

Mamang

An old story retold by
Kim Scott, Iris Woods and the
Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project

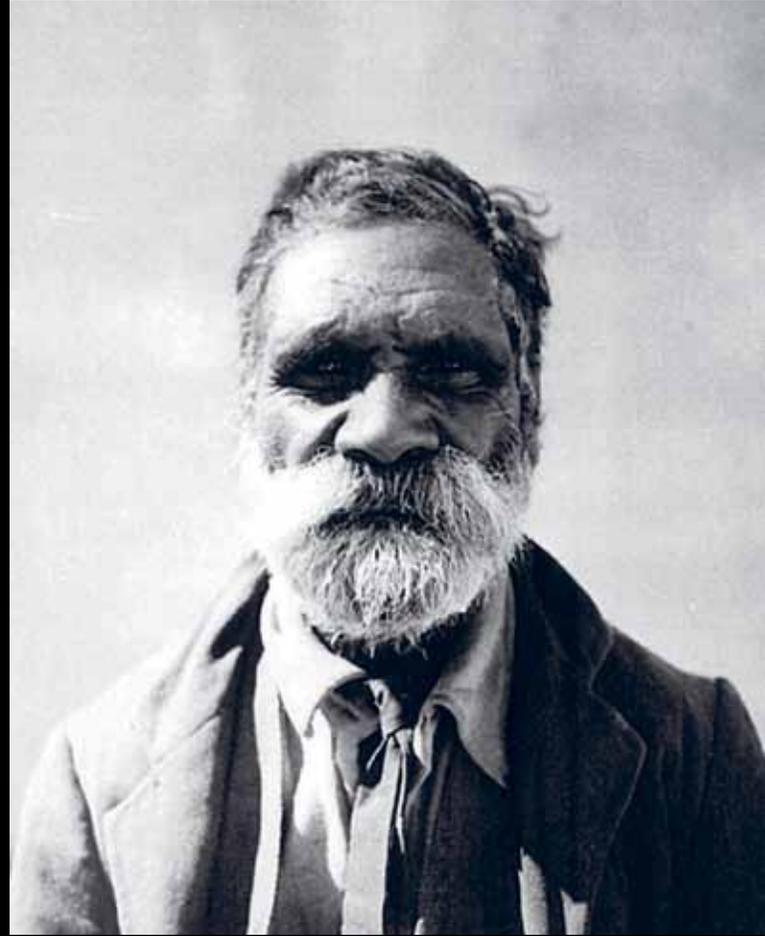
With artwork by
Jeffrey Farmer, Helen Nelly
and Roma Winmar (Yibiyung)



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Freddie Winmer (Winmir), Borden, 1973. image courtesy of the SA Museum

Mamang

THIS BOOK IS INSPIRED BY a story Freddie Winmer told the linguist Gerhardt Laves at Albany, Western Australia, around 1931. It has been workshopped in a series of community meetings, which included some of the contemporary family of both those men, and would not have been possible without their involvement and support. We would also like to thank Dr John Henderson at the University of Western Australia, Abmusic (Aboriginal Corporation), the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Mary Gimondo, Lefki Kailis and Margaret Robinson. The goodwill of the family of Gerhardt Laves is also very much appreciated.

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of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and Healthway promoting the Respect Yourself Respect Your Culture message.

Key people in the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project have included: Hazel Brown, Audrey Brown (RIP), Lomas Roberts Sr (RIP), Helen Nelly, Gerald Williams Sr, Gerald Williams Jr, Russell Nelly, Iris Woods, Geoffrey Woods (RIP), Roma Winmar, Edward Brown Sr (RIP), Ezzard Flowers, Jenny Crosbie and Kim Scott.

To download a reading of this story, or for instruction on how to purchase a CD containing the reading, go to:
www.wirlomin.com.au

Datj wardarn-ak boyak-ngat ngoorndiny. Mamang!

Meat ocean-of rock of beside lying Whale

A young Noongar man saw something in the ocean, something big and right up close beside the rocks. Oh... a whale!



Noongar baal bordak koorl djinang karep koombar moorlany mamang.

Noongar he close go see hole big back whale

Noongar baal bardang darap koorl bwooar mamang.

Noongar he jump enter go inside whale

That brave young man was one of our family. He stood on the rock next to the whale, and looked down at the hole on the whale's back. Then he jumped right down inside the whale. Oh, it was like a cave in there!



Baal mamang koort barang.

He whale heart grab

Mamang baal ngayanginy 'Nga-ooo, nga-oo.

Whale he/it screaming scream scream

Baal ngardi koorl bwooar wardarn-ak.

He/it down go inside ocean-of

Noongar baal mayer wangkiny, walang-walanginy, mamang keniny.

Noongar he sound speaking singing whale dancing

That Noongar man pushed and squeezed the whale's heart so that the whale cried out and dived, down, deep into the ocean. As it grew darker the man began to sing a very old song, a song his father taught him, a song to make a whale carry you on a very special journey.



Mamang yira koorl.

Whale up go

Noongar baal mamang-miyel-ang djinang.

Noongar he whale-eye-with see

Baal djert worl-ak wariny djinang.

He bird sky-of hanging see

Boola wardarn woora, boodja yoowart.

many/much ocean far earth no/not

Deep down there in the dark inside the whale the man sang to the rhythm of the whale's big slow heart beat until, slowly, the light came back. The man saw ocean all around him, birds in the sky, but no sign of land.



Noongar baal mamang koort barang, don.

Noongar he whale heart grab stab

Mamang ngardi kep-al darap, bindjel bindjel bindjel.

Whale down water enter bubble bubble bubble

Mamang baal Noongar kediny.

Whale he Noongar carrying

Worl yoowart, djert yoowart, bindjel boola bindjel bindjel.

Sky no bird no bubble many bubble bubble

Noongar baal mayer wangkiny, walang-walanginy, mamang keniny mamang

Noongar he sound speaking singing whale dancing whale

baal Noongar barang kediny.

He Noongar grab carrying

Mamang baal wort wardarn-ak koorl.

Whale he away ocean-of go

Again the man stabbed and squeezed the whale's heart, and again the whale roared and dived and again there was no more sky, no more birds, only bubbles. Deep and dark within the whale, the young man sang his father's song.



Noongar baal mamang-miyel-ang djinang.

Noongar he whale-eye-with see

Baal djinang djert worl-ak wariny.

He see bird sky-of hanging

Kalyakoorl wardarn woorra, boodja yoowart.

All around ocean far earth no/not

Many times the whale came to the surface. Many times the Noongar looked out from within the whale only to see white birds in the blue sky, white waves spilling on the sea and still no sign of land.



Noongar baal mamang koort barang, don.

Noongar he whale heart grab stab

Mamang kep darap koorl.

Whale water enter go

Noongar, baal mayer wangkiny, walang-walanginy.

Noongar he sound talking singing

Mamang keniny, kep-al Noongar kediny

whale dancing water-of Noongar carrying

Our ancestor grabbed and stabbed and squeezed the whale's heart. He would not let the whale rest. The whale leapt out of the water, splashed and dived even deeper. That Noongar man kept singing.



Mamang baal dabakarn bireniny baalang koboorn boodja-k.

Whale he slow scrape he-with stomach ground-of

Mamang baal koorn yoowart nanap.

Whale he go not stop

Noongar boodja djinang.

Noongar land see

After a long time the man heard the sound of the whale's belly scraping against the sand. He kept singing, softly, and the whale struggled and struggled until...Alright. The man looked out through the whale's eye and saw a beautiful sandy beach.



Noongar baal bardang wort mamang.

Noongar he jump away whale

Nidja koodjal yoka koodjal djook yaakiny, djinanginy.

These two women two sister standing seeing

Noongar maam yoka djinangelangainy.

Noongar man women seeing- all together

He jumped from the whale, and landed right in front of two women. The three of them stood there, looking at each other. They looked at the whale.



Baalap wangk, 'Nyoondok windja karlak?'

They say you where home

Noongar: 'Ngan karlak bookidja woorra.'

Noongar my home over there far

Ngaytj datj-ak wardarn-al koorl.

I meat-of ocean (agency) go

Nidja mamang ngayn kediny.

This whale me carrying

'Oh,' the women said. 'Where you from?'

The man waved his arm and pointed. He was so proud and happy he couldn't stop grinning.

'My home long way back there where the sun rises. This whale bring me.'



Koodjal yoka koodjal djook djerabiny.

Two women two sisters happy/desiring

Nidja Noongar maam koodjal yokang karlangat nyin.

This Noongar man two women-with fire-beside sit

Boola boola Noongar yoowarl koorl ngaanelangainy keniny walang-walanginy.

many People this-way go eat together dancing singing

The women made a fire, and their family and friends came to dance and feast and sing about their new friend, our clever, brave ancestor. They all wanted to hear his song.



Boorda maam yoka baalapiny boola boola koolanga karlak koorl.

Later man women their many children home go

Nidja ngalang karlak yey baalapiny ngalang demangka, ana?

This they-with (our) home now they us-with (our) grandparents (question)

After a long time the whale became part of the sand and the rocks of that beach, and part of all the people there. Then one day the man and the women and their many children travelled all the way back to the man's home. And that's our home, now. And they our old people, unna?





Family members and elders present at the first workshop held in Albany, January 2007

Mamang

THE STORY IN THIS VOLUME is one a of series, and part of an attempt to share with an ever widening circle of readers some of the stories emanating from the people who first formed human society – ice ages ago – in our part of the world, the south coast of Western Australia.

On a sombre note: since we began this project a number of individuals important to the return and consolidation of material that provided the inspiration for the story in this book have passed away. No disrespect is intended to other Australian Aboriginal groups for whom names of the deceased are taboo, but those of us involved in this book have gathered around the names and images of the following Noongar individuals to farewell their cold bodies:

Lomas Roberts
Audrey Brown
Edward Brown Sr
Geoffrey Woods

This book is dedicated to them. In their absence it would never have been brought to life.

The aging of our elders and the turbulence in our community means that there is no doubt we will lose more key people. Hazel Brown is the last of her siblings, two of whom are named above, and she and her cousins still remember people like Bob Roberts and Fred Winmer – the two people who, in 1931, told the American linguist Gerhardt Laves the story that inspired this book.

Hazel Brown was only a child in 1931, and Bob Roberts was a young man. Several of the people in our group were his biological nephews and nieces.

Fred Winmer's name is also written down as Windmill, Williams and Winmar. Elders of our group preferred that we spell it as 'Winmer' to reflect their sense of how it should be pronounced. This was only one of many discussions about how we might best match the spelling and sound of a particular word.

None of us had previously heard of the linguist Gerhardt Laves who, upon returning to the United States of America,

abruptly changed careers. His notes were neglected until the 1980s when his family sent them to Australia to be placed under the guardianship of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). We remain very grateful to the Laves family.

AIATSIS, the University of Western Australia and a ‘reference group’ of Noongar people set in place an initial protocol for the return of the Gerhardt Laves material to its community. Some of those in the reference group worried that it is one thing to suggest rules for who should control the access to those materials, but another thing altogether to find a way to genuinely return that material to a community of people descended from the ‘informants’, let alone consolidate it in ways that bring that community together.

Please note that the ‘material’ we are speaking of comprises language and stories. Stories live longer and stronger by being shared. Our intention was, and is, to claim, control and enhance our heritage. We choose to do this by starting with a small ‘community of descendants’, and progressively sharing with ever widening circles of people.

We would like to tell you how we put this story together.

OUR PROCESS

Laves’ International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is hard to read, and rather idiosyncratic. His notes have no punctuation, and often no translations. We studied the current IPA alphabet and, after applying it to transcriptions of recordings of Lomas Roberts, Cedric Roberts, Audrey Brown and Hazel Brown speaking Noongar language, went through parts of Laves’ transcriptions

with some of the elders identified as related to the informants. Gerald Williams, one of our group, is the son of the Simon Williams with whom Laves spoke in 1931. Laves also spoke with George Nelly, who had died when his daughter and son – Helen and Russell – were still very young. Both Helen Hall and Russell Nelly are also part of this project. Another was Lomas Roberts, who, like his sisters Hazel and Audrey Brown remembered all of Laves’ Noongar informants. These three siblings called all the informants ‘uncle’, and their father was brother to two of them (Bob Roberts and Malcolm Roberts) and brother-in-law to another two (George Nelly, Simon Williams).

Lomas Roberts was crucial to our research. He had heard parts of some of the stories before, recognised words and phrases, was befuddled by some of the texts and said some of language didn’t sound right. The problem may have been my renditions of the IPA, but there did seem to have been changes in Noongar language in the seventy plus years since Laves had made his notes. When I pronounced a particular word in the way indicated by Laves’ script Hazel Brown said, ‘Yes’, with a look of surprise. ‘We used to say it like that.’

Occasionally Uncle Lomas pointed out mistakes that Laves appeared to have made in translation. Often, he was reminded of stories and anecdotes, or stimulated to talk about things that may otherwise have been neglected.

It was intense and demanding work, and although we were only skimming the texts in order to get an idea of what might be ‘sensitive’ in terms of protocol, it was exciting to begin to grasp stories of people who had long passed away and to see the ‘value-adding’ quality of bringing together archives and elders. As the

Mamang

senior man of an extended clan it was rare for Uncle Lomas to have uninterrupted time, and his house had a constant stream of visitors. As we stumbled through the dense texts, reading passages aloud, others in the house moved a little closer, attracted by the vocabulary, the sound and – when they stayed a little longer – the stories themselves. Uncle Lomas thought it would be good to get more people involved, properly.

How?

The texts were very difficult, hard to share.

The sounds didn't seem to quite match the way most Noongar was spoken today.

Some of the information seemed to contradict what many Noongar people today believe.

We couldn't really return the stories to community unless we could find a way to share them properly.

Descending from the stage at a literary festival where I had been talking about *Kayang and Me*, a work I co-authored with Hazel

Brown and which coincidentally intersects with some of the material collected by Laves, a woman came up and introduced herself: Mary Gimondo. She asked if I knew a way to produce some books for children, books written in Noongar language.

Yes, I said, I might. But I was not sure they'd be children's books.

I don't think Mary knew what she was letting herself in for. I didn't (although I'd wished for something like it).

My conversations with Lomas Roberts and Hazel Brown had suggested how we might be able to return this archival material to a 'group of descendants' in ways which helped revive our ancestral language and strengthen our community. A novelist, a loner, I couldn't do it alone; but there were elders who would help, and strong people in our community who I was sure would be valuable. I suggested to Mary that she meet some of these people. Most of them were already involved, and thus Edward Brown Sr, Iris Woods, Roma Winmar, Ezzard Flowers and Olivia Roberts became the centre of a group which would oversee a still embryonic plan which had been formed in conversation with

Lomas Roberts and Hazel Brown. Marg Robinson and Lefki Kailis joined Mary Gimondo as generous collaborators in the sort of cross-cultural team so important to a project like this.

We held three workshops, to which our reference group invited people with whom they wished to share the stories.

At the first workshop a package of copies of the linguist's transcripts of all their ancestor's stories were handed to each of the people among us named in the protocol as a key descendant. Within a few moments everyone in the room was crying – a measure of the emotional intensity behind what's normally expressed in words like 'ownership' and 'rights'. People said it was good to gather around the stories of our old people, rather than at a funeral.

We worked for two days with a few stories chosen by members of the reference group. The stories had been written on large sheets of paper, using Laves' IPA script, contemporary Noongar spelling and some of Laves' translation notes. We read them aloud and recorded our continuing elaborations, along with the discussion of pronunciation, semantics and cultural references.

We heard people's memories of the 'informants', and other stories that came to mind. Recording and remembering like this germinates seeds in the archives.

The number of descendants/elders in the immediate circle varied between seven and thirteen, although a greater number of people informally observed from elsewhere in the room. People came and departed throughout the day. There were probably never more than about sixty people present at any one time, never less than about twenty.

At the end of the weekend we'd agreed to hold further workshops to help consolidate stories and language in ways that would help create opportunities for more of us to share them with ever widening circles. One day we might even publish some of them. The story in this book comes from those initial and continuing discussions, and from additional wordlists derived from the south coast of Western Australia.

Some months later we invited people to participate in a second workshop led by an experienced children's book illustrator, Frané Lessac. Frané led us through the nuts and bolts of making a picture book: the size and number of illustrations, what materials to use and her way of working. We continued telling and retelling the stories as we began drawing and painting, and the stories grew with our attention. Some of us spoke of sites to which the stories might refer, while others listened to descriptions of places we had never seen. Looking through the lens of our ancestral language helped refresh our world. An artist – Yibiyung – showed us the perspective you will share in this story, that of looking through a whale's eye.

The third workshop was held at the 'Noongar Centre' in Albany, and featured an exhibition of the artwork produced in the second workshop, photographs from all the workshops so far, and a 'reading' of each of the stories. We also ceremoniously handed out fifty packages – each containing three picture books and a CD of the stories being read aloud in Noongar language – to the reference group and other individuals who represented key families in the Albany Noongar community. Our intention was to celebrate the stories, as well as to create a sense of community ownership and a situation where – should the stories ever be published – individuals might find

Mamang

employment in schools and other places because of their knowledge of both the stories and the process of their creation. But even more than this, we wanted to use these stories to bind a community together rather than – as sometimes happens in oppressed communities – promote rivalry over our collective heritage and exacerbate other community tensions and tear us apart. We hoped the people who received the stories would share them with their family and friends.

The fourth stage of this process was the development of a one-hour ‘performance’ which we took to selected schools in Albany and Perth and, in a couple of instances, presented at community events. The performance began by emphasizing the diversity of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and, to introduce ourselves as Wirlomin Noongar, consisted of a welcome in language, an illustrated explanation of our process, the three stories, and one or two songs. The team of presenters varied slightly as individuals felt ready to take on greater roles, and always included elders.

These presentations placed some of us in a novel position: non-Indigenous people were listening avidly to what we had to say, and grateful for what we were sharing. The Noongar individuals in the stories were confident, talented, generous heroes. Please excuse the immodesty, but some of us may have felt that very same way at the time. To judge by the enthusiasm with which Noongar students introduced themselves to our group, and the extent to which they wished to share stories told in their own families, I think other Noongars also felt proud.

As the final component of this first cycle of claiming, controlling and enhancing our heritage, we filmed Hazel Brown and Lomas Roberts taking us to places that connected with the stories we had developed, and to old camping and dancing grounds and other sites along the south coast of Western Australia that were important to them. Fifty copies of an edited version of that film were distributed at the first of our next cycle of workshops.

WHO WE ARE

We've named individual creators of this story, but it really comes from all of those involved in what we have called the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project. Noongar is the name for people indigenous to the south-west of Western Australia. Wirlomin? Literally, it means 'curlew-like'. It is not a name that features even in the most commonly cited Aboriginal language maps, and is only hinted at in the archives. Since we are considering language survival and the weight of heritage a tongue can carry, it's probably apt that the name is so very reliant upon oral history. The name is also associated with a particular site, ceremony and song. We will not recount the details of site, ceremony and song here. Suffice to say that it tells of spirits of the past, beyond a veil of death, acknowledging and speaking to those who have come to listen.

As Wirlomin Noongar we hope this story – *Mamang* – will help you feel the human, cultural pulse of this part of the oldest continent on earth.

It has not been an easy task, keeping that pulse alive. Colonised less than two hundred years ago, our ancestral population was reduced to something like ten percent of its original size within decades and subsequently, until less than forty years ago, subject to exclusion, discrimination and oppressive legislation. Some of us learned shame. No wonder our ancestral tongue shriveled, and stories such as the one in this book withered and dried like old snake skin, curling back to a thin, barely-there scrap and synecdoche of what was once the living sinew and sap of our place.

We have gathered around the papers – dry and brittle as old skin – left by a linguist who listened to our community elders

who have long ago passed way. At the time there were probably very few who bothered to do that. We have encouraged ourselves to listen and give voice to the sounds of long ago and to thus resonate with the ancient human sound of this edge of the continent. We may be some distance from what is often called the most remote capital city on the planet, yet to us it can feel like the very centre. We are glad you have joined us as part of this ever widening, concentric circle.

A NOTE ON VOCABULARY, PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING

I have referred to the issue of differences between the archival material and the way Noongar language is spoken today. An additional complication with this project has been our desire to pay due respect to the south coastal dialect of Noongar language, at the same time as accepting the need to combine these dialects in order to maximise the survival and spread of the language as a whole. With this in mind we have used spelling agreed upon by the now defunct Noongar Language and Culture Centre and utilised in the Western Australian Education Department's curriculum, although in comparison to other dialects 'b' is pronounced more like a 'p', 'd' is perhaps closer to 't' and there are many diphthongs the spelling cannot reproduce.

This story also features a few notable differences from the vocabulary of other dialects. One is our use of the word 'nyoondok' rather than 'noonook' for the word 'you'. Elders in this project usually use the words 'maambangat' and/or 'maambakoort' for ocean. We decided to use the word probably more commonly known by Noongar people to refer to ocean in a generic sense:

Mamang

‘wardarn’. In general, we have relied upon consensus and the judgement of elders involved in the project for the solution to any discrepancies between archival material, current use and dialects. Sometimes a fluent speaker will stretch out sounds near the end of a word to indicate subject or object, or even alter words slightly for the sake of rhythm and flow. Occasionally we have tried to indicate something similar, and would welcome Noongar speakers to alter the text to suit their own inclinations.

We wavered over the English versions of our stories: Aboriginal English, or a more formal English? The consensus was that Noongar readers would make their own versions anyway, and so we decided on a relatively standard English, flavoured by the spoken voice. We have provided a limited literal translation, and also offer a loose translation which attempts to compensate for the lack of gesture and tone available to words on a page.

Kim Scott

on behalf of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project

GLOSSARY

<i>-ak</i>	(suffix) of, associated with	<i>-iny</i>	(suffix) present participle, or to indicate object in sentence	<i>nga-ooo</i>	scream
<i>ana</i>	question			<i>ngardi</i>	down
<i>-ang</i>	(suffix) with			<i>ngat</i>	(usually suffix) beside, next-to
<i>baal</i>	it	<i>kalyakoort</i>	all around; forever	<i>ngayanginy</i>	screaming
<i>baalang</i>	he/she-with; his/hers	<i>karep</i>	hole	<i>ngaytj</i>	I
<i>baalap</i>	they	<i>karlak</i>	home	<i>ngoorndiny</i>	lying/reclining
<i>baalapiny</i>	their	<i>karlangat</i>	beside fire	<i>nidja</i>	these
<i>baaminy</i>	hitting	<i>kediny</i>	carrying	<i>Noongar</i>	Noongar, person, people
<i>barang</i>	grab	<i>keniny</i>	dancing	<i>nyin</i>	sit
<i>bardang</i>	jump	<i>kep</i>	water	<i>nyoondok</i>	you
<i>bindjel</i>	bubble	<i>kep-al</i>	water (agency)		
<i>bireniny</i>	scrape	<i>koboort</i>	stomach	<i>unna</i>	see <i>ana</i>
<i>boodja</i>	earth, land, country	<i>koodjal</i>	two		
<i>boodja-k</i>	ground-of	<i>koolanga</i>	children	<i>wangkiny</i>	speaking, talking
<i>bookidja</i>	over there	<i>koombar</i>	big	<i>wangk</i>	say
<i>boola</i>	many	<i>koort</i>	go	<i>walang-walanginy</i>	singing
<i>boorda</i>	later		heart	<i>wardarn</i>	ocean
<i>bordak</i>	close	<i>l</i>	(suffix) marker of subject in sentence	<i>wardarn-al</i>	ocean (agency)
<i>boya</i>	rock			<i>wariny</i>	hanging
<i>bwooar</i>	inside			<i>windja</i>	where
		<i>maam</i>	man	<i>woora</i>	far
<i>dabakarn</i>	slow	<i>mamang</i>	whale	<i>worl</i>	sky
<i>darap</i>	enter	<i>mamang-miyel</i>	whale-eye	<i>wort</i>	away
<i>datj</i>	meat	<i>mayer</i>	sound		
<i>demangka</i>	grandparents	<i>moorlany</i>	back	<i>yaakiny</i>	standing
<i>djerabiny</i>	proud/happy/desiring			<i>yey</i>	now
<i>djert</i>	birds	<i>nanap</i>	stop	<i>yira</i>	up
<i>djinang</i>	see	<i>ngalang</i>	our	<i>yoka</i>	women
<i>djinangelangainy</i>	all seeing/looking together	<i>ngaanelangainy</i>	eating, all together	<i>yoowarl-bili</i>	this side/way
<i>djook</i>	sister	<i>ngan</i>	my	<i>yoowart</i>	no/not
<i>don</i>	stab	<i>ngayn</i>	me		