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# Stop, Revive, Survive:

Lessons from the Hebrew Revival Applicable to the Reclamation, Maintenance and Empowerment of Aboriginal Languages and Cultures



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## ABSTRACT

The revival of Hebrew is so far the most successful known reclamation of a sleeping tongue and is a language movement that has been in progress for more than 120 years. By comparison, language revival movements in Australia are in their infancy. This paper provides comparative insights and makes information about the Hebrew revival accessible to Australian linguists and Aboriginal revival activists. Needless to say, the first stage of any desire by professional linguists to assist in language reawakening must involve a long period of thoroughly observing, carefully listening to the people, learning, mapping and characterizing the specific indigenous community. Only then can one inspire and assist. That said, this paper proposes that there are linguistic constraints applicable to all revival attempts. Mastering them would be useful to endangered languages in general and to Aboriginal linguistic revival in particular.

This paper contributes towards the establishment of **Revival Linguistics**, a new linguistic discipline and paradigm. Zuckermann's term Revival Linguistics is modelled upon 'Contact Linguistics' (<language contact). Revival linguistics inter alia explores the universal constraints and mechanisms involved in language reclamation, renewal and revitalization. It draws perspicacious comparative insights from one revival attempt to another, thus acting as an epistemological bridge between parallel discourses in various local attempts to revive sleeping tongues all over the globe.

*Keywords: Revival Linguistics, Language Revival, Aboriginal Studies, Hebrew, Social Empowerment, Hybridity and Multiple Causation, Purism versus Compromise, Language and Identity, Contact Linguistics, Yiddish, Aboriginal English*

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Since 1972 Dr Michael Walsh has conducted fieldwork in the Top End of the Northern Territory, mainly in the Darwin-Daly region. This has been a mixture of academic endeavours as well as consultancies since 1979 mainly relating to Aboriginal land issues. From 1999 he has participated in the revitalization of Aboriginal languages in NSW. From 1982 until 2005 he was part of the teaching staff of the Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney. Since then, he has continued his research interests especially through a large ARC grant involving a team of linguists and musicologists running from 2004 to 2010. <http://azoulay.arts.usyd.edu.au/mpsong/>

*I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.*

*(John Adams, 1735–1826, second president of the United States)*

The main aim of this paper is to suggest that there are perspicacious lessons applicable from the relatively successful Hebrew revival to the reclamation, maintenance and empowerment of Aboriginal languages and cultures. 'Language is power; let us have ours', wrote Aboriginal politician Aden Ridgeway on 26 November 2009 in the Sydney Morning Herald. Previous revival efforts have largely failed (for obvious reasons, we are not going to single out specific failures here). While there have been some good results from several projects since 1992 (e.g. Kurna, see below), Aboriginal people overall do not see as many positive outcomes from revival programmes as they would like. In large part this is the result of shortage of sufficient (continuity of) funding, lack of technical expertise, and lack of integration of school-based programmes with community language programmes. However, there are purely linguistic reasons too: Many revival efforts were not supported by a sound theoretical understanding of how successful language revival works. As pointed out by Thieberger (2002), decisions about the appropriate target for language maintenance programmes are too often driven by structural linguistics, where the supposed ideal is intergenerational transmission of the language with all its original structural complexity retained, thus creating unrealistic expectations among the Aboriginal community.

This paper is the first of its kind as it will innovatively draw crucial insights from 'Modern Hebrew' (henceforth, Israeli – see Zuckermann 1999), so far the most successful known reclamation attempt of a sleeping tongue. Zuckermann's (2005, 2008a, 2009, 2010, 2011) research on Israeli demonstrates which language components are more revivable than others. Words and conjugations, for example, are easier to revitalize than intonation, discourse, associations and connotations. **We should encourage revivalists and Aboriginal leaders to be realistic rather than puristic, and not to chastise English loanwords and pronunciation, for example, within the emergent language.** Applying such precious conclusions from Hebrew will closely assist Australian revivalists in being more efficient, urging them not to waste time and resources on Sisyphean efforts to resuscitate linguistic components that are unlikely to be revivable.

While the results the endeavors we are proposing here have considerable value as a research enterprise, one can also consider them in terms of a cost-benefit analysis (Mühlhäusler and Damania 2004, Walsh 2008): Language revitalization contributes to social reconciliation, cultural tourism (Clark and Kostanski 2005), capacity building, and improved community health for Indigenous peoples (Walsh forthcoming B). In the process of language revival, some Aboriginal people will go from being dysfunctional (cf. Sutton 2009) to well-balanced, positive people. The benefits to the wider community and to Australian society are immense.

Reversing language shift (RLS) (Fishman 1991, 2001, Hagège 2009, Evans 2010, Walsh 2005a, Zuckermann 2011) is thus of great social benefit. Language revival does not only do historical justice and address inequality but can also result in the empowerment of people who have lost their heritage and purpose in life.

Some Aboriginal people distinguish between usership and ownership. There are even those who claim that they own a language although they only know one single word of it: its name. Consequently, some Indigenous Australians do not find it important to revive their comatose tongue. We, on the other hand, have always believed in Australia's very own roadside dictum: 'Stop, revive, survive!'

## Background: The Hebrew Revival

I suppose the process of acceptance will pass through the usual four stages: 1. This is worthless nonsense. 2. This is an interesting, but perverse, point of view. 3. This is true, but quite unimportant. 4. I always said so.

(Haldane 1963: 464)

'Hebrew' is the most quoted example of a successful language revival. On the other hand, if we are to be brutally truthful with ourselves, the modern-day vernacular spoken in downtown Tel Aviv is a very different language – both typologically and genetically – to that of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) or of the Mishnah, the first major redaction of Jewish oral traditions.

Hebrew was spoken since approximately the 14th century BC. It belonged to the Canaanite division of the northwestern branch of the Semitic languages, which constitute a branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Following a gradual decline, it ceased to be spoken by the second century AD. The failed Bar-Kokhba Revolt against the Romans in Judea in 132-5 AD marks the *symbolic* end of the period of spoken Hebrew. We believe that the Mishnah was codified around 200 AD because Hebrew was then dying as a mother tongue. Rabbi Judah haNasi and his collaborators might have realized that if they did not act then to redact the oral tradition, it would soon have been too late because Jews were already speaking languages other than Hebrew. (In fact, the Gemara, the other component of the Babylonian Talmud, which was codified around 500 AD, was written in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew.)

For approximately 1,750 years thereafter, Hebrew was 'clinically dead'. A most important liturgical and literary language, it occasionally served as a *lingua franca* – a means of communication between people who do not share a mother tongue – for Jews of the Diaspora, but not as a native language.

Fascinating and multifaceted Israeli, which emerged in Palestine (*Eretz Israel*) at the end of the nineteenth century, possesses distinctive socio-historical characteristics such as the lack of a continuous chain of native speakers from spoken Hebrew to Israeli, the non-Semitic mother tongues spoken by the Hebrew revivalists, and the European impact on literary Hebrew. Consequently, it presents the linguist with a unique laboratory in which to examine a wider set of theoretical problems concerning language genesis, social issues like language, identity and politics, and important practical matters, such as whether it is possible to revive a no-longer spoken language.

The genetic classification of Israeli has preoccupied scholars since its genesis. The still regnant traditional *thesis* suggests that Israeli is *Semitic: Hebrew revived*. The revisionist *antithesis* defines Israeli as *Indo-European: Yiddish relexified*; that is, Yiddish, the revivalists' mother tongue, is the 'substratum', whilst Hebrew is the 'superstratum' providing the vocabulary (cf. Horvath and Wexler 1997). According to Zuckermann's *mosaic* (rather than *Mosaic*) *synthesis*, Israeli is not only multi-layered but also multi-parental. A Semito-European, or Eurasian, hybrid, Israeli is both Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) and (Indo-) European. It is based simultaneously on 'sleeping beauty' / 'walking dead' Hebrew and '*máme lóshn*' (mother tongue) Yiddish, which are both *primary contributors* to Israeli, and a plethora of other tongues spoken by Jewish pioneers in Palestine in the 1880s–1930s, e.g. Russian, Polish, Arabic, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), Turkish, German, French and English.

## The Success Rate of the Hebrew Revival

The vernacularization of Hebrew was partially a success and partially a failure. It is hard to provide an exact quantification for such a multi-variable enterprise, but we would roughly estimate that on a 1-10 scale, 10 being a complete success and one being a complete failure, the Hebrew revival is at seven. More specifically, we propose the following continuum approximations for the extent to which Israeli can be considered Hebrew: mindset/spirit: 1 (i.e. European); discourse (communicative tools, speech acts): 1; sounds (phonetics and phonology): 2; semantics (meaning,

associations, connotations, semantic networkings): 3; constituent/word order (syntax): 4; general vocabulary: 5; word formation: 7; verbal conjugations: 9; and basic vocabulary: 10 (i.e. Hebrew).

The factors leading to the partial failure of the Hebrew revival have little to do with a lack of motivation or zealotry, or with economic or political variables – not even with the fact that the revivalists, such as the symbolic father of Israeli, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (born Perelman, 1858-1922), were not as linguistically sophisticated as contemporary linguists. It is simply the case that one cannot negate one's most recent roots, be they cultural or linguistic, even if one is keen to deny one's parents' and grandparents' heritage (diasporic Yiddish) in search of cultural antiquity (Biblical Hebrew). It is therefore most unlikely to revive a clinically-dead language without cross-fertilization from the revivalists' mother tongue(s). Thus, when most native Israeli-speakers speak Israeli, their intonation is much more similar to that of Yiddish, the mother tongue of most revivalists, than to that of Arabic or any other Semitic language. It is high time to acknowledge that Israeli is very different from ancient Hebrew. We should embrace – rather than chastise – the multisourcedness of Israeli.

That said, the Hebrew revival cannot be considered a failure because without the zealous, obsessive, enthusiastic efforts of Ben-Yehuda and of teachers, writers, poets, journalists, intellectuals, social activists, political figures, linguists and others, Israelis would have spoken a language (such as English, German, Arabic or Yiddish) that could hardly be considered Hebrew. To call such a hypothetical language 'Hebrew' would have not only been misleading but also wrong. To call today's Israeli 'Hebrew' may be puristic but not wrong: Hybridic Israeli is based on Hebrew as much as it is based on Yiddish. So, although the revivalists could not avoid the subconscious influence of their mother tongue(s), they did indeed manage at the same time to consciously revive important components of Hebrew.

## Hybridity, Camouflage and the Congruence Principle

Israeli is a new hybrid language rather than an evolutionary phase of Hebrew. Yiddish is not a 'foreign language' vis-à-vis Israeli, and the word *intuítzya* 'intuition' – to give but one example out of thousands of alleged loan words – is not a loan word (from Yiddish *intuítzye*, Russian *intuítziya*, Polish *intuicja* etc., all meaning 'intuition') but rather an integral part of Israeli from its very beginning.

According to the Congruence Principle, the more revivalists speak contributing languages with a specific linguistic feature, the more likely this feature is to prevail in the emergent language. Based on feature pool statistics, this principle weakens August Schleicher's famous Family Tree theory in historical linguistics, which may give the wrong impression that every language has only one parent. For example, most revivalists spoke languages, mainly Yiddish, that lacked that Semitic pharyngeal gulp 'ayin (represented, for instance, by the apostrophe in Zuckermann's Christian – actually Jewish – name Ghil'ad). Naturally, their children – the ones who, in fact, shaped the real character of Israeli – could not buy the argument 'do as I say, don't do as I do!' The result is that most Israelis do not have this sound in their speech.

Similarly, *má nishmà*, the common Israeli 'what's up?' greeting, looks like a *calque* – loan translation – of the Yiddish phrase *vos hért zikh*, usually pronounced *vsértsekh* and literally meaning 'what's heard?' but functioning as a common greeting. However, a Romanian-speaking immigrant to Israel might have used *má nishmà* because of Romanian *ce se aude*, a Polish-speaker Jew because of Polish *co słyhać*, and a Russian-speaker Что слышно *chto slyshno*, all meaning the same and functioning in the same way.

The distinction between forms and patterns is crucial here as it demonstrates multiple causation. In the 1920s and 1930s, *gdud meginéy hasafá*, 'the language defendants regiment' (cf. Shur 2000),

whose motto was *ivrí, dabér ivrít* 'Hebrew [i.e. Jew], speak Hebrew,' used to tear down signs written in 'foreign' languages and disturb Yiddish theatre gatherings. However, the members of this group only looked for Yiddish **forms**, rather than **patterns** in the speech of the Israelis who did choose to speak 'Hebrew.' The language defendants would thus not attack an Israeli speaker saying *má nishmà*. Ironically, even the language defendants regiment's anthem included calques from Yiddish.

Zuckermann (2011, forthcoming) analyzes the hitherto-overlooked camouflaged semantic networking transferred from one language to another. Whereas mechanisms as calques (loan translations such as *superman*, from German *Übermensch*), phono-semantic matches (e.g. *crayfish*, from Old French *crevice*, a cognate of *crab* that has little to do with *fish*) (Zuckermann 2003) and portmanteau blends (e.g. *motel*, from *motor+hotel*, or *sprummer*, from *spring+summer*) have been studied, there is a need to uncover concealed semantic links between words in the Target Language which reflect – often subconsciously – semantic networking in the Source Language. Consider the Israeli word *gakhilít* 'firefly, glow-worm' – coined by poet laureate Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934). This word is semantically and etymologically linked to the Biblical Hebrew word *gahelet* 'burning coal, glowing ember.' Morphologically, Israeli *gakhilít* derives from Hebrew *gahelet* plus the reduplication of its third radical [l]. However, no Israeli dictionary reveals the crucial semantic networking aspect, namely that the Israeli concoction, *gakhilít*, in using an element associated with 'glow,' in fact replicates a European mindset, apparent for example in the Yiddish word *glivórem*, literally 'glow' (cf. *gahelet*) + 'worm', or in German *Glühwürmchen*.

## Native Israeli Speech and the Academy of the Hebrew Language

Since its conception, Israeli has been the subject of purism (the dislike of foreign words – as in Icelandic: Sapir and Zuckermann 2008) and the enforcement of 'correct' pronunciation. Brought into being by legislation in 1953 as the supreme institute for 'Hebrew', the Academy of the Hebrew Language (known in Israeli as *haakademya lalashón haivrít*) is funded by Israel's Ministry of Education. It superseded the (Hebrew) Language Council (*váad halashón (haivrít)*), which was established in 1889 – as a branch of *Safá Brurá* (Clear Language) – by Ben-Yehuda and colleagues. As defined in its constitution, the Academy's functions are: (1) To investigate and compile the Hebrew lexicon according to its historical strata and layers; (2) To study the structure, history, and offshoots of the Hebrew language; and (3) To direct the development of Hebrew in light of its nature, requirements, and potential, its daily and academic needs, by setting its lexicon, grammar, characters, orthography and transliteration [in fact, transcription].

The first goal is most useful, as Israeli is indeed a multi-layered language. For example, one could say both (a) *khashkhú enáv*, literally 'His eyes became dark,' meaning 'He saw black' ('black' in this context meaning 'bad news'), and (b) *niyá/naasá lo khóshekh baenáim*, meaning the same, albeit structurally different. While *khashkhú enáv* is Hebrew, *niyá lo khóshekh baenáim* is a calque of the Yiddish phrase *siz im gevórn fíntster in di óygn*, which might in turn be an adaptation of the very Hebrew *khashkhú enáv* (transcribed here in its Israeli form, which would have been unintelligible for an ancient Hebrew-speaker).

Israeli has many other minimal pairs, such as *asá din leatsmó* and *lakákh et hakhók layadáim*, both referring to a person violating the law, with the latter being more colloquial; as well as *lelót kayamím*, literally 'nights as days' (also *yamím kelelót*, literally 'days as nights'), and *misavív lashaón*, literally 'round the clock,' both often referring to hard work.

Somewhat resembling the 'catastrophic success' of the 1928-1936 Turkish Language Revolution (see Lewis 1999), many referents have several Israeli signifiers, one of which is puristically Hebrew and the other, often more commonly used, 'foreign' (in fact, Israeli *ab initio*). These include many internationalisms such as *opozítsya* 'Opposition' (according to the Academy, the word should be

*negdá* – cf. Hebrew *néged* 'against') and *koalítsya* 'Coalition' (according to the Academy: *yakhdá* – cf. Hebrew *yaḥad* 'together').

However, goal (3), to **direct the development of Hebrew in light of its nature**, is oxymoronic (cf. Zuckermann 2008b: 139). If the nature of a language is to evolve in a specific direction (cf. Sapir's 'drift,' the pattern of change in which the structure of a language shifts in a determinate direction), why direct its evolution by language policing?

## From the Promised Land to the 'Lucky' Country

The three principles of linguistic revival and survival:

- (1) If your language is endangered → Do not allow it to die!
- (2) If your language died → Stop, revive, survive!
- (3) If you revive your language → Embrace the hybridity of the emergent language!

Questions of this kind, albeit in an implicit and sometimes confused fashion, are being raised within the context of Australian Aboriginal languages. Current language revival activities are worthy but often under-theorized. The tendency has been to attempt to revive the language *en masse* despite what has been indicated about the Hebrew rate of success for take up of particular components of language. There is a need to examine a range of existing language revitalization programmes with a view to assessing the rate of success for take up of particular components of language and at the same time adduce the preferences (and sometimes the prejudices) of the group in question (cf. Couzens and Eira forthcoming).

Indigenous Australians have been living in Australia for more than 40,000 years. Today Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders make up 2.6% of Australia's population. Unfortunately, one of the main findings of the most recent National Indigenous Languages Survey Report (2005) was that the situation of Australia's languages is grave (in both senses). Of an original number of over 250 known Australian Indigenous languages, only about 145 Indigenous languages are still spoken and the vast majority of these, about 110, are critically endangered: they are spoken only by small groups of people, mostly over 40 years old. Eighteen languages are strong in the sense of being spoken by all age groups, but three or four of these are showing some disturbing signs of moving into endangerment. So of an original number of over 250 known Australian Indigenous languages, only 6% (i.e. 15) are in a healthy condition.

Aboriginal language revival began recently – from the late 1970s (Amery and Gale 2007) – and has therefore much to learn from other revival efforts, especially that of Hebrew, which began in the late nineteenth century. There has been little coordination among the geographically-scattered language revival efforts in Australia. Most recently, language revitalization practitioners have begun to share experiences at various conferences and workshops (Hobson et al. forthcoming). There is thus an urgent need for an on-the-ground, ongoing input, creating intellectual and practical synergy and complementing the mission of the regional Aboriginal language centres and the recently-established mobile language team based at the University of Adelaide – by adding significant advice based on scholarly and universal perspectives. Practical outcomes will include a useful handbook of the best practices for language revival in Australia (Christina Eira, pers. comm.), and an improved sense of well being in the local Aboriginal community.

There is community support in some parts of the country for revival and heritage learning programmes: either in reclamation proper (e.g. extensive courses similar to Israel's *ulpaním*) or only in symbolic, postvernacular maintenance (teaching Aboriginal people some words and concepts related to the dead language – cf. postvernacular Yiddish among secular Jews in the United States – see Shandler 2005). At its broadest level language revival refers to the range of strategies for increasing knowledge and use of a language which is no longer spoken fully across all

generations. In practice, however, this can range from largely symbolic uses of ancestral languages like naming buildings or places through to more constant involvement with the language through school-based language instruction (Walsh 2005a).

## Comparative Analysis of Hebrew and Aboriginal Language Revival

Although they too were at the beginning very few in number, and encountered great hostility and animosity (e.g. by those who saw the revival as the desecration of a holy tongue), the Hebrew revivalists had several advantages compared with Australian revivalists. Consider the following:

- (1) **Documentation:** extensive – consider, for example, the Hebrew Bible and the Mishnah.
- (2) **Accessibility:** Jews have been exposed to literary Hebrew throughout the generations, e.g. when praying in the synagogue or when saying the blessing over the meal. It would be hard to find a Jew who did not have access to Hebrew (unless in totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union).
- (3) **Prestige:** Hebrew was considered a prestigious language (as opposed to Yiddish, for instance, whose Australian sociolinguistic parallel might be Aboriginal English). It is true that some Aboriginal languages are held in high regard by their owners/custodians but unfortunately usually not by the wider Australian society.
- (4) **Uniqueness:** Jews from all over the globe only had Hebrew in common (Aramaic was not as prominent), whereas there are dozens of 'sleeping' Aboriginal languages and it would be hard to choose only one unifying tongue, unless one resorts to Aboriginal English. The revival of a single language is much more manageable than that of numerous tongues in varying states of disrepair.
- (5) **National self-determination:** revived Hebrew was aimed to be the language of an envisioned state, where speakers of Revived Hebrew would eventually have the political power (cf. Yadin and Zuckermann 2010).
- (6) **Lack of ownership:** Unlike in the case of Aboriginal languages (cf. Walsh 2002), anybody has the right to speak Hebrew, without getting permission from the Jews.
- (7) **Easy borrowing:** Loanwords and foreign words are not considered theft. In fact, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda loved borrowing from Arabic, Aramaic and other Semitic languages.
- (8) **Lack of place restriction:** Hebrew could be and was revived all over the globe – consider Haim Leib Hazan's coinage *mishkafáim* 'glasses' in 1890 in Grodno (see Zuckermann 2003: 1-4).
- (9) **Multilingualism:** Jews arriving in *Eretz Israel* in the time of the revival were used to multilingualism and did not have a 'monolingual mindset'. For example, back in Europe many of them spoke Yiddish at home and Polish in the market, and prayed in Hebrew (and Aramaic) in the synagogue.
- (10) **Number:** There are many more Jews than Aboriginal people in Australia.

But, as it happens, Aboriginal revivalists actually have some advantages vis-à-vis Hebrew revivalists. Consider the following:

- (1) **Deontological reason for the revival:** As we see it, Aboriginal tongues deserve to be revived for historical, humanistic and social justice, inter alia addressing inequality (cf. Thieberger 1990). This can provide strength to the revival attempts. We hear again and again 'native title' but where is the 'native tongue title'? Is land more important than langue and (cultural) lens? And if land, langue and heritage are bound together as a trinity, then why ask for reparation

only for land?

- (2) **Numerous utilitarian reasons for the revival:** The revival of sleeping Aboriginal languages can result in personal, educational and economic empowerment, sense of pride and higher self-esteem of people who have lost their heritage and purpose in life (see concluding remarks). The Hebrew revival had many less utilitarian purposes, the main one being simply the constitution of a unifying tongue to Jews from all over the world. It would have been unfair, for example, for Ladino-speaking Sephardim if German were selected.
- (3) **Governmental support:** Although it could obviously be greater, the Australian government does support the reclamation and maintenance of Aboriginal languages, or at least there is an obvious address to apply for money from. This has not been the case in fin-de-siècle Palestine.
- (4) **Similarities between Aboriginal English and Aboriginal Languages:** Aboriginal English (e.g. Nunga English in Adelaide), spoken by some revivalists, contain various linguistic features – such as connotations, associations, sounds and morphological characteristics like the dual – of the reclaimed Aboriginal languages at stake. One might perspicaciously argue that Israeli semantics, which is deeply modelled on Yiddish semantics, also maintains the original Hebrew semantics after all because Yiddish, a Germanic language with Romance substratum, was deeply impacted by Hebrew and Aramaic. However, the Yiddish dialects that have been the most influential ones in Israel, e.g. Polish Yiddish, are, in fact, the ones that underwent Slavonization from the thirteenth century onwards, when Jews moved from Germany to Slavonic-speaking areas in Eastern Europe. Aboriginal English is much younger and therefore is much more likely to retain features of Aboriginal languages, than Yiddish is to retain features of Hebrew.

## Universal Constraints of Language Revival

And yet, although obviously language revival attempts should be tailored to the specific contexts, needs and desires of each community, there are some universal constraints that should be recognized. As we have already seen, Hebrew revivalists, who wished to speak pure Hebrew, failed in their **imprisoning purism prism**, the result being a multifaceted and fascinating fin-de-siècle Israeli language, both multi-layered and multi-sourced. Most relevantly, some Australian interest groups (cf. Tiwi in Dorian 1994: 481-4) get hung up on misled views akin to the slogan **‘Give me authenticity or give me death!’** (cf. ‘Give me Liberty, or give me Death!’, the famous quotation attributed to Patrick Henry from a speech he made to the Virginia Convention in America on 23 March 1775), where the death, of course, ends up being the Indigenous language they wish to save from ‘contamination’! (On authenticity and language revival, see also Wong 1999 and Hinton and Ahlers 1999.)

Why should we encourage revivalists and Aboriginal leaders to be realistic rather than puristic? Purism creates unrealistic expectations that may discourage learners from acquiring the emerging language. A revived language should not be viewed negatively if it is seen to be influenced by a neighbouring language or by English. The use of words from a neighbouring language should not discredit the revived language. There might be some rare occasions when it is more appropriate for revivalists to favour purism – see Harlow (1993) on Maori. However, in the case of reclamation proper (i.e. the revival of a language that has no native speakers such as Hebrew), one must learn to embrace, celebrate and champion – rather than chastise – the inevitable hybridity of the emerging language.

One might argue that the difference between the conditions that surround Aboriginal languages and Israeli are so large that it is impossible to learn across these contexts. But denying universal traits or constraints in human language in general, and in reversing language shift in particular, is

counter-productive. Linguistic reality lies between relativism and universalism. No progress will be made by turning a blind eye to any of these extremes. Based on a critical analysis of Israeli, one can predict accurately the situation in various reclaimed Aboriginal languages such as Kurna [ga:na], a resurrected language spoken around Adelaide, which is the result of one of the most successful revival attempts in Australia – cf. Gumbaynggirr (Ash et. al. forthcoming), Ngarrindjeri, Walmajarri and Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay.

There are scholars, e.g. Dalby (2003: 250), who scoff at some attempts at reviving the use of an endangered language: 'this is no longer a language, any more than musicians are speaking Italian when they say *andante* and *fortissimo*. These are simply loanwords used in a special context'. A more balanced view is manifested in Crystal's (2000: 162) comments on Kurna:

The revived language is not the same as the original language, of course; most obviously, it lacks the breadth of functions which it originally had, and large amounts of old vocabulary are missing. But, as it continues in present-day use, it will develop new functions and new vocabulary, just as any other living language would, and as long as people value it as a true marker of their identity, and are prepared to keep using it, there is no reason to think of it as anything other than a valid system of communication.

The impact of English (Aboriginal or Australian English) on reclaimed Kurna is far-reaching. Consider the following:

- At the level of phonology, there are often spelling pronunciations, especially for sequences of *er* (as in *yerlo* 'sea' and *yerta* for instance), *ur* (as in *purle* or *purlaitye*). In classical Kurna, the *r* in these words belonged with the consonant (it was be retroflex) but many times we hear an *er* vowel as in English *slur* or *sir*. The original vowel was /a/ in *yerlo* and *yerta*, and /u/ in *purle* and *purlaitye*. Stress is often placed on the second syllable rather than on the first (Amery 2000: 121-122; Amery and Rigney 2004: 2-3).
- At the level of vocabulary, there are many calques – see Amery 2000: 124, as well as Chapter 12 *Wodlingga* 'In the Home' (pp. 63-70), Chapter 15 *Tidnaparndo* 'Football' (pp. 81-84) and Chapter 16 *Kuya Pirri-wirkindi* 'Fishing' (pp. 85-88) in Amery (2007), where a range of calques have been developed – especially evident in the names of AFL football teams such as *Kuinyunda Meyunna* (lit. 'sacred men') for the St Kilda Saints. Knowingly – and jocularly – *cricket* (the sport game) was replicated as *yertabiritti* (the term for the insect with the same name in English) (Amery 2003: 86). It should be noted, however, that in reclaimed Kurna there are relatively few loanwords/foreignisms from English per se, far less than we see in any 'strong' language such as Pitjantjatjara or Yolngu Matha.
- Constituent/word order is free in classical Kurna as in other Aboriginal languages, though it tended to be SOV (Subject-Object-Verb). Naturally, there are contemporary users of Kurna who tend to produce more SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) sentences, replicating English (Amery and Rigney 2004: 5).
- English semantics tends to carry through to Kurna words (Amery and Rigney 2004: 5-7).
- The most pervasive influence from English is at the level of discourse. Almost everything said or written is translated from English. Thus, the turn of phrase and the idiom are from English (Amery 2001a: 190-194; Amery 2001b; see also Amery and Rigney 2006).

And still, the impact of English on Kurna is less than in many other revived languages in Australia – cf. the neighbouring Ngarrindjeri, where published texts are practically English calques: an isomorphic 1 to 1 translation of English, including the use of interrogative 'where' for 'were' and 'thus' for 'the'. Case suffixes are used as prepositions – see p. iii of *Reviving Languages: warranna purruttiaappendi: tumbelin tungarar: renewal and reclamation programs for indigenous languages in schools* (1999), as well as Rhonda Agius in Proctor and Gale (1997: 4-6).

We predict that any attempt to revive an Aboriginal language will result in a hybrid, combining components from Australian English, Aboriginal English, Kriol, other Aboriginal languages and the target Aboriginal tongue. But we are going to assist Aboriginal revivalists to make their efforts more efficient and to embrace hybridity.

## Concluding Remarks

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

(Nelson Mandela)

This paper contributes towards the establishment of Revival Linguistics, a new linguistic discipline and paradigm. Zuckermann's term Revival Linguistics is modelled upon 'Contact Linguistics' (<language contact). Revival linguistics *inter alia* explores the universal constraints and mechanisms involved in language reclamation, renewal and revitalization. It draws perspicacious comparative insights from one revival attempt to another, thus acting as an epistemological bridge between parallel discourses in various local attempts to revive sleeping tongues all over the globe.

There is a need to map the revival attempts throughout Aboriginal Australia by (1) assessing the success of the revival so far; and (2) categorizing the specific need on a continuum of revival efforts, e.g. reclamation (e.g. Karna), renewal (e.g. Ngarrindjeri) and revitalization (e.g. Walmajarri) – cf. other RE-terms to be defined such as restoration, resurrection, resuscitation, reinvigoration, reintroduction, regeneration, revernacularization, reawakening, rebirth and renaissance.

Needless to say, even if there is eventually a sound understanding and awareness of the linguistic/sociolinguistic issues involved and even if the endeavour is well-theorised, language revival efforts may well still fail. Internal factional politics are likely to be far more influential in deciding the fate of a language revival movement than any linguistic theory or lack of one. There is no doubt that the first stage of any desire by professional linguists to assist in language revival involves a long initial period of carefully observing, listening, learning and characterizing each indigenous community specifically. Only then can we inspire and assist. That said, this paper proposes that there are linguistic constraints applicable to all revival attempts. Mastering them would be most useful to endangered languages in general and to Aboriginal linguistic revival in particular.

While we know that language revitalization can have numerous beneficial effects, we also know that some revival efforts are more successful than others (see Walsh forthcoming A). A better understanding of success in this arena by surveying numerous language reinvigoration efforts in Australia, and by drawing on lessons from the Hebrew revival, will enable less waste of resources and better outcomes. Besides significant scholarly impact and intellectual benefits, the results of such endeavours will also improve substantially the future of Australia's Indigenous communities, promoting and maintaining their physical, spiritual and cultural good health through:

- (1) Transformation of disturbed individuals;
- (2) Capacity building: Some Aboriginal people will undertake training only because they are interested in language(s). However, what they will learn in the process are useful generic skills such as literacy, computer literacy, conducting research and giving speeches in public;
- (3) Improved sense of well being in the local Aboriginal community;
- (4) Reconciliation and potential decrease in racism towards Aboriginal people in some country centres;
- (5) Promoting cultural tourism to Aboriginal areas in order to learn about their cultures and languages.

Regaining language is a life-changing experience for many Aboriginal people. One Aboriginal person has told us that he used to be angry, often drunk and in trouble with police and his home life was a mess. Two years later, when he had regained his language, his situation had turned around and his family life had greatly improved.

Through this and other experiences we became convinced that a small investment in language revitalization could yield very significant dividends. Language revival can result in the saving of vast amounts of money and resources going into housing, social services and health intervention to little effect. A small investment into language revitalization can make an enormous difference to society. Public health can benefit from language intervention.

To date such money as has been devoted to Aboriginal language revival and maintenance has not been well targeted. This is partly because Australian Indigenous language policies have been piecemeal and un-coordinated at best or otherwise non-existent or implicit (Liddicoat 2008, McKay 2007, 2009, Truscott and Malcolm forthcoming; see also <http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/policy.html> – accessed 6 July 2010). We aim at a better informed Indigenous language policy at the national level, as well as in particular institutional contexts. For instance, in considering Indigenous policies of Australian universities, Gunstone (2008: 107) complains: ‘it is apparent that universities are still largely failing to adequately address the educational needs of Indigenous staff, students and communities.’

As cellist Yo Yo Ma said on 28 November 2000 at the White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy:

A Senegalese poet said 'In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.' We must learn about other cultures in order to understand, in order to love, and in order to preserve our common world heritage.

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