

## APPENDIX 2

# Pronunciation Guide

This pronunciation guide has a general guide to Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation, and then a longer, more detailed discussion of the topic. The guide owes a lot to the material in Peter Austin's *A Reference Dictionary of Gamilaraay, Northern New South Wales* (1993) and in particular to comments from John Hobson, but they are not responsible for any errors in the final product.

### *Dhaalan* Pronunciation

The following is a **brief introduction** to pronunciation rules in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay (GY). These languages are being relearnt and rebuilt, and it will not be possible to get exactly the sounds that traditional Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay people made. We do not have those people to listen to us, model pronunciation and correct us. However, with effort and care we will get closer to those sounds, and our Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay will sound less like English and more like it should.

Note that in the Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay writing system two letters (such as *dh*, *ng* and *dj*) can be used to represent one sound. Also, many people used to speaking English have trouble saying the *ng* sound at the start of a word and *rr*. But, with practise, you will master them.

In March 2009 *Gayarragi, Winangali* was released. This multimedia resource based on the *Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay & Yuwaalayaay Dictionary* (Ash, Lissarrague & Giaccon, 2003) contains a lot of sound. It is a very useful resource, particularly for improving pronunciation, and you can download it from the link at [yuwaalaraay.com](http://yuwaalaraay.com).

In the following vowel and consonant description the format is:

GY spelling      Similar English sound

## Vowels

There is a more detailed discussion of vowels later.

<i>a</i>	short vowel, as in 'cut', but sounds like 'o' in 'cot' after w
<i>aa</i>	long vowel, as in 'card'
<i>i</i>	short vowel, as in 'fit/feet'
<i>ii</i>	long vowel, as in 'feed'
<i>u</i>	short vowel, as in 'soot/suit'
<i>uu</i>	long vowel, as in 'sued'
<i>ay</i>	as in 'bay' or 'hay'
<i>aay</i>	as in 'buy' (but sometimes like 'oy', as in 'boy')

## Consonants

<i>b</i>	like 'b' in 'bin' or 'p' in 'spin' but never like 'p' in 'pin'
<i>d</i>	like 'd' in 'duck' or 't' in 'tuck' but never like 't' in 'stuck'
<i>g</i>	like 'g' in 'git' or 'k' in 'kit' but never like 'k' in 'skit' [That is, there is no significant puff of air with any of b, d or g.]
<i>nh</i>	like English 'n' but with the tip of your tongue between your teeth
<i>dh</i>	like English 'd' and 't', but with the tip of your tongue between your teeth
<i>ny</i>	like 'n' in 'onion', but with the tip of your tongue against your bottom teeth, and the top of your tongue pressed against the roof of your mouth
<i>dj</i>	like 'judge' or 'church' and even like the 'ch' in 'catcher', but the tongue position is the same as for <i>ny</i> .
<i>ng</i>	a single sound, as in 'sing', not two sounds, as in 'finger'
<i>rr</i>	a rolled 'r', as some Scottish or German people say it. Often, at the end of a word, it can sound like the 'd' in 'bed'

The following are pronounced much the same as in English:

m, n, l, r

<i>w</i>	though <i>wu</i> at the start of a word is mostly pronounced like <i>u</i>
<i>y</i>	though <i>yi</i> at the start of a word is mostly pronounced like <i>i</i>

The above guide will get you started on correct Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation, but it is only an introduction, and there is a lot more to learn, including the variations in some sounds, and stress patterns. Some of that is covered in the material below.

## More detailed information

### The sounds of Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay

You can read more about the Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation system on pp. 6–8 of the *Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay & Yuwaalayaay Dictionary*. Chapter 2 of *Yaluu* (Giacon, 2017) has a more complete and up-to-date, but more technical, description. It is important to realise that any written description of sound is limited. So take what is written below as a general guide, not as a precise description. The only way to really learn about the sounds is to listen to them, so to learn good Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation you need to use material from the archival tapes, and listen to it carefully. Even that material is limited because the speakers had sometimes lost their teeth, or were remembering a language that they had not used for many years. And to get the sound really accurately you would need a fluent speaker commenting on your pronunciation.

Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay uses many sounds that are also used in English, and others that are not. Our mouths and ears are trained to the language(s) we know, so you may have to get used to making new sounds and noticing differences that you did not notice before.

Because the spelling system for Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay is fairly new it is a lot more consistent and so a lot easier to read than English. Generally, there is only one letter or pair of letters for each sound. In English the pronunciation of many words has changed over the centuries but the spelling has not, and so the spelling system is inconsistent and quite difficult to learn. (Think of the different sounds represented by ‘ough’ in ‘plough’, ‘through’, ‘cough’, ‘rough’ and ‘bought’.) In Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay the pronunciation of words has not changed recently, so the spelling system is very friendly, and does not take long to get used to.

The Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay sounds that are similar to English include the three vowels *a*, *i* and *u*, and the consonants *l*, *m*, *n*, *r*, *w* and *y*. In Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay (and in most Aboriginal languages) there is little or no distinction between the sounds made by English ‘b’ or ‘p’. You can use either, but we have chosen to use the letter *b* in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay spelling. Similarly there is no distinction between ‘d’ and ‘t’ (we have used *d*) or between ‘g’ and ‘k’ (we have used *g*).

## Variation in pronunciation

In any language there will be variation in pronunciation. Sometimes this variation is dialectal – people in one place or family might pronounce things differently from others. Sometimes it depends on whether the person is speaking casually or formally, slowly or quickly. Listen to the many different ways people say ‘going to’ in English (e.g. ‘They’re gunna do it.’). So it is perfectly normal to have variations in pronunciation within a language. But, to begin with, it is better to try to develop standard Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation, because if you try to talk it casually, you will probably introduce patterns of casual English rather than casual Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay.

### Vowels

Vowels are sounds that can be made continuously with the mouth fairly open. There are three short vowels in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay, and they are written *a*, *i* and *u*. When the sound is made for a longer period it is called a long vowel, and these are written *aa*, *ii* and *uu*. Since vowels are particularly influenced by the sounds immediately before or after them, there is some variation in the way vowels are pronounced. While *a* is often like the ‘u’ in the English word ‘cut’, it is different after *w*, when it often sounds like ‘o’ in ‘cot’. This also often happens after *b*, so the *a* in *bawi-li* sing can be like ‘o’ in ‘lot’. After *y* (*yanay* ‘walk’) *a* can be a bit like ‘e’ in ‘bet’.

There seems to be less variation in the vowels *i* and *u*.

The sequence *guw* at the start of a word is often pronounced *gw*. In *guwaali* ‘tell’ *waal* sounds like English ‘wall’, so the first part of the word is said *gwaal*.

The difference between long and short vowels is important. It can be the only difference between two similar words, as in:

<i>milan</i>	one
<i>milaan</i>	a type of yam
<i>dhurri</i>	will spear
<i>dhuurri</i>	will crawl
<i>yili</i>	lip
<i>yiili</i>	savage

The Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay word *gabaa* is used by some old people for ‘white person’, and they use *gaba* for ‘good’. Some young people do not know the ‘good’ meaning of *gaba* and use *gaba* to mean ‘white person’. This is an example of a language changing so that you no longer need to make a sound distinction. At times, vowel length does not seem to make a difference to the meaning. In some of the recordings the word for rock is pronounced as both *maayama* and *mayama*.

### Non-English sounds and spellings

There are some sounds that people who only speak English have difficulty learning to distinguish and find hard to make. These include *dh*, *nh*, *dj*, *ny*, *rr* and also *ng* at the start of a word. As well, the way unstressed vowels are pronounced in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay is very different to the English pattern.

Remember that *ng* is always one soft sound, as in ‘sing’. If you see *ngg* then this is two sounds together (*ng* and *g*) and so has a hard pronunciation, more like English ‘finger’. A full stop between the letters *n* and *g* (*n.g*) means that there are two distinct sounds (*n* and *g*, as in ‘turnkey’ or ‘sunglasses’), not one sound, as in *ng*.

It is a good idea to practise these by yourself somewhere – in the shower or when driving or walking. You can practise *ng* by saying ‘singingsinging...’, and then gradually dropping the ‘si’ at the start. For *nga* say ‘singanganga...’ and once again try to drop the ‘si’. For *rr* try to make machine gun or engine noises.

The Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay sounds *nh* and *dh* are similar to English ‘n’ and ‘d’ but are both made with your tongue tip on your bottom teeth or between your teeth. The sound *dh* has a similar tongue position to English ‘th’, but *dh* is a stop – the air is released quickly – whereas in ‘th’ there is ongoing air vibration, and you can continue the ‘th’ sound for a long time.

The Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay sounds *ny* and *dj* are both made with the tip of your tongue against your bottom teeth, and the flat part of your tongue pressed against the roof of your mouth. You can practise *ny* by acting like a cheeky child and saying ‘nya-nya-nya-nya-nya’. Previous descriptions had *ny* as similar to the sound in ‘onion’, but that sound is made with the tongue tip touching the top of the mouth.

When a *nh* is followed by a *dh* the *nhdh* that would result is simplified and written *ndh*. Similarly *nydj* is written *ndj*.

Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay words can begin with *b, m, dh, nh, g, ng, w* and *y* and a small number of words may begin with *dj* and *ny*. Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay words can end with *a, aa, i, ii, u, uu, n, l, rr* and *y*. One exception recorded is *maang*, meaning ‘message stick’. This could well be a borrowed word, possibly from Wiradjuri, since that language uses a final *ng*.

### Stress patterns

Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay has patterns for stressing or emphasising parts of a word. The stressed part of the word is emphasised or said a bit louder, and maybe for a bit longer. In English the first syllable of ‘**happy**’ is stressed, but in ‘**beside**’ it is the second syllable that is stressed.

A syllable is a part of a word that contains a vowel, such as ri-ver, ju-ve-nile, al-pha-be-ti-cal. In Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay each syllable begins with a consonant and contains one vowel, such as: *ga-ba, mi-laan*.

For the great majority of words in Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay, the rules are as follows. First, you need to work out where the main emphasis goes. When there are single vowels only in the word, the emphasis falls on the first syllable. Thus, *gaba, guni* and *wambanhiya*. However, when there are double vowels in the word they are emphasised. Thus, *bubaa, dbaadbaa, birralii* and *yaama*. But remember, unstressed vowels always remain recognisable, unlike many unstressed English vowels, as discussed below.

The second step is to work out the lesser emphasis. This occurs on the syllables two to the left or right of the main emphasis. The underlining shows the lesser emphasis:

*wambanhiya*

*birralii*

*burrulaa*

### Unstressed vowels

In English, unstressed vowels tend to be said in a way that loses a lot of the distinction between the vowels. For instance, when most people say ‘principal’, the second ‘i’ and the ‘a’ do not sound much like ‘i’ or ‘a’, but more like the ‘er’ in ‘butter’. However, in Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, and in many Aboriginal languages, the vowels retain their basic sound much more strongly. When you say *bigibila* each of the ‘i’ sounds and the ‘a’ needs to be pronounced clearly. Most people need lots of practice to use the Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pattern rather than the English pattern for pronouncing vowels.

To recap, here are a few examples of Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay pronunciation:

<b>GY word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>'English' spelling</b>
<i>gagil</i>	bad	guggil [but with an 'i' sound in the second syllable]
<i>walaay</i>	camp	wol-eye [emphasis on 'eye']
<i>wamba</i>	mad	womba [keep the 'a' sound in the second syllable]
<i>yinarr</i>	woman	inarr or inud
<i>wuulaa</i>	bearded dragon	oohlaa [both syllables long and stressed]

## Sentences and phrases

This is a preliminary discussion of the sound patterns of GY phrases and sentences. The area needs more research.

As a very general observation, much GY talk consists of short phrases, whereas English talk tends to have longer sections of continuous sound, and more variation in volume. The following two diagrams are of Arthur Dodd speaking in Yuwaalaraay and then in English.

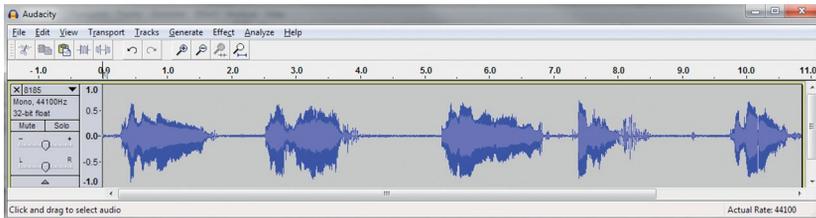


Figure 1: Arthur Dodd speaking in Yuwaalaraay.

Source: Giaccon, 2017, p. 349. It shows the volume as Arthur Dodd speaks Yuwaalaraay (tape 8185, 2211 seconds into the tape).

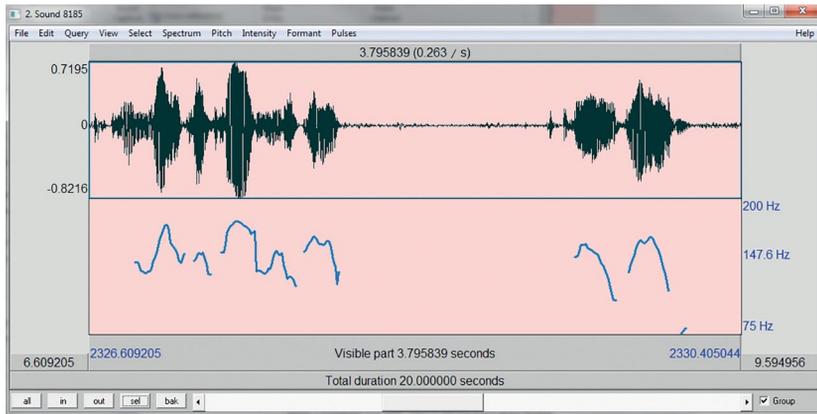


Figure 2: Arthur Dodd speaking in English.

Source: Giacon, 2017, p. 349. It shows the volume and pitch (frequency) as Arthur Dodd says, in English, 'He brought the crawfish back, to his wife' (tape 8185, 2326 seconds in).

In Figure 1 there are short bursts of sound, starting loudly and mostly decreasing in volume. There are pauses between the phrases. In Figure 2, an English sentence, the continuous sound is longer and there is much more variation in volume. As a starting hypothesis, it may be that GY emphasises words by putting them at the start of a phrase, whereas in English the word order is much more fixed, and so words are stressed wherever they occur in the sentence.

This text is taken from *Wiidhaa: An Introduction to Gamilaraay*,  
by John Giacon, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian  
National University, Canberra, Australia.