

Torres Strait Islanders Languages

There are two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Islands, **Meriam Mir** and **Kalau Lagau Ya**.

Meriam Mir is the language of the Eastern Islands of Mer (Murray), Erub (Darnley), Waier, Dauar and Ugar (Stephen). **Kalau Lagau Ya** has four distinct dialects derived from this language which are:

- Kalau Kawau Ya - the dialect of the top Western Islands group of Saibai, Dauan (Mt Cornwallis) and Boigu including Bamaga and Seisia.
- Kalau Lagau Ya - the dialect of the Central Western Islands of Mabuiag (Jervis) and Badu (Mulgrave). This dialect is also known as Gumulgau Ya.
- Kulkalgau Ya - the dialect of the Central Islands of Aurid (Aureed), Damut (Dalrymple), Iama (Yam or Turtle-Backed), Masig (Yorke), Mauar (Rennel), Naghir (Mt Earnest), Poruma (Coconut) and Warraber (Sue).
- Kawalgau Ya - the dialect of the South Western Islands of Muralag (Prince of Wales, Nurupai (Horn), Giralag (Friday), Waiben (Thursday Island), Keriri (Hammond), Maurura (Wednesday), Moa (Banks). It is also known as Kaurareg.

The dialects are determined geographically that developed over period of time influenced through traditional trade, visits, inter-marriages, and kinship ties and most recently in the last century, due to the marine industry and missionary arrivals, gave birth to another language the Torres Strait Creole also called Ailan Tok or Umpla Tok spoken by all.

Torres Strait Creole

Creole is a language that developed from pidgin English of the southwest Pacific and spread around the Torres Strait Islands during the twentieth century. It has its own distinctive sound system, grammar, vocabulary, usage and meaning. Creole became a language by about 1910, among the St Paul's mission children. There are several factors encouraging its adoption; its convenience in helping speakers of the Western (Kala Lagaw Ya) and Eastern (Miriam Mir) Strait languages communicate with each other, the workforce of the Strait pearling and beche-de-mer industries, and the employment of Pacific Islanders as mission teachers.

This is not a completed list of Indigenous language material held at the State Library of Queensland, but an example.

- Shnukal, A. (c1988). *Broken: an introduction to the creole language of Torres Strait*. Canberra: Australian National University. (John Oxley Library Call Number - J 427 shn).
- Singe, J. (1979). *The Torres Strait: people and history*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. (John Oxley Call Number - J 994.38 sin).

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