



all yours

Indigenous Language Wordlists

Torres Strait Islander Languages

There are two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Islands, Meriam 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. Torres Strait Creole is also spoken on the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) following the movement of people there to Seisia and Bamaga.

Note: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages were oral-based; there may be several variations in spelling and pronunciation. The following list should be seen as a guide – check with local language speakers as to the preferred local pronunciation.

Torres Strait Islander Languages Wordlists

The following list is a selection of everyday words for the two languages of the Torres Strait and Torres Strait Creole.

English	Kala Lagaw Ya	Meriam Mir	Torres Strait Creole
Anchor	<i>Iadi</i>	<i>Par</i>	<i>Angka</i>
Axe	<i>Aga</i>	<i>Tulik</i>	<i>Tamyok</i>
Book	<i>Thusi</i>	<i>Ziau-wali</i>	<i>Buk</i>
Child	<i>Kazi</i>	<i>Werem</i>	<i>Piknini</i>
Church	<i>Yoewth</i>	<i>Zogometa</i>	<i>Soes</i>
Cloud	<i>Zia</i>	<i>Baz</i>	<i>Klaud</i>
Coconut Tree	<i>Boey</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Koknat tri</i>
Crocodile	<i>Koedal</i>	<i>Kodal</i>	<i>Algida</i>
Drum	<i>Warup</i>	<i>Warup</i>	<i>Dram</i>
Dugong	<i>Dhangal</i>	<i>Deger</i>	<i>Dugon</i>
Ear	<i>Kaura</i>	<i>Laip</i>	<i>Talinga</i>
Eye	<i>Purka</i>	<i>Poni</i>	<i>Ai</i>
Father	<i>Thathi</i>	<i>Abe</i>	<i>Baba</i>
Fire	<i>Mui</i>	<i>Ur</i>	<i>Paya</i>
Fish	<i>Wapi</i>	<i>Lar</i>	<i>Pis</i>
Fish Hook	<i>Tudi</i>	<i>Mekek</i>	<i>Pis uk</i>
Foot	<i>San</i>	<i>Teter</i>	<i>Thraik</i>
Frog	<i>Katube</i>	<i>Gowai</i>	<i>Prog</i>
Girl	<i>Ngawaka</i>	<i>Neur</i>	<i>Gel</i>
Ground	<i>Apa</i>	<i>Geseb</i>	<i>Graun</i>
Hand	<i>Geth</i>	<i>Tag</i>	<i>An</i>
Head	<i>Kuik</i>	<i>Kirim</i>	<i>Ed</i>
House	<i>Mudth</i>	<i>Meta</i>	<i>Aus</i>
Island	<i>Lagua or Lag</i>	<i>Kaur</i>	<i>Ailan</i>
Kangaroo	<i>Usar</i>	<i>Usar</i>	<i>Kangru</i>
Knee	<i>Kulu</i>	<i>Teter-au-kok</i>	<i>Ni</i>
Lizard	<i>Iku</i>	<i>Zirar</i>	<i>Gwana</i>
Mat	<i>Waku</i>	<i>Papek</i>	<i>Mat</i>
Moon	<i>Kisal</i>	<i>Meb</i>	<i>Mun</i>
English	Kala Lagaw Ya	Meriam Mir	Torres Strait Creole

English	Kala Lagaw Ya	Meriam Mir	Torres Strait Creole
Mother	<i>Apu</i>	<i>Amau</i>	<i>Ama</i>
No	<i>Launga</i>	<i>Nole</i>	<i>Launga</i>
Octopus	<i>Sugu</i>	<i>Arti</i>	<i>Sugu</i>
One	<i>Urapun</i>	<i>Netat</i>	<i>Wan</i>
People	<i>Garkazi</i>	<i>Gaire-le</i>	<i>Pipel</i>
Rain	<i>Ari</i>	<i>Irmer</i>	<i>Ren</i>
Sea	<i>Malu</i>	<i>Gur</i>	<i>Solwata</i>
Shark	<i>Baidham</i>	<i>Beizam</i>	<i>Sak</i>
Sky	<i>Dapar</i>	<i>Kotor</i>	<i>Skai</i>
Snake	<i>Tabu</i>	<i>Tabu</i>	<i>Sneik</i>
Spear	<i>Dagul</i>	<i>Baur</i>	<i>Spiya</i>
Spider	<i>Enti</i>	<i>Seber</i>	<i>Spaida</i>
Stingray	<i>Thupmul</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>Thingari</i>
Stone	<i>Kula</i>	<i>Baker</i>	<i>Ston</i>
Sun	<i>Goega</i>	<i>Lim</i>	<i>San</i>
Today	<i>Kaib</i>	<i>Abele-gereger</i>	<i>Tidei</i>
Tomorrow	<i>Batainga</i>	<i>Iobaru</i>	<i>Thumara</i>
Turtle	<i>Waru</i>	<i>Nam</i>	<i>Totol</i>
Two	<i>Ukasar</i>	<i>Neis</i>	<i>Tu</i>
Water	<i>Nguki</i>	<i>Ni</i>	<i>Wata</i>
Wind	<i>Gub</i>	<i>Wag</i>	<i>Win</i>
Yam	<i>Gabau</i>	<i>Lewer</i>	<i>Yam</i>
Yes	<i>Wa</i>	<i>Aa</i>	<i>Wa</i>
English	Kala Lagaw Ya	Meriam Mir	Torres Strait Creole

Learn more about Torres Strait Islander languages!

Listen to Retold! A collection of stories from Margaret Lawrie's Myths and Legends of the Torres Strait, retold by community members:

<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/contemporary-stories/retold>

Sources and Further Reading

Words listed above were sourced from several historical texts within the State Library Collections, including the following items. There may be variations in spelling and/or pronunciation across the region due to dialectical differences.

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Singe, J. *The Torres Strait: people and history*. **G 994.38 1989**

Vocabulary of the Murray Island dialect [microform]. **FILM 0713**

This is only a selection from the SLQ Collections – for a comprehensive listing of print and electronic materials [books, journals, manuscripts, videos, images, sound recordings and items from digital collections, etc.] use the One Search facility:

www.onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au

Further Details

For more information on the languages of the Torres Strait, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has administrative responsibility for the region and is working towards a language centre and currently supports language activities in schools and communities.

TSRA coordinated a second Torres Strait Island Language Symposium in May 2017 - further details on the event can be found at the Symposium website: <http://www.tslangsym.net/>

Contact details

Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)

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Website: www.tsra.gov.au

SAIMA Torres Strait Islander Corporation

Based in Rockhampton, SAIMA provides support for Torres Strait Islander languages and Creole in the region.

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State Library of Queensland

For further information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages at the State Library of Queensland, please contact:

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Telephone: (07) 3840 7666 Fax: (07) 3842 9126

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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