

# The TIWI Dictionary Project

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The Tiwi language is an Australian Aboriginal language, spoken by the inhabitants of Bathurst and Melville Islands, off the north western coast of Australia. The Tiwi language is not directly related to any other language, though it has similar features to the languages spoken on the Australian mainland. However, the issues involved in producing a dictionary are relevant to similar situations all over the world. Over the 90 years since regular and prolonged contact with Europeans and the English language the Tiwi language has undergone considerable change. The younger people (including those in their forties) no longer speak the hard traditional language but a "half-and-half" language which, in my considered opinion, is a creolized form of Tiwi, with many vocabulary items from English and using a periphrastic verb phrase instead of the complex polysynthetic traditional verb forms. There is a periphrastic verb phrase present in the traditional language as well as the normal inflected verb, but the younger people extend the class of traditional "free form" verbs to include English loan verbs. (See the examples in Appendix 1.)

However, the "half-and-half" has a very low status and many people do not wish to see it used in writing or in any formal setting, such as in church services. This has influenced the style of Tiwi used and taught in the bilingual education program in the school on Bathurst Island. The style used is a modified form of the traditional language, using basically traditional verb forms but without the full complexities of the traditional inflectional system. This style has been named modern Tiwi.

The use of varying styles has implications for dictionary making - what styles should be included in a dictionary? This can only be decided with reference to the intended audience. In the computer database that I have been building over the years I have included all styles with a note as to the particular style of an entry (where there is a difference) and cross-references to appropriate entries in the other styles. The lexical database (an ASCII text file with backslash codes marking the different fields) has been devised so that different dictionaries for different users or purposes could be culled from it. It contains many fields which would not necessarily appear in a printed dictionary.

Recently I have been given a grant to produce a dictionary for use in the school. The school wishes this to be aimed at upper primary and secondary students but also suitable for use by the wider community. The nature of the traditional language, the change in the language, the sociolinguistic situation and the audience for which the dictionary is intended, are all influencing the base form of the lexical item to appear in the school dictionary, the type of material to be included in the entries, as well as the structure and layout of the dictionary.

The desire to try and keep or reestablish a "pure" form of Tiwi has led to an overreaction (particularly by those employed in the school) to the use of even well established and "Tiwiized" loans in writing. This poses the question of what to do with English loans. Do we include them in the body of the dictionary, do we ignore them or do we include them in an appendix?

The last suggestion is the one agreed upon as being more acceptable to the people in general. This means that **pirayimani** 'school boy' (from English 'prayer man') would not be included as an entry in the main body of the dictionary even though it is a long established and Tiwized loan.

Another problem is what form to use as the base lexical form - one with the traditional pronunciation or modern form - where there is a difference. Where this is simply a difference between the use of a retroflex consonant in traditional vs a non-retroflex in modern (-**angurlimayi** vs -**angulimayi** 'walk') the modern Tiwi form is used - with the traditional form noted. However, where there is quite a drastic change in pronunciation by young people and this change is not accepted in writing by many people then the traditional form is used (such as traditional **ngarra** 'he' vs modern **arra**, traditional **awungarruwu** 'over there' vs modern **awarruwu**) with a note about the modern form.

The biggest problem has been working out how to represent the verbs. The basic meaning is carried by the verb root which, as you have seen from the above examples, is not word-initial and may be preceded by a number of prefixes (as well as having a number of suffixes). In the past the school has used a "word list" style dictionary which included the verb root in the body of the dictionary. A lot of people, even educated ones, have had problems knowing how to look up a verb and how to use it. After discussion with my colleagues and various people I have decided to choose the third plural past form as the citation form. This form is the least ambiguous form and is one which most clearly shows the differences between the three verb classes (as well as the transitivity). Of course not all verbs would have such a form and in these cases whatever form is appropriate to the particular root has been chosen.

Because the dictionary is to be basically a teaching dictionary, and the young people do not easily recognize verb forms, it has been decided to put the verbs into a separate section. This is to be preceded by grammatical notes on the verbs, including charts with the subject-tense prefixes. The verbs are then listed alphabetically by the root which is bolded (rather than alphabetically by the prefix). Whatever form the dictionary takes, there will need to be some education of the users as to how to use it. If a word cannot be found in the main body of the dictionary, then young Tiwi speakers can see if it starts with any of the verb subject-tense prefixes from the charts given in the verb section (which hopefully they will eventually come to recognize) and can then look up the root. The root is given within the context of the full verb so that it is clear that it can never stand alone. (see Appendix 2)

Because of the loss of the language by the young people, it has been felt that it is important to include good illustrative examples of the usage of many of the words, particularly verbs. These are taken from actual texts where available and are elicited or manufactured where good examples are not available from text material.

The dictionary will also include pictures where applicable and needed. A separate grant has been given for this purpose.

Ideally the English-Tiwi section should have full entries as a tool for learning English but, because of the time limit on the project (and the amount of funding provided), this will have to be limited to an index style listing with cross-references back to the Tiwi entries.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Examples of language styles

## 1. English:

'We tried to kill/catch some flying foxes.'

traditional:

**Ngintu-wa-wuni-marringi-pirni (tarnikuwi).**

we.past-try-them-flying.fox-kill (flying foxes)

"half-&-half":

**Tra killimi nginti -ri -mi tarnikuwi.**

try kill we.past-CV-did flying foxes

modern:

**Ngintu -wari-pirni tarnikuwi.**

We.past-try -kill flying foxes

## 2. English:

'She (the sun) is shining over there in the morning.' (Lit: 'She is walking over there in the morning with a light.')

traditional:

**(Nyirra) ampi -ni -watu-wujingi-ma -j -irrakirningi-y -angurlimay-ami.**

she she.non.past-loc-morn-CONT -with-CV-light -CV-walk -movement

"half-&-half":

**Japinara jirra wokapat ampi -jiki -mi kutawu with layit.**

morning she walk she.non.past-CONT-do over.there with light

modern:

**Japinara (nyirra) ampi -ji -rr -angurlimayi kutawa wutiriyi layit.**

morning she she.non.past-CONT-CV -walk over there with light

## 3. English:

'We saw them near the river.'

traditional:

**(Ngawa) ngintu -wun -t -akurluwunyi yinkitayi kapi makatinga.**

we we.past-them-CV-see near to river

"half-&-half":

**Awa lukim yinti -ri -mi wuta yinkitayi kapi makatinga.**

we see we.past-CV-do them near to river

modern:

**(Ngawa) nginti -p -akuluwunyi wuta yinkitayi kapi makatinga.**

we we.past-CV-see them near to river

NB: CV - connective (varies according to class of root and preceding morpheme)

**Appendix 2: Sample of verbs**

**pirripakilinga** they climbed up

*Root: -akilinga* ivs2 to **climb**; *See also:* -awulari. Ngiya-rringani yi-p-akilinga taka kiyi yuwunyayi wuninga. 'My father climbed a tree and found a possum.'

**pirripakirtirruwa** they carried him

*Root: -akirtirruwa, -akurtirruwa, -akurturruwa, tvs2* to **carry on shoulders, to carry** (extended to mean 'carry' [in general]). 1. Karri ngawa ngaripirni jipwajirringa api awungarri ngamp-akirtirruwa awarra. 'When we kill wallaby we carry that wallaby on our shoulders.' 2. Anginayi miratinga angi arikulanga a-p-akirtirruwa arramukaminawurrti ngingingaji kanijawa, purupunguluwurri, yiyawungarri. 'That big ship carries all sorts of things like flour, cars, and whatever.'

**jiripirrarawami** they died

*Root: -arawami, -arawumi, -arami, -awami* (trad.; modern: -mirrarami, -marrarami) fvs2 (trad.: + indirect object - person who dies + 'she' as "dummy" subject, modern: person who dies as subject) to **die** (long time in past or future - now just meaning "die"). *Same as:* kura, pajuwani -mi. Ngarra waya yinkitayi ngini ampi-ngi-rr-arawami pili karrikamini pularti ngini imatamangapa. 'He was close to dying because he had no milk to drink.'

**pirikilipi** they twirled it

*Root: -kilipi* ivs1 to **twist something** by rubbing in back and forth hands (such as hair in making *tinimurrula* [a hair belt]), to **twirl firestick** on another (i.e. by twisting firestick in hands on another piece of wood), to **bang clapping sticks together, to clap sticks together, to blink eyes** (indicates movement back and forth.) 1. Murrula pi-p-ili-kilip-ani. 'They used to twist hair (to make a *tinimurrula*).' 2. Ngarra muluwanya yi-kilipi api yikwani yikirimi. 'He twirled a firestick (on wood) and made a fire.'

**-kilipi piyani** (+ *wuji*- "CONTINUOUS" to **keep blinking eyes when nodding off to sleep, eyelids to keep closing with sleep**. Wuta waya a-wuji-kilipi piyani. 'Their eyelids keep closing from sleepiness.'

**-kilipi + body part** to **twitch (a nerve), to tingle**. *See also:* -kilarirri

**pirikiringirri** they drew something, they copied something

*Root: -kiringirri* tvs1

1. to **draw, to copy, to imitate, to carve figure**. Nga-ma-wuni-kiringirri ngawa-ampi paparlui. 'We should imitate our forebears.'

2. to **take over (job) from someone**. Ngiya pakinya ngi-ri-pukirimi kiyi ngatawatuwu yi-mini-ja-kiringirri. 'I cut worms first then he in turn took over from me.'

**pirikiripwiya** they dressed, they put on clothes

*Root: -kiripwiya, -kuripwiya, -kiripiya* (trad.; modern: -kuripiya) fvs1 to **wear clothes, to put on clothes, to dress**. Arnuka pi-ti-jingi-pu-kiripwiya-mini, awuta paparliwi. 'Those ancestors used not to wear clothes.'