

THE NGARRINDJERI DICTIONARY PROJECT
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POSTER Presentation

The Ngarrindjeri Dictionary Project: "Bringing the Language Home" began in 2003 with the recording of words, remembered by the Elders of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong region of South Australia. Over the next few years we recorded about 450 remembered words, but soon demands grew, particularly from an expectant community forever requesting language-rich welcome speeches, songs and other cultural performances. Many people have compiled Ngarrindjeri wordlists in the past, but the current dictionary project, managed through the University of South Australia, conflates these diverse and at times confusing sources into a single accessible format.

In June 2009, the first edition of the Ngarrindjeri Dictionary is to be launched at Raukkan community. It contains 3,700 entries from key oral and written sources, beginning with the list of Protector William Wyatt collected in the late 1830s. Compiling this dictionary has been tedious and time consuming, particularly trying to interpret whether multiple spellings used for cognate words were dialect differences or variation due to poor representations by various recorders, remembering there are between 18 clan dialects, according to the Rev. George Taplin (1879), and 77 dialects, according to the anthropologists Catherine and Ronald Berndt (1993).

One particularly problematic set of words to be added to the dictionary were 1,000 words recorded from Milerum, from the Coorong, by the anthropologist Norman Tindale in the 'Tanganekald' box held at the SA Museum. Tindale recorded extinct mammals and other words not previously recorded, resulting in 530 new words being added to the corpus. But unfortunately his entries offered unusual phonotactics that sometimes resembled the CV patterns of Japanese (in which Tindale was fluent) more than the unusual word initial consonant clusters typical of Jaraldic languages (of which Ngarrindjeri is a member).

This poster presentation will display the newly printed Ngarrindjeri dictionary and summarise the sources that make up this first edition. It will also outline some of the puzzles we had to unravel, particularly in deciphering the sources used by the late Steve Johnson (available through ASED). Steve's wordlist used the current accepted orthography, and meticulously coded his sources with double initials. Unfortunately, Steve left no key to his code, so cracking that code with the many Ngarrindjeri Elders, who fondly remember their time studying with Steve at Batchelor College in the 1980s, has drawn many enthusiastic Elders to assist in the contemporary dictionary project.

The Ngarrindjeri dictionary is available to schools in electronic format using Filemaker Pro software, which has been made transferrable into Toolbox with the generous assistance of Nick Thieberger. We may later transport the dictionary into Miromaa for community use, so the presenter of this paper is open to suggestions from those with practical experience with community-friendly dictionaries.

References:

- Berndt, Ronald and Berndt, Catherine (1993) *A World That Was: the Yaraldi of the Murray River and the Lakes, South Australia*. MUP, Melbourne
- Taplin, George (1879) *The Folklore, Manners, Customs, and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines*. Government printer, Adelaide

Key Words:

Dictionary, Ngarrindjeri language, Lower Murray, Raukkan