

Ecology of the endangered dialect Wanyjirra between Jaru, Gurindji and Kriol

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Abstract

Wanyjirra is an endangered, little-known language. It was traditionally spoken around Inverway Station, East Victoria River District, NT. Wanyjirra people had been moving around cattle stations and neighbouring communities and been in contact with other people, e.g. Gurindji and Jaru people. Now they no longer live in their traditional land and stay in surrounding communities or towns. So Wanyjirra people and their descendants are multilingual and tend to speak Kriol, dominant indigenous languages in these areas or Wanyjirra influenced by those other indigenous languages.

Since the Wanyjirra language shares many properties with surrounding languages, Gurindji, Jaru (and also others), in terms of vocabulary, phonological and grammatical aspects, it is often treated as a dialect of either Gurindji or Jaru. However, the differences from other languages are also recognised, at least my language consultants who currently live in the traditional Jaru area though they sometimes mix up these languages and code-switching to Kriol often happens. Moreover, the use and features of Wanyjirra language seems to be different among individuals and in time based on comparing with old materials.

In this presentation, using different linguistic properties as examples, I will look at how this language has been changing in culturally and linguistically complex societies. Also I will show similarities and differences between Wanyjirra, Jaru and Gurindji and how Wanyjirra speakers recognise these differences.