

Ngalakan

Consider the data below from Ngalakan, a recently-extinct language that was spoken in Northern Australia. (According to Ethnologue (<http://www.ethnologue.com/>), the last fluent speaker died in 2004).

Word list

- bakol bakolnggi waterlily
- wom womnggi black plum
- got gotgi paper bark
- balmaŋa balmaŋangi hat
- malk malki subsection
- ɖaɖa ɖaɖangi wild honey
- bak baki pond algae
- waŋɖat waŋɖatgi arm
- ɖarbija ɖarbijangi black cockatoo
- guɭaʔ guɭaʔgi skin
- gapuɭa gapuɭangi blind person
- balɬɖuɖaʔ balɬɖuɖaʔgi blanket lizard
- wotɬwotɬ wotɬwotɬgi thief
- jirkup jirkupgi water rat
- womborot womborotgi rock wallaby
- giŋalk giŋalki white ibis

What are the three allomorphs of the second-person possessive suffix? What determines which allomorph is used?

By separating the words into different groups based on the ending as such:

Group 1

- bakoɭ bakoɭŋgi
- wom womŋgi
- balmaŋa balmaŋangi
- ɖarbiɟa ɖarbiɟangi
- ɖaɖa ɖaɖangi
- gapuɭa gapuɭangi

Group 2

- wotɕwotɕ wotɕwotɕgi
- jirkup jirkupgi
- womborot womborotgi
- got gotgi
- waŋɖat waŋɖatgi
- guɭaʔ guɭaʔgi
- baɭɕuɖaʔ baɭɕuɖaʔgi

Group 3

- malk malki
- bak baki
- giŋalk giŋalki

we can observe three different allomorphs for the second-person possessive morpheme: -ŋgi, -gi, and -ki.

The latter one only appears if we're already ending on an unvoiced velar plosive /k/, and the sound merges with the ending.

Otherwise, the suffix is -gi. The allomorph -gi appears whenever the base word ends on a voiceless consonant, but if the last stem of the noun ends in a voiced phoneme, we insert a nasalized velar sound between the suffix and the word to make the suffix more natural, giving us the /ŋgi/ allomorph.