

Sample Ilgar text: The last speaker's lament.

Recorded at Minjilang in December 1999 from the late C.W., in the Ilgar language, by Nick Evans, at Minjilang, N.T. First transcription 1999 by Nick Evans; retranscription and translation by Nick Evans, April 2004. This recording was made at a time when the current DOBES project was first being discussed with elders in the region, and captures the dismay of many senior members of the community at how their language and culture are not being passed on to the next generation.

[Out of respect for the recent death of the speaker, the recording is not currently being made available on the web. The other speaker of Garig mentioned in the text has also passed away recently, and his name is deleted from the current version of the text]

- (1) *rakabara ngabi wawu ngabi bunyi,*
ɹakapaɹa ŋapi wawu ŋapi puɹi
that my father's.father my father
'That paternal grandfather of mine, my father,
- (2) *ngapi wiwi, ngabi wurluburlu,*
ŋapi wiwi ŋapi wuɹupuɹu
my mother's.mother my mother's.mother's.mother
'my maternal grandmother, my great grandmother on my mother's side,
- (2) *rakabara yildatbihi raka.. yildatbihi raka aman*
ɹakapaɹa yi-latpiuɹi ɹaka yi-latpiyi ɹaka a-man
that 3masc-law that 3masc-law that 1sg/3sg.masc-havePR
'that culture (of theirs), I have it,
- (3) *aman ngawani,*
a-man ŋa-wani
1sg/3sg.masc-holdPR 1-sitPR
'I still hold onto it.
- (4) *rakabara nganamaju, nganamaju ,*
ɹakapaɹa ŋ-ana-maju ŋ-ana-maju
that 1sg-FUT-die 1sg-FUT-die
'When I die,
- (5) *mangu animanga_ga yildatpihi raka?*
maju a-ni-ma-ŋa_ka i-latpiuɹi ɹaka
who ANG.O-3sg.masc.A-hold-IRR 3masc-law that
'who will understand that law?

- (6) *nobody nobody, yiwanima*
nobody nobody yi-wa-ni-ma
 3mascOBJ-FUT-3mascA-hold

raka aldaharrama raka,
.iaka a-lauqarama .iaka
 DEM 3plS-talk DEM

‘Noone maintains it, can talk it.

- (7) *nganimanga raka nganturu raka yiwurruli arrkbi,*
ŋa-ni-ma-ŋa .iaka ŋantu.ru .iaka yi-wuruli arkpi
 1sgO-3sgA-hold-IRR DEM where DEM 3masc-good person
 ‘Where is a good man who can support me / who can get hold of it for me?’

- (8) *yiharlu aju, yiharlu yiwanima raka*
yiyaŋu a-ju yiyaŋu yi-w-ana-ma .iaka
 NEG 3pl-lie NEG 3sg.mascO-3plA-FUT-get that
 ‘There is noone; noone will get hold of it.

- (9) *yiharlu yiwanima_raka kutbinangkara mangu raka,*
yiyaŋu yi-w-ana-ma .iaka kutpinanƙara maŋu .iaka
 NEG 3mascO-3plA-FUT-get_that if.you.please who that
 ‘There is noone will understand it, if you please.

- (10) *niki yiwani kalajarr Murrmar kalajarr.*
niki yi-wani kalajar murmaɪ kalajar
 there 3mascS-sit deaf/old.man Black.Point old.man

Murrmar raka raka yiwani
murmaɪ .iaka .iaka yi-wani
 Black.Point DEM DEM 3mascS-sit

‘Just that old man who lives at Black Point, who lives there at Black Point.

- (11) *yildaharrama raka Garig ngarrildaharrun,*
yi-lauqarama .iaka kaɪk ŋari-lauqarun
 3mascS-talk DEM Garig 1plS-converse
 ‘He talks that Garig language, and we can converse together.

- (12) *ngarrilaharrun raka, kalajarr yiwurruli,*
ŋari-lauqarun .iaka kalajar yi-wuruli
 1plS-converse DEM old.man 3sg.masc-good
 ‘We can converse together, (me and) that wise old man.

- (13) *balanda* *yiwungijbungkun* [X]
palanta *yi-wu-ŋijpuŋku-n* [X]
 white.person 3mascOBJ-3plA-call-NPST
 ‘(Who) white people call [X].’

Notes on phonology, orthography and transcription.

Ilgar has the same phoneme inventory as Iwaidja; the final form of the practical orthography is still under discussion so this version is provisional. Apart from the use of *b* instead of *p* for the bilabial stop, and the existence of several graphs for liquid phonemes not found in Maung, we employ the same system as the more established orthography used for the related language Mawng.

There is just a single stop series, with no voicing contrast, so it is somewhat arbitrary whether to use voiced or voiceless symbols (*b, d, g* or *p, t, k*, etc.) though the standard pronunciation of stop phonemes in all positions is voiced; in the transcription above voiceless symbols are used for all stops except for *j* for the laminopalatal stop), but voiceless ones are used in the practical orthography on the top line for all stops except the bilabial and laminopalatal. This frees up the voiced symbols for unambiguous use in a number of digraphs, namely *ng, ld, rld* and *rd*. [One complication is that the spelling of the language names, Ilgar and Garig, became conventionalized some time ago; in the orthography employed here they would be spelled Ilkar and Karik]. Our discussion below only uses phonetic symbols when necessary to clarify particular sound values.

There are five points of articulation for stops and nasals: bilabial (*b, m*), velar (*k, ŋ*), apico-alveolar (*t, n*), apico-postalveolar (*rd, rn*) and lamino-palatal (*j, ny*).

Semi-vowels occur at four of these points of articulation: bilabial *w*, lamino-palatal *y*, apicoalveolar *r*, and velar *h* (which varies phonetically between [u] before *a* and *u*, and [ç] before *i*),

There is a generous set of liquids, including:

rr, an apical trill or tap [r],

rd, a retroflex flap [ɽ]

l, an apicoalveolar lateral [l]

rl, an apicopostalveolar lateral [ɭ],

ly, a laminopalatal lateral [ʎ]

ld, a flapped apicoalveolar lateral [ɺ]

rld, a flapped apicopostalveolar lateral [ɽ̥]

There are three vowels, *a, i, u*, with no length contrast.

After the verb certain words are often reduced and joined on to the preceding verb, in which case the underscore is used in this transcription, e.g. in lines 5 and 9.

Further notes on text.

This text illustrates the propensity towards complex prefixed verbs in Ilgar, with prefixation for subject, object, future tense and (not illustrated here) direction. The ordering of subject, object and future tense prefixes is complex: basically first or second persons precede others, and objects precede subjects, with the placement of the future morpheme depending on the 'weight' of the other prefixes. Some verbs have fixed object prefixes when used with special meanings, such as the 'ang' prefix in line 5 (in the combination *ang-ni-*, which reduces to *ani-*), which here converts the basic verb meaning of 'hold, grasp' to 'understand' (i.e. grasp something abstract, or having to do with language, country or culture). Verbs take little suffixation, except for some non-zero suffixes like the irrealis suffix in line 7.

Nominals take no case inflection, though some have (essentially lexical) prefixes like the masculine *yi-* in *yilatbihi* 'law, custom'. In fact, the existence of *yi-*prefixed nouns is one of the most salient differences between Ilgar and Iwaidja, with *yi-X* in Ilgar corresponding to unprefixed nouns in Iwaidja, but with the initial consonant mutated: the Iwaidja correspondent of *yilatbihi* is thus *ratbihi* (currently spelled *ratbiyi*).

Rakabara, which occurs widely in Ilgar, has a variety of translations including 'that', 'well', 'when' and 'if', and is often uttered as the first word to make it clear one is speaking Ilgar rather than some other language of the region.

Lines 10, 12. The term *kalajarr*, literally 'ear', has a further extension to 'deaf/mad', but is also a term of respect for old people. (Terms of respect for old people based on failing vision or eyesight are widespread in Arnhem Land). As the positive assessment of the old man's knowledge in lines 10 and 12 makes clear, this term is certainly not being used in a negative context here.