

THE OCCURRENCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF LONG VOWELS IN PILBARA LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

Most Australian languages feature long vowels and they manifest in all but one or two Pilbara languages. This paper presents a brief summary of each of the 25 Pilbara languages surveyed for long vowel behaviour. The number of long vowels found in each corpus varies considerably throughout the region, but some generalisations about their distribution can be made at this stage. Firstly, a greater number of long vowels are more common in the southern Pilbara languages, and secondly, even where languages feature them heavily, long vowels constitute no more than 10% of any corpus. Thirdly, vowel lengthening is predominantly a feature of the first syllable of a word or morpheme which is also the place of primary stress in most Pilbara languages. In most languages, they maintain the preferred word structure.