

Anangu language



Anangu (pronounced arn-ahng-oo) are the traditional owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. They ask visitors to Uluru to use this term. Very few Anangu speak English as a first language.

For reference

Anangu and non-Anangu linguists have produced a Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary.

It is available from the Uluru Shop at Yulara and several bookshops in Alice Springs.

Aboriginal languages

It is estimated that prior to European colonisation, more than 250 different languages, including around 800 dialects, were spoken by Indigenous Australians. These languages are unique and distinct from each other as English is from Russian, or Italian.

Today however, only 13–20 Indigenous Australian languages are described as 'healthy' and they are regularly spoken. Another 100 or so are spoken to varying degrees by older Indigenous Australians, but they are at risk as senior people pass away. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are working to maintain and strengthen their traditional languages.

Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara

Anangu at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park speak mainly Pitjantjatjara (pronounced as PIT-jan-jarra) and Yankunytjatjara (pronounced as YAN-kun-jarra) with some people speaking up to six Aboriginal languages.

Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are dialects of the Western Desert Language, the largest language group of Aboriginal Australia.

There are about 4,000 people in this language group in an area that stretches northwest to Balgo, west to Port Hedland, south to Kalgoorlie, Yalata, and Oodnadatta, and northeast to Alice Springs.

Anangu means 'people' in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara. Pitjantjatjara literally means the people who use 'pitjantja' when they say 'coming'. Yankunytjatjara are the people who use 'yankunytja' to say 'going'.

The grammar and structure of the Western Desert languages are noticeably different to English. There are 17 consonants, some of which non-Pitjantjatjara speakers find difficult to pronounce. There are three vowels, 'a', 'i' and 'u', each of which may sound long or short. Sounds such as 's', 'z', 'v', 'sh' or 'th' do not exist. Some 'old' words are adapted for new situations such as the word for tourists, 'minga', which literally means 'ants' because the crowds of visitors moving around the park look like crowds of ants.

Anangu also incorporate English words such as 'mutuka' – motor car.

Pronunciation

An emphasis is placed on the first syllable of Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara words.

The letters 't', 'n', 'l' and 'r' can be written with an underline – called a retroflex.

Retroflexes, such as the first 'n' in Anangu, are placed to remind the reader to pronounce the sound in a particular way – which is different to the sound of the same letter without the retroflex line.

To pronounce a retroflexed letter, produce the sound with a slight curl of the tongue toward the back of the mouth. This produces a sound similar to an 'r' sound, for example 'walpa' is pronounced 'warlpa'.

A retroflex on an 'r' indicates the normal English 'r' sound. An 'r' without a retroflex indicates a rolled 'rrrr' sound, like some European languages.

The largest language group of Aboriginal Australians are the dialects of the Western Desert Language



Pitjantjatjara words

The 'oo' sound is the same as in 'look'.

Family

Tjitji...(gee-gee) child.

Ngun-tju...(ngoon-choo) mother.

Mama...(mah-mah) father.

Kami...(kah-mee) grandmother.

Tjamu...(jah-moo) grandfather.

Kangkuru...(kan-kooroo) big sister.

Kuṯa...(koo-tah) big brother.

Kuntili...(koo-tu-lee) auntie.

Kamuru...(kum-moo-roo) uncle.

Numbers

Kutju...(koo-joo) one (1).

Kutjara...(koo-djah-rah) two (2).

Manḱurpa...(man-koor-pah) three (3).

Kutjara-kutjara...four (4).

Kutjara-manḱurpa...five (5).

Other words

Tjukurpa...(chook-or-pa) Anangu law/story.

Kapi...(kah-pee) water.

Waru...(wah-roo) fire.

Kulji...(koo-lee) hot weather, summer.

Uwa...(oo-wah) yes.

Wiya...(wee-ah) no.

Palya...(pahl-yah) okay, good, hello, bye.

Pulka...(pool-kah) big.

Tjuṯa...(joo-tah) many.

Wiru...(wi-roo) beautiful.

Places

Ininti...(in-in-tee) Red seeds of the bean tree often used in making necklaces and other decorations. It is also the name of the café at the Cultural Centre.

Kata Tjuṯa...(kah-tah choor-tar) translated to Kata 'head', tjuṯa 'many'

Maruku...(mah-roo-koo) It literally means belonging to 'dark' or Aboriginal people. It is also the name of the arts and crafts shop located at the Cultural Centre.

Muṯitjulu...(moor-ti-djoo-loo)

The name of the Anangu community situated on the eastern side of Uluru and the name of one of the major waterholes at the base of Uluru.

Uluru...(oo-loo-roo) There is no literal translation of Uluru, it is a name only, like Sydney, Paris, Rome or Berlin.

Fauna

Itjaritjari...(ee-cha-ree-cha-ree) marsupial mole, an ancestral creature yet rarely seen as it lives almost entirely underground.

Kalaya...(kah-lay-ah) emu, the feathers and meat are both used by Anangu.

Kuniya...(koon-e-ya) woma python is a non-venomous, edible snake that is an important ancestral being.

Liru...(lear-oo) king brown snake, highly venomous and not eaten, also an important ancestral being.

Lungkaṯa...(loong-cart-ah) Central Australian blue-tongue lizard, an ancestral creature.

Mala...(mahr-la) rufous hare-wallaby. A small wallaby with big-ears and ginger fur. Mala are one of the most important ancestral creatures associated with Uluru.

Maḷu...(mar-loo) red plains kangaroo. An important food and material source (rear leg sinew used as binding for spears).

Mingkiri...(ming-keer-ree) spinifex mouse, a small nocturnal marsupial.

Ngintaka...(nin-tar-ka) perentie, the largest monitor lizard, a good food source.

Ngiyari...(nee-ah-ree) thorny devil.

Papa...(pah-pah) dog/dingo

Rapita...(ra-pi-ta) rabbit

Waṇampi...(wahr-nahm-pee) watersnake. A waṇampi lives in a waterhole and guards it against strangers. Traditionally you would alert the waṇampi by making noise or lighting a small fire and announcing who you are as you approach. This is considered appropriate and necessary behaviour when not in your own country. Muṯitjulu waterhole has a resident waṇampi.

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