

Language

YOLNGU MATHA - THE LANGUAGE

Yolngu Matha means Yolngu language. It refers to Yolngu languages in general. There are over 40 Yolngu languages. Most Yolngu speak multiple Yolngu languages. The following explanation may help you to pronounce the words.

Yolngu languages are written using special characters. For technical reasons we have not used them throughout this booklet. At right is a description of the special characters and on the far right the Yolngu words appear in orange with these special characters.

Vowels

There are three pairs of vowels.

SHORT VOWELS	LONG VOWELS
a as in about	ä as in father
i as in bin	e no equivalent in English - try lengthening the i in bin
u as in put	o as in pore

Consonants

b, g, k, l, p, m, n, t, w, y — are like the English equivalents

dh, th, nh — pronounced with the tongue between the teeth

d, t, n, l, r — pronounced with the tongue curled back

dj — as with jug

tj — somewhat similar to the ch in church

ny — as with news

ng — as in song

If you want to learn more about Yolngu language and culture, go to www.learnline.cdu.edu.au/yolngustudies

Special Characters

ŋ or N ng as with song

ḍ or Ḑ tongue curled back

ä or Ä long a, as with father

ṅ or N tongue curled back

ḷ or Ḹ tongue curled back

’ glottal stop

SOME COMMON YOLNGU TERMS

Bäpi Snake

Bäru Crocodile

Bathi Dilly bag

Bayŋu None, I don't have any

Bilma Rhythm sticks (clap sticks)

Bungawa Boss, leader (can be a derogatory term)

Bungul Dance not necessarily Traditional ceremony (corroboree)

Bungul djäma Ceremony business or work is considered important work in Yolngu society

Dhuwa, Yirritja Everything in the world belongs to one of these two named social moieties or categories. Yolngu marry into their opposite moiety.

Dirramu Man, male

Djäma Work, business

Ga' Give it here!

Galpu Spear launcher

Gara Spear

Gapan White clay used for ceremony purposes, dancing and painting.

Gapu Water

Gurtha Fire, lighter, match, firewood

Ma Okay! Do it!

Manymak Good, okay

Miyalk Female

Miwatj Region You are in Miwatj or sunrise country

Njäntji or Manha Alcohol

Njapaki Non-Yolngu person, white person.

Njarali Tobacco, cigarette

Njata Food

Nhämirri nhe How are you?

Nhulunbuy The hill around which the township is located.

Rrupiya Money (Macassan introduced word)

Wäwa Brother

Yaka No

Yaka manymak I am not good

Yalala Later

Yapa Sister (it's common to refer to a female you don't know as yapa)

Yatj Bad

Yidaki Didgeridoo (The Miwatj region is recognised as the home of Yidaki. You are on yidaki country)

Yolŋu The peoples of the north-east Arnhem Land region call themselves Yolngu. Different from other tribes around Australia Koori, Noongah, and Murri for example

Yo Yes

Yo manymak Yes, good, thanks. A positive response/ acknowledgement

Yolŋu matha A general term for the many Yolngu languages of north-east Arnhem Land