

***Revivalistics: From the Genesis of Israeli to Language
Reclamation in Australia and Beyond***
Ghil'ad Zuckermann (2020)

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Revivalistics, Ghil'ad Zuckermann's latest book, published by the Oxford University Press, is a must read for anyone interested in the field of endangered languages and language revival. This book is not just about language typology and linguistics, but it is also a sensitively and brilliantly written work that touches on the history of the genesis of Israeli; the social and cultural relevance of language revivals and how language learning impacts the health and well-being of a native speaker. The Hebrew revival, which resulted in what Zuckermann calls the Israeli language, is one of the most successful language reclamations that the world has witnessed. Being an Israeli native speaker, a hyperpolyglot (fluent in 13 languages) and an incredible linguist, Zuckermann draws parallels from his own cultural and linguistic background to compare the scenario in Aboriginal Australia, where he is hard at work with the Barngarla People of South Australia, trying to reclaim the Barngarla language, a language that belongs to the Thura-Yura language family in Australia. The Barngarla language has been a victim to *linguicide* following the colonization of Australia and due to the Stolen Generations phenomenon. The only document available for the language was recorded by a German Lutheran missionary Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann in 1844.

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Zuckermann begins by taking the reader through the various approaches and principles in the Hebrew reclamation, setting a background to the reclamation story. In Chapter 1, he compares this language that was asleep for over 1700 years to a *Sleeping Beauty*, as in the English fairy tale. The Hebrew revival began at the end of the nineteenth century and the Israeli language began to be spoken around the early twentieth century. Zuckermann strongly argues that this new ‘Revival Language’, ‘*Israeli*’, named so by the author himself, is different from ancient Hebrew (p. 1). He elaborates this using an ornithological metaphor: On the one hand, Israeli rose from the ashes (Hebrew) like a *phoenix*. On the other hand, like a cuckoo, it lays its eggs in the nest of another bird, tricking the bird into believing it is its own egg (Yiddish). In addition, Israeli also borrows from other languages like English or Arabic giving it a magpie-like attribute. Zuckermann says Israeli is a ‘*phoeni-cuckoo* cross’ with magpie-like features too (pp. 4–6). Owing to the complexity of Israeli’s history, Zuckermann points to his *Congruence Principle Approach* (Zuckermann, 2003) for hybrid languages, according to which ‘the more contributing languages a feature exists in, the more likely it is to persist in the emerging tongue’ (p. 15). This is in contrast to the Stammbaum genetic model, where a language has only one parent and the languages sharing a common ancestor are grouped within a language family.

As the true scholar that Zuckermann is, he explains how the modern hybrid language Israeli is similar to and dissimilar from ancient Hebrew, elaborating on the phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and semantics of Hebrew and Israeli. The differences between Israeli and ancient Hebrew cannot be compared to the ones between Modern English and Shakespearean or Chaucerian English (p. 15), as the Israeli sound system continues the phonetics and phonology of Yiddish rather than of Hebrew, as Yiddish was the native language of almost all Hebrew revivalists. Thus, Zuckermann proposes the *Founder Principle*: Yiddish is a primary contributor to Israeli because it was the mother tongue of the vast majority of revivalists and first pioneers in *Eretz Yisrael* (‘Land of Israel’, Palestine) at the *critical period* of the beginning of Israeli (p. 17). These are very relevant and much-needed approaches, for what Zuckermann calls Revival Languages, as the latter are bound to be the result of cross-fertilization between the language being reclaimed and the languages spoken by the revivalists, a point explored in detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 of the book takes the reader through the rich origins of Israeli, detailing the histories and cross-linguistic dynamics in the syllable structure, morpho-phonology and grammatical structure of Israeli, noting the marked differences between Israeli and Hebrew. For example, from the perspective of

morphology, Hebrew is a synthetic language but Israeli is much more analytic (p. 65). From the point of syllable structure, every syllable in Biblical Hebrew consisted of a consonant, a vowel, an optional vowel or consonant, optionally followed by a consonant. Israeli syllables, however, consist of a vowel only with the choice of having a cluster of three consonants before and after the vowel. The Israeli syllable structure is identical to Yiddish, corroborating Zuckermann's argument that Israeli is a hybrid language based not only on Hebrew but also on European contributions.

In Chapter 3, Zuckermann introduces the readers to a diachronic detailing of how the Hebrew ideologies of religion and nationhood are reflected in Israeli (pp. 114–149). He describes lexical expansion that revivalists use, with examples from Israeli, suggesting that understanding the socio-cultural contexts of a language is crucial for any revival. In this chapter, Zuckermann applies his profound 'fractal, holographic' (p. 58) approach, according to which '*maximus in minimis*', an analysis of a tiny linguistic feature, such as a phoneme or a lexical item, can teach us a lot about the big picture of culture and society (p. 136).

Differences between the modern language and its alleged ancestor are bound to create an imbalance between prescriptive/conservative and descriptive/liberal linguists. According to the descriptive ones such as Zuckermann, the native speaker is always right when speaking their language and no one has the right to correct them. Zuckermann discusses this with regard to the Hebrew Language Academy and the native speaker in Chapter 4. Progress in language reclamation can be achieved only by accepting the language 'hybridity' without the 'purifying' prescriptive tendencies, which Zuckermann calls alliteratively 'imprisoning purism prism' (p. 21 and p. 195). Zuckermann points out that language academies should work along with revivalists, accepting natural and necessary changes within a language, to move forward and ensure success in their projects. The moment the language is alive and kicking (as is Israeli), there is no need for an Academy other than writing an objective historical dictionary (pp. 159–163).

Chapter 5 introduces *Culturomics*, a trans-disciplinary form of computational lexicology that examines language, culture, behaviour and historical changes of human beings, using quantitative text analysis (p. 169). Zuckermann calques the term as *Tarbutomics*: *tarbút* means 'culture' in Israeli. Hebrew texts are analysed using Google Books, accessible through Ngram-Viewer, to observe the historical changes in Hebrew texts from the year 1500 until 2009. Lexical items from the corpus are compared in the historical and socio-political contexts of the period. Using this technique, Zuckermann is able to strengthen his model of hybridic Israeli genesis, as distinct from an organic evolution from Hebrew to Israeli.

In Chapter 6, Zuckermann provides an eye-opening comparative analysis of Hebrew and Aboriginal language revivals (p. 192) and discusses the importance of LARD – the Language Revival Diamond (p. 212), comprising *Language owners* – custodians, speakers (they should always be the ones at the wheel and at the centre, according to Zuckermann, see also Zuckermann, 2015); *Public Sphere* – general society including media and government; *Linguistics* – research, resources; and *Education* – art, song, teaching, method – that is vital to language revival efforts. Hebrew revivalists have a few advantages over Aboriginal revivalists. For example: extensive documentation available; Jews have always been extensively exposed to literary Hebrew through the synagogues; the vision that once the speakers obtained political power, reclaimed Hebrew would serve as the language of the nation; and higher numbers, as there are more Jews than Australian Aboriginal people (pp. 192–193).

Revivalistics, an emerging much needed global, comparative, trans-disciplinary field of enquiry that combines native language acquisition and foreign language learning, is the absolute need of the hour. It studies language revival from various perspectives such as evolution, anthropology, history, biology, law, genetics, colonial studies, law, music and archaeology (p. 199). Aboriginal languages should be revived for historical, humanistic, social justice and equality reasons, for personal, educational and economic empowerment, and a sense of pride and self-esteem amongst people who have lost their heritage and wellbeing. There are three similar sounding terms on the revival spectrum that Zuckermann clearly differentiates – *reclamation* (revival of a no-longer spoken language), *revitalization* (revival of a severely endangered language) and *reinvigoration* (revival of an endangered language that still has a high percentage of children speaking it) (pp. 199–200).

Zuckermann also introduces readers to the importance of technology and ‘talknology’ in modern day language revival programmes, how the tools can be used to create more access and make language learning more easier and fun. In Chapter 7, he discusses the tools being used in the Barngarla language reclamation workshops he holds in Port Augusta and Port Lincoln, in the Eyre Peninsula of South Australia. Zuckermann began the Barngarla reclamation in 2012 after he contacted the Barngarla community in 2011, enquiring if they were interested in reclaiming their language using Schürmann’s dictionary and brief grammar written in 1844. The elders of the community present at the historic meeting at Zuckermann’s office on 14 September 2011 responded, ‘We’ve been waiting for you for fifty years!’ (p. 231). Since then, Zuckermann has been regularly holding Barngarla reclamation workshops in the Eyre Peninsula involving over 120 Barngarla people. Among other activities, he has also created

a user-friendly Barngarla dictionary, considerably improving Schürmann's dictionary (Schürmann and Zuckermann, 2018), established and consolidated the Barngarla Language Advisory Committee (BLAC), recorded Barngarla songs from elders of the community who remember some of them so as to pass on for the future generations, attempted to change the lanGscape (linguistic landscape) of the Eyre peninsula through the councillors to introduce Barngarla language signs (pp. 232–233), and written various accessible, user-friendly resources such as Zuckermann (2019). In 2016, he successfully launched the Barngarla Dictionary App with the help of friends in the IT sector. This App is now being widely used by the Barngarla community, as well as by interested general public (p. 232). Although technology poses its own challenge (culturally or linguistically), Zuckermann elaborates on how adapting and being open to a challenge helps in moving forward to reach the ultimate aim by the Aboriginal community itself: the Barngarla reclamation.

In Chapter 8, Zuckermann takes a serious stand when suggesting that a 'Native Tongue Title' must be provided as a compensation for *linguicide* (p. 240). Such a legislation to compensate for linguicide will recognize the Indigenous people's rights to revive their languages and the money can be used to promote and financially aid more Indigenous language programmes. He points out ethical and aesthetic reasons, as well as utilitarian benefits, of such a system. By supporting such a cause, and recognizing the significance of Indigenous languages, we may be able to correct a small part of the wrong committed to the Aboriginal people's ancestors.

In Chapter 9, Zuckermann explores the link between language and mental health. Using studies conducted all over the world, he describes how language loss affects the mental health and wellbeing of an individual or a community (pp. 266–273). He then proposes that just as language loss results in poor mental health, language revival empowers wellbeing. Learning the language of their ancestors can provide people with a sense of pride and identity. Zuckermann, who received a grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in 2017, is now conducting research to assess the effectiveness of language revival in improving mental health and reducing suicidal tendencies (pp. 278–279). The Barngarla reclamation workshops bring about positive change and empowerment in the community, thereby making a contribution to '*closing the gap*'. A Barngarla woman, Evelyn Walker, wrote to Zuckermann following one of his numerous reclamation workshops that 'Our ancestors are happy!' (p. 280).

As Fishman (1991:12) rightly notes, the most important point of any 'reverse language shift' situation is to choose the best possible options for the language, considering the 'particular context and in a given time-frame' and to work

forward from there. In a field of study where language losses outnumber success stories, Zuckermann's *Revivalistics* focusses on accepting the cross-linguistic influences of the modern world with all the technological advancements to pave the way forward. The core issues discussed in Zuckermann's *Revivalistics* are applicable universally as his magnificent book creates an awareness and sensitises the larger public to the challenges faced by linguistic minorities and language revivalists. Learning one's language is an emotional activity and an important one for ethnic identity.

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