



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN AUSTRALIA

Before Europeans arrived in Australia it is estimated that there were as many as 300 different language groups amongst the Indigenous people of Australia.

Today it is estimated that there about 250 different Indigenous Australian languages around the country. If you walk down the main street in Alice Springs you can hear many different languages being spoken by Aboriginal people who live in the region and Aboriginal people visiting from a different language area.

The Arrernte (ah-run-da) language

The Eastern and Central Arrernte languages are spoken by Arrernte people mainly in or around Alice Springs in central Australia. Eastern and Central Arrernte are strong languages with about 1,500 to 2,000 people speaking them.

Eastern and Central Arrernte are used as everyday languages for most of these people and children are still learning them. However, the languages are under a lot of pressure from English, which is used in government services and the media.

Arrernte sounds and spelling

Arrernte has a large vocabulary of words, just as all languages do, but its grammar is very different to English.

The writing system used for the Arrernte languages may look strange at first, but they represent the way that the sounds work. The sound system is complicated and very different to other Indigenous languages or English, therefore, the spelling system is different too.

Starting a conversation

When Arrernte people meet someone they usually say 'Werte?' (wood-ah), which means 'What is the matter?' but can be translated as 'G'day', 'How are you going?' or 'What's up?' The normal reply to 'Werte?' is 'Ware' (waar-

The main communities where Eastern and Central Arrernte dialects are spoken are Alcoota, Harts Range (Artetyerre) Bonya (Uthipe Atherre), Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte), Amoonguna (Amengkwerne) and Alice Springs (Mparntwe). These are also spoken on outstations within the area.

Arrernte people identify themselves very strongly through their language, which is related to family, country and dreamings. For example, in the same way that other Australians might say they come from the country of Australia, the Arrernte people of central Australia say they come from Arrernte country.

ah) which means 'nothing much'. And the usual thing to say when you are farewelling someone is to say 'Urreke aretyenhenge' (oo-rug-a ah-rretch-a-nung-ah) which means 'See you later'. A short conversation might go like this:
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of Town Camp children in Alice Springs are concerned that this is another reason some of their children find it difficult and do not attend school as often as they should.

A few words from the Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary

by IAD Press

Person A	Person B
Werte G'day, what's up?	Ware Nothing much
Unte mwerre (oon-dah moor-a)? Are you alright?	Ye, ayenge (ah- yoong-a) mwerre Yes, I'm alright
Urreke aretyenhenge See you later	Kele (ka-la) aretyenhenge OK, See you later

Eastern and Central Arrernte are part of a group of languages which also includes Anmatyerr, Alyawarr and Kaytetye. There are also other types of Arrernte, including Western Arrernte, Pertame and Lower Arrernte. In total these languages probably have around 4,500 speakers in total, which is a relatively large number compared to most other indigenous Australian languages.

Many older Arrernte people believe that younger people are not learning or using their language as well as they should and are worried that the language will be lost if something is not done.

Children on remote communities are sometimes teaching in their own language for part of their schooling. However, English is often a second or even third language for Aboriginal children in central Australia and in most schools they are taught in English. Many parents

English	Arrernte
baby newborn baby	ampe akweke alyelke, ampe akweke alkarle, arltere, urlkere
bad , no good, evil	akurne, akenge
banana wild banana fruit	alangkwe, luty
boomerang Hook boomerang 'number 7' boomerang	alye, ilye alye irlpe, irlkwe, irlkwe akerte, alye irlpakerte
boy	urreye, aweye, amane, awerre, artare
boyfriend , girlfriend	anewe, anewe-anewe, mirte-mirte
country area, region, country country where there is no water country, land, region dried out country, barrencountry dry country dry, sandy country	ahelhe, aherne, herne ahelhe anteke arlpawe apmere, pmere tywerretye ahurratye arerrke



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English	Arrernte
flat country with sandy red soil	urrkale
flat country, plain	arturle, aturle
strange country	ampere ulerenye
ceremony	
women's dancing at the time of initiation ceremonies	anthepe
ceremony type	arlarlunpe
public ceremony performed for entertainment	altharte
a type of ceremony where men dance	unenthe
ceremonial firestick	ntyangkweknge
ceremonial headdress	kwetare
ceremonies for women only	awelye
food prepared for people to eat during ceremony time	tyenkarre, tyenkerre
part of initiation ceremonies where women and girls dance and men sing	apwelhe

English	Arrernte
public ceremony with singing and dancing	arawe-irrentye
type of ceremony, with dancing and singing	pwentye
chalk, white ochre, white clay	atyelkwe, atywelke
girl, young woman	kweye, kwerre
a female, girl, woman	marle
girlfriend	anewe, anewe-anewe, mirte-mirte
goanna	altyekwerre, altyikwarre
black goanna	altywekarre
good, right, proper	mwarre, mwerre
'Good job'	awethime
'ok, good'	kele mwerre, kele mwarre
gossip	tyele angkeme
happy, happily	akangkentye
feel happy, be happy	akangkeme, tangkeme, rtangkeme, inkwerelheme
feel happy, enjoy yourself	ilkelheme
happy person	akangkenhekenhe
hawk	
type of hawk	irrkertantye
Hello!	werte
here	nhenhe, nhe



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English	Arrernte	English	Arrernte
Hey!	aye	talk, speak, say	angkeme, ngkeme
Hidden Valley town camp	Uyenpere Atwatye	talk to each other, a number of people	
laugh, smile, giggle	atherreme, therreme	talking	angkerreme, ngkerreme
laugh or smile		someone who talks too much or too loudly	arrakerte akngerre
at someone	atherrelhe-ileme	talk angrily,	ahele angkeme,
make someone laugh or smile	atherrelherrelhe-ileme	speak roughly	ahele-ahele angkeme
law		talk loudly or enthusiastically	alterrelheme, arrakerte alterrelheme
traditional law	atywerrenge,	talk softly	apertemele angkeme
tywerrenge		talk using your hands	iltyele angkeme, iltyele ngkeme
learn	akaltye-irreme, akurrkngeke-ileme	communicate	iltyeme-iltyeme
sad	alhwarpe, anturrknge	whisper, talk softly	arretyeme, arrirteme
make (someone) feel sad	alhwarpele-antheme	tall, long	arlpentye, arlpennge
sad and lonely, homesick	irrare	be taller than someone	akerte-areme
		tall and thin, long and thin	arlpentye utyewe, utyewe arlpentye
		teach	akaltye-antheme, akaltyele-antheme, akaltyele- ntheme