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Yarn as a verb meaning 'talk' in Australian English varieties

Jane Helen Simpson

Australian National University

ABSTRACT

The word *yarn* in the sense of 'talk' and pronounced [ja:n] has gained currency as a marker of Australian Indigenous Englishes. I explore its origins in Australian Aboriginal languages, in early Australian contact language sources, and in early Australian, New Zealand and British English sources. In the nineteenth century the English expression *spin a yarn* became accepted as sailor talk for storytelling. The noun *yarn* became used for 'story', and *yarn* then became used as a verb. Evidence is sparse for *yarn* in early English-derived Australian contact languages, or in languages of the Sydney area. However, a verb *yarn-in* 'speak, talk, say' was recorded in 1843 in the Ngarrindjeri language. Verbs with forms and meanings similar to Ngarrindjeri *yarn-in* are found in other Aboriginal languages in inland NSW and Queensland. The modern Australian English use of *yarn* for 'informal talk' diverges from the earlier English use of *yarn* for entertainment talk, and is closer in meaning to the Ngarrindjeri *yarn-in*. *Yarning* is now adopted as a label in institutional discourse for talk with and among Australian Indigenous people. I suggest that the modern use is influenced by both the verbs in some Australian Aboriginal languages and the English sailor-talk use.

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1. Introduction

The verb *yarn* (pronounced [ja:n]) meaning 'talk' has become a marker of Australian Indigenous Englishes, and has entered academic discourse to the extent that *yarning methodology* is now used by researchers as a name for gathering information from free conversation with Indigenous people – often on serious topics (Power, 2004). *Yarning circle*[1] and the expression *yarn up* have become established as part of this process, whether in academic research, government administration, counselling, or in school activities:

> **Yarning** (or storytelling) is a way to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge. (From *Creating a yarning circle:*

CONTACT Jane Helen Simpson jane.simpson@anu.edu.au

[1] *Yarning circle* has been recorded in the *Australian National Dictionary* (AND) database as early as 1951 (https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/andc/yarning-circle), but referring to a group of wool-growers, rather than Indigenous people. It accords with earlier uses such as *yarn spinning circle* (1901) and *yarning fire circle* (1920). The earliest AND record of *yarning circle* used by Indigenous people is 2002.

> *using your yarning circle*, https://juniorlandcare.org.au/learning_activity/creating-a-yarning-circle-using-your-yarning-circle)

> The **Yarn Up** cards can be used in schools, men's and women's yarning circles, community groups and workplaces to encourage people to explore their cultural identity and recognise their strengths. (From *Families are First: Yarn up Cards*, https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/families/families-are-first/yarn-up-cards)

The word *yarn* has also long been used colloquially in Australian English for informal talking and storytelling, particularly in rural areas, as in "yarn with someone, have a yarn with someone", "yarn about something".[2] In 1861 the similarity between a Ngarrindjeri word *yannin* and the English use of *yarn* was noted in a diary entry by the Reverend George Taplin, who worked with Ngarrindjeri people living on the Coorong:

> Yannin Talking. It is curious that such a likeness to our common term for a long conversation should be used, "yarning" – the sailor's phrase. 10/10/1861 (Taplin, 1859–1879)

Is this similarity between the Ngarrindjeri verb *yarn-in* and the English verb *yarn* accidental? How did this word *yarn* develop three metaphorical senses (or sub-senses), one about telling entertaining stories, one encompassing both casual conversation and serious talk, and one used to describe conversation by Indigenous Australians? In this paper I discuss three competing possibilities:

- the word *yarn* in its communication meaning was borrowed into English from an Australian Indigenous language and/or a contact language;
- the word was borrowed from English into Australian Indigenous languages and/or a contact language; and
- the word *yarn* in its communication meaning developed independently in English and in Australian Indigenous languages, but with later mutual influence.

I begin with a short discussion of the methods for gathering evidence. I then trace the history of this word in settler Australian English in the nineteenth century. I discuss the evidence for a form like the verb *yarn* in traditional Australian languages, especially Ngarrindjeri, and consider its presence in early records of Australian contact languages. I conclude that the most likely account of the presence of *yarn* for 'talking' in both modern Australian Indigenous Englishes and in Australian English more generally is the mutually reinforcing influence of a similar-sounding verb meaning 'talk' in some Australian Aboriginal languages, and the English noun *yarn* as 'story' in the expression *spin a yarn* and the derived verb *yarning* 'telling stories, conversing'.

2. Method

The first step in tracing the history of an English word is to examine its entry in a dictionary organized on historical principles. The three dictionaries I used were the

[2]The *Australian National Dictionary* (Moore et al., 2016) contains entries for *yarn* as a noun glossed as 'chat, discussion' with 11 citations, the first in 1843, and *yarn* as a verb glossed as 'to talk, chat' with 11 citations, the first in 1847. All citations appear to be from non-Indigenous sources, although one 2007 example involves yarning with Aboriginal people.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (OED Online, 2025a), the *Australian National Dictionary* (AND) (Moore et al., 2016) and the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (Orsman, 1997). In these dictionaries entries for words are alphabetically organized. Within an entry, the senses of the word are organized chronologically from the earliest attested sense to modern senses. Each sense is illustrated by example sentences, also arranged chronologically from earliest record to modern records. This allows us to find the first written record, which almost certainly occurred well after the word had become common in speech.

The next step for examining usage and development of senses of a word in Australian English is to seek antedatings of the example sentences given in the dictionaries. When an earlier example is found, then the context of the use must be examined for collocations allowing us to infer the sense of *yarn* intended by the writer.

Context of publication is important for indications of authenticity. For example, the earliest Tasmanian example of the metaphorical use of *yarn* for 'story' that I have found is "Long Yarns" in an 1824 Tasmanian newspaper (Appendix 1.3). But it is actually a version of an 1823 letter to an English magazine purporting to be from a sailor "Tom Starboard":

> [**Long yarns**] This is a phrase generally used by seamen to denote a species of marvellous stories with which they delight to wile away the dreary "midwatch", and to astonish the minds of such green horns or landlubbers, as may happen to be on board. ("Tom Starboard", 1823)

Reprinting work from another country is not evidence that Tasmanians used *yarn* in this way. Second, in determining authenticity, genre matters – police reports are likely to be more accurate than literary fiction, or reminiscences recorded long after the interaction (Simpson, 2025). The second Tasmanian attestation I have found (1828) is probably authentic since it is in an editorial preamble to a story from Ireland:

> The following, copied from an Irish paper, is one of the best specimens of what is technically called *spinning a yarn*, that we have lately met with. (Appendix 1.4)

The example illustrates a separate point. If *yarn* appears in italics or quotation marks, this is evidence that the writer thought that their readers might not know that particular sense of *yarn*, or perhaps that they considered it slang.

For *yarn* in settler Australian English, I carried out several searches of the digitized newspaper collection for the period 1800–1900 in *Trove* (National Library of Australia, https://trove.nla.gov.au/).[3] A list of some early attestations is provided in the Appendix. I have also made some comparisons with New Zealand English, through searching the digitized newspapers in *Papers Past* (National Library of New Zealand, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/).

For similar-sounding verbs meaning 'speak, talk, say' in Australian languages, I searched *Chirila* (Bowern, 2016), a lexical database of historical and modern words and meanings in many Australian languages, along with searching other dictionaries of

[3]These searches were conducted in 2025. I had to exclude instances of illegible text, reprints of articles, and uses of *yarn* for 'rope' or 'thread' or occasionally a non-standard form of 'earn'. The failure of optical character recognition on blurred print means that many instances have probably been missed.

Aboriginal languages. When the Ngarrindjeri language emerged as a possible early source, I searched other material on Ngarrindjeri.

In looking for attestations of *yarn* in early Australian contact languages I used material drawn on for a study of early Australian pidgin (Simpson, 2024). A particular problem for interpreting material on how Indigenous Australians spoke in the nineteenth century is that almost all recorders were non-Indigenous, and they were often unreliable reporters of Indigenous speech.

3. *Yarn* in English

3.1 Yarn *as noun*

The OED recognizes two senses of the noun *yarn*. The first is the 'spun fibre' sense (which has sub-senses). It was a term used on ships as well as in domestic textile making. For example, *rope-yarn* is attested in 1399 (OED Online, 2025b) as yarn used for making rope or created by untwisting yarn. *Rope-yarn* continued to be used in eighteenth century dictionaries and encyclopaedias as a term used among sailors (Society of Gentlemen, 1764). The second sense in the OED is labelled as "figurative", and as originally "Nautical slang". It is defined as 'to tell a story (usually a long one)' (OED Online, 2025c). It has a sub-sense defined as 'A chat, a talk' which is labelled as "colloquial (chiefly Australian and New Zealand)".

In the OED the first attestation in writing is from *A New and Comprehensive Vocabulary of the Flash Language* (Vaux, 1819). Vaux's definition also includes a verb use:

> **YARN**; yarning or spinning a **yarn**; is a favourite amusement among flash-people; signifying to relate their various adventures.

"Flash language" is the language of the "flash people", the people of the underworld of thieves, prostitutes and so on. James Vaux (1782–1841) (Fink, 1967) was an Englishman who was transported to Australia several times as a convict. He compiled the dictionary in the penal colony of Newcastle, Australia, in 1812, and it was published in 1819. The fact that Vaux had lived in Australia and had experience of how convicts conversed in the new penal colonies might suggest that this figurative use arose in Australia. However, as a thief in south England, Vaux had become acquainted with English thieves' slang, and as a transported convict he had experience of how sailors talked on board ships. Any of these could be the source.

For Vaux *spinning a yarn* expresses 'telling stories', and not general talk. In the nineteenth century more attestations appear of *spinning a yarn* as a term for telling tall tales, as in the 1823 "Starboard" letter quoted above, where the stories are definitely tall tales ("marvellous"), and where the context is on board ships. An 1826 Sydney attestation also links the phrase with sailors, and uses the adjective *long* of the story. It is from a report of a police incident about a sailor who was robbed. The quotation marks indicate that the writer thought the term was not yet in everyday written language:

> There could not have been found a book better calculated to fascinate the seaman, who soon hailed the bearer of it in friendly terms, and commenced "**spinning a long yarn**", (as sailors have it) all about lines and sines … . (Appendix 1.2)

The most likely bridging context for going from *yarn* as textile to *yarn* as 'talk' comes from rope-working.[4] A key in a 1730 definition of *spun yarn* is the indefinite length of the yarn. The indefinite length of the rope can be compared with the length of stories:

> **SPUN Yarn** [in Sea language] is the **Yarn** of untwisted Ropes, whose Ends are scraped and beaten thin, in order to be let into the End of other Ropes, and so made as long as Occasion shall require. (Bailey et al., 1730, p. S P)

A similar metaphor arising from the analogy between *yarn* and stories is found in other terms recorded by Vaux: *cut the line/string/yarn* meaning 'conclude the story'.

The context of working with ropes on a ship is also relevant for the metaphor. Sitting working with ropes gave sailors the time to amuse themselves and passengers by telling long stories. This is seen in a description by A. Russell, a traveller from Scotland to Australia in 1839:

> [of a sailor] … is a most interminable story-teller. For instance, when he gets a piece of work, such as **pointing a rope**, &c. he might sit with impunity, and **spin a yarn**; till he gets blacker in the face, which could hardly be, although I believe he would suffer such, rather than lose the pleasure of telling to a gaping few of the very miraculous things he has seen, and done. Should a passenger step forward, he most accommodatingly will run over **the heads of his yarn** … . (Russell, 1840, p. 40)

Subsequent attestations of the figurative use of *yarn* in the OED include an 1834 use by the English naval officer and writer Frederick Marryat and an 1837 use by the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. An 1842 British attestation also relates the term to sailors, and to made-up or exaggerated stories:

> **Spinning yarns**, is either making a great deal of a little, or telling a long story about what never happened at all. Sailors are more apt to spin their yarns when they have the opportunity to landsmen than to messmates. ("Old Humphrey" [George Mogridge], 1842, p. 235)

By 1840 there are indications that *yarn* had become common for 'tale' in Australia. An emigrant to South Australia wrote a long letter back to England using *yarn* as a noun for 'story' 15 times (Taylor, 1840). The first example has quotation marks around it, indicating that the writer considered the phrase colloquial or possibly unfamiliar to his English reader:

> however, previous to the "**long yarn**" I intend to bore you with respecting the Colony I must first tell you the fate of "my notions". (Taylor, 1840, p. 1)

Taylor also uses the term in association with convicts:

> Many a strange & wild tale have I heard from these fellows [JHS convicts and ex-convicts] when a party of them have gathered round one of our "Gypsey fires" of Deeds done in the old Country & in the Colonies – they generally commence in some such fashion as this – "Come Bill give us a **yarn** – tell us what you were lagg'd for?" & then for a detail of adventures worthy of the annals of Jack Shepperd or Jonathan Wild … . (Taylor, 1840, p. 17)

[4]Spinning wheels as a different context for using yarn are brought up in an 1846 attestation in a Queensland newspaper (Appendix 1.10). It is probably a play on "old wives' tale":

> "Let then," says this political economist, "the squatters and settlers stop the increase of their flocks and herds until the increase of the population warranted their progression." This, we must confess, is a staggerer. Stop his grandmother's spinning wheel, and his own foolish yarn, say we.

Unhurried, informal storytelling among equals (whether insiders or outsiders) seem to be key components of this early metaphorical use of *yarn*.

While *spin a yarn* remained a very common collocation, *yarn* as 'story' rapidly moved to collocating with other verbs. In fact, the first attestation of the noun *yarn* in New South Wales (apart from Vaux) is of *have a yarn*:

> To tell the truth, whistling and smoaking is Bill's delight; and he likes to **have a long yarn** from the cove, who is sure to get a bit of tobacco, if he tells Bill a good 'un. (Appendix 1.1)

A Trove search of newspapers between 1833 and 1864 for the collocation **told a yarn** found nine instances, all but one of which were in police incident reports or court proceedings, and so have some claim to authenticity. The noun *yarn* remained in common use in Australia throughout the nineteenth century.

The sub-sense of *yarn* defined as 'A chat, a talk' is claimed by the OED to be primarily Australian and New Zealand. The earliest OED attestation is in 1857 from New Zealand. Trove searches allow antedating this to 1836 in Australia, where it is used in a satirical letter purporting to be royal correspondence:

> My dear Sir Richard,
>
> I have overhauled **a long yarn** from you, which has been handed to me by my Lieutenant in command of the Colonies, in which you desire to exchange your berth at Botany Bay, for a much bigger thing at home …. I should feel vastly obliged if you would stay where you are for about seven years, for as I see by the **long yarns** you tip my people that you get work done, and that the crew like you …. (Anonymous, 1836, p. 2)

In New Zealand, the earliest attestation I have found is 1845:

> when we find a priest or a missionary so grossly violating his own neutral ground, as to make the political subjects of the day the staple of his **yarn**, it must be becoming that we should withhold our forbearance. (Anonymous, 1845, p. 3)

An 1850 report of a murder in Victoria uses the phrase *had a yarn with* which makes clear the 'chat, talk' sense:

> A party who had called at Mason's hut in the morning informed Gill that he had **had a yarn with** him, and that the prisoner was then with the deceased. (Appendix 1.7)

An 1856 NSW example shows that the interlocutor could be an institution:

> As they had seen by his letter in the Bathurst Free Press some time since, he did not tell his constituents every time he **had a yarn with** the government upon matters affecting the welfare of the district. (Anonymous, 1856, p. 2)

In conclusion, the collocations *spin a yarn* and *cut the yarn* clearly indicate the origin of the noun *yarn*'s metaphorical 'tall tale' sense in rope/thread/string making, and the likely spreading of the sense in shipboard talk. While the 1819 date of the Vaux attestation is after the 1788 invasion of Australia, the transparency of the metaphor, along with the common association of the expressions with sailors, and the early attestations in New Zealand, British and American writing indicate that the 'tall tale' sense of the noun *yarn* is unlikely to have developed from Australian Indigenous languages. The early attestations of the sub-sense of 'chat, talk' (1836 Australia, 1845 New Zealand) suggest that this use may have originated in Australia and New Zealand, since they are earlier than

attestations elsewhere, and they occur less than 20 years after the first attestation of the 'tall tale' sense anywhere.

3.2 Yarn *as verb*

English has an easy path for converting nouns to verbs. From the noun *yarn* 'tale' to the verb *yarn* as 'tell stories' and then to 'converse' are short steps, assisted by light verb collocations such as *have a yarn*. The steps were taken quite early, as indicated by the fact that Vaux provides the form *yarning* as well as the noun *yarn*. However, he does not provide an example sentence showing its use as a verb. Attestations of the verb use are much less common than the noun use. The first verb use I have found antedates the first attestation (1840) in the OED (OED Online, 2024).[5] It is an intransitive verb use in an 1833 Tasmanian police report:

> The complainant stated, that about half-past nine o'clock in the evening, she stood in Collin's-street, "**yarning**" with one Mr. Thompson, who is a friend of Mrs. Pomeroy's who came up just at the moment and abused her in the most scandalous way. (Appendix 2.1)

Again, the quotation marks indicate that the author thought this was a new use or possibly a colloquial use. Similarly, in a memoir about Australia published in Britain in 1847 (An Emigrant Mechanic (Alexander Harris), 1847), the author uses the noun *yarn* three times without quotation marks (Chapters 5, 17, 16) for long informal conversations and stories. He puts quotation marks around his first use of *yarn* as a verb (Chapter 9), but not in a later use:

> As R – and his acquaintance "**yarned**", I took up one of the books to amuse myself. (An Emigrant Mechanic (Alexander Harris), 1847, Ch. 9)

This suggests Harris thought that his readers would know the use of *yarn* as a noun 'story, storytelling', but that the verb use might be new to his readers in Britain. In Australia the sense of the verb *yarn* as 'converse' had been established by the 1840s, as in this 1846 example from a South Australian law report:

> Captain Irving. – Perhaps your Worship will allow me to make a remark on the subject.
>
> Mr Wigley. – You have made remarks enough. You have been **yarning** here for an hour, and said nothing on the subject. (Appendix 2.3)

In Australia and New Zealand, the first attestations of the verb use of *yarn* all follow the noun use, but not by many years, as shown in Table 1 (attestations are given in the Appendix).

Thus, by the late 1840s, *yarn* had become established in Australian English as a noun 'story, storytelling', and elsewhere in the world, especially in memoirs about sea voyages. In Australia, *yarn* was also becoming established as an intransitive verb for both 'telling stories', and for 'informal conversation'. By 1853 this use had been attested in New Zealand. Elsewhere in the world when the verb use began to be attested, it often had

[5]The OED attestation of *yarn* as a verb is in an Australian context, but curiously, as a transitive verb:

> … these boys look down on him with all becoming respect, as in duty bound, to one who can **yarn** the dangers of the deep, so well. (Russell, 1840, p. 40)

Table 1 Early attestations of *yarn* as noun and verb in Australian and New Zealand newspapers

Colony	Establishment date	First attestation of *yarn* as noun	First attestation of *yarn* as verb
Tasmania	1803	[1824] 1826[a]	1833
New South Wales	1788	1823	1836
Western Australia	1802/1826[b]	1838	1856
South Australia	1831/1836	1839	1846
Victoria	1803/1836	1839	1848
Queensland	1824/1859	1846	1849
New Zealand	1791/1840	1843	1853

Notes: [a][xxxx] in [xxxx]/yyyy indicates that I don't consider the first attestation an authentic attestation.
[b]xxxx/ in xxxx /yyyy is the likely start of unofficial invasions (e.g. by sealers and whalers), and yyyy is the year of the official invasion.

the implication of 'tall tale', rather than 'converse', as in this example from an American army officer:

> "Julius Cæsar!" exclaimed the major, "are you *yarning* now, or is it the truth?". (Willcox, 1857, p. 110)

4. *Yaan ~ yaaŋ* in Australian indigenous languages

4.1 Origins

Since Vaux compiled his wordlist in NSW, if the modern English verb *yarn* for 'talk' was directly derived from Australian languages, we might expect to find similar words being used for 'say, speak, talk' in the coastal NSW languages where the invasion first took place. The most commonly attested word for 'speak, say, tell' in the Sydney language is *baya* (Troy, 1993). I have not found a form like *yarn* or *yaan* in the Sydney area language records, with the possible exception of *yar-re* glossed as 'say' in the Dawes collection.[6] However, the scantiness of early records of languages in the Sydney area means that we cannot conclude that a form-meaning pair *yarn* 'say, speak' did not exist in these languages.

Some evidence supports the independent origin of a verb *yarn(-in)/yan(-in)* in Australian languages. Even though I have not found similar verbs in languages of the Sydney area, and no form **ya(:)N* has yet been reconstructed as a root with a 'speak, talk' meaning (Alpher, 2004) in proto Pama-Nyungan, the proposed ancestral language for most Australian languages, similar form-meaning pairs are found in some other eastern Indigenous Australian Pama-Nyungan languages, and in more geographically remote languages:

- *yaan* 'talk, say' in Muruwari (Austlang D32), an inland language of north-west New South Wales and south-west Queensland, first written down in 1903 by the surveyor, R. H. Mathews, as *yän* 'talk', along with *thurgurra* 'tell' (Mathews, 1903);
- *yaṉḏa* 'talk, speak' in Kullilli (Austlang D30), a language spoken in Queensland to the north-west of Muruwari (McDonald & Wurm, 1979);
- *yally* 'talk' in Bigambul (Austlang D34), a language spoken well to the east of Muruwari on the Queensland/NSW border (Turbayne et al., 1887); and

[6]It occurs on p. 19 of the anonymous early record Manuscript C of the William Dawes collection, https://www.williamdawes.org/ms/msview.php?image-id=book-c-page-19.

- *yän* ([ya:n]) 'language' in several Yolŋu Matha (Austlang N230) varieties (Chirila databases) spoken in Arnhem Land (Northern Territory).

The earliest record of a form like *yarn* for 'talk' in an Aboriginal language that I have found is the word that Taplin mentions, *yarn-in*~ *yănin*[7] 'speaking, talking, saying' recorded in a dictionary (Meyer, 1843) of the language of the people living at Encounter Bay in South Australia, a variety now called "Ngarrindjeri" (Austlang S69). This is given as an intransitive verb, and contrasts with a transitive verb formed by suffixing a causative suffix *-mind, yarne-mind-in* 'mentioning'.

For more than a decade before the missionary Heinrich Meyer began studying their language, Ngarrindjeri people had been interacting with English-speaking sealers and whalers who were operating along the south coast of Australia (Koeler, 1844, p. 37, 40). Given that the metaphorical use of the English word *yarn* was nautical slang, we might wonder if the Ngarrindjeri form had been borrowed from the sailors. However, there is circumstantial evidence against this speculation. First, the Ngarrindjeri form is clearly a verb, and no noun form is given. But, as we have seen, the English noun *yarn* as 'story' is much more common than the verb *yarn* in the early sources. Second, if Ngarrindjeri had borrowed *yarn* for 'talk', we might expect to find some other competing intransitive verb glossed as 'speak/say/talk' because it is a basic concept. But there is none. (Meyer does record a transitive verb *ramm-in* 'saying, telling' (and glossed as 'speaking' in an example sentence) but the transitivity and the 'tell' meaning distinguish it from the intransitive verb *yarn-in*~*yăn-in*.)

The verb *yarn(-in)/yan(-in)* continued to be used in Ngarrindjeri throughout the nineteenth century. In 1864, George Taplin's Bible translations (Taplin, 1864) include *yarnin*, *yarnir* and *yarn* for 'say/said' along with *tungarar* (the latter apparently translating 'words'), but I found no instances of a form like *ramin* denoting acts of communication. In 1892 an Aboriginal person, Karammi, provided John McConnell Black with a short word list of "Narrinyeri", which includes [jarnin] 'talking' (Black, 1917).[8]

In 1935 Norman Tindale recorded Frank Blackmoor on wax cylinders (Tindale, 1935) and two transcriptions exist of a 'speak/say' word, one by Tindale: e.g. [*ja*:nang][9] and one by Blackmoor himself who worked with a younger Ngarrindjeri man: e.g. *yurning*. In the early 1940s several words for 'speaking' appear in records of the Ngarrindjeri man Albert Karloan's speech made by the anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt (Berndt et al., 1993). Most comprise more than 130 inflected forms of *yan*, *yanin* and the transitive verb *yanimindin*, but there are examples of *rammin* glossed as 'tell/told', and *thungga*, *tunggal* (and other inflected forms), glossed mostly as 'speak, talk'. The Berndts make a link with the use of *yarn* in Australian English: in one song example *yana* is glossed as 'yarn' and given in free English translation as 'yarning, yarns' (Appendix 7.25).

[7] *-in* is a regular present tense ending in Ngarrindjeri.

[8] Black used a version of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The italicized 'r' indicates a retroflex 'r' sound, and 'j' stands for a palatal semivowel.

[9] *a* pronounced as in *cat*. Tindale gives a symbol chart illustrated by examples in English (and French and German) of words pronounced with similar sounds. The symbols were devised for South and Central Australian languages in 1930–1931 by a committee consisting of himself, Professor J. A. FitzHerbert and Charles Chewings.

A later sound recording was made around 1963 when the Ngarrindjeri man James Kartinyeri was recorded by Catherine Ellis and Luise Hercus. The word on this recording was transcribed by the linguist Colin Yallop as:

> Lun ya:rn 'talk thus, say it this way!', ya:rnunelap 'I am talking'. (Yallop, 1975, p. 18)

Finally, in 1974 Bert Pinkie (born 1919, Ancestry.com) provided *yanan*, *yanunun* 'talk' to the linguist Bob Dixon (Dixon, 1974; cited in Clarke, 2004).

4.2 Quality of the nasal

The quality of the nasal in *yarn* deserves discussion. The early settlers in Australia came from different parts of the United Kingdom, some pronouncing *yarn* with a postvocalic 'r' sound [jaɹn] ~ [ja:ɹn], and some pronouncing it more like modern Australian English without the rhotic: [ja:n]. The post-vocalic 'r' has been retained in the English speech of some Ngarrindjeri people (Sutton, 1989, p. 161).

The first transcription of Ngarrindjeri *yarn-in* by Heinrich Meyer contains <rn>. He used <rC> to represent consonants which have been subsequently analyzed as retroflex. However, he also writes it as *yãnin* (p. 92) with a long vowel and no retroflex. This could reflect pronunciation variation between a retroflex consonant and some other nasal consonant. George Taplin writes *yarnin* and *yannin*. Black's 1892 transcription [jarnin] of Karammi's speech indicates that Karammi pronounced the root-final nasal as retroflex. Black was an early adopter of the International Phonetic Alphabet, and paid particular attention to retroflex sounds, which he suggested that Taplin had often ignored. The italicized '*r*' indicates a retroflex 'r' sound.

I conclude that at least until the end of the nineteenth century the Ngarrindjeri verb was pronounced with a retroflex nasal or a sequence of a rhotic and a nasal, even though by that time standard Australian English had lost post-vocalic 'r'.

In the twentieth century, loss of retroflexes began in Ngarrindjeri. In 1935 Norman Tindale transcribed the word without an 'r': [j*a*:nang] ('*a*' pronounced as in *cat*) and also [enang] ('e' pronounced as in *there*[10]) and [*e*nang] (*e* pronounced "almost *th***e***y*"). These three vowels are all higher than the low vowel in English *yarn*. This is compatible with raising of vowels preceding a retroflex nasal. Blackmoor and his colleague wrote the same words with *yurning*, or with *ening*, supporting the raising from /a/. Unfortunately, because they used a version of English spelling, it is impossible to determine whether they were using <r> to represent a retroflex nasal. But, in both transcriptions the quality of the vowels is compatible with raising of vowels preceding a retroflex nasal, and possible loss of the actual retroflexion.

In transcribing Albert Karloan's speech, the Berndts don't indicate retroflexion. The roughly 130 inflected forms of *yan* are transcribed with root-final <an>. It is hard to say if this is because the Berndts did not hear retroflexion, or because retroflexion was being lost in Ngarrindjeri at that time. Forms that Meyer distinguished in spelling through retroflexion, e.g. *yarnde* 'spear' and *yarnde* 'whence', contrasting with *yande*

[10]Tindale's symbols include e, *e* and **e**. Unfortunately, the bold is not always clear on the digital version I had access to.

Table 2 Chronology of renditions of the Ngarrindjeri verb 'speak, say, talk'

Year	Speaker/Transcriber	Form with <r>	Form without <r>
1843	?/Meyer	yarn-in	yān-in
1864	?/Taplin	yarnin, yarnir, yarn	
1892	Karammi/Black	[jarnin]	
1934	Tindale /Frank Blackmoor	yurning (FB) ening (FB)	[ja:nang] (NT) [enangi], [enang], [enangi:l, enang il] (NT)
Mid-1940s	R and C Berndt (Albert Karloan)		yan
1963	James Kartinyeri/Yallop, McDonald	ya:rn (CY)	[yaṉ], [yæṉ] (MM)
1973	Bert Pinkie/Dixon		yanan, yanunun

'useless, worthless, old', are often collapsed by the Berndts, e.g. *yandi~yantu* 'spear', *yandi* 'whence' and *yande~yanthe~yandi~yandheli* 'old'.

Bob Dixon appears to have transcribed the word in Bert Pinkie's speech without a retroflex. In 1976, Maryalyce McDonald studied early sources and taped recordings, including the 1963 sound recording of James Kartinyeri by Catherine Ellis and Luise Hercus. Whereas Colin Yallop had transcribed Kartinyeri's *yan* word as *ya:rn* with a long vowel and <rn> (Yallop, 1975), McDonald, who focussed on the phonetics, transcribed the word as interdental, not retroflex [yaṉ ~ yæṉ] (McDonald, 1977, p. 134). She concluded that "Most retroflexes have been lost" observing that interdentals seemed to have been preserved more than retroflexes (McDonald, 1977, p. 12).

Table 2 shows how the original *yarnin* probably lost retroflexion over the hundred years following Meyer's record.

In losing retroflexion, the Ngarrindjeri verb's form became closer to that of modern Australian English *yarn*. Its meaning as 'talk' is similar to that of modern Australian English *yarn*. Its use has been attested since 1843, and it was still being used in the early 1970s in spoken Ngarrindjeri. The word is unlikely to have been borrowed from the English-speaking sealers and whalers since it was the main verb recorded in 1843 with the meaning 'talk, speak', and at that time, *yarn* was not well established in English as a verb meaning 'talk'.

5. Early contact language forms

Given the prevalence of *yarn* in modern Australian Indigenous Englishes, we might expect to find it in early records of NSW pidgin (Troy, 1994). But the only example[11] in Troy's compendium is relatively late – 1849 – and it is attributed to an English speaker talking to an Aboriginal man. This use clearly relates to the use of *yarn* as 'story', as discussed earlier:

> Come, come, Tommy, now **cut the yarn** as short as you can. (Harris 1849, 1967, p. 395; cited in Troy, 1994, p. 626)

In updating Troy's work through searching Trove for records of Australian Indigenous people's speech in the nineteenth century (Simpson, 2024), I did not find examples of *yarn* used by Aboriginal people. This contrasts with another example of "flash talk" recorded by Vaux, *gammon*, which is found in several records of Aboriginal people

[11]A form *yabber* is found in early NSW, but is of uncertain origin, and possibly relates to English *jabber*.

speaking, including an example reported in NSW in 1828, which appears together with the Dharuk word for 'say, speak' (*pai-alla* in the example):

> He frequently said to one of the clergymen who occasionally visited him in his cell, "All **gammon** white fellow **pai-alla** cabon gunyah, me tumble down white fellow". It was all false that the white fellows said in the Court-house, that I killed the white fellow. (Anonymous, 1828, p. 3)

Because the expression *yarn up* has been listed in the AND as "Esp. *Aboriginal English* 'To talk, to chat'", I also searched for this phrase in Australian newspapers in Trove (https://trove.nla.gov.au/) between 1803 and 1900 (search date 23 June 2025). I found no examples of *yarn up* as a phrasal verb, but hundreds of examples of *yarn* as 'tale' or 'talk'. This absence suggests that *yarn up* was not used by settlers. But it does not prove that Indigenous Australians did not use *yarn* or *yarn up*, since, as noted earlier, it is hard to find reliable reports in that period of Indigenous Australian speech. In fact, the first attestation of *yarn up* in the AND (2025) is in 2000 in an Aboriginal newspaper, the *Koori Mail*, referring to a gathering labelled as an "Aboriginal Seniors' Yarn Up". Tom Gara has antedated this to 1996 as the name of a national Indigenous radio programme *Arts Yarn-Up* produced by the NSW based Gadigal Information Services. This suggests that *yarn up* is a phrasal construction that developed in Indigenous communities, perhaps analogously to *meet up* and the derived noun *meet-up* (David Nash, p.c. 24 August 2025). This is suggested by recent attestations of *yarned up* as a main verb:

> It was great to have mob from far and wide – from Yaegl, Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung and Gullibul Country and beyond – come for a **yarn** and a feed. Some stories and song were shared amongst those present.
>
> Bugalbeh to all who came, **yarned up** and connected. (Jagun Alliance circa 2025, https://www.jagunalliance.org.au/yarns/cultural-fire-dorrobbee)

Returning to the Ngarrindjeri *yarn-in*, if it were the source of the modern Australian English and Aboriginal English verb *yarn*, we might expect *yarn(-in)/yan(-in)* to appear in early South Australian contact forms. But it does not appear in the main compilation of early South Australian pidgin forms (Foster et al., 2003), although *yabber* does appear with the meaning 'talk'.

But *ya:nin* as 'talking (along with)'[12] is recorded in a 1994 glossary of "Nunga English", a label given to an English variety used by Aboriginal people in southern Australia (Clarke, 1994). Clarke's list also includes other words familiar from Vaux, *flash* as 'brazen', *gammon* (written as *ge:min* 'false'), as well as a modern marker of Aboriginal English, *deadly* as 'really good' (Clarke, 1994). Clarke expanded on his 1994 work (Clarke, 2004) noting the widespread attestation of *yanin* (spelled in different ways) in nineteenth century and twentieth century descriptions of Ngarrindjeri as 'speak' along with the extra meaning 'language, lingo, way of talking'.

In terms of pronunciation, Clarke writes the word with a plain <n>. He confirms (Clarke, p.c. 22 March 2025) that when he recorded Nunga English in the 1980s, he never heard *yanin* pronounced [ja.ɹnin] with a postvocalic [.ɹ], even though some Ngarrindjeri still

[12]Clarke also gives the possibly related *yanya-malthi* 'chatterbox, person who talks all the time'. McDonald's recording of an interdental (lamino-dental) nasal could be consistent with a lamino-palatal nasal, as in *yanya*. For *malthi* see Meyer's *-amalde* 'forming nouns of the person from nouns of the action'.

retained post-vocalic [ɹ] in words such as [áɹts bóɹd] 'Arts Board' (Sutton, 1989, p. 161). This suggests that, like other Ngarrindjeri words, the word *yarnin* which continued to be used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries underwent a sound change of loss of retroflexion. This in turn suggests that the word was identified as Ngarrindjeri, and not as English. Otherwise, we might have expected it to be pronounced with a post-vocalic [ɹ] like other English words and phrases such as *Arts Board*.

Finally, in Kriol, which has the main dictionary of an Australian contact language (Lee, 2014), *yan* appears, but as a noun, glossed as 'yarn; talk; conversation', whereas *tok*, *sei* and *spik* are given for 'talk, say, speak'. Kriol often keeps words from the earlier contact languages such as *geman* (gammon), *shugabeg* (sugarbag, honey) and from modern Aboriginal Englishes *dedliwan* (deadly). So, the absence of *yan* as a verb in Kriol is circumstantial evidence that the verb use was not part of the early contact language.

6. *Yarn* in modern Australian Englishes

The verb *yarn* continues to be used for 'talk' in rural Australian English[13] and by older Australians,[14] in New Zealand English[15] and in Australian Indigenous Englishes. But it has taken on a special meaning in Australian academic, institutional and government discourse. Ian Malcolm identified *yarning* as a genre used by Aboriginal English speakers in Perth, Western Australia, similar to the "recount" genre talked about in Australian English school pedagogy (Malcolm, 2002), and this has been taken up by other researchers (Coffin, 2010; McLeod et al., 2014). Around the same time as Malcolm's identification of a *yarning* genre, the Indigenous education researcher Dianne Roberts and her non-Indigenous colleague Kerith Power (Power, 2004) began using the phrase *yarning methodology* to describe research through taking part in informal conversations and storytelling with Aboriginal people. For Malcolm, Roberts and Power, the label *yarning* derived from Aboriginal people in Western Australia using *yarn* to mean 'talk, chat'. Later Bessarab and Ng'andu outlined an approach to information exchange which they called *yarning*:

> Let's talk implies a conversation that is two way and inclusive of both speakers. To have a yarn is not a one way process but a dialogical process that is reciprocal and mutual. (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2018, p. 38)

This unhurried informal information-seeking by researchers tries to break down barriers between researchers and the people whose information they are seeking, allowing for exchange of information and concerns on serious matters. "Yarning methodology" is contrasted with the one-sidedness of interviewer/interviewee questioning. Groups of

[13]E.g. "The unofficial spokesperson for Rural Aid's 'Good Onya Mate' concert has encouraged Australians to learn how to '**yarn'** like a farmer ahead of the fundraising event on Saturday night." Shannon Jenkins, "Charity encourages Australians to dress and 'yarn' like a farmer for fundraising concert", *The Mandarin*, 23 November 2020. https://www.themandarin.com.au/145634-charity-encourages-australians-to-dress-and-yarn-like-a-farmer-for-fundraising-concert/.

[14]E.g. "In 2019, over a long lunch at Catalina restaurant in Rose Bay facing the Sydney Harbour, I was with John [Olsen] and Barry Humphries when they **yarned** about what might happen to John's 2005 Archibald Prize winning Self Portrait." Ross Fitzgerald, "John Olsen: A gift to the nation", 8 October 2024. https://rossfitzgerald.com/2024/10/08/john-olsen-a-gift-to-the-nation/.

[15]E.g. "We **yarn** with a Wairarapa farmer, who is also one of the country's leading sheep breeders." See "Tasman farmer Kevin Freeman on flooding aftermath", *NZ Herald*. The Country, 14 July 2025. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/listen-to-the-country-tasman-farmer-kevin-freeman-on-flooding-aftermath/4CLIPXQSDRGYTD3S6AZNSESIPA/.

Indigenous people involved in this are sometimes labelled *yarning circles*. The approach has become popular in social science research involving Australian Indigenous people, including in linguistics (Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021, 2024).

While Malcolm did not identify differences (apart from topics) between the Aboriginal English genre labelled "yarning", and the informal storytelling of non-Indigenous Australians, recent researchers have made distinctions between them (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 171). Some extend *yarning* beyond free conversation, to include specifically Australian Indigenous "ways of knowing" (Williams, 2011). Samuel Osborne draws a distinction between the use of *yarn* for 'story' in Australian English and the use of *yarning* to describe a method of working with Indigenous people to gather information through informal conversation:

> The term 'yarning', for example, draws specifically on Indigenous concepts of language and communication to define a methodological approach to promote culturally appropriate research methods (…). In the Australian vernacular, however, it can mean 'spinning a yarn', an exaggerated or untrue, but entertaining story. (Osborne, 2016, p. 61)

The phrasal expression *yarn(ing) up* is now common in academic discourse about using free discussion in research with Australian Indigenous people. For example, a search of Google Scholar (23 August 2025) produced 13 titles of journal articles, reports and book chapters which included the phrase *yarning up*, beginning in 2008. They described research in all states except Tasmania, and covered disciplines of social work, health and well-being, land management and biological knowledge, education, oral history and theatre.[16]

In sum, in the nineteenth century the communication sense of the English word *yarn* developed two sub-senses: entertaining story and conversation/talk/chat. In the twenty-first century a new use of the word has been promoted in academic, government and institutional discourse to label a research method for gathering information from, and sharing information with, Australian Indigenous people. The label derives from the retention of the 'talk' meaning of *yarn* in rural Australia and its use by Indigenous English speakers, many of whom grew up in rural Australia.

7. Conclusion

I began with the questions of three competing possibilities: the word *yarn* in its communication meaning was borrowed into English from Ngarrindjeri and/or a contact language; it

[16] 2008 (Victoria) "Yarning up on trauma."
2011 (NSW, QLD) "Yarning up Indigenous pedagogies: A dialogue about eight Aboriginal ways of learning."
2016 (northern SA) "Ngapartji Ngapartji 1–Narratives of Reciprocity in 'Yarning Up' Participatory Research."
2017 (QLD) "Woorabinda Youth Yarning Up".
2017 (Victoria) "'Yarning up with Koori kids'–hearing the voices of Australian urban Indigenous children about their health and well-being."
2018 (NSW) "Yarning up: Stories of challenges and success."
2018 (General) "Yarning up oral history: An Indigenous feminist analysis."
2021 (NSW, QLD, SA) "Yarning up about Out-Of-Pocket Healthcare expenditure in burns with aboriginal families."
2022 (NSW) "Yarning up with Oliver Costello – An interview about Indigenous biocultural knowledges."
2022 (NSW, QLD) "Yarning up with Gerry Turpin – An Interview about Indigenous biocultural knowledges."
2023 (Victoria) "Yarning Up Relations: Enacting a relational ethics in cross-cultural research-based theater."
2025 (SA) "'I didn't know nothing' – yarning up on access to compensation from road traffic injury with Aboriginal people."
2025 (NSW, WA) "Yarning up with Doc Reynolds: an interview about Country from an Indigenous perspective."

was borrowed into Ngarrindjeri and/or a contact language from English; the verbs developed independently in Australian Aboriginal languages and Australian English but may have influenced each other.

I have shown that the attestation evidence favours the third possibility: independent evolution but mutual influence. The English noun use of *yarn* as 'tall tale' arose on shipboard in the eighteenth century, spread to English thieves' cant, and to Australia and New Zealand in the early nineteenth century. At that time Aborigines interacted with convicts, shepherds and sailors, and were exposed to their "foreigner talk", which included words from "flash talk" (Simpson, 2024). In Australia and New Zealand *yarn* developed into a verb, with the sense of 'talk, chat'. The verb *yarn* and the phrase *have a yarn* have continued in rural Australia among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, losing the 'tall tale' implication, and being used for 'informal conversation'. The phrasal verb *yarn up* probably arose in Australian Indigenous Englishes, but when this happened is unknown, as there are so few reliable early attestations of the speech of Indigenous Australians.

The Ngarrindjeri word *yarn-in* started as a verb meaning 'say, speak', with corresponding forms in some other eastern Australian languages. While I have not found attestations of *yarn* as 'talk' in the scanty nineteenth century records of Indigenous Australians speaking English or contact languages, the decades-long interaction between Ngarrindjeri people and sailors could have reinforced the use of y*arn* as a verb meaning 'say, speak' in Ngarrindjeri, Ngarrindjeri English and the Aboriginal Englishes of southern Australia. In eastern Australia the long interaction between Aboriginal people, convicts and sailors probably reinforced the use of *yarn* as both verb and noun, first for storytelling (*yarn* as 'tall story'), and then for 'informal conversation' (*have a yarn*). This parallels the adoption of other "flash talk" terms such as *gammon* into Aboriginal Englishes. In places such as western NSW, adopting *yarn* for 'informal conversation' would have been supported by the presence of *yaan* as a verb for 'speak' in languages like Muruwari.

The use of the verb *yarn* for 'talk' (whether or not on serious matters) diverges from the entertainment of the nineteenth century sailors' storytelling sessions, and is closer to the general 'speak, say' meaning found in Ngarrindjeri and Muruwari for verbs with a similar form. The verb *yarn* has continued to be used in Indigenous Australian Englishes and in rural Australian Englishes. It has recently been identified as a marker of Australian Indigenous Englishes, as shown by the extension of *yarning* and *yarn up* to label information exchange with Indigenous people in academic, government and institutional discourse.

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Notes on contributor

Jane Helen Simpson is an Emeritus Professor in linguistics at the Australian National University. She has carried out fieldwork on Indigenous Australian languages since 1979. She has worked in Central Australia, mostly with Warumungu and Warlpiri people. She has also assisted on language revitalization projects, in particular the Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains, and more recently Muruwari (north-western NSW). While her main research areas are in grammatical structures and in word meanings, she also collaborated with Gillian Wigglesworth on child-directed speech in Central Australia, which led to her work on language policies, census data and the 2021 National Indigenous Languages Report. She has been carrying out research on the documentation of Aboriginal languages and the development of contact languages in the nineteenth century.

Data availability statement

This paper is based on the referenced resources available in the public domain.

ORCID

Jane Helen Simpson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7487-1234

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Appendix: Sample Trove search for early attestations of *yarn, yarning, yarned* (conducted July 2025)

1. YARN as noun

1.1 New South Wales 1823

To tell the truth, whistling and smoaking is Bill's delight; and he likes to have a long **yarn** from the cove, who is sure to get a bit of tobacco, if he tells Bill a good 'un.

To the Editor of the Sydney Gazette (30 October 1823) *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW: 1803–1842)*, p. 4. Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2182345.

1.2 New South Wales 1826

There could not have been found a book better calculated to fascinate the seaman, who soon hailed the bearer of it in friendly terms, and commenced "**spinning a long yarn**", (as sailors have it) all about lines and sines.

POLICE INCIDENTS (20 May 1826) *The Australian (Sydney, NSW: 1824–1848)*, p. 3. Retrieved 15 January 2023, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article37072284.

1.3 Tasmania 1824

Long Yarns. – This is a phrase generally used by seamen to denote a species of marvellous stories with which they delight to wile away the dreary "mid watch" and to astonish the wondering minds of such green horns or landlubbers as may happen to be on board.

British Intelligence (12 March 1824) *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser (Tas.: 1821–1825)*, p. 2. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1090106.

1.4 Tasmania 1826

The following, copied from an Irish paper, is one of the best specimens of what is technically called ***spinning a yarn***, that we have lately met with.

Irish Oratory (10 May 1828) *The Hobart Town Courier (Tas.: 1827–1839)*, p. 4. Retrieved 10 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article4222644.

1.5 Western Australia 1838

Another Labourer of the name of J. LAWRENCE, commonly called "Play up Jack", then stept forward and said "Let's have out our **yarn** Mr Moore. We know you very well! You are paid for your duty and are the Crown Solicitor not our Solicitor, as you well know".

THE TWO EDITORS (18 January 1838) *Swan River Guardian (WA: 1836–1838)*, p. 284. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article214041995.

1.6 Victoria 1839

and thereupon he commenced **a yarn** as long as two main braces spliced to the following effect: – "he had just landed with the captain of the Imogine, from London direct, in three months, … ."

SYDNEY NEWS (4 May 1839) *Port Phillip Gazette (Vic.: 1838–1845)*, p. 4. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article225005839.

1.7 Victoria 1850

A party who had called at Mason's hut in the morning informed Gill that he had **had a yarn** with him, and that the prisoner was then with the deceased.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE (26 December 1850) *The Melbourne Daily News (Vic.: 1848– 1851)*, p. 2. Retrieved 18 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article226520081.

1.8 South Australia 1839

I should not under these circumstances have found it necessary to have troubled you with this "**tough yarn**", had it not been for remarks made since the appearance of the said advertisement. It was said, no doubt Charles Smith had restored the credit of Smith and Shean, but it was not equally clear that Charles Smith had not used Shean's money to put himself into his 600 and odd acres at Port Lincoln, and into the firm of Smith and Shean, of which he is the prior. Really, Sir, I can scarcely proceed for laughing.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE EGOTIST (14 May 1839) *The Egotist (Adelaide, SA: 1839)*, p. 1. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252021750.

1.9 South Australia 1839

To the Editor of the South Australian Register.

Adelaide, July 8, 1839.

SIR – In your paper of Saturday last you pronounce yourself no lawyer, and therefore incapable of splitting hairs; but Nature, ever true to her system of compensations, if she has denied to editors the lawyers' power of splitting hairs, has made it up to them by the faculty of **spinning yarn**s. In a **little yarn** of yours on Saturday on the subject of Mr. Stephen, you exclaim upon the excellent absurdity of the law which treats the perjured man as a criminal only when his falsehood is material to and has an effect upon the issue of some judicial proceeding.

To the Editor of the South Australian Register (13 July 1839) *South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA: 1839–1900)*, p. 6. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article27440649.

1.10 Queenland 1846

" … Let then", says this political economist, "the squatters and settlers stop the increase of their flocks and herds until the increase of the population warranted their progression". This, we must confess, is a staggerer. Stop his grandmother's spinning wheel, and his own foolish **yarn,** say we. We would advise this wise gentleman to get into a basket, and try if he can lift himself by means of the handle.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE (5 December 1846) *The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane, Qld.: 1846–1861)*, p. 2. Retrieved 8 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3715808.

2. YARN as verb

2.1 Tasmania 1833

The complainant stated, that about half-past nine o'clock in the evening, she stood in Collin's-street, "**yarning**" with one Mr. Thompson, who is a friend of Mrs. Pomeroy's who came up just at the moment and abused her in the most scandalous way.

POLICE REPORT (11 January 1833) *The Tasmanian (Hobart Town, Tas.: 1827–1839)*, p. 6. Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article233613340.

2.2 NSW 1836

… a servant to Captain Collins was in Sydney with a chaise and cart, which he left standing in Kent street, whist he went into the house of an acquaintance; during the time he was **yarning** with his friend, a policeman took the horse and cart to the pound.

MATTER FURNISHED BY OUR Reporters and Correspondents (6 April 1836) *The Sydney Monitor (NSW: 1828–1838)*, p. 2 (MORNING). Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32151086.

2.3 South Australia 1846

Captain Irving. – Perhaps your Worship will allow me to make a remark on the subject.

Mr Wigley. – You have made remarks enough. You have been **yarning** here for an hour, and said nothing on the subject.

LAW AND POLICE COURTS (22 April 1846) *South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA: 1839–1900)*, p. 2. Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article27452679.

2.4 Victoria 1848

Davy stretched his length on a ricketty form near the fire; and here the **yarning** commenced, by Jack's relating the exploits of the day.

A MASTER'S MAN (14 June 1848) *Geelong Advertiser (Vic.: 1847–1851)*, p. 1. Retrieved 18 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article91459171.

2.5 Queensland 1849

37. Enacts that every person keeping any house, shop, room, or place of public resort, wherein provisions, liquors, or refreshments of any kind shall be sold or consumed, and who shall permit drunkenness or other disorderly conduct in such place, or permit unlawful games or **yarning** therein.

THE NEW PUBLICANS[?] ACT (15 December 1849) *The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane, Qld.: 1846–1861)*, p. 4. Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3711357.

2.6 Western Australia 1856

On Sundays our model driver give his bullocks "a spell", and employs himself in the pious recreations of cutting whipsticks, repairing tackling, smoking, drinking, and "**yarning**".

The Model Bullock – Driver (5 March 1856) *The Inquirer and Commercial News (Perth, WA: 1855–1901)*, p. 3. Retrieved 9 July 2025, from http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66006330.