

## **Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics ELL2**

Article MS 5042 'Languages of the World: Jiwarli'

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### **Abstract**

Jiwarli is an Australian Aboriginal language, from the north-west of Western Australia. On the death of Mr Jack Butler, the last speaker, in May 1985 it is now extinct. A range of recorded materials and publications exist, and a reference grammar is in preparation. The language has become known in the linguistic literature for its non-configurational syntax (Austin and Bresnan 1996, Baker 2000), and it also shows switch-reference and a complex system of case-marking that reflects clause type (Austin 2004).

### **Introduction**

Jiwarli is an Australian Aboriginal language and was traditionally spoken along the upper reaches of the Henry River, a tributary of the Ashburton River, in the north-west of Western Australia. The language was unrecorded until 1978 and is now extinct, the last speaker, Mr Jack Butler, having passed away in May 1985. Before his death Jack Butler worked with Peter Austin to record over 70 texts in a range of genres, a lexicon of some 1,500 words and elicitation of morphological paradigms and syntactic constructions. Publications on the language include a bilingual dictionary (Austin 1992), a text collection (Austin 1997), articles on morpho-syntax (Austin and Bresnan 1996, Austin 1995, 1998,

2000, 2001) and a web site. The language has become known in the linguistic literature for its non-configurational syntax (see Austin and Bresnan 1996, Baker 2000, and below), and it also shows switch-reference and a complex system of case-marking that reflects clause type (Austin 2004). A reference grammar is in preparation.

### **Language relationships**

Jiwarli is closely related to its immediate neighbours, Warriyangka, Thiin and Tharrkari as members of the Mantharta subgroup (*mantharta* being the word for ‘person’). The languages share up to 80% common vocabulary and a similar grammatical system. Tharrkari has undergone a number of historical phonological changes that make its phonetics and phonology highly unusual for an Australian language (see further below). None of the Mantharta languages has any native speakers today, though some knowledge of words and expressions remains among descendants. The Mantharta languages are most closely related to the Kanyara languages spoken to their west and north-west: Payungu, Pinikura, Purduna, and Thalanyji. They share approximately 60% cognate vocabulary and a number of grammatical features in common, including switch-reference and clause linkage effects on case-marking (Austin 1996, 2004). Today only Thalanyji continues to be spoken by older members of a single family living near Onslow, Western Australia. The Kanyara and Mantharta languages belong to the widespread Pama-Nyungan family which covers the southern two-thirds of Australia (see Australia article), and are most closely related to the Nyungic languages spoken to their east.

## Linguistic characteristics

### *Phonology*

The phonological system of Jiwari is typical of languages of the region with contrastive stops at six points of articulation, a nasal for each stop position, a lateral for each non-peripheral stop, a flap, a semi-retroflex continuant, and two glides. Table 1 gives the relevant consonants in their practical orthographic form. There are just three vowels: high front *i*, high back *u*, and low *a*, with a phonemic length contrast mainly, but not exclusively, found in the first syllable of words. Tharrkari has undergone a number of historical phonological changes which have resulted in the creation of a stop voicing contrast (unusual in Australia) and, in one dialect, complete loss of laterals.

< Table 1 goes here >

The general structure of Jiwari roots is CV(C)CV(C). Every word in Jiwari must begin with a consonant and end in a vowel; roots can end in a consonant but if otherwise unsuffixed *-ma* is added to nasal-final roots and *-pa* to roots ending in *l*, *rl*, *ly* or *rr*. Word-initially only non-apico-domal stops and nasals, and the two glides are found. Word-medially there are limited consonant clusters, primarily homorganic nasal plus stop, and apical nasal or lateral plus peripheral stop (*p* and *k*). Vowel clusters are not found. Words borrowed from English are generally restructured to meet these phonotactic constraints, eg. *walypala* ‘white man’ (from “white fella”), *ngayirlanma* ‘island’.

### *Morphology*

Jiwarli, like other languages of the Pama-Nyungan group, is entirely suffixing in its morphology. There are two major word classes: nominals and verbs, with nominals showing a rich system of case-marking and verbs marking tense/aspect/mood and dependent clause categories. Nominals can be subdivided into substantives (that cover both noun and adjective concepts in a language like English), pronouns, locationals and demonstratives. Minor word classes include adverbs, particles and interjections.

Nominals in Jiwarli inflect for case, with the syntactic functions of intransitive subject (S), transitive subject (A) and transitive object (P) showing a split-ergative pattern of syncretism in the case forms determined by animacy:

- for the first person singular pronoun, S and A fall together as a single (unmarked) form
- for inanimate nominals and demonstratives, S and P fall together as a single (unmarked) form
- for all other nominals, there are three forms for S, A and P functions

In addition to the three main cases (*nominative* for S, *ergative* for A, *accusative* for P) there are also the following case forms:

- *dative* marking alienable possession, and complement of certain verbs
- *allative* coding direction towards a place
- *locative* coding location in a place, and complement of verbs of speaking
- *ablative* coding direction from a place, and cause

The actual forms of the cases is affected by the phonological shape of the root, eg. whether it ends in a vowel or not, what kind of vowel or consonant is root-final, and how many

morae it contains (long vowels counting as two mora). Table 2 sets out a sample substantive declension.

<Table 2 goes here>

The coding of transitive object P varies according to clause type and cross-clausal reference relations: in certain dependent clauses (for details see below) P is marked as *dative* or as *allative*. In addition, case is added to dependent clause verbs to indicate cross-clausal coreference (see below), and manner adverbs in transitive clauses carry an ergative case agreement marker.

Jiwarli has a rich system of nominal word-building morphology that involves suffixation between the root and case inflection. Categories encoded in word-building morphology include number (dual, paucal, plural), having (eg. *yakan-jaka* ‘married (lit. spouse-having)’), lacking (eg. *yakan-yirra* ‘unmarried (lit. spouse-lacking)’), and kin dual and plural (eg. *kurta* ‘older brother’, *kurtarra* ‘pair of brothers’).

Pronouns in Jiwarli distinguish three persons and singular, dual and plural number; in the first person non-singular there is an inclusive-exclusive contrast. Demonstratives encode a proximal and distal contrast. Table 3 sets out the basic pronoun and demonstrative forms.

<Table 3 goes here>

Verbs morphologically distinguish between main verb and dependent verb inflections. Main verbs encode tense/aspect/mood categories such as past habitual, present, future and imperative. Dependent verbs occur in hypotactically linked clauses and encode clause type (relative tense plus aspect) plus cross-clausal coreference or non-coreference of subjects (S or A), ie. switch-reference (see further details in the syntax section below). There are five morphologically determined verb conjugations: conjugations 1 and 2 are primarily, but not exclusively, transitive, and conjugations three, four and five are intransitive. Table 4 sets out the verb conjugations.

<Table 4 goes here>

Verbs show limited word-building morphology, mainly transitivity and detransitivising affixes that shift conjugation and transitivity. There are also category-changing affixes:

- nominalising suffixes that create agent or instrument nominals from verbs
- verbalising suffixes that create intransitive (inchoative) or transitive (causative) verbs from nominals

The minor categories of adverb, particle and interjection show no morphological variation. However, there is a set of post-inflectional suffixes which may be attached to words of any class to encode various information status concepts, such as *-rru* for ‘new information’ and *-thu* for ‘old information’. These affixes are ubiquitous in texts.

### *Syntax*

Jiwarli is a non-configurational language (Hale 1983, Austin and Bresnan 1996, Baker 2000) and shows the following syntactic characteristics:

- free word order, in which any possible order of sentence constituents is found (Austin 2000)
- split-NP syntax, where nominals understood as referring to a single entity can be separated in the clause by other constituents (each nominal bearing a relevant case marker)
- free argument elipsis, where nominals of any person or number whose reference is clear from the context can be freely omitted (Austin 2001)

The following example illustrates split-NP syntax:

- (1) *Karla        wantha-nma-rni        jarnpa        juma.*  
 fire.acc        give-imper-hence        light.acc        small.acc  
 ‘Give me a small fire light.’ [T52s15]

Free elipsis of arguments is seen in the following (see also line 68 in the sample text below):

- (2) *Wirntupinya-nyja-rru.*  
 kill-past-newinf

‘(They) killed (him).’ [T42s25]

Jiwarli also shows interesting inter-clausal syntax. Dependent clauses occur hypotactically located on the margins of main clauses and their verbs encode clause type plus switch-reference, ie. (non-)coreference of subject (S or A) between the main and dependent clause. In same-subject clauses the dependent clause subject is obligatorily unexpressed (these being ‘control’ structures). When the main clause is transitive, some same-subject dependent clause verbs carry an ergative case marker in agreement with the controlling subject nominal. The following examples illustrate this:

(3) *Mantharta kumpa-inha wurnta-wu yinka-rnu.*  
 man.nom sit-pres shield-dat adze-imperfSS  
 ‘The man sits adzing a shield.’ [N11p31s3]

(4) *Nhurra-kara-lu thika-nma yarrukarri-ngu-ru-thu.*  
 you-pl-erg eat-imper want-imperfSS-erg-oldinf  
 ‘You eat it if you want it!’ [N11p39s3]

For different-subject dependent clauses if there is coreference between the (omitted) subject of the dependent clauses and a non-subject in the main clause, an agreement case marker appears on the dependent verb, as in:



- (5) *Tharla-nma yinha julyu-nha kamu-rri-ya-nha.*  
 feed-imper this.acc old man-acc hunger-inchoat-imperfDS-acc  
 ‘Feed this old man who is becoming hungry!’ [JIT13s1]

Notice that there is a complex interaction between the marking of P inside the dependent clause (as either dative, allative or accusative) depending on clause type and cross-clausal coreference relations. Table 5 illustrates this.

<Table 5 goes here>

The significance of these patterns is explored more generally in Austin 2004.

Particles in Jiwari have scope over the whole clause and encode such semantic concepts as negation, possibility etc. An example is *warri* ‘not’ in (see also *kaji* ‘try’ in Text line 69 below):

- (6) *Nhaa-rri-nyja nhurra warri kurlkayi-rnu wangka-iniya-wu nganaju*  
 what-inchoat-past you.erg not listen-imperfSS talk-imperfDS-dat I.dat  
 ‘Why didn’t you listen to me talking?’ [T35s7]

### **Text example**

The following extract (Text 43 in Austin 1997) exemplifies the morphological and syntactic characteristics of Jiwari, as well as showing a little of the cultural background of the

language. It comes from a traditional story where one bird steals fire from the people who then ask the Peregrine falcon to get it back from the thief:

61 *Ngana-lu ngunha karla mana-ra.*

who-erg that.acc fire.acc get-fut

‘Who will get the fire?’

62 *Nhurra parru.*

2sg.nom then

‘How about you?’

63 *Nhurra karlathintirnira kurukurura, nhurra yini-thu.*

2sg.nom Peregrine falcon Peregrine falcon 2sg.nom name.nom-oldinf

‘You are karlathintirnira Peregrine falcon, (that’s) your name.’

64 *Ngaa.*

yes

‘Yes.’

65 *Ngunha thurni-nyja-nthi.*

that.nom laugh-past-just

‘He just laughed.’

- 66 *Yana-nyja ngunha purtipala-rru.*  
 go-past that.nom pretty.nom-newinf  
 ‘He was pretty now.’
- 67 *Wantha-rninyja juuri wangkarr-a.*  
 put-past paint.acc throat-loc  
 ‘(They) put paint on (his) throat.’
- 68 *Wantha-rninyja kala-pa wangkarr-a.*  
 put-past like this-spec throat-loc  
 ‘(They) put (it) like this on (his) throat.’
- 69 *Kaji nhurra yana-ma mana-ngku ngurlu karla-rla.*  
 try 2sg.nom go-imper get-purpSS that.allat fire-allat  
 ‘You try to go and get the fire.’

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**Web site**

[www.linguistics.unimelb.edu.au/projects/jiwarli](http://www.linguistics.unimelb.edu.au/projects/jiwarli)

**Table 1**

	Bilabial	Lamino-		Apico-		Dorso-velar
		dental	palatal	alveolar	domal	
Stop	<i>p</i>	<i>th</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>rt</i>	<i>k</i>
Nasal	<i>m</i>	<i>nh</i>	<i>ny</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>rn</i>	<i>ng</i>
Lateral		<i>lh</i>	<i>ly</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>rl</i>	
Flap				<i>rr</i>		
Continuant					<i>r</i>	
Glide	<i>w</i>		<i>y</i>			

**Table 2**

	A	S	P	DATIVE	LOCATIVE	ALLATIVE
boy	<i>wirtangku</i>	<i>wirta</i>	<i>wirtanha</i>	<i>wirtawu</i>	<i>wirtangka</i>	<i>wirtarla</i>
girl	<i>kurlkingku</i>	<i>kurlki</i>	<i>kurlkinha</i>	<i>kirlkiyi</i>	<i>kurlkingka</i>	<i>kurlkirla</i>
dog	<i>thuthungku</i>	<i>thuthu</i>	<i>thuthunha</i>	<i>thuthuwu</i>	<i>thuthungka</i>	<i>thuthurla</i>
fire	<i>karlangku</i>	<i>karla</i>	<i>karla</i>	<i>karlawu</i>	<i>karlangka</i>	<i>karlarla</i>
tree	<i>wurungku</i>	<i>wuru</i>	<i>wuru</i>	<i>wuruwu</i>	<i>wurungka</i>	<i>wururla</i>
hill 'roo	<i>mathantu</i>	<i>mathanma</i>	<i>mathannha</i>	<i>mathanku</i>	<i>mathanta</i>	<i>mathankurla</i>
tongue	<i>thalanythu</i>	<i>thalanyma</i>	<i>thalanyma</i>	<i>thalanyku</i>	<i>thalanytha</i>	<i>thalanykurla</i>
chin	<i>nyinyarntu</i>	<i>nyinyarnma</i>	<i>nyinyarnma</i>	<i>nyinyarnku</i>	<i>nyinyarnta</i>	<i>nyinyarnkurla</i>
wind	<i>yuwalpalu</i>	<i>yuwalpa</i>	<i>yuwalpa</i>	<i>yuwalku</i>	<i>yuwalpala</i>	<i>yuwalkurla</i>
cousin	<i>ngathalpalu</i>	<i>ngathalpa</i>	<i>ngathalpanha</i>	<i>ngathalku</i>	<i>ngathalpala</i>	<i>ngathalkurla</i>
barb	<i>ngarlirrpalu</i>	<i>ngarlirrupa</i>	<i>ngarlirrupa</i>	<i>ngarlirrku</i>	<i>ngarlirrpalu</i>	<i>ngarlirrkurla</i>

**Table 3 Pronouns and Demonstratives**

	A	S	P	DATIVE	LOCATIVE
1sg	<i>ngatha</i>	<i>ngatha</i>	<i>ngathanha</i>	<i>nganaju</i>	<i>ngathala</i>
1dlincl	<i>ngalilu</i>	<i>ngali</i>	<i>ngalinha</i>	<i>ngalimpa</i>	<i>ngalila</i>
1dlexcl	<i>ngalijuru</i>	<i>ngaliju</i>	<i>ngalijunha</i>	<i>ngalijungu</i>	<i>ngalijura</i>
1plincl	<i>nganthurralu</i>	<i>nganthurru</i>	<i>nganthurranha</i>	<i>nganthurrampa</i>	<i>nganthurrala</i>
1plexcl	<i>nganthurrajuru</i>	<i>nganthurraju</i>	<i>nganthurrajunha</i>	<i>nganthurrajungu</i>	<i>nganthurrajura</i>
2sg	<i>nhurralu</i>	<i>nhurra</i>	<i>nhurranha</i>	<i>nhurrampa</i>	<i>nhurrala</i>
2dl	<i>nhupaluru</i>	<i>nhupalu</i>	<i>nhupalunha</i>	<i>nhupalumpa</i>	<i>nhupalura</i>
2pl	<i>nhurrakaralu</i>	<i>nhurrakara</i>	<i>nhurrakaranha</i>	<i>nhurrakarampa</i>	<i>nhurrakarala</i>
3sg	<i>panhaluru</i>	<i>panhalu</i>	<i>panhalunha</i>	<i>parnumpa</i>	<i>panhalura</i>
3dl	<i>pulalu</i>	<i>pula</i>	<i>pulanha</i>	<i>pulampa</i>	<i>pulala</i>
3pl	<i>thanalu</i>	<i>thana</i>	<i>thananha</i>	<i>thanampa</i>	<i>thanala</i>

this	<i>yilu</i>	<i>yinha</i>	<i>yinha</i>	<i>yirnu</i>	<i>yila</i>
that	<i>ngulu</i>	<i>ngunha</i>	<i>ngunha</i>	<i>ngurnu</i>	<i>ngula</i>



**Table 4 Verb inflections****Main clause Verb Inflections**

Inflection	Conj1	Conj2	Conj3	Conj4	Conj5
Usitative	<i>-laartu</i>	<i>-rraartu</i>	<i>-artu</i>	<i>-artu</i>	<i>-artu</i>
Past	<i>-rninyja</i>	<i>-rninyja</i>	<i>-nyja</i>	<i>-nyja</i>	<i>-nyja</i>
Present	<i>-nha</i>	<i>-nha</i>	<i>-inha</i>	<i>-inha</i>	<i>-a</i>
Future	<i>-lka</i>	<i>-rrka</i>	<i>-ira</i>	<i>-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i>
Imperative	<i>-nma</i>	<i>-nma</i>	<i>-ma</i>	<i>-ma</i>	<i>-ma</i>
Irrealis	<i>-nmararni</i>	<i>-nmararni</i>	<i>-mararni</i>	<i>-mararni</i>	<i>-mararni</i>

**Dependent clause Verb Inflections**

ImperfSS	<i>-rnu</i>	<i>-rnu</i>	<i>-nhu</i>	<i>-nhu</i>	<i>-nhu</i>
ImperfDS	<i>-niya</i>	<i>-niya</i>	<i>-iniya</i>	<i>-iniya</i>	<i>-iniya</i>
PerfSS	<i>-rninyjalu</i>	<i>-rninyjalu</i>	<i>-nyjalu</i>	<i>-nyjalu</i>	<i>-nyjalu</i>
PerfDS	<i>-rninyjaparnti</i>	<i>-rninyjaparnti</i>	<i>-nyjaparnti</i>	<i>-nyjaparnti</i>	<i>-nyjaparnti</i>
PurpSS	<i>-ru</i>	<i>-rru</i>	<i>-yi</i>	<i>-ngku</i>	<i>-a</i>
PurpDS	<i>-lpuka</i>	<i>-rrpuka</i>	<i>-puka</i>	<i>-puka</i>	<i>-puka</i>
Intentive	<i>-lkarri(ngu)</i>	<i>-rrkarri(ngu)</i>	<i>-irarri(ngu)</i>	<i>-rarri(ngu)</i>	<i>-rarri(ngu)</i>
Might	<i>-lkangu</i>	<i>-rrkangu</i>	<i>-irangu</i>	<i>-rangu</i>	<i>-rangu</i>

**Table 5 Coding of P**

	Dependent object
intensive	dative
imperfective-SS	
perfective-SS	
imperfective-DS	
perfective-DS	
purposive-SS	allative
purposive-DS	accusative
might	

**Key words**

Australian Aboriginal languages, ergativity, case-marking, non-configurationality, free word order, zero anaphora, switch-reference, complex sentences

**Biography**

Peter K. Austin is Märit Rausing Chair in Field Linguistics and Director of the Endangered Languages Academic Programme in the Department of Linguistics, SOAS, University of London. He joined SOAS in January 2003 after having held a Humboldt Prize (Germany's most prestigious research award) at the University of Frankfurt, and previously being Foundation Professor in Linguistics at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is past President of the Australian Linguistic Society and was English Language Convenor for the secondary school Board of Studies for the state of Victoria. He is on the DOBES Endangered Languages Documentation Advisory Board of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen.

Prof Austin has held numerous visiting appointments including the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen, University of Frankfurt, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, University of Hong Kong, and Stanford and Harvard Universities. He has carried out extensive fieldwork on Australian Aboriginal languages and published widely on them, including writing seven bilingual dictionaries and co-authoring the first fully hypertext bilingual dictionary on the world wide web (the Gamilaraay-English dictionary). He has published articles on computer-aided linguistic analysis and multimedia, and co-authored websites displaying multimedia materials on several languages. He is also

currently working on the morpho-syntax of Sasak and Samawa, Austronesian languages of eastern Indonesia. In theoretical linguistics his main interest is in morpho-syntax and typology, including non-configurationality, case marking, complex sentence constructions, transitivity, and Lexical Functional Grammar. He has published six books and 60 articles.