

Anangu language

The traditional land owners of Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park, call themselves A nangu (pronounced arn-abng-oo), and would like you to use that term. Very few A nangu speak English as a first language but they may speak several other indigenous languages. Very few senior people speak English well and many have difficulty pronouncing English words. Younger A nangu are learning both Yankunytjatjara or Pitjantjatjara and English.

Aboriginal Languages

It is estimated that prior to European colonisation, there were about 700 dialects spoken by indigenous Australians. These languages are as different and distinct from each other as, for example, English, Russian and Italian. Since colonisation many of these languages have become extinct or are in danger of disappearing. It is estimated that there are only 20 - 50 languages which are still described as 'healthy', that is, which are spoken to and used by children.

Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara

The Traditional Owners of Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park mainly speak Yankunytjatjara (pronounced as yan-kun-ja-jarra) and / or Pitjantjatjara (pronounced as pit-jan-jah-jarra). Some may speak Ngaatjatjarra and Luritja. These are all dialects of what linguists call the Western Desert Language, the largest language group of Aboriginal Australia. The group includes about 4000 speakers, and stretches north-west to Balgo, west to Port Hedland, south to Kalgoorlie, Yalata and Oodnadatta, and north-east to Alice Springs.

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

The Western Desert languages have different grammar and structures to English. There are sounds that do not occur in English, and vice versa. There are 17 consonants, some of which non-Western Desert speakers find difficult. There are also 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.

Such dynamic languages develop and adapt 'old' words to new situations. For example, the word for tourists, 'minga', literally means 'ants' because the lines of visitors climbing Uluru look like lines of ants. Anangu also incorporate but change the form of English words such as 'mutuka' for 'motor car'.

Pronunciation

There is always stress on the first syllable of Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara words. The letters t, n, l and r can be written with a line, called a retroflex, underneath. The retroflexes are there to remind the reader to pronounce the sound in a certain way - a different way to the same letter without the line. The lines indicate retroflex pronunciation which are produced by slightly curling the tongue back in the mouth. (see the Visitor Guide for a further explanation of this)

SOME ANANGU WORDS

Note: The 'oo'sound is the same as in 'look'

FAMILY

Tjitji (gee-gee)	Child
Ngunytyju	Mother
Mama (mah-mah)	Father
Kami (kah-mee)	Grandmother
Tjamu (jah-moo)	Grandfather

OTHER WORDS

Kapi (kah-pee)	Water
Kuli (koo-lee)	Hot weather, summer
Uwa (oo-wah)	Yes
Palya (pahl-yah)	OK, good,hello, bye
Pulka (pool-kah)	Big
Tjukurpa (chook-or-pa)	Anangu Law
Tjuta (joo-tah)	Many
Waru (wah-roo)	Fire
Wiya (wee-ah)	No
Wiru (wi-roo)	Beautiful

NUMBERS

Kutju (koo-joo)	One (1)
Kutjara (koo-djah-rah)	Two (2)
Mankurpa (man-koor-pah)	Three (3)
Kutjara-kutjara	Four (4)
Kutjara-mankurpa	Five (5)

PLACES

Ininti (in-in-tee)

The name of the Arts shop at the Cultural Centre.
Red seeds of the bean tree often used in making necklaces and other decorations.

Kata Tjuta (kah-tah choor-ta)

Kata - 'head', tjuta - 'many'.

Maruku (mah-roo-koo)

The name of the Arts and Crafts shop located at the Cultural Centre. It literally means 'dark' or Aboriginal peoples'.

Mutitjulu (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)

The rock and the name of a waterhole. 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. Rarely seen because it lives almost entirely underground. An ancestral creature.

Kalaya (kah-lay-ah) Emu

Kuniya (koon-e-ya) Woma Python
Non-poisonous and edible snake. It has very important ancestral associations with Uluru.

Liru (lear-oo) Brown snake
Poisonous and not eaten. One of the most important ancestral beings.

Lungkata (loong-cart-ah)
Centralian Blue-tongue lizard. Ancestral creature.

Mala (ma-la) Rufous Hare Wallaby
A small, big-eared wallaby with ginger fur. Mala are no longer found in the Park, however they are still one of the most important ancestral creatures associated with Uluru and the surrounding areas.

Malu (mar-loo) Red plains kangaroo
An important food and source of materials such as sinew for binding together spear sections.

Mingkiri (ming-keer-ree) Mouse

Murtja (moor-djah) Mulgara
An endangered carnivorous marsupial, distinguished by a short tail which is fattened at the base with a crest of black hairs.

Ngintaka Perentie
Largest of the monitor lizards. A good food source.

Ngiyari (nee-ah-ree) Thorny Devil

Papa (pa-pa) Dog, dingo

Wanampi (wahr-nahm-pee) Watersnake.
A wanampi lives in a waterhole and guards it against intrusion, particularly by strangers. When approaching a waterhole, one traditionally alerts the wanampi by making noises, perhaps lighting small fires, and announcing who you are. Such measures are considered appropriate and necessary behaviour when in someone else's country.
Mutitjulu is one of the waterholes in the Park which is said to have a resident wanampi.

FOR REFERENCE

Anangu and non-Anangu linguists have produced a Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English Dictionary. It is available from Ininti Café and Souvenirs at the Uluru - Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre.