
BOOK REVIEW

BOOK REVIEW of ZUCKERMANN, GHIL'AD. 2020. REVIVALISTICS:
FROM THE GENESIS OF ISRAELI TO LANGUAGE RECLAMATION IN
AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

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The latest book by Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann is a tale of two language journeys and the emergence of a new trans-disciplinary field, revivalistics. It is a book that very much reflects the author's fascinating and multifaceted journey from his formative works critically analysing his Israeli mother tongue's revival efforts through to his passion and focus on language reclamation and empowerment of Aboriginal languages and culture in Australia. This book speaks strongly to his desire to right the wrongs of the past and bringing what he describes as 'sleeping beauties' back to life. In recounting these intriguing language journeys, Zuckermann explores the "various moral, aesthetic, psychological, cognitive, and economic benefits of language revival" that encompass "social justice, social harmony, diversity, wellbeing, mental health, and employability" (xxiii).

The book is divided into two main parts, the first (chapters 1-5) critically analyses the reclamation of Hebrew from 1880s-1930s and the second (chapters 6-9) takes the numerous insights gained from the Israeli language experience and applies them to the revival movements globally and in Australia. Zuckermann provides a catchy punchline of each chapter which adeptly summarises the gist of the book:

Part One:

Chapter 1: Reclaimed Hebrew is a Hybrid Language, a Mosaic Rather Than Mosaic *Tout Court*

Chapter 2: Grammatical Cross- Fertilization with the Revivalists' Mother Tongues Is Inevitable

Chapter 3: Language is Most Useful for Nationhood, and Vice Versa

Chapter 4: Language Academies are Good, Unless a Language is Fully- Fledged, Alive, and Kicking

Chapter 5: Culturomics is a Useful Quantitative Tool for Revivalistics and Linguistics

Part Two:

Chapter 6: Revivalistics is a Beneficial Global, Comparative, Trans- Disciplinary Field of Enquiry

Chapter 7: Technology and Talknology are Language Killers, But can also be used to Reverse Language Shift

Chapter 8: People whose Language was Subject to Linguicide Should be Compensated for Language Loss.

Chapter 9: Language Revival can Improve Wellbeing and Mental Health.

The first chapter, entitled ‘The Hebrew Reclamation: Myth and Reality’, introduces the Hebrew reclamation, resulting in what Zuckermann describes as ‘Israeli’, a term that was first coined by him in 1999. It details its rise from a *sleeping beauty* through to its official status as the primary mode of communication in Israel. He argues that the language spoken in Israel today is a mosaic rather than mosaic tout court noting that the resulting language is a semi-engineered, Semito-European hybrid language. He also introduces two principles to analyse revival languages: The Founder Principle and the Congruence Principle. The former proposes that the “impact of the mother tongues of the revivalists— in the critical period of the emergence of the revival language— is much greater than that of following generations. The latter principle proposes that features which are contributed by more languages are more like to persist.

The second chapter, ‘Nother Tongue: Subconscious Cross-Fertilization between Hebrew and Its Revivalists’ Mother Tongues’, provides a critical analysis of the prominent phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features of Israeli. This chapter is packed with fascinating examples, tables and figures covering a broad range of areas and topics, such as consonant inventories, Hebrew Allophones vs Israeli Phonemes, syllable structure, intonation, word order, possessives, tense/ aspect/ mood, overt borrowing, calquing, phono- semantic matching, etymology and reality. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the practical consequences of approaching Israeli as a hybrid language, rather than as ‘pure’ Modern Hebrew, the use and influence of terminology and some of the political and social implications of the theories outlined in this book.

The third chapter, ‘Defying Religion and Deifying Nationhood: Conscious Ideological Secularization of Hebrew Terms’, explores the phenomenon of semantic secularization. This chapter discusses, what Zuckermann describes as, ‘lexical engineering’ where semantic change is driven by the conflict between the religious and the secular in Israel. This approach to lexical engineering, is “exemplified by deliberate, subversive processes of extreme semantic shifting, pejoration, amelioration, trivialization, and allusion”(p. xxvii). The revivalist agenda is interrogated at great length and the links between language, religion, and identity are drawn in this compelling chapter.

The fourth chapter, ‘Realistic Prescriptivism: Language Academies and the Native Speaker’, explores the work and mission of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. It critically analyses the academy, its goals and mission, function, internal dynamics, processes and decision making. Established by legislation in 1953, the Academy of the Hebrew Language prescribes standards for Israeli grammar, lexis (vocabulary), orthography, transcription, and vocalization (vowel marking) (p. xxvii). Zuckermann describes their approach as futile lexpionage (lexical + espionage) and notes that “it is good to have a language academy when you revive a language— until the language is fully fledged” adding that “When it is fully fledged and not endangered anymore (as is Israeli), then a prescriptive language academy is a

waste of time and money” (p. 151). This chapter provides a fascinating insight into the internal workings of the academy – ‘warts and all’.

The fifth chapter, ‘Shift Happens: Tarbutomics, Israeli Culturomics’, presents culturomics, a trans-disciplinary form of computational lexicology that studies human behaviour, language, and cultural and historical trends through the quantitative analysis of texts (p. 167). Culturomics involves culture-sequencing using ‘big data’. In this chapter, culturomics is applied to Israeli to investigate how Hebrew lexis has changed across time using data accessed from Google Books. Zuckermann describes his approach as tarbutomics, based on the Israeli word for ‘culture’ which is then calqued into the term culturomics to fit this context. He concludes that tarbutomics illustrates that Israeli, “a Revival Language, is a fully fledged, alive and kicking, tongue rather than a language still involved in a linguistic reclamation. The Hebrew revival is complete” (p. 184).

The sixth chapter, ‘Stop, Revive, Survive’ Revivalistics From the ‘Promised Land’ to the ‘Lucky Country’, introduces revivalistics, a trans-disciplinary field of enquiry and applies it to the reclamation and empowerment of Aboriginal languages in Australia and elsewhere. This chapter draws from the insights gained from Israeli and details the types of linguistic constraints (as seen in the Hebrew reclamation) that are applicable to all revival attempts including Indigenous languages. Zuckermann describes Australia and its languages as the ‘Unlucky Country’ “through the historical processes of linguicide (language killing) and glottophagy (language eating)” (p. 189), as two powerful forces that have decimated the original 400 or so Australian Indigenous languages since the early colonial period. He introduces the quadrilateral Language Revival Diamond (LARD), featuring language owners, linguistics, education, and the public sphere (pp. 211-226), as key components in reviving any language.

The seventh chapter, ‘Talknology in the Service of the Barngarla Reclamation’, introduces the fascinating and multifaceted reclamation of the Barngarla Aboriginal language of Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. This chapter details the reclamation efforts and activities that have been undertaken to bring back to life a ‘sleeping beauty’. These innovations include online chatting, newsgroups, as well as photo and resource sharing and the Barngarla Dictionary App.

The eighth chapter, ‘Native Tongue Title: Compensation for Linguicide’, Zuckermann explores the legal dimensions of revivalistics in Australia. He proposes the enactment of an *ex gratia* compensation scheme for the loss of Indigenous languages in Australia. The chapter describes the benefits of language revival for Australia and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and proposes an enactment of new legislation to compensate for the lost Aboriginal languages. After outlining the ethical, aesthetic, and utilitarian benefits of reviving hibernating Indigenous languages in Australia and elsewhere, Zuckermann evaluates the limits of existing Australian law in supporting language revival efforts. He then proposes a ‘Native Tongue Title’ as a means to compensate for language loss that recognises statute-based compensation scheme accords with international human rights law. The proposed compensation scheme recognizes the rights of Indigenous people to own, use, and revive their languages.

The final chapter, ‘Our Ancestors are Happy’: Language Revival and Mental Health’, explores the correlation between language revival and wellbeing. Zuckermann suggests that “just as language loss increases suicidal ideation and depression, language gain reduces ill mental health” (p. xxx). Although there has not yet been a systematic study investigating the impact of language revival on mental health and suicide, the power of revivalistics can be heard in the voices of two Barngarla Aboriginal women who took part in a Barngarla reclamation

workshop facilitated by Zuckermann. In an email to Zuckermann, Jenna Richards wrote “Personally, I found the experience of learning our language liberating and went home feeling very overwhelmed because we were finally going to learn our “own” language, it gave me a sense of identity and I think if the whole family learnt our language then we would all feel totally different about ourselves and each other cause it’s almost like it gives you a purpose in life.” Evelyn Walker (née Dohnt) also wrote: “Our ancestors are happy!” (p. 280). A sentiment that all of those involved in the revivalistics wish to hear.

Although the context for languages in Aotearoa New Zealand is markedly different to the languages covered in this book, there are many insightful lessons that can be garnered from this book to assist and guide our language communities. For individuals and groups involved in language planning, language revitalisation, Māori-medium education contexts, I would definitely recommend the second part of this book. In particular the concept of native tongue title and the notion of seeking compensation for linguisticide, and the correlation between language revival and wellbeing, are two areas worthy of further exploration in an Aotearoa New Zealand context. As noted in many places throughout this fascinating book, language is the vehicle that carries our deepest thoughts, our ideas, customs, genealogy, history, mythology, songs, prayers, dreams, hopes, desires, frustrations, anger, knowledge, and identity. It is at the core of our existence.