



Languages of the Torres Strait Islands

There are two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Islands, Miriam Mir and Kala Lagaw Ya.

Meriam Mir (also written as Miriam Mer) is the language of the Eastern Islands of the Torres Strait. Linguistically, it is connected to the Papuan languages of the Austronesian family of languages. There are two regional dialects:

- Mer dialect – Mer (Murray), Waier, Dauar.
- Erub dialect – Erub (Darnley) and Ugar (Stephen).

Kala Lagaw Ya (also written as Kalaw Lagaw Ya) is the traditional language owned by the Western and Central islands of the Torres Strait. It is linguistically connected to the Aboriginal languages of the Australian mainland and has four distinct regional dialects derived from this language:

- Mabuyag – The dialect of Mabuiag, Badu and St Paul's Village.
- Kalaw Kawaw Ya – The dialect of the top western islands of Saibai, Dauan and Malu Ki'ai.
- Kawrareg – The dialect of the south western islands of Kubin, Kaiwalagal, Muralag (Prince of Wales), Nurupai (Horn), Giralag (Friday), Waiben (Thursday Island), Keriri (Hammond), Maurura (Wednesday), Moa (Banks). It is also known as Kawalgau Ya.
- Kulkalgau Ya – The dialect of the central islands of Aurid (Aureed), Damut (Dalrymple), lama (Yam or Turtle-backed), Masig (Yorke), Mauar (Rennel), Naghir (Mt Earnest), Poruma (Coconut) and Warraber (Sue).

The dialects are determined geographically and developed over time with influences by traditional trade, visits, inter-marriage and kinship ties.

Torres Strait Creole

The contact with missionaries and others since the 1800's has led to the development of Torres Strait Creole; it has developed from a Pidgin and now has its own distinctive sound system, grammar, vocabulary, usage and meaning. Torres Strait Creole (also known as Ailan Tok or Yumplatok) is spoken by most Torres Strait Islanders and is a mixture of Standard Australian English and traditional languages. It is an English-based creole; however each island has its' own version of creole.

State Library Collections

There are a range of materials in the collections that relate to the languages of the Torres Strait. Probably the best known items are the *Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait* (Q 994.38 CAM) and the *Margaret Lawrie Collection* (TR2082). However, there are other significant items that provide important linguistic information for community language workers and researchers.

A brief selection of these include:

Aragu, B. *Moegina Pawlaw Ya (Little Hen Story)*. P398.2 ara

Bani, E. and Nona, D. *Dabu : the baby dugong = Dabu : kazi dhangal*. CLP SOL 1992

Davies, A. *Notes 1924-1925*. OM66-02/3
Edwards, R. (ed) *Dictionary of Torres Strait languages*. Q 499.1503 RAY
Eseli, P. *Eseli's Notebook*. S 306.089 001
Jukes, J. *Narrative of the surveying voyage of the HMS Fly*. J 919.43 JUK
Lawrie, M. *Myths and legends of the Torres Strait*. Q 398.2099438 MYT
MacGillivray, J. *Narrative of the Voyage of the HMS Rattlesnake*. G 994.02 1967
Petta, Sister *Yoewdhaylgaw mabaygaw igililmay thusi*. P933 sis
Shnukal, A. *Broken, an introduction to the Creole language of Torres Strait*. J 427 shn
Vocabulary of the Murray Island dialect [microform]. FILM 0713
Further items can be found using OneSearch, the State Library's online catalogue.

Contact Torres Strait Traditional Languages Centre

Torres Strait Traditional Languages Centre

The centre is based in the Yangu Pawaw Ngurpay Mudh building in the grounds of Waybeni Koey Ngurpay Mudh – the Secondary Campus of Tagai State College on Thursday Island and coordinates regional and community-specific efforts to retrieve, record and research traditional languages.

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e. <https://www.tstlanguages.org/about-us/contact>

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SLQ Indigenous Languages Webpages: www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/languages

SLQ Indigenous Languages Blog: <http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/ilq/>

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