

What do the words in linguistics mean?

A sample of definitions for the languages of Victoria, with examples from Gunditjmara. More coming soon to <http://www.vaclang.org.au>

diacritic

Little lines and dots above and below letters, often used in old documents and linguistics writing to show small differences in sound.

Example: ā (long a, as in wang 'crow').

locative

A word-ending showing where. It might translate into English as 'at', 'in', 'on', etc.

Example: To show where in Gunditjmara, you add **-i**, as in Ngeerrang woorn-**i** (literally 'mother hut-**in**') 'Mother is in the hut'.

morpheme

Any part of a word that has its own meaning. The word any has only one morpheme, but anybody has two: 'any' and 'body'. Anybody's has three: 'any', 'body' and 's'. In Gunditjmara, koornawoorn 'small hut' has two morphemes: koorna- , from koornong 'small', and woorn, 'hut'. You can use the morphemes of your language to make new words and sentences.

orthography

A spelling system that has been finalised and agreed on by the people who use it. This is different from the spellings of the 19th century collectors, or used in linguistics, which are just spellings for one purpose. If your community has worked out an orthography, this can make it easier to read and teach your language.

palatal

A sound pronounced with the tongue against the roof of your mouth (the palate), such as **ny** and **ly**. Sometimes now these sounds are said just **ny** or **ly**.

Example: kalanyoong 'box tree seed'.

pronoun

Words used instead of the name of someone or something, such as 'I', 'her', 'theirs'. There are many pronouns in Aboriginal languages, with complex meanings.

Examples: ngathoongal 'you and I'
ngootoowal 'you two'.

bound pronoun

A word-ending which is a pronoun. This is common in Aboriginal languages, but there are none in English.

Example: yana-**ngal** (literally 'go-you and I')
'We (you and I) go'.

possessive pronoun

A pronoun showing who is the owner (or caretaker or custodian).

Examples: ngathoongat 'my'
ngootoongat 'your'.

retroflex

A kind of sound common in Aboriginal languages, but not in English. To say these sounds, put the middle of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, and say **n**. Try the same for **l** and **t**. These sound are usually spelt **rn**, **rl**, and **rt** (or **rd**).

Examples: tarrakoort 'large green cicada'
woornong 'ant nest'.

suffix

A word-ending, that changes the meaning of a word slightly.

Examples: karl 'dog'
karl-**ngan** 'my dog'
weerreeng 'man's spirit'
weerree-**yarr** 'woman's spirit'.

For more information, contact VACL at vacl@vaclang.org.au or via the web at www.vaclang.org.au