

Athima  
Barry Alpher

Athima is known from just eight pages<sup>1</sup> of notes taken by Gerhardt Laves as a record of the speech of Jack Munsel, in 1931 probably in Normanton. Preceding Mr Munsel's name at the beginning of the notes is "Normanton—Gilbert River"; on the basis of the affinity of the language to Ogunyjan (see below), it is possible to surmise that Athima country is somewhere on the middle reaches of the Gilbert River. Laves' record contains some 55 lexical items and 19 elicited sentences sufficiently varied for tense of the verb to give a few inflectional paradigms.

### Sounds

There are not enough forms in the list to attest a complete inventory of sounds. The sounds encountered, in a first approximation to a phonemic analysis, are these:

#### Consonants

p	th	t		k
b	dh	d	dj	g
bm		dn		
m		n	ny	ng
		l		
		rr		
w		r	y	

#### Vowels

i		u
e		
	a	

Stress is marked sporadically in the MS, but where marked, it is invariably on the first syllable with a consonantal onset. Laves uses either a straight apostrophe preceding the syllable or an acute accent mark on the vowel to indicate stress; I have reproduced these marks literally in the examples below.

Athima is an initial-dropping language: *abmal* 'foot' < Proto-Paman \*tjamal. In some cases Laves has written an initial "y" before /i/ where one would expect the /i/ to be initial on historical grounds: *yidna* 'ear' (< Proto-Paman \*pina, with *idna* the expected reflex). Although the initial of 'ear' as written is distinct from that of /ilpinj/ 'tongue', I suspect that Laves was reading in to words like 'ear' the pattern he had become attuned to in languages whose every word begins with a consonant. There is some support for this suspicion in Laves' variant transcriptions of the second person singular pronoun, *ina* and *yina*. Laves also heard initial [w] for at least some forms that probably begin with /u/, as with *wub'man* 'lower leg' (< Proto-Paman

<sup>1</sup> Numbered 29 through 35 (6738-44 and 6784).

\*kuman)—it is significant here that Laves marked stress on the second syllable. Note also 'wub'mu 'nose', with stress marked for the second syllable as well as the first (I do not know of a cognate for this form, with or without initial consonant).

I have subsumed sounds transcribed as "rd" and as "d" with subscript dot (with the exception noted below) with /r/ on the assumption that this system works like those of Ogunyjan and Koko-Bera, languages of this region in which the glide phoneme /r/ can be realised as a retroflex flap. I consider /bm/ and /dn/ to be unit phonemes (prestopped nasals) of the type found in a number of languages of this area, despite Laves' rendition of them (to judge from the stress mark written between the stop symbol and the nasal symbol) as split between two syllables. The prestopped (tense) nasals are distinct from the plain ones (/abmal/ 'foot', /amadhv/ 'lower leg'), but there is not enough evidence to demonstrate the voiced/voiceless distinction for stops.

Stop and nasal sound-types in the positions left blank in the diagram no doubt occurred and were contrastive.

There are probably at least five vowels, but the status of the one mid vowel attested, /e/, is in some doubt because of the near identity of *idjilv* 'home' and *edjélang* (presumably also 'home', the 'back' of 'I been come back') in

- (1) *idjilv* *inggjin*  
home come  
'You come home'

and

- (2) *edjélang* *indjin*  
'I been come back'.

Laves has marked vowel length in various forms, but it impossible to tell if vowel length is distinctive.

### Verb paradigms

	'spear'	'make'	'go'	'climb'
<b>Imperative</b>	umil	wurrngil	agal	ar.di:lv
<b>Past</b>	uminv	wurrnginiyv		ar.di:nv
<b>Future-Purposive</b>	imigv	wurrnginvgv	agalag, aganangg	ar.digiv

### Similarity to Ogunyjan

Athima shares some 59% of the vocabulary attested in this list with Ogunyjan, its neighbour to the north. On the evidence Laves has given us, its consonant inventory is probably identical to that of Ogunyjan but its vowel inventory is somewhat simpler (Ogunyjan distinguishes at least six, and possibly seven, vowels). Athima shows /i/ in some forms whose Ogunyjan cognates have other vowels: *iri* 'hand', Ogunyjan *ar3*

(and Proto-Pama-Nyungan \*mara)<sup>2</sup>; *irril* ‘elbow’, Ogunyjan *orr3l* ‘arm’ (cf. Proto-Paman \*tjirri [Hale’s “Other Paman” list]); *ipil* (in *ir-ipil*) ‘one’, Ogunyjan *op3l* (cf. Proto-Paman \*nyupun [Hale’s “Other Paman” list]—Ogunyjan final /l/ and /n/ fluctuate in a number of forms); *athigv* ‘mother’s brother’, Ogunyjan *athakvr*; *athil* ‘older brother’, Ogunyjan *athal*. Some of the Athima /i/s appear to be retentions here; others (as in *iri* ‘hand’ < \*mara) appear to be innovations. What is of interest for the Ogunyjanist is that Ogunyjan has raised second-syllable vowels (usually to the mid to high central vowel /3/) in closed syllables in a number of forms; this raising is one of the keys to Ogunyjan’s second-syllable vocalic ablaut alternations in nouns and verbs under inflection. It is possible that part of the history of Ogunyjan and Athima vowel raising took place in common.

Ogunyjan verb paradigms are very similar to those of Athima: Ogunyjan ‘climb’ has the nonpast *altil*, the past *altin*, and *altilg* ‘might’; other verbs of this L conjugation (the one with the most members) use precisely the same set of endings. The endings attested in both languages are conservative and continue, for the most part, throughout Pama-Nyungan and beyond. But the parallelism of cognate verb stems and endings in Athima and Ogunyjan argues for a close genetic relationship.

### Laves’ and Munsel’s Contribution

In this very short interview Laves and Munsel have handed on to the present evidence for an Ogunyjan-like language spoken at some distance to the south of Ogunyjan’s attested territory, filling in a blank on the linguistic map. The transcription of Munsel’s utterances shows traces of, and probably interference from, Laves’ acculturation to other Australian languages of a more usual phonological type. For me to observe this of an eight-page corpus (small pages) is surely to be hypercritical: linguists get all kinds of things wrong in far more extensive work with speakers of languages they haven’t heard before—and perhaps Laves heard correctly after all. That such a short list can reveal the affinities of the Athima language and can possibly contribute something to the understanding of Ogunyjan morphophonemics is something to marvel at.

### Wordlist

#### Orthographic notes:

This list	Laves’ handwriting
r (glide)	printed lc “r”; one “rd” <sup>1</sup> ; one “d” with subscript dot
rr (flap)	script lc “r”
r.d (retroflex glide followed by apical stop) <sup>1</sup>	rd
u	small uc “u” (no tail)
ú	ordinary lc “u” (with a tail) <sup>2</sup>
ɪ	iota or undotted “i” <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ogunyjan “3” is a stressed mid to high central vowel.

e	lc epsilon (two items only; “e” never used)
v	shwa symbol
: (length)	single raised postscript dot
dj	dj <sup>4</sup>
ny	nj <sup>4</sup>
ng	eng
th	subscripted (dental) “t”
dh	subscripted (dental) “d”
δ	“d” with a line through the loop <sup>5</sup>
nggy	nggj <sup>4</sup>

## Notes:

1. ‘to climb’ is written “ardi” (possibly with “d” with a subscript dot once [33/6742]; see *ara*. Since I’m pretty sure retroflex/nonretroflex is not distinctive for stops and this form is etymologically \*tar.ti, “rd” has to be specified as a sequence and not a digraph. Note also /irilng/ [irdilng] ‘nape’ (Ogunyjan *orolng*) and /ara/ (sense not clear; [arda]?).
2. This symbol is used in just two items, *ayú* ‘I’ (recorded in two other places as *ayu*) and *a’mangúndjula* ‘potential wife’, and is almost certainly an accidental variant (in more script-like writing) of tailless small cap “u”, here written “u”.
3. In two forms only: *umi*+ ‘to spear’ (once with iota, twice with undotted “i”, and once with—apparently—dotted “i”, all p32) and *urdilng* ‘nape’ (apparently undotted “i”, but possibly has a dot, p30).
4. The last of these “j” digraphs, *nggj*, occurs in “wuinggjinba” ‘red kangaroo’ (“note gy” [p32]) and *inggyinv* ‘come’ (p33). The sequence is possibly a realisation of /nyg/ in one or both of these forms, but ‘come’ is also transcribed *indjin*. Laves in these notes uses “j” only as a diacritic with preceding “n”, “d”, and “g” and uses “y” only for the palatal glide consonant. Ogunyjan has /y/ after /g/ in a few forms.
5. In a single token, *inδu*; see *indu* (‘you?’).

## Abbreviations

P, past tense  
 Imp, imperative  
 F, future  
 Prp, purposive  
 Loc, locative  
 GL, Gerhard Laves

## Athima to English

## ab'mal

‘foot’ Ogunyjan *ebm3l*.

**abumba**

‘top, on’ Example: *aya ardi:nv abumba* ‘I climbed on top’. Source: 33. Ogunyjan *ab* ‘that (distal)’, *amb3* ‘outside’ (?).

**aga+**

‘go’ Paradigm: Imp *agalv*, ‘to’ *agalaga*, ‘let’s’ *aga'nangga*. Examples: *aga'nangga awiya* ‘come here, let’s go!’, *aya agalaga* ‘I go’, *in agalv* ‘you go!’, *agalau* ‘go!’.

Source: 31,33. Ogunyjan *eli+* ~ *ele+*.

**alan**

‘hair’ Ogunyjan *al3n*.

**ali:v awai**

Note: gloss? Source: 31.

**a'madhv**

‘leg (lower)’ Ogunyjan *arrnd3* ‘leg’, *ak3l* ‘calf’, *ubm3n* ‘thigh’.

**amang**

‘mother’ Ogunyjan *atham*.

**a'mangundjula**

‘potential wife’ Note: Distant (only) MoBrDa marriageable. Ogunyjan *othol* ‘wife’.

**ambuk**

‘head’ Ogunyjan *olk3l*.

**angkul**

‘teeth’ Ogunyjan *anggul* (/u/??).

**a'pandvl**

‘chin’ Note: Last vowel letter uncertain; p30. Ogunyjan *elp3r*.

**ara**

Note: The sense of the single example (‘not’? A reduplication of the following *ar.dil* ‘to climb’?) is not clear; the consonant (here “r”) is written “d” with subscript dot in the notes. Example: *ara ardigiv ulgunv* ‘I’ll climb the hill’. Source: 33.

**ardi+**

‘climb’ Paradigm: Imp *ardi:lv*, P *ardi:nv*, F-PrP *ardigiv*. Examples: *agagia ulgumb ar'digiyyv* ‘I’ll go climb the hill’, *ara ardigiv ulgunv* ‘I’ll climb the hill’, *ina ardi:lv* ‘you climb’, *aya ardi:nv abumba* ‘I climbed on top’. Note: /r.d/. Source: 33. Ogunyjan *alte+*.

**arragal**

‘arm (lower, upper)’ Ogunyjan *arrag3l* ‘shoulder’, *orr3l* ‘arm’.

**arrbandjv**

‘big mob’ Note: *arrbandji* in context. Example: *yilinga yina arrbandji imigv* ‘tomorrow you’re going to spear many’ (for “tomorrow I going to spear many”). Ogunyjan *amol*, *arrchun-atham* ‘many, big mob’.

**arrulk**

‘three’ Note: Initial “e”? Ogunyjan *elnyjur*.

**a'thaba**

‘sister (elder)’

**a'thigv**

‘mother’s brother’ Ogunyjan *athakvr* ‘uncle’.

**athil**

‘brother (elder)’ Ogunyjan *athal*.

**athim**

‘father’ Ogunyjan *athip*.

**a'thimv**

(the name of this language)

**ati+**

‘come’ Example: *ina átilawai* ‘you come’. Note: ‘go up’? Source: 33. Ogunyjan *uca+* ‘return, come back’.

**awiyv**

‘come here’ Example: *aga'nangga awiya* ‘come here, let’s go!’

**awu:k**

‘whiskers, moustache’

**ayu**

‘I’ Source: 31. Ogunyjan *ay3*.

**edjeland**

‘back (destination of return)’ Example: *edjélang indjin* ‘I been come back’. Source: 33.

**idjilv**

‘home’ Example: *idjilv inggyinv* ‘you come home’ [sic]. Source: 33.

**igadhv**

‘brother (younger)’

**ilpiny**

‘tongue’ Ogunyjan *enhdhawvr*.

**ilpun**

‘mother’s sister’

**umi+**

‘spear (it)’ Paradigm: Imp *umil*, P *uminv*, F *imigv* [sic, with “i”]. Examples: *yina yumina arrbandji minv* [written with “i” at the end of *arrbandji* and space before *minv*] ‘you been spear plenty’ (for “I been spear plenty”); *yilinga yina arrbandji imigv* ‘tomorrow you’re going to spear many’ (for “tomorrow I going to spear many”). Source: 32. Ogunyjan *ema+*.

**in(a)**

‘you (Sg)’ Examples: *in \_mil* (also *yiná \_mil*) ‘you go spear!'; *yilinga yina arrbandji imigv* ‘tomorrow you’re going to spear many’ (for “tomorrow I going to spear many”) Note: Also written *yina* and *yiná*, as in ex.. Source: 32 Ogunyjan *en3*.

**indji+**

‘come (back)’ Paradigm: P *indjin*. Example: *edjélang indjin* ‘I been come back’. Note: probably the same as *inggyi+*. Source: 33. Ogunyjan *uca+* ‘return, come back’.

**indu**

‘you’ (?) Example *indu agal* ‘you go’. Note: Same as *iná* ‘you (Sg)’? Once as *indu agal*. Source: 31 (2x).

**inggyi+**

‘come’ Example: *idjilv inggyinv* ‘you come home’ [sic]. Note: Probably the same as *indji+*. Source: 33. Ogunyjan *in.g(y)a+* ‘sit, stay’?

**trilng**

‘neck (back)’ Note: Original has “rd” for what is here interpreted as a retroflex flap realising /r/. Possibly “I” was meant as the first vowel. Ogunyjan *orolng*.

**iri**

‘hand’ Ogunyjan *ar3* ‘hand, finger’.

**iripil**

‘one’ Note: Probably /ir ipil/ ‘one finger’. Ogunyjan *op3l*.

**irril**

‘elbow’ Ogunyjan *ongkong, orr3l-* (/on.k.../?).

**i'wetin**

‘mouth’ Ogunyjan *ek3nh* ‘mouth’, *ek3nh-etin* ‘lip’.

**i'yin**

(1) ‘father’s sister’, (2) ‘wife’s mother’ Note: Given as “iyinv” once (sense 2).

Source: 34,35.

**mangandhul**

‘FaSiDa, MoBrDa’ Ogunyjan *ew3lpvg* ‘FaSiCh’, *alnyil* ‘MoBrCh’.

**ulgun**

‘hill; rock’ Paradigm: Loc (?) *ulgumb*. Examples: *agagia ulgumb ar'digiyy* ‘I’ll go climb the hill’; *ara ardigiv ulgunv* ‘I’ll climb the hill’. Source: 33. Ogunyjan *olgonh* ‘stone’.

**ungku**

‘chest’ Ogunyjan *engk*; UO *ugngg*.

**ur'dum**

‘belly’ Note: “r’d” is /r/? Ogunyjan *orrkol* ‘belly’, *or3l* ‘bdy cavity’.

**wub'manv**

‘leg (upper)’ Note: Probably /ubman/. Ogunyjan *ubm3n* ‘thigh’.

**'wub'mu**

‘nose’ Ogunyjan *elng3r*.

**wudi:l**

‘neck (front)’

**wuingyinba**

‘kangaroo (red)’ Note: /wunyinginba/? GL: “note gy”. Source: 32. Ogunyjan *eyirrpvr* ‘kangaroo’ (Q species).

**wuinyuiny**

‘wife’ Ogunyjan *othol*.

**wurrngi+**

‘make’ Paradigm: Imp *wurrngil*, ‘will’ *wurrnginiyy*, ‘to’ *wurrnginvgv*. Examples: *alga wurrngil* ‘make spear!’, *ayu wurrnginiyy* ‘I’ll make spear’, *ayu wurrnginvgv in'membin* ‘I’ll make spear try to finish him’. Source: 32.

**yibman**

‘eye’ Note: Probably /ibman/. Ogunyjan *ibm3n*.

**yid'na**

‘ear’ Note: Probably /idna/. Ogunyjan *an.g3l, idn-*.

**yiladha**

‘sister (younger)’ Ogunyjan *ilol*.

**yilinga**

‘tomorrow’ Example: *yilinga yina arbandji imigv* ‘tomorrow you’re going to spear many’ (for “tomorrow I going to spear many”) Source: 32. Ogunyjan *olor*.

**yirmpa**

‘two’ Note: Probably /irmpa/. Ogunyjan *irmp3*.

**yirndal**

‘knee’ Note: Probably /irndal/. Ogunyjan *errnd3l*.

55 forms (words)

53 glossed forms (words), 37 with Ogunyjan equivalents, 22 cognate (59%)