

Language Groups

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A few examples of Language Groups and their origins.

Kamilaroi
Upper North Coast
Bandalang
North-East NSW
Walmajarri
Northern WA

Gumatj
Arnhem Land
Pitjantjatjara
North West SA
Ngangajarr
Eastern West Australia
Wik-Mungkan
Cape York
Kunja/Mandgang
South West QLD

There are many forms of communication by which Aboriginal people pass on traditions and laws for social interaction.

Language, song, art and cultural practice are all part of The Dreaming and remain part of The Dreaming. There are many creation stories that talk of the Mother Being, the Dreaming Serpent and other Ancestral Beings giving life to people and children of the land and life to their tongues through language.

Waramurungundji is seen to be the great mother figure who emerged from the sea in Northern Australia giving the languages to all who were created. Biami and his two wives are talked about in the South East area of Queensland as the significant Creator and Ancestral Beings. Each language group has its own name for this mother figure and other Ancestral Spirits developed the many dialects that are spoken across the country.

In Aboriginal societies language is not only seen as a form of communication but as a method of right to land, forming boundaries for each family group, and language group. Language is used as social control as it has various forms depending on the ages and status of people within a language group.

The language group of a particular family group give social order to kinship and marriage laws. It was and is, common to find Aboriginal people with many languages or tongues, not just from their own area but neighbouring language groups. In order to function within a large language group which may have many dialects. Trade and Travel across language boundaries saw a need for multi-lingual people within language groups.

There were assumed to have been 700 distinct language groups in Australia prior to European Invasion. Of these at least 250 languages have been recorded. The dramatic impact on the languages of Aboriginal people from European invasion cannot be underestimated. Aboriginal people were taken from their own areas/language boundaries to the areas of others. Many language groups were encamped together causing conflict and mixing their own languages. Aboriginal people on missions were banned from using their own languages. Thus the maintenance of these languages was generally left to just a few.

Nowadays there is a greater understanding of the importance of Aboriginal Language. The

close ties language has with The Dreaming. Spirit Beings and the land have often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Contemporary land rights execute such evidence of the great relationship between language boundaries, the land, social and spiritual beliefs. The Dreaming is thus inseparable from Language.