. In the absence of factual evidence, it seems the temptation to fill the void with something else becomes very strong and this does not appear to be done in consultation with Aboriginal people who then inherit the problem.*