## Developing words for numbers in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay

Discussion of this topic began around 2000, mainly in Yuwaalaraay teaching programs, and in 2001 a discussion paper was produced and comments obtained from many involved as language workers and elders in various sections of GY (Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay) revival. What follows is adapted from the 2001 discussion paper.

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## The reason for having number words

The topic of developing new words in Aboriginal languages is not a simple one. An early question is whether to develop new words, and if so what types of word. Some people are slow to change the handed down languages out of respect. Others would propose that respect for the language means keeping it alive, making it something that people can use every day. If that is so then new words need to be developed for new things, or for aspects of life that have become more important. That discussion will continue. This proposal to develop number words came from most of those teaching GY in schools and had strong support elsewhere. Having a number system means that GY can be used more.

The following number system was developed largely from existing sources, a number of options presented, and the final version has the approval of Uncle Ted Fields. He chose a number of words on the basis that "They sound like Yuwaalaraay".

### Principles

Some principles adopted in developing numbers are that it is:

• better if the words for numbers are short words

• better if the beginning of each word for 1 to 10 is different

• good if the new words have some basis in language.

## Developing the number words: collecting information

After initial discussion, the next step was to collect existing information on GY numbers.

## Austin and Williams

The main references for GY at that stage were Austin's dictionaries and Williams' *Grammar of Yuwaalaraay*.

Peter Austin (PA) is a senior linguist and produced Gamilaraay dictionaries, printed and on the web. Corrine Williams (CW) did a very good honours thesis on Yuwaalaraay. (For more details see the Bibliography.)

Most Aboriginal languages have words for one and two, a few have words for three, and if there are words for bigger numbers they usually involve combining the words for one and two, in is the word for 'four' below. Austin and Williams had the following.

| 1 | biirr/biyarr, milan (CW) | maal (PA) |
| 2 | bulaarr | (CW, PA) |
| 3 | gulibaa | (CW, PA) |
| 4 | bulawulaarr | CW |

## Milson

There is manuscript of Gamilaraay in the Mitchell Library, Sydney but details about its origin are sketchy. The document has a much more extensive number system, which is shown here together with the current orthography (spelling system):

|   | Milson's orthography | Current othography |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | maal | maal |
| 2 | bullar | bulaarr |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | bullarmaal | bulaarrmaal |
| 3 | goolebah | gulibaa |
| 4 | tabberah | |
| 5 | bonego | |
| 6 | yullingulla | |
| 6 | moolando | |
| 7 | groolebah | |
| 10 | bonegoboo | |

| | |
|---|---|
| (10,000) lots | cougy bulla |

The word for 10 is an extension of the word for five; it could be using *-boo* [-bu in current orthography] to mean two, so 10 = 5x2. Given that most Aboriginal languages do not have corresponding words, and that other informants and researchers did not have such a list, there must be some doubt as to the actual meaning of these words.

## Ian Sim

A very important source for Yuwaalayaay language is the material collected by Ian Sim in Goodooga around 1950. It includes two lists, including one from Greg Fields.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | biyarr, biyarrduul | |
| 2. | bulaarr | |
| 3. | gulibaa | |
| 4. | bulaarrbulaarr | |
| 5. | biyarr-maa | Lit. one hand |
| 10. | bulaarruu-maa | Lit. two hand |

## Greg Fields

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | milan |
| 2 | bulaa |
| 3 | gulibaa |
| 4 | buligaa |
| 5 | milan-maa |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| two the same | bulaangu(u) | Poss. bulaangur; twins |
| pair | bulaangaa | a pair of anything, two together. |

Alternatives

| | |
|---|---|
| 4. | bulaarrmabulaarrma |
| 5. | milan-maa |
| 6. | milan-maa-biyaarr |
| | etc |

## Walgett Primary School (unknown author)

Uncle Ted Fields and others taught language at Walgett Primary School in the 1990s.

The following number list was found on the wall of the language room.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | wongra |
| 2 | bullawa |
| 3 | dilleen |
| 4 | binahl |
| 5 | murra |
| 6 | gwee |

| 7 | mungal |
|---|---|
| 8 | gullay |
| 9 | mirrahl |
| 10 | murradee |

## Discussion

After the data was collected the words for 1, 2 and 3 were clearly in the sources.

They are:

| 1. | **milan** | **Yuwaalaraay** |
|---|---|---|
| | **maal** | **Gamilaraay** |
| 2. | **bulaarr** | |
| 3. | **gulibaa** | |

There was a traditional source which used *gulibaa* for four, and Uncle Ted Fields also used this word, so it became the word for four.

| 4. | **buligaa** |
|---|---|

Many languages use the word for hand for five, and it was decided to use the Yuwaalaraay word for both languages originally. However, some Gamilaraay people now use mara, since this makes a clearer distinction from maal (one).

| 5. | **maa** | Yuwaalaraay |
|---|---|---|
| | **Mara** | Gamilaraay |

For other numbers it was decided that each word would have two syllables, and words from the Milson and Walgett Primary (WPS) List were adapted. The discussion list was:

6.            <u>yuli</u> from Milson or **guwii** from WPS

7.            **guulay** from Milson <u>**mungal**</u> from WPS

8.            buligaa-bu – shortened to bu-bu or buli-bu          (see '-bu' above)

           <u>galay</u> – adapted from from WPS if mungal for 7

9.            <u>**mirraa / mirraal**</u> from WPS

10.           <u>**banay**</u>                         abbreviation of Milson


When it got to 'hundred', 'thousand' and 'million' there were no obvious sources in GY, so it was decided to borrow from Kaurna, the language of Adelaide, where a number system had already been developed. Permission was obtained to use the Kaurna words, which are adapted from existing Kaurna words – pile, multitude, etc.

100           partika

1000         Tauatta

million       Wiwurra


Adapting these to the GY spelling system gives:

100             **barriga** –

1000           **dhawadha**

million         **wiwurra**


An alternative is to use *gawugi* from Milson for thousand.


These were discussed with a range of people, and Uncle Ted Fields chose when there were alternatives for the numbers.

In 2004 there was a decision to develop a word for 'zero'. It was suggested to use the Wangkumarra word for 'nothing', and approval had been obtained from Greg McKellar When this was discussed with Auntie Rose Fernando [Flick] she strongly suggested using the Muruwari word, as this was a neighbouring language, and both groups are in Lightning Ridge. The Muruwari word is *parlanj*, It is adapted phonologically in to GY as *balan*. Uncle Roy Barker [a Muruwari elder] gave approval for the borrowing, and Auntie Rose and Uncle Ted Fields approved the use of the word;

0        **balan**


There was also discussion as to how to form numbers beyond 10. Rather than the English system [twenty, thirty etc] it was decided that the simplest way is to use the system used for hundreds (two hundred, etc) for tens as well. A number of languages do this.

So **20 = two ten = bulaarr banay**. Etc


And 5436 =

Maa dhawadha buligaa barriga   gulibaa banay yuli

5    thousand  4      hundred 3      ten    6


## The current GY number words

The full set of GY numbers is given below. Other number words that could be developed include:

> Ordinals: how to say first, second etc

> Fractions: half, one third, etc

Mathematical terms: plus, minus, times, etc

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | **balan** |
| 1 | **milan YR  maal GR** |
| 2 | **bulaarr** |
| 3 | **gulibaa** |
| 4 | **buligaa** |
| 5 | **maa YR  a GR** |
| 6 | **yuli** |
| 7 | **guulay** |
| 8 | **galay** |
| 9 | **mirraal** |
| 10 | **banay** |
| | |
| 100 | **barriga** |
| 1000 | **dhawadha** |
| million | **wiwurra** |

## Bibliography

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