

# The Negative Existential Cycle in Western Desert

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**RESEARCH UNIT  
FOR  
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE**

I thank and acknowledge:

- Anangu in Pukatja and Utju who have taught me Pitjantjatjara
- Speakers and custodians of the other languages I discuss
- James Gray, Tom Ennever, and Josh Phillips for data and input

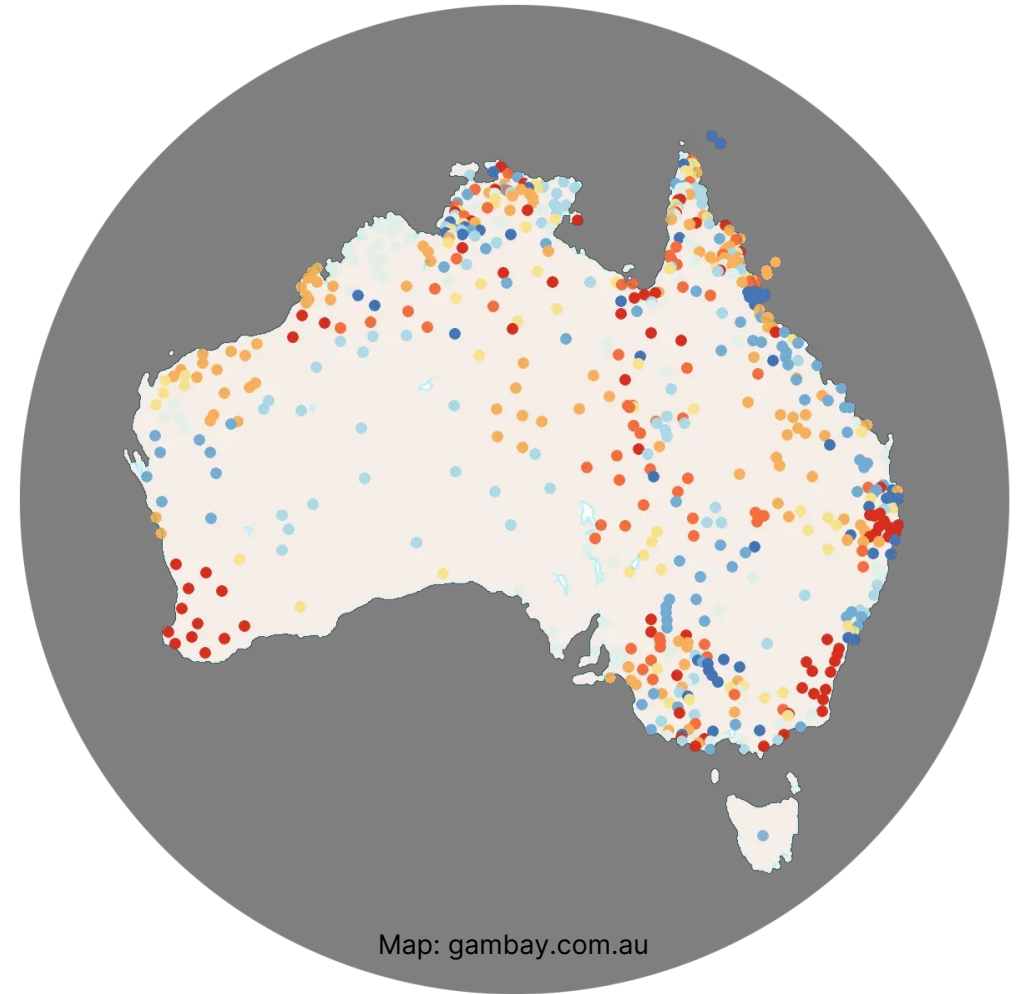
Negation is universal, yet is encoded in diverse ways within and across languages.

Negation constructions seem to follow common pathways across the world's languages, but we are only now beginning to understand how this happens in Australian languages (Phillips 2021, Koch 2022, although see also Evans 1990).

The Negative Existential Cycle (NEC) is one such pathway. The NEC has been seen in a number of language families around the world but is rarely completed.

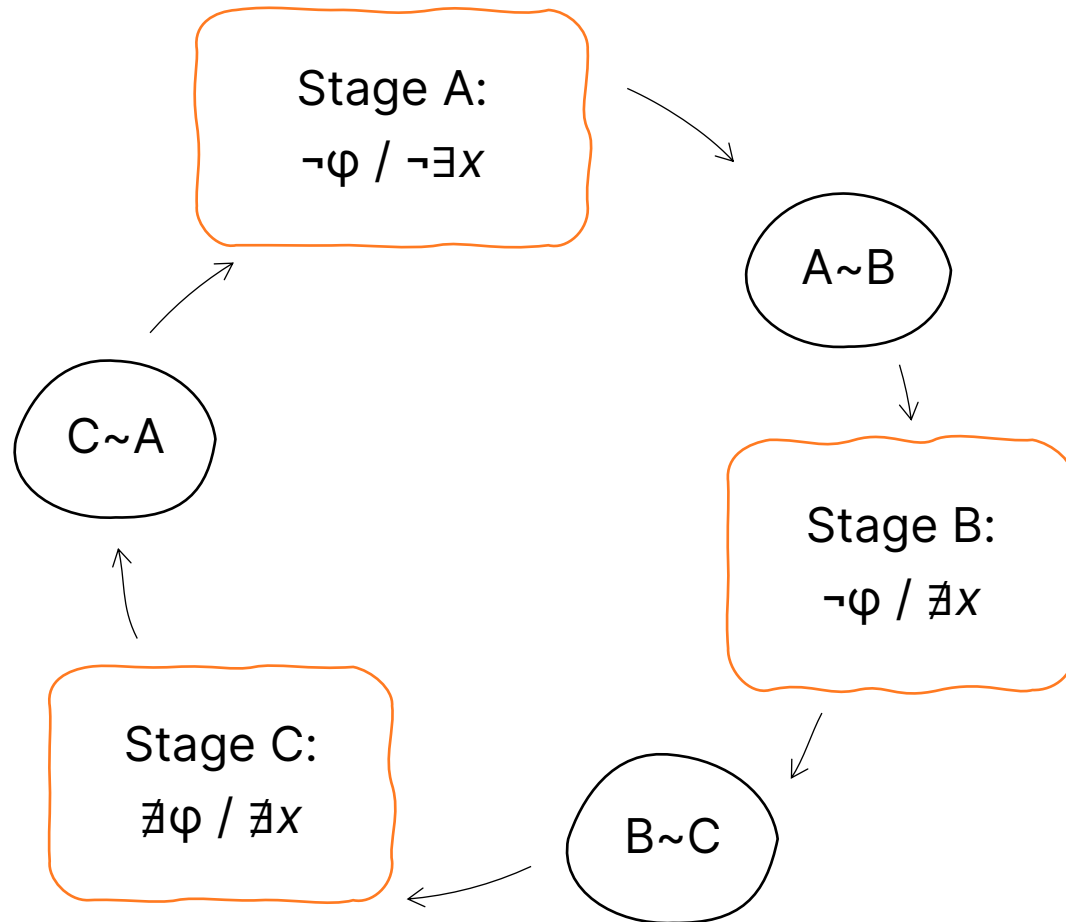
I propose a modified NEC and show evidence for a full cycle in Western Desert.

- Introducing the NEC
- The Western Desert data
- Some preliminary issues
- Findings



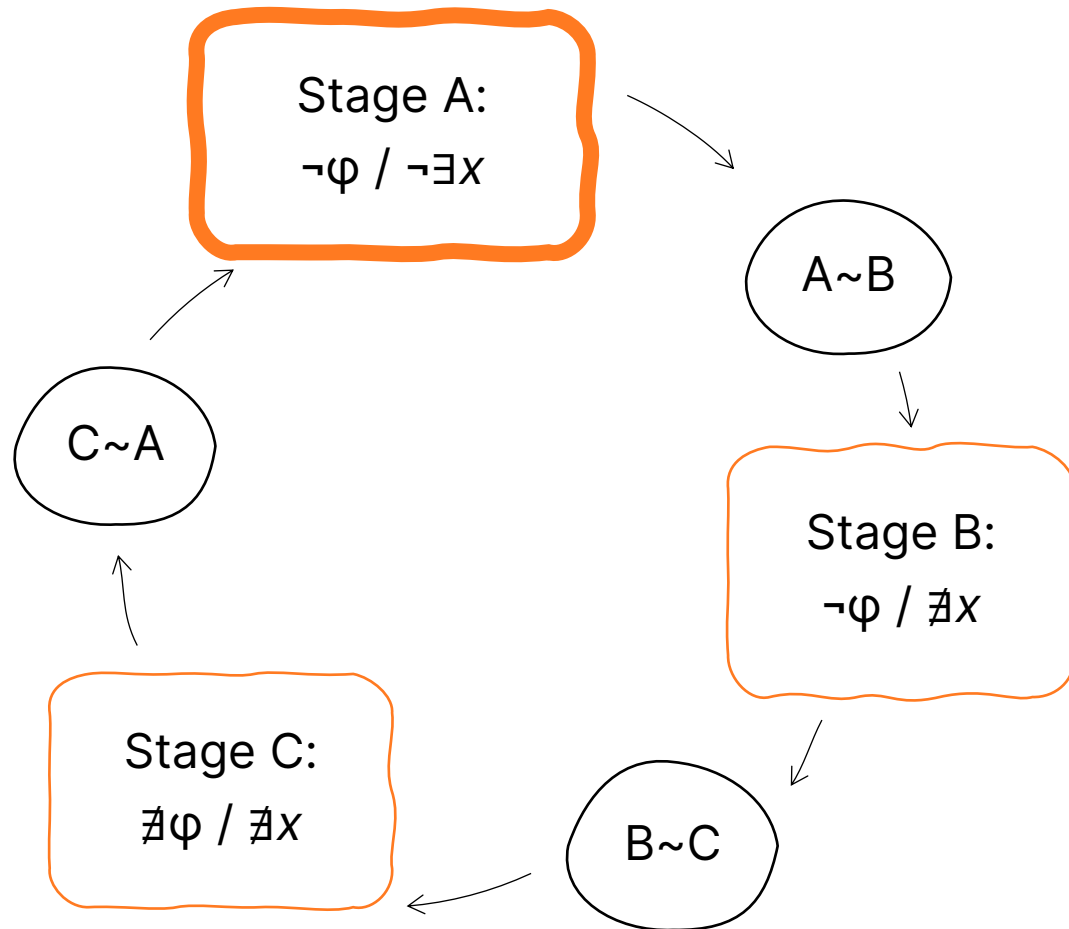
# The Negative Existential Cycle

First proposed by Croft (1991), further research by Veselinova (2014, 2015, 2016), recent volume Veselinova & Hamari (2022), also van Gelderen (2008 *inter alia*).



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Stage A:

Same negative marker used in standard negation and in negative existential

**Niuean** (Veselinova 2016)

Standard negation:

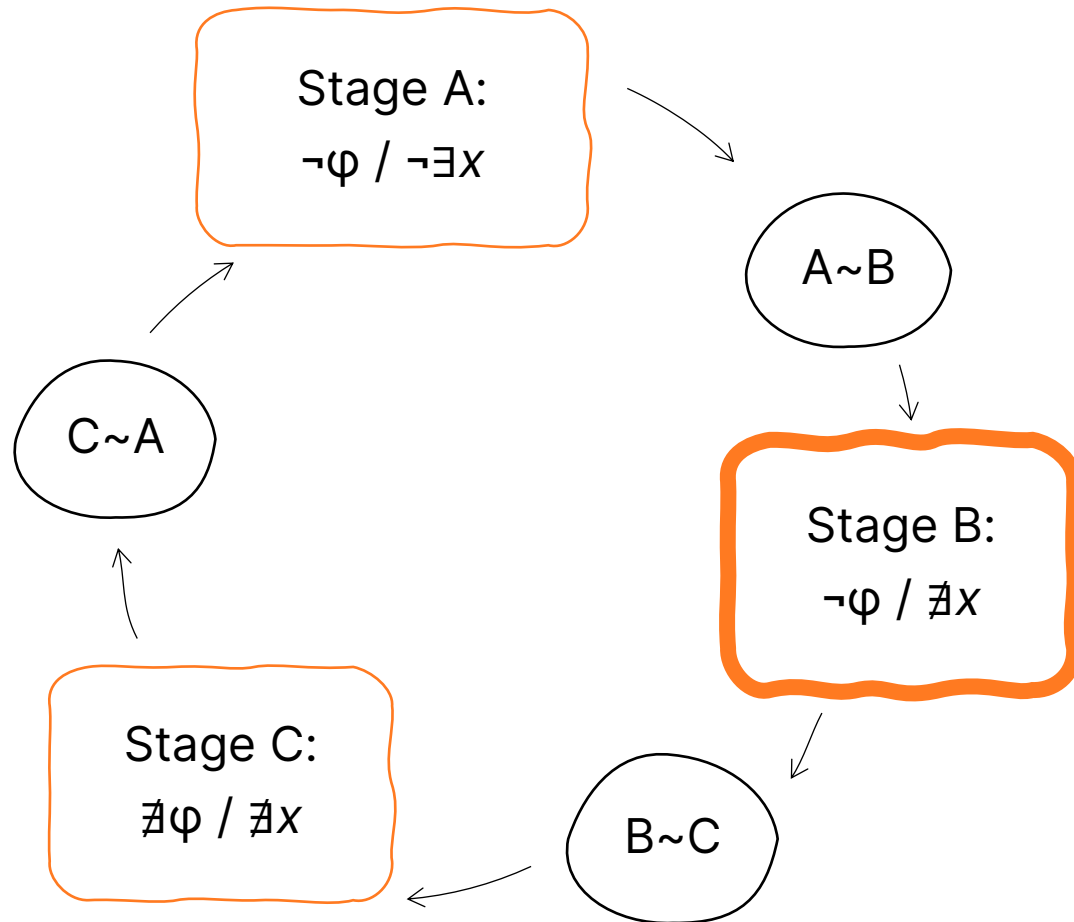
(1) Ne *nākai* fano kehe a ia  
PST NEG go.SG away s 3SG  
'He didn't go.'

Negative existential

(2) *Nākai* *hā* hinei e tama  
NEG EX here ART boy  
'There are no boys here'

# The Negative Existential Cycle

First proposed by Croft (1991), further research by Veselinova (2014, 2015, 2016), recent volume Veselinova & Hamari (2022), also van Gelderen (2008 *inter alia*).



**Stage B:**  
Negative existential marker is different from marker in standard negation

## Tuvaluan (Veselinova 2014)

Standard negation

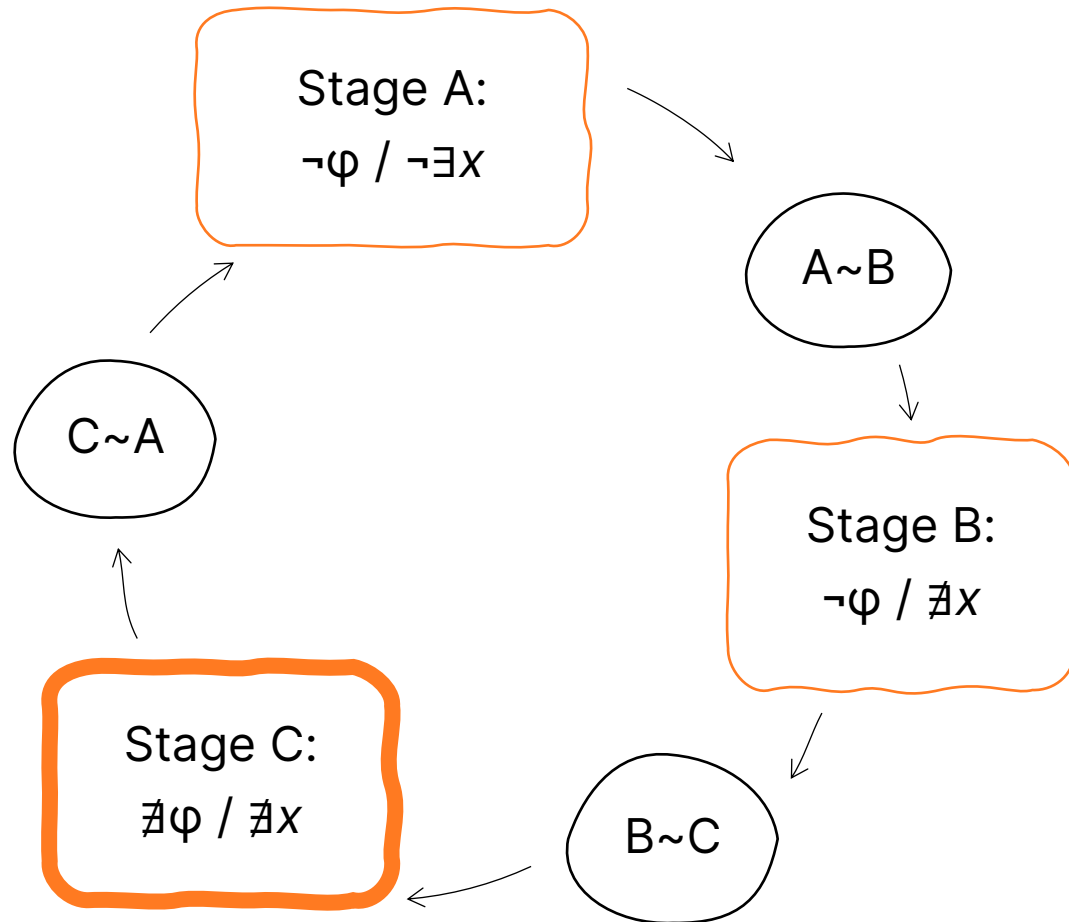
(3) *Au see naa lookoo maalamalama nee au ana*  
I NEG quitequite understand ERG I his  
*pati*  
word  
'I didn't quite understand what he said'

Negative existential

(4) *E seeai se paepae i ei*  
NON.PST NEGEX a boundary.stone at ANP  
'There are no boundaries around it'

# The Negative Existential Cycle

First proposed by Croft (1991), further research by Veselinova (2014, 2015, 2016), recent volume Veselinova & Hamari (2022), also van Gelderen (2008 *inter alia*).



Stage C:  
Negative existential marker extended to  
standard negation

## Māori (Bauer 2003)

Standard negation

(5) *Kāhore* a Hera i te whakarongo  
NEG PERS Hera T/A listen  
'Hera is/was not listening'

Negative existential

(6) *Kāhore* he whare o reira  
NEG a house GEN there  
'There were/are no houses there'

# Western Desert

| Variety                     | Source(s)                                   |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Nyiyaparli*                 | Battin (2019)                               |
| Warnman                     | Wangka Maya (2003)                          |
| Mantjiltjarra               | Marsh (1976), Wangka Maya (2008a)           |
| Martu Wangka                | Marsh (1992), Wangka Maya (2017)            |
| Yulparija                   | Burridge (1996), Wangka Maya (2008b)        |
| Wangkajunga                 | Jones (2011)                                |
| Kukatja                     | Ennever (p.c.), Valiquette (1993)           |
| Pintupi-Luritja             | Gray (2023), Hansen and Hansen (1978, 1992) |
| Utju Pitjantjatjara         | Langlois (2004), own fieldwork              |
| Pukatja Pitjantjatjara      | Wilmoth (2022)                              |
| Yankunytjatjara             | Goddard (1985)                              |
| Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjarra | Glass & Hackett (1970, 2003)                |
| Ngalia                      | Muir et al. (forthc.)                       |
| Kokatha                     | Platt (1967, 1968, 1972)                    |
| Wangkatja                   | Vaszolyi (1973)                             |

\*Probably not Western Desert (see O’Grady & Laughren 1997) but included for comparison’s sake.

Language locations except Pitjantjatjara courtesy of First Languages Australia 🙏



# Note #1: Privatives and negative existentials

Non-possession is a specific instantiation of a general negative quantifier (Phillips 2021). Privatives typically also used for general NegEx functions, and may colexify with negators of nominal predicates.

Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjarra (Glass & Hackett 2003) is only language in sample which distinguishes these three functions:

Privative

(7) *Ngunytju-maralpa=li*  
mother-PRIV=1DU.S  
'We've got no mother'

Negative existential

(8) *Kapi=nyu wiyartu*  
water=QUOT NEGEX  
'They say there's no water'

Nominal negation

(9) *tiwa-munu*  
far-NEG  
'Not far'

*wiya* in Pitjantjatjara



## Note #2: Existential verbs

Croft (1991, p. 19): 'there are no languages that I am aware of in which an existential sentence consists solely of the noun phrase whose existence is predicated'

But this is common in Australian languages (see Phillips 2021 for more discussion). Postural verbs may be used existentially but not obligatory.

In the absence of an obligatory verb it is impossible to distinguish between stages A ( $\neg\varphi$  /  $\neg\exists x$ ) and C ( $\nexists\varphi$  /  $\nexists x$ ).



# Note #3: Nominal vs verbal negation

Extra detail to NEC: not only **form** of negators but also **morpho-syntactic characteristics**.

Both Pintupi-Luritja and Pukatja Pitjantjatjara use *wiya* in SN and NegEx, but SN constructions are very different.

## Pintupi-Luritja (Hansen & Hansen 1992)

Standard negation

- (10) *Wiya*=*na*    *munga-ngka*    *ya-nku*.  
NEG=1SG.S    dark-LOC    go-FUT  
'I will not go there in the dark.'

Negative existential

- (11) *Pirriya*    *warri-tjarra*    *wiya*  
wind    cool-PROP    NEG  
'There's no cool breeze'

## Pukatja Pitjantjatjara (Wilmoth 2022)

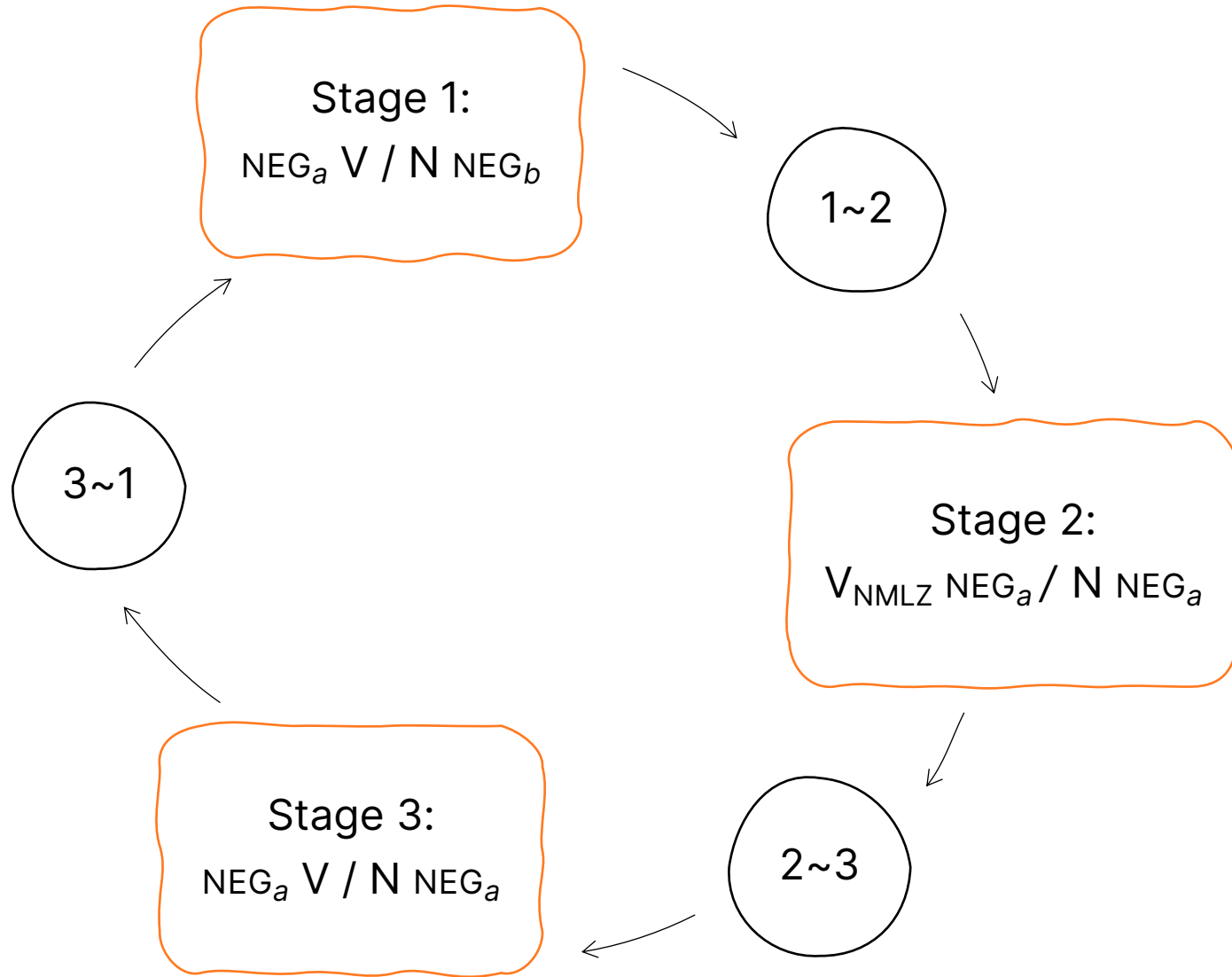
Standard negation

- (12) *Tjinguru tjana*    *ninti-ri-ngku-nytja*    *wiya* *school-angka*  
maybe 3PL.NOM knowledgeable-INCH-AUG-NMLZ NEG school-LOC  
'Maybe they're not learning at school'

Negative existential

- (13) *Waaka*    *wiya*    *munu mani*    *wiya*  
work NEG CONJ money NEG  
'There's no work and no money'

# The NEC in Western Desert



## Stage 2 ( $V_{\text{NMLZ}} \text{NEG}_a / N \text{NEG}_a$ )

### Pukatja Pitjantjatjara (Wilmoth 2022)

Standard negation

- (14) *Tjinguru tjana ninti-ri-ngku-nytja wiya skuula-ngka*  
maybe 3PL.NOM knowledgeable-INCH-AUG-NMLZ NEG school-LOC  
'Maybe they're not learning at school'

Negative existential

- (15) *Waaka wiya munu mani wiya*  
work NEGEX CONJ money NEGEX  
'There's no work and no money'

At stage 1, PRIV/NegEx marker is used on nominalised verbs to negate subordinate clauses. This undergoes **insubordination** to become SN.

Subordinate clause negation

- (16) *Palu kuma-ma-ntja wiya a-nu*  
3SG.ERG comb-LOAN-NMLZ NEG go-PST  
'He went without combing his hair' (Wilmoth 2022, p. 324)

Similarities in other **Pama-Nyungan** languages (Phillips 2021, Koch 2022, Wilmoth 2022), **Arawakan** (Michael 2014, 2015, Rybka & Michael 2020), **Tupían** (Singerman 2018), **Polynesian** (Veselinova 2014), **Arizonan Tewa** (Kroskrity 1984, 2010)...

## Stage 2~3

The negator sometimes negates finite verbs in main clauses, while still retaining nominal functions.

### Utju Pitjantjatjara (ARE-20221027\_01-LA, Langlois 2004)

Standard negation

- (17) *Piruku u-ngku-nytja wiya*  
again give-AUG-NMLZ NEG  
'[I'm] not giving [it to you] again'

- (18) *Palu-ru wiya ula-ngu*  
3SG-NOM NEG cry-PST  
'He didn't cry'

Negative existential

- (19) *kutjupa~kutjupa wiya panya mutukai-ngka wiya,*  
RDP~another NEG ANAPH car-LOC NEGEX  
*iniwai, kamula-ngka a-nku-pai*  
anyway camel-LOC go-AUG-CHAR  
'Many things weren't around, you know, we'd travel by camel, not by car'



still from *Camels and the Pitjantjatjara* (1969)

# Stage 3 (NEG<sub>a</sub> V / N NEG<sub>a</sub>)

Same negator used to negative finite verbs in SN, and with nominals.

## Pintupi-Luritja (Hansen & Hansen 1992)

Standard negation (preverbal)

- (20) *Wiya*=*ṇa*    *munga-ngka*    *ya-nku*.  
NEG=1SG.S    dark-LOC    go-FUT  
'I will not go there in the dark.'

Negative existential

- (21) *Pirriya*    *warri-tjarra*    *wiya*  
wind    cool-PROP    NEG  
'There's no cool breeze'

## Wangkatja (Vászolyi 1993)

Standard negation (postverbal)

- (22) *Wangka-nyi-wiya=rna*  
talk-PRS-NEG=1SG.S  
'I don't talk'

- (23) *Ngayu-lu marlu*    *nya-ngu wiya-ngku*  
1SG-ERG    kangaroo    see-PST    NEG-ERG  
'I didn't see a roo'

Privative/negative existential

- (24) *Mutuka*    *wiyartu*    *paluru*    *purtu*    *kuli-rni*  
car    NEGEX    3SG.NOM    in.vain    think-PRS  
'Having no car, she can't think (of another way to get there).'

# Stage 3~1

A new negative quantifier (PRIV/NegEx) is introduced, while old one still retains verbal and most nominal functions.

## Kukatja (Tom Ennever p.c.)

Standard negation

- (25) *Wiya=rna=nta kuli-rnin*  
NEG=1SG.S=2SG.O hear-PRS  
'I can't hear you'

Privative

- (26) *Ngayu=rna thongs-parni ya-nama*  
1SG=1SG.S thongs-PRIV go-IPFV.PST  
'I went around without any thongs'

Negative quantifier

- (27) *Nyuntu-lu kalyu wiya=n ma-ntji-ltjaku*  
2SG-ERG water NEG=2SG.S get-NMLZ-TJAKU  
'You couldn't get any water. (Peile 1971, p. 19)



# Stage 1 (NEG<sub>a</sub> V / N NEG<sub>b</sub>)

Old nominal negator/NEGEX now exclusively verbal negator.

## Wangkajunga (Jones 2011)

Standard negation

- (28) *Wiya*=lampaju material warin-ka-ngun  
NEG=1PLEXDAT material arrive-carry-PST  
'Material didn't come for us'

Negative existential

- (29) *Money-parni* kuwarri-marta warinkati-ngu mani  
money-NEGEX NOW-MOD arrive-PST money  
'There was no money. Money arrived much later'



# Stage 1~2

Subordinate construction begins to be used as standard negation.

## Yulparija (Burridge 1996, Wangka Maya 2008)

Standard negation

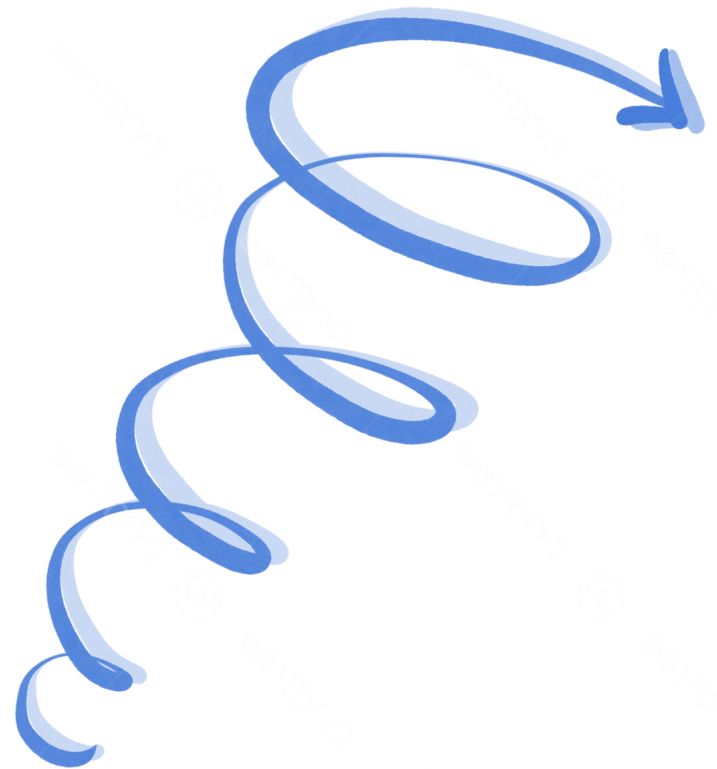
(30) *Wiya* *yu-ngku-ra-ku*  
NEG give-IRR-OPT-PURP  
'(I) won't give (you) anything'

(31) *Ju-nku-parni*  
put-IRR-NEGEX  
'He did not put it'

(32) *Wiya=Ø* *rangju-ngku-parni*  
NEG=3SG breathe-IRR-NEGEX  
'He is not breathing'

Negative existential

(33) *yaka-rri-wa* *yajiji-parni*  
quiet-INCH-IMP ashes-NEGEX  
'Be quiet, there are no ashes'

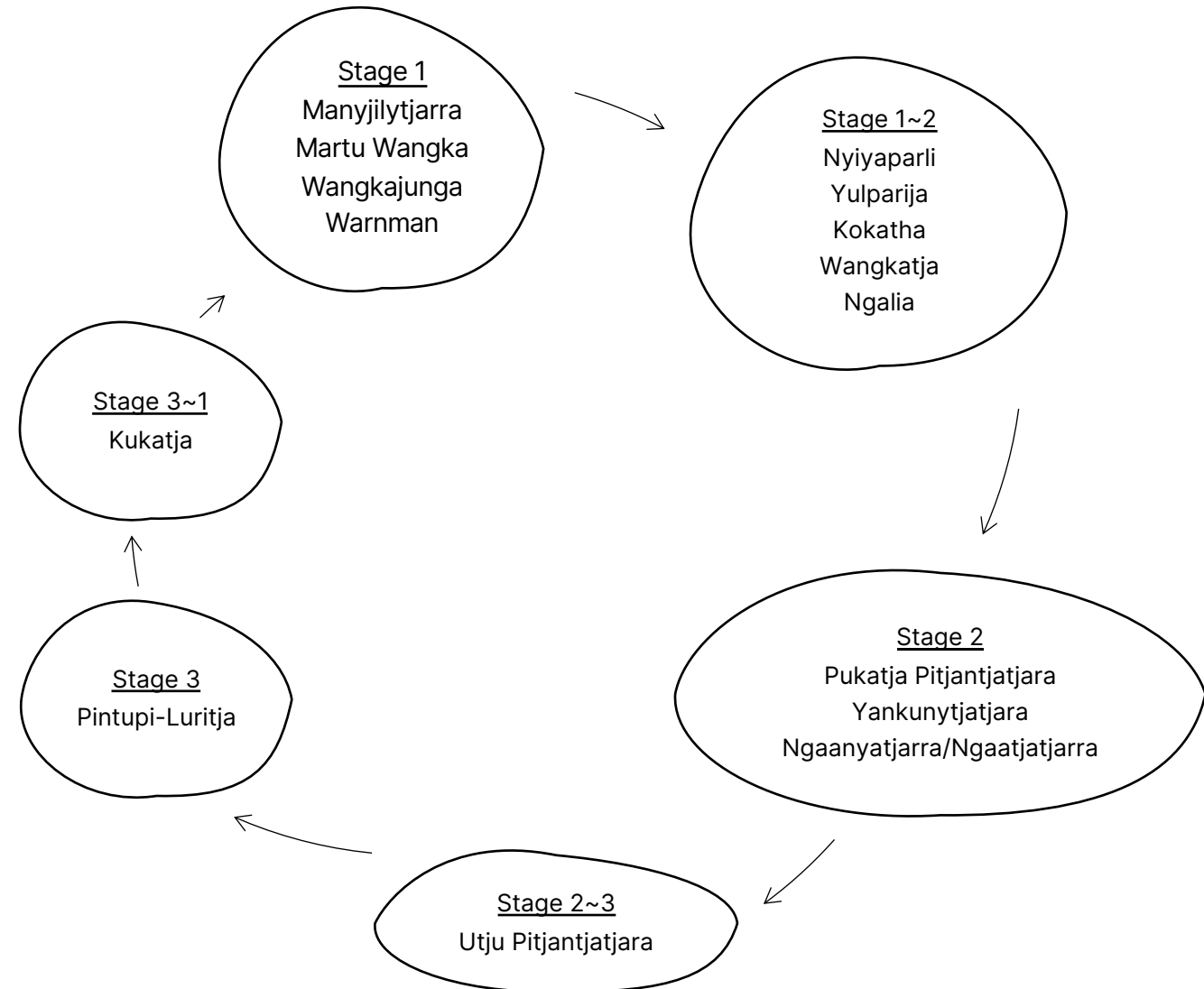


SN based on nominalised verb + nominal negator

Wiya used to negate finite verbs

Parni used as negative quantifier

Mirta used to negate finite verbs



# Conclusion

- Clear evidence for a completed, but modified, NEC in Western Desert.
- Negation shifts between being a nominal vs verbal category.
- Cycle begins with nominal negators being used on subordinate clauses,
  - ↳ these become insubordinated and used as standard negation strategy,
  - ↳ those negative markers start to negate finite verbs,
  - ↳ introduction of a new nominal negator.

| NEC as usually formulated |                                       | NEC in Western Desert |                                   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Stage A                   | NegEx is negation of existential verb | -                     |                                   |
| Stage B                   | NegEx distinct from negator in SN     | Stage 1               | NegEx distinct from negator in SN |
| Stage C                   | NegEx used for SN                     | Stage 2               | NegEx used in SN with NMLZ'd verb |
|                           |                                       | Stage 3               | NegEx used in SN with finite verb |

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*Nyiyaparli*: Battin 2019

*Mantjiltjarra*: Marsh 1976, WM 2008a

*Martu Wangka*: Marsh 1992, WM 2017

*Yulparija*: Burridge 1996, WM 2008b

*Wangkajunga*: Jones 2011

*Kukatja*: Ennever p.c., Valiquette 1993, Peile 1971

*Pintupi-Luritja*: Gray 2023, Hansen & Hansen 1978, 1992

*Utju Pitjantjatjara*: own fieldwork, Langlois 2004

*Pukatja Pitjantjatjara*: Wilmoth 2022

*Yankunytjatjara*: Goddard 1985

*Ngaany./Ngaatjatjara*: Glass & Hackett 1970, 2003

*Ngalia*: Muir et al forthcoming

*Kokatha*: Platt 1967, 1968, 1972

*Wangkatja*: Vaszolyi (1973)

| NEC as usually formulated |                                                       | NEC in Western Desert |                                   |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A                         | NegEx is negation of existential verb                 | -                     |                                   |
| B                         | NegEx distinct from negator in standard negation (SN) | 1                     | NegEx distinct from negator in SN |
| C                         | NegEx used for SN                                     | 2                     | NegEx used in SN with NMLZ'd verb |
|                           |                                                       | 3                     | NegEx used in SN with finite verb |

**Stage 2: Pukatja Pitjantjatjara** (&Yankunytjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra/Ngaatjatjara)

SN:

- (14) *Tjinguru tjana ninti-ri-ngku-nytja wiya skuula-ngka*  
 maybe 3PL.NOM learn-NMLZ NEG school-LOC  
 'Maybe they're not learning at school'

NegEx:

- (15) *Waaka wiya munu mani wiya*  
 work NEGEX CONJ money NEGEX  
 'There's no work and no money'

**Stage 2~3: Utju Pitjantjatjara**

SN:

- (17) *Piruku u-ngku-nytja wiya* (18) *Palu-ru wiya ula-ngu*  
 again give-AUG-NMLZ NEG 3SG-NOMNEG cry-PST  
 '[I'm] not giving [it to you] again' 'He didn't cry'

NegEx:

- (19) *Kutjupa~kutjupa wiya* ...  
 RDP~another NEGEX ...  
 'Many things weren't around'

**Stage 3: Pintupi-Luritja**

SN:

- (20) *Wiya=na munga-ngkaya-nku*  
 NEG=1SG.Sdark-LOC go-FUT  
 'I will not go there in the dark'

NegEx:

- (21) *Pirriya warri-tjarra wiya*  
 wind cool-PROP NEG  
 'There's no cool breeze'

**Stage 3~1: Kukatja**

SN:

- (25) *Wiya=nra=nta kuli-rnin*  
 NEG=1SG.S=2SG.O hear-PRS  
 'I can't hear you'

Privative:

- (26) *Ngayu=rna thong-parni ya-nama*  
 1SG=1SG.S thongs-PRIV go-IPFV.PST  
 'I went around without any thongs'

Negative quantification:

- (27) *Nyuntu=lu kalyu wiya=n ma-ntji-ltjaku*  
 2SG-ERG water NEG-2SG.S get-NMLZ-TJAKU  
 'You couldn't get any water.'

**Stage 1: Wangkajunga** (&Manjyilytjarra, Martu Wangka, Warnman)

SN:

- (28) *Wiya=lampaju material warin-ka-ngun*  
 NEG=1PLEX.DAT material arrive-carry-PST  
 'Material didn't come for us'

NegEx:

- (29) *Money-parni kuwarri-marta warinkati-ngu mani*  
 money-NEGEX now-MOD arrive-PST money  
 'There was no money. Money arrived much later'

**Stage 1~2: Yulparija** (&Nyiyaparli, Kokatha, Wangatja, Ngalia)

SN:

- (30) *Wiya yu-ngku-ra-ku* (31) *Ju-nku-parni*  
 NEG give-IRR-OPT-PURP put-IRR-NEGEX  
 '(I) won't give (you) anything' 'He did not put it'

- (32) *Wiya=Ø rangju-ngku-parni*  
 NEG=3SG breathe-IRR-NEGEX  
 'He is not breathing'

NegEx:

- Yaka-rri-wa yajiji-parni*  
 quiet-INCH-IMP ashes-NEGEX  
 'Be quiet, there are no ashes'

| Variety         | Privative                                   | NegEx                          | Negation of nominal pred.                      | Standard negation (SN)                                                                                                                                               | Subord. neg.                                                                    | Prohibitive                                     | No              |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Nyiyaparli      | pati                                        | pati                           | <b>mirta</b> N<br>N waya                       | <b>mirta</b> V<br>V <sub>stem/hab</sub> pati/yapa                                                                                                                    | V <sub>stem</sub> pati/yapa                                                     | <b>mirta</b> V                                  | waya            |
| Warnman         | kutunta                                     | ?                              | (N <b>maranypa</b> ?)                          | <b>mirta</b> V, (parti V?)                                                                                                                                           | ?                                                                               | <b>mirta</b> V                                  | <b>maranypa</b> |
| Mantjiltjarra   | <b>parni</b> , <b>punaja</b>                | ?                              | <b>mirta</b> N, N <b>parni</b> , N <b>munu</b> | <b>mirta</b> V                                                                                                                                                       | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>munu</b>                                                   | <b>mirta</b> V                                  | paki            |
| Martu Wangka    | <b>parni</b> , <b>punaja</b>                | <b>parni</b>                   | N <b>munu</b> , <b>mirta</b> N                 | <b>mirta</b> V<br><b>wiya</b> V<br><b>wiya</b> V <sub>NMLZ/IRR</sub> <b>parni</b>                                                                                    | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>munu</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>parni</b>                 | <b>mirta</b> V                                  | paki            |
| Yulparija       | <b>parni</b>                                | <b>parni</b>                   | <b>wiya</b> N, N <b>munu</b> ?                 | V <sub>NMLZ/IRR</sub> <b>parni</b>                                                                                                                                   | V <sub>NMLZ/IRR</sub> <b>parni</b>                                              | <b>wiya</b> V                                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Wangkajunga     | <b>parni</b>                                | <b>parni</b>                   | <b>wiya</b> N                                  | <b>wiya</b> V                                                                                                                                                        | <b>wiya</b> V                                                                   | <b>wiya</b> V                                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Kukatja         | <b>parni</b>                                | N <b>wiya</b><br><b>wiya</b> V | <b>wiya</b> N                                  | <b>wiya</b> V                                                                                                                                                        | <b>wiya</b> V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>parni</b>                                 | <b>wiya</b> V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>parni</b> | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Pintupi-Luritja | <b>wiya</b><br><b>parni</b><br><b>maral</b> | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>wiya</b>                                  | <b>wiya</b> V                                                                                                                                                        | <b>wiya</b> V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b><br>V <sub>stem</sub> <b>wiya</b> | <b>wiya</b> V                                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Areyonga Pitj.  | <b>wiya</b>                                 | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>wiya</b><br><b>wiya</b> N                 | <b>wiya</b> V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b><br>(V <b>wiya</b> )                                                                                                   | <b>wiya</b> V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Pukatja Pitj.   | <b>wiya</b>                                 | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>wiya</b>                                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                                                                                                                                        | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                                                   | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Yankunytjatjara | <b>wiya</b>                                 | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>wiya</b>                                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                                                                                                                                        | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b><br>V <sub>stem</sub> <b>wiya</b>                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>wiya</b>                   | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Ngaany./Ngaatj. | <b>wiya</b><br><b>maalpa</b>                | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>munu</b>                                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>munu</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa wiya</b>                                                             | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>munu</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b>                | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b>                 | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Ngalia          | ?                                           | ?                              | N <b>munu</b>                                  | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>munu</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b><br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa wiya</b><br>naji V<br>naji V <b>munu</b><br>natji V <b>munu wiya</b> | V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b>                                                 | naji V<br>V <sub>NMLZ</sub> <b>maalpa</b>       | <b>wiya</b>     |
| Kokatha         | aaja<br>yurtu                               | yurtu<br><b>wiya</b>           | ?                                              | V <sub>stem</sub> aaja<br>maka V                                                                                                                                     | ?                                                                               | maka V                                          | ?               |
| Wangkatja       | <b>wiya</b>                                 | <b>wiya</b>                    | N <b>wiya</b>                                  | V <b>wiya</b><br>V <sub>stem</sub> <b>wiya</b>                                                                                                                       | ?                                                                               | V <sub>stem</sub> <b>wiya</b>                   | <b>wiya</b>     |