

Pronunciation of Wamba Wamba Vowels and Consonants

based on - 'WembaWemba Dictionary': Hercus L.A., 1992, pages 5 - 8

Wamba Wamba is one of over 500 Indigenous Languages spoken in Australia. It is one of a group of languages of SW and NW Victoria and South West New South Wales. It has different rules of pronunciation from English.

See - yarkuwa.org.au/wurrekangurr-home for more information.

Introduction

For thousands of years Wamba Wamba was learned by children listening to and copying fluent speakers. From an early age, beginning in the womb, this process shaped the brain of young learners to be able to hear and speak the sounds of Wamba Wamba and how words and sentences are put together.

Currently most people learning Wamba Wamba, speak English as their first language and will have a brain that has been shaped to hear and speak English. This guide compares the sound of Wamba Wamba with useful English sounds. For example, the standard or normal 'a' in Wamba Wamba is the same as the 'a' in the English words 'path' or 'car'.¹

Guides

In this resource we have included guides to saying Wamba Wamba sounds that make use of English sounds and our English speaking brains. To help make the pronunciation clearer there are three and often four guides added to each word

- 1 - each word show which '**vowels**' are included - '**kali**' has '**a**' as in '**path**' or '**car**' and '**i**' as in '**hill**'
- 2 - each word has the speaking or pronunciation guide - (**say** - **kah-lih**)
 - this speaking guide is not written in English or Wamba Wamba, it's written in '*this way of writing it might encourage E1L speakers to choose the right English sound*'
 - for example an E1L speaker is more likely to choose the '**a**' as in '**path**' if they see '**kah**' and '**i**' as in '**pin**' if they see '**lih**'
- 3 - an underlined **syllable** (a group letters that is pronounced as one sound), eg **kah**-lih, shows that the 'kah' syllable is emphasised (usually the first syllable in WW is emphasised along with the 3rd syllable having less than the first)
- 4 - where we currently have a good recording of a word online we have included a link (in blue) to the page that has the recording. For example: '**kali**' ([dog](#)) (say - **kah**-lih). (Click the link and scroll to find the recording at bottom of page.)

Standard Wamba Wamba Vowels

'a' as in 'path' or 'car'

'kali' ([dog](#)) (say - **kah**-lih), 'kanak' ([heel](#)) (say - **kahn**-ahk), kakat (white ibis) (say - '**kah**-kaht')

'e' as in 'pet' or 'shed'

'kepin' ([one](#)) (say - **keh**-piin), 'kethawil' ([many](#)) (say - **ked**-ah-wiil), putheka (come in) (say - puud-eh-kah)

'i' as in 'sit' or 'pit'

'kiki' ([here now](#)) (say **kiik**-ii), 'mityuk' ([skin](#)) (say **miity**-uuk), 'kila' (that one) (say - **kiil**-ah)

'u' as in 'put' or 'foot'

'mum' ([bottom](#)) (say '**muum**'), 'kurruluk' ([magpie](#)) (say '**kuurr**-uu-luuk'), marrung (pine) (say - **marr**-uung),

'o' as in 'on' or 'pot'

'Kolety' ([Edward R.](#)) (say - **kol**-ety), 'nongwe' (yes) (say - **nong**-weh), 'mowe' (nest) (say - **moh**-weh)

'ə' a neutral vowel as in 'the'

'kapəl' ([river](#)) (say - **kah**-pul), karndəla ([to call out](#)) (say - **kahrnd**-əl-ah), 'wilək-wilək' (galah)

¹ English has other sounds that are written down as 'a'. These include 'a' as in 'hay' or 'pay' and 'a' as in 'cat' or 'pat'. The first, 'a' as in 'hay', doesn't occur in Wamba Wamba and should be avoided. The second ('a' as in 'cat') is rare and care is needed in its use. (If in doubt use the standard 'a' sound - 'a' as in 'path'.)

Vowel Variations (not as common as the standard vowel sounds) ²

'a' 1 - when 'a' follows an initial 'w' and is followed by an 'r', 'm', 'ng', 'ny', or 'n', the 'a' is pronounced as in 'water' or 'war'

eg 'waripa' (to dance) (say 'war-ii-pah'), 'wanap' (fire) (say - 'warn-ahp'), 'wam' (idiot) (say 'warm'), wanggal (cumbungi) (say - 'wang-gəl', 'wany' (egret) (say - 'warny'),

(the second 'a' in 'waripa' and 'wanap' is 'a' as in 'path')

- as well, this 'a' as in 'water' sound variation may also be used in those words where an 'a' just follows a 'w' eg in 'watha' (brown sand goanna) the first 'a' can either be the standard 'a' as in 'path' or the 'a' as in 'water'. The second 'a' in 'watha' is always the standard 'a' sound ('a' as in 'path') ³

2 - when 'a' is followed by 'w'

the 'a' is pronounced as the diphthong 'au' sound as in 'ground' or 'owl'.

eg 'tawa' (to hit) is 'taou-wah', 'kawenda' (to crawl) is 'kaou-wend-ah' (second 'a' is standard 'a' as in 'path')

3 - when 'a' is followed by 'y' and another vowel esp. 'a' and 'i'

the 'a' is pronounced as the diphthong 'ai' sound as in 'ice' or 'buy' ⁴

eg 'telkaya' (to be well) is 'terl-kai-yah', 'kalaya' (to ask a question) is 'kah-lai-yah', (all stative verb endings, 'aya', will include the 'ai' sound), 'payika' (to get up) is 'paiy-yik-ah'. The 'y' is usually pronounced as a 'glide' between the 'ai' and the vowel. For example, 'kaiyah' is two syllables connected by the gliding 'y'.

'ayu' is rare - only 3 words were recorded

eg - 'tirtenayuk' (new, fresh) is pronounced 'tiirt-en-aiy-yuuk'

4 - 'a' as in 'man' or 'bat' variation, the diphthong 'ae' is rare

eg the phrase 'mayomanda' (over there) is 'mai-o-maen-dah' - contains three 'a' variations - the diphthong 'ai', 'ae' as in 'man' and finally the standard short 'a' as in 'path'. ⁵

'e' 1) when 'e' is:

- followed by 'l' or 'r' or 'nasal consonant' + vowel (immediately after the consonant)

eg 'ema' or 'ena' or 'enga' or 'emi' or 'emu'

the 'e' is pronounced as 'e' in 'fern'

eg - 'kapel-kuk' (river mint), 'pandelang' (W. Kite) ⁶

or - 'pert-pert' (needle), 'Pəpəpəpəpə'

- 'e' followed by an 'l'

- 'e' followed by an 'r'

or - 'pathema' (to taste), 'tyema' (discover)

or - 'yemin-yemin' (graves)

or - 'Yemurraki' (Dreamtime)

- 'e' followed by 'ma'

- 'e' followed by 'mi'

- 'e' followed by 'mu'

or - 'kena' (tie up)

or - 'pener' (teal duck)

or - 'keninga' (to tie up)

- 'e' followed by 'na'

- 'e' followed by 'ne'

- 'e' followed by 'ni'

or - 'karrenga' (spill), 'purrenga' (to snore)

or - 'nyetenya' (to play)

or - 'nyenyeng' (hooked stick)

- 'e' followed by 'nga'

- 1st 'e' standard, 2nd 'e' variation 'enya'

- 'e' followed by 'nyi'

² Note: There are some English 'a' sounds that either not used in Wamba Wamba.

These include: - 'a' as in 'pay' or 'hay'. For example 'Mayrung' is an anglicisation of 'marrung' which is pronounced with the WW standard 'a' as in 'path' and the WW standard 'u' as in 'put'.

³ See - 'WWDict' p8 'The Vowel a'

⁴ The standard 'a' and 'i' sounds are combined to produce the one 'ai' sound. Hercus didn't list 'diphthongs' in the 'WembaWemba Dictionary', but it is in 'Victorian Languages: a Late Survey' p20 and 21 and on recordings with fluent speakers eg Nancy Egan. In VL's-a Late Survey, Hercus writes the pronunciation of 'telkaya' as 'delgaia' (it is well) and 'delgainj' (it will be well). 'kayi kuthap' (I'm sorry.) is spelt with the diphthong 'ai' in VLALS. p.182. It is pronounced 'kai-yi kuth-ahp'

⁵ This diphthong (ae) or 'a' as in 'man' variation can be heard on AIATSIS tape 998A with Nancy Egan speaking with Louise Hercus. Nancy Egan pronounces 'mayomanda' with three 'a' variations - the diphthong 'ai', 'a' as in 'man' and finally the standard short 'a' as in 'path'. In 'Victorian Languages a late survey' Hercus also mentions the 'ae' as a variation with 'kepin'. The agreed pronunciation of Wamba Wamba ie 'waembah waembah' could be considered another example of this rare 'ae' variation.

⁶ See [audio recording of Uncle Stan Day saying 'pandelang'](#). Clear example of this 'e' variation. (both 'a's are standard).

or - 'kutenyuk' ([younger sister](#)),

- 'e' followed by 'nyu'

(Vowel Variations 'e' continued)

- 2) when 'e' is:
 - followed by a nasal consonant eg 'm', 'ng', 'ny' 'n' in the same syllable
(and **not** immediately followed by a vowel)

the 'e' is **long** and slightly **nasalised**

eg 'wemba' (no), wembakən (never) 'pembengguk (children), 'peng' (man), 'weny-weny' (clothes), 'pen' (hollow tree), muremba (to wind), nyemberra (wait for), panem (damper, bread)

'i' when 'i' follows a 'p' an 'm' or a 'w' and is followed by 'r', 'rn' or 'rt' (not a 'rr')

the 'i' is **rounded off like 'tu' in French**. (top of the tongue touches the back of the palate)

- 'mirnuk' (his eye) is pronounced 'moorn-uk', 'miri' (hole in the ground) is pronounced 'moor-iih'
- 'pirna' (appear, to rise) is pronounced 'poorn-ah, 'wirta' (to whistle) is pronounced 'woort-ah'

Vowel Sounds to Avoid

- 'a'** **avoid** - 'a' as in 'pay'
'a' as in 'man', 'cat' or 'band' although common in English is rare in Wamba Wamba
- 'e'** **avoid** - 'e' as in 'she' or 'e' as in 'hey'
- 'i'** **avoid** - 'i' as in 'hi'
- 'o'** **avoid** - 'o' as in 'oh' or 'go'
- 'u'** **avoid** - 'u' as in 'bucket' or 'putt'

(see next page for Wamba Wamba consonant sounds)

Wamba Wamba Consonant Sounds⁷

The 17 main consonant sounds used in Wamba Wamba can be divided up as:

- **type of sounds**

ie stops, nasals, laterals, semivowels and r-sounds

- p, k, th, ty, t, rt	stops	(the act of saying stops the breath and ends the sound)
- m, ng, ny, n, rn	nasals	(includes a nasal vibration or tone)
- l, rl	laterals	(tongue is raised so that air flows around the tongue)
- w, y	semivowels	(between a vowel and a consonant)
- rr, r	r-sounds	

or as:

- **how the sounds are formed**

ie labial, velar, dental, palatal, alveolar, retroflex

- labials **p, m, w,**

- involve the lips in making the sound

- velars **k, ng,**

involve the velum or soft palate in making the sound,

the blade of the tongue touches the soft palate towards the middle or back,

the 'k' is a 'velar stop' - ie the tongue touches the soft palate & stops the breath,

the 'ng' is a 'velar nasal' the tongue touches the soft palate and a nasal vibration is produced as well

- dentals **th**

the tip of the tongue touches the back of the upper teeth

- palatals **ty, ny, y**

involves the hard palate in making the sound

(in **ty** and **ny** the tip of tongue touches the hard palate

(in **y** blade of the tongue touches the hard palate)

- alveolars **t, n, l, rr**

tip of tongue touches just above the upper teeth ⁸

Voiced and unvoiced consonants

The list of 17 main consonant sounds doesn't include 'voiced' consonants like '**d**', '**b**', '**g**'. In English when we say 'b' 'w' or 'd' we can hear a 'urr' vocal chord sound as well as the initial 'plosive' 'b' or 'w' or 'd' breath sound.

A plosive sound is when we stop the air exiting from the lungs and then let it push out past the tongue etc. The 'stops' above are unvoiced 'plosive' sounds. For example, in Wamba Wamba, the 't' is produced by stopping the air and then releasing it while the tip of the tongue is touching the top teeth (there is no vocal chord sound).

Hercus found that fluent speakers of Wamba Wamba didn't have both voiced and unvoiced consonants as English language speakers do.

English can be said to have 'voiced/unvoiced vocal pairs' eg 'b' and 'p'. This results in words such as 'ball' and 'web' (voiced 'b') and 'pop' and 'tap' (unvoiced p and t). This distinction doesn't happen in most Wamba Wamba words but there is **an exception**. The exception is **after 'nasal consonants'**⁹ -

⁷ (See pages 5,6,7 in 'WambaWamba Dictionary', Hercus: L.A., 1992)

⁸ See detailed explanation - https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Place_of_articulation&oldid=1139758448

⁹ A nasal consonant can be made with the lips closed. The air flows out through the nose and the sound vibrates in the nasal sinuses. (Try putting a finger under your nostrils as you say 'm')

‘m’ ‘n’. Hercus says ‘because here the **consonants were strongly voiced**’ it is more correct to write them as the voiced consonant e.g. ‘wamba’ rather than the unvoiced e.g. ‘wampa’.

eg - ‘wemba’ (no), ‘pumbəl’ (blossom), ‘wirimbula’ (ear), ‘tyarrmba’ (to yell at), ‘pumba’ (to be cold)
& - ‘tanbil’ (cloud), parnbandila (shine in many colours), ‘yandang’ (I), ‘windya’ (where),¹⁰

Consonant combinations

Many of the consonants in Wamba Wamba are said the same as they are in English but, like Aboriginal languages in general, a number are said differently. This is especially so with the consonant sounds that have to be written down as a group of letters or combinations.

‘rr’

Roll or lightly trill double ‘rr’s (if you can) but not a single ‘r’

eg ‘karrek’ (spear thrower), ‘yirri’ (to slip), wirrengən (dog), tyurriila (to gossip), tyarrəmbayin (Uncle)

(If you’re not currently able to roll or trill your ‘rr’s’ you can probably learn. You don’t have to roll your tongue up. Just place it in the right place - just above your top teeth with the very tip only pointing up a little - as you breathe out. It’s a good idea because there are over 300 Wamba Wamba words with the ‘rr’. There are plenty of youtube videos to tell you how.

They’re usually about Spanish and a bit strange but still useful. [This one is not bad](#). or [this one](#).

‘th’

- ‘th’ is a hard sound, a dental plosive sound with the tongue right against the teeth, like the English ‘d’
eg ‘Dad’

eg ‘kethul’ (friend) (say ked-uul), ‘wuthu’ (man) (say wuud-uu), ‘thathakuk’ (arm) (say dah-dah-kuuk’)

‘ty’

‘ty’ is a palatal stop. To pronounce it, say ‘ty’ together with tongue tip touching your palate just above the top teeth. It is an ‘unvoiced’ consonant ie it is not pronounced like ‘tyurr’ but just the sound of the air passing the tongue on the palate for the ‘t’, combined with the ‘y’ sound.

e.g. ‘tyina’ (foot) (say tyin-ah), ‘tyuluk’ (calf) (say tyuul-uuk), ‘tyang’ (chest) (say tyahng), puletya (two), Kolety (name Edward River) (say - kol-ety),

(For those of us whose first language is English, our English brain will tend to want to split ‘ty’ up into two separate sounds like in ‘city’ or ‘beauty’. Just think ‘Wamba Wamba’ and keep the ‘ty’ together as one sound.

As Hercus says on p.6. ‘the final of the word ‘purtity’ (cumbungi root) is **not** pronounced as in the English word ‘purity’, but as ‘ty’. This is closer to the final of the English ‘stitch’ though by no means identical to it. Similarly the final of ‘katty-katty’ (evil magic) is **not** pronounced as in ‘Cathy’, but more like the final of ‘muchy’, though not identical to it.)

‘ny’

- ‘ny’ is a single palatal nasal consonant. It is made by touching the top of the tongue to the top of the mouth behind your teeth and adding some nasal vibration while saying ‘ny’. An English equivalent is the ‘ny’ in ‘cannyon’. In Wamba Wamba ‘ny’ is pronounced together as one sound.

There are 148 words listed in the dictionary that contain ‘ny’.

eg ‘manyu’ (hand), ‘munyuk’ (elbow), ‘tyang-manyu’ (palm), nyuwa (here, near)

Hercus reminds us on p. 6 of the ‘WambaWamba Dictionary’ that : ‘puny’ (hot ashes) is **not** pronounced like English ‘bunny’ or ‘many’ but as ‘puuny’ with the ‘y’ forming part of the ‘n’ sound. (it sounds a bit like ‘new’ in Australian English)

¹⁰ There are also 7 words with the ‘mp’ unvoiced combination listed in the dictionary eg ‘tyimpang’. These words would be pronounced without a lot of emphasis on, or with a gap before, the second syllable eg tyim-pang (billy can)

(Consonants combinations cont.)

'ng'

- 'ng' is a soft sound, a velar nasal sound as in 'English' or 'song'.
combine 'n' and 'g' as back of the tongue vibrates against the soft palate along with a nasal vibration.
eg 'kinga' (here), 'tyarrang' (blue sky), 'ngapa' (grandfather), 'tyang-manye' (palm),

'ngg'

- 'ngg' - soft 'ng' followed by a hard 'g' kingga (here) pronounce king-ga
eg - 'parngga' (to be thirsty), 'nyengga' (to sit), 'kuyinggurin' (mother), 'pathinggu' (knee)

Lengthening of some consonants

The consonants 'n', 'ny' and 'l' 'tend to be lengthened, even doubled when they follow a stressed first syllable' (Hercus, 'WW Dict. p7)

eg 'kanak' (heel) - the 'n' tends to be emphasised and lengthened - pronounced 'kannnak'
'wile' (brush-tail possum) - the 'l' is emphasised and lengthened. pronounce - 'wille',
'wanyakayi' (crayfish) - the 'ny' is emphasised and lengthened - pronounced - 'wannyakayi',

Pronouncing consonant clusters eg 'ndy' and 'rnd' (Hercus, 'WW Dict. p7)

eg 'pandyil' (Murray Cod) - pronounced 'pany-dyil' - the spelling is simplified, only one 'y' is written
or 'windya' (where) is pronounced 'winy-dya' but spelt 'windya'
or 'pandyewang' (shoes) is pronounced 'pany-dye-wang'
or 'karnda' (to scream) instead of 'karnrda'

Word beginnings

There are no words in Wamba Wamba beginning with vowels and only 12 consonants begin words
p, k, th, ty, t, m, ng, ny, n, l, w, y

(note: Hercus appears to leave out 'l' as a beginning consonant, p6 of Wemba Wemba Dictionary', but it was possibly an error as there are 47 words in the dictionary that start with a 'l')

This combination results in the Wamba Wamba dictionary starting with a word that begins with the letter 'k' - 'kakat' (white ibis).

Emphasis & Syllables

In normal Wamba Wamba speech, we usually place the emphasis on the first and third syllables with the first being stronger of the two. This gives a rhythm to normal speech. In day to day speech, traditional fluent speakers speak and pronounce sounds quite quickly and don't normally draw out sounds. This can change in songs however.

Wamba Wamba is one of over 500 Indigenous Languages spoken through Australia. It is one of the group of related languages of South West and North West Victoria and South West New South Wales that have been referred to by linguists as 'Kulin Languages'. This group of languages have many common features and similarities. It has a lot in common with neighbouring languages such as Yorta Yorta and Werkaya (Wergaia). The Pererapa-Perəpaperəpa language is so close that only a few words are different.

Like all Indigenous Languages Wamba Wamba has different rules of pronunciation and grammar from English.

Resources and Information

See - The Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Wamba Wamba language site - 'Wurrekangurr' (we all speak) <https://culture.yarkuwa.org.au/> for more information.

You can use the [Dictionary Word Search](#) to search for individual words in either Wamba Wamba or English, or [Category Browse](#) to browse subject lists of Wamba Wamba words.

In [Phrases](#) you can search for, understand and practice Wamba Wamba phrases and sentences.

The [Learning Lists](#) section allows you to learn lists of Wamba Wamba words and, if you register, create your own learning lists.

The [Resources](#) section allows you to download learning and teaching guides, posters, songs and stories.

This pronunciation guide will continue to be updated as more research, learning and resources become available and to adapt to programming changes in the Wurrekangurr database.

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