

Is Kriol an Aboriginal Language?

Kriol is more like an Aboriginal language, than a form of English. It is true that Kriol has a lot of words that came from English, but they are often pronounced differently and they are put together in an Aboriginal way. Kriol also gives new Aboriginal meaning to some of the words borrowed from English. This is not unusual since the English language itself has borrowed many of its words from other languages:

majurrumap 'gather together' (Kriol language)
↑
muster 'gather soldiers or cattle' (English)
↑
monstrare 'show' (the Latin language)

The most important thing about a language is that people use it to talk to each other, in other words, it is used to *communicate*. Kriol is used by Aboriginal people to communicate in everyday situations such as in community meetings, in schools, in churches and in their homes. There are many books in Kriol, including a dictionary, story books and a complete Bible.

Language can be an important part of people's *identity*. For many Aboriginal people, Kriol is a part of who they are, especially for those who no longer use traditional languages for daily communication.

Where did Kriol come from?

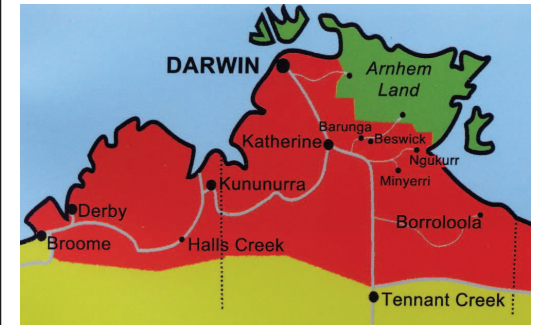
Kriol started as a contact language, which is sometimes called a pidgin. When Europeans first came to Australia, they did not know any of the Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal people did not know English. They had to work out a way to talk to each other. So they slowly made up a new language as they interacted with each other.

Gradually, more and more people began using this new language to communicate with each other. More words were added and people used it to talk about more things in life. But it still was not the mother tongue of any group. No one thought of it as "my language".

When a pidgin language becomes the first language children learn and the main language they use every day, it is then called a creole language.

That is how Kriol developed from the pidgin language like the one spoken at the Roper River Mission (now Ngukurr community) in the Northern Territory. Aboriginal people from many different language groups came to live at Roper River Mission, and as the children interacted and played together, they used this pidgin language as a common language. When these children grew up, they continued to speak it and they spoke it to their children. That is how it became the language of many people and became a complete language in its own right.

Where is Kriol spoken?



This map shows Kriol Kantri, the area of Australia where most Kriol speakers live. Almost all Kriol speakers are Aboriginal people, but a few non-Aboriginal people speak Kriol.

Are there different kinds of Kriol?

Many Aboriginal people speak the variety of Kriol that developed at Roper River Mission (Ngukurr). Other dialects of Kriol are spoken in the Kimberley and also in northwest Queensland. In fact, each community probably has its own unique variety of Kriol! But Kriol speakers can still understand each other, no matter where they come from. Look at these examples:

Language	Sentence
English	<i>We went to town.</i>
Kimberley Kriol	<i>Mela bin go taun.</i>
Roper Kriol	<i>Melabat bin go langa taun.</i>

What do Kriol speakers say about their language?

“Kriol is my only language.”

Carol Robertson
Ngukurr Community

“We don’t know each other’s (traditional) languages, so we use Kriol. Kriol is our language. It is natural to us. We can meet anybody from Broome to Kununurra and we can understand each other.”

Nita Cox and Donita Button
Noonkanbah, WA

“I dont understand English so when I read the Bible in Kriol, it helps me to understand it. Young people also understand it and they are now writing songs based on the Bible.”

Julie Miller,
Minyerri Community

NOTE

Kriol is different from Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole, though it shares similarities with both. Aboriginal English is a variety of English, not a separate language. Torres Strait Creole is a creole language that originated in the Pacific islands. It is spoken mainly in the Torres Strait and Northern Queensland.

Want to know more about Kriol?

* An Introduction to Conversational Kriol:
A language learning course (Ngukurr dialect).
30 lessons with audio.
Sandefur & Sandefur, 1981.
Available from AuSIL.

* Making the Jump: A Resource Book for
Teachers of Aboriginal Students
Rosalind Berry and Joyce Hudson. 1997.
Available from Catholic Education Office.
PO Box 1451, Broome WA 6725,
Ph 08 9191 3600
Email: broome@ceo.wa.edu.au

* Kriol Dictionary
A compilation of material from Ngukurr,
Barunga, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek.
Print copies are available from AuSIL.
The Kriol Dictionary is also available
online at:

www.ausil.org.au

For more Kriol resources visit our shops at:

Darwin
72 Dripstone road, Nakara, 0810
Alice Springs
3/38 Elder Street, Ciccone, 0871

AuSIL
PO Box 40771 Casuarina
NT 0811

Email: ausil@sil.org
Tel: 08 8911 1326



Australian Society for
Indigenous Languages

What is Kriol?

