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## **Gamilaraay, a Sleeping Language of New South Wales, Australia**

### **Abstract**

The main aim of this paper is to present the situation of Gamilaraay, an Aboriginal language spoken in New South Wales, Australia, currently undergoing a revitalization (Giacon 2007). After discussing the classification of the world's languages according to their vitality, the author presents the language situation in Australia and offers a definition of *revival linguistics* (see Zuckermann & Walsh 2011), a new branch of linguistics as yet little known in Poland, justifying its relevance to the revitalization of Aboriginal languages. Special attention is given to the language situation in New South Wales, and to the specific revivalistic attempts undertaken by linguists there (Troy & Walsh 2010). Some morphological, syntactical and lexical features of Gamilaraay are described in order to show the complexities of language revival and problems revivalists have to face.

*Keywords:* sleeping language, Gamilaraay, revival linguistics, language reclamation, linguistic diversity, language endangerment

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### **Introduction**

The main aim of this paper is to present the situation of Gamilaraay, an Aboriginal language of Pama-Nyungan family once spoken in New South Wales and in southern Queensland, Australia, currently undergoing a revitalization (Giaccon 2007, 2010, 2014). The methodological context for presenting Gamilaraay will be a new field of study called *revival linguistics* (Zuckermann & Walsh 2011, Zuckermann et al. 2014).

This paper will be organized as follows. In the first place, the classification of the world's languages according to their vitality will be presented. Then, the language situation in Australia, with an emphasis put on New South Wales, will be sketched briefly. In the following subsection a definition of *revival linguistics*, a new branch of linguistics as yet little known in Poland, will be given justifying its relevance to the revitalization of Aboriginal languages. And, last but not least, some morphological, syntactical and lexical features of Gamilaraay will be described in order to show the complexities of language revival and problems revivalists have to face.

### Classification of the world languages according to their vitality<sup>1</sup>

There are more or less 7 thousand languages in the world today, with 30% of them being severely endangered (Lewis et al. 2016). There exist various classifications of the world languages according to their vitality, ranging from very sketchy (e.g. Wurm 1996, see Lo Bianco 2014: 56) to very detailed ones (e.g. EGIDS, Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, with its 13 levels of language endangerment, see Lewis et al. 2016). For the purpose of the present research a very simple classification is adapted, where four basic groups are distinguished: a) *safe* languages, that is more or less 66% of all known world languages (Lewis et al. 2016), b) *endangered* languages, c) *dying* or *moribund* languages and d) *extinct* languages. The very last category comprises a subcategory of what we may call *dormant* or *hibernating* languages (Zuckermann 2013, see also EGIDS, Lewis et al. 2016). These languages are no longer used in daily communication, but have enough resources to allow reclamation attempts<sup>2</sup>. To make the attempts successful however, not only the language resources but also the interest both on the part of the community and academia is necessary; not to mention the money of course (cf. Cavanagh 2005).

Crystal (2010: 380) says that the majority of world languages, approximately 96%, have less than 1 million speakers and are spoken by less than 4% of world population. It is enough to look at New Guinea, where 10 million people speak more than 1150 languages (Evans 2010: 11)—that gives an average of 10 000 people per language—to understand that many of the world languages are in danger. The lack of written sources and the overwhelming preponderance of English and English-based creoles lead to diminishing numbers of speakers of autochthonous languages and are responsible for the language death of many. For Evans (2010: xxii) “a major cause of language loss is the belief that everything wise and important can be, and has been, said in English.” But, as Joseph Lo Bianco (2014: 54) puts it, “the past two decades have seen redoubled energy devoted to research and practical action on reversing language loss, producing ever more sophisticated analytical tools, creation of specialized agencies, and increased opportunities for discussing the phenomenon.” Yet, the language shift seems irreversible, with one of the approximately 7 thousand world languages disappearing forever every two weeks (Crystal 2010: 380, Evans 2010: xviii).

There is no doubt that the effort of many people working on the endangered languages documentation and preservation will bear some fruit in the future. But some linguists decided to follow

1 This section and the following one are an expanded version of a part of (Bulat Silva in press).

2 According to *Ethnologue*, the crucial difference between *extinct* and *hibernating* language lies in the fact that although none of them has proficient L1 users, “there is an ethnic community that associates itself with a dormant language and view the language as a symbol of that community’s identity” (Lewis et al. 2016).

the path of what we may call a Don Quixote style—they want to reverse language shift by bringing the already extinct languages back to life. To sound more realistic they coined a metaphorical term for the languages that have died—they call them *sleeping languages* (see Zuckermann & Walsh 2011). And we may easily see how this schema of a fairy tale about a Sleeping Beauty—being *asleep* for a hundred years or so—suits well the situation of language reclamation in Australia where the linguist comes galloping on his white horse of knowledge to break free his beloved from the clutches of death... Before checking whether this fairy tale may ever come true though, let us examine more closely the linguistic situation in Australia.

### Linguistic situation in Australia

The linguistic situation in Australia, deceptively simple at the very first sight, is quite complex in reality. There is one dominant language, English (albeit with quite a lot of variation), one strong creole language, Kriol in the Northern Territory, most of the Aboriginal languages extinct or moribund, very few—like Arrernte, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri and Yankunytjatjara—are used in daily communication, and some, like Barngala, Gamilaraay or Kurna, among others, are being brought back to life with an immense effort both on the part of the linguists and the community (see e.g. Amery 2011, Giaccon 2010, Zuckermann et al. 2014). When we consider Australia's linguistic past, it is not bright at all. Zuckermann (2013) claims that Australia has witnessed one of the major *linguicides* 'language killings' in human history.

In the 18th century, when the first vessels of Captain James Cook arrived at the continent of Australia, *Terra Australis*, there were approximately 600 to 700 thousand Indigenous people (Bęben 2012: 12) speaking ca. 500 languages there (Crystal 2010: 334). Out of those 500 languages, only one half have been documented (Walsh 1993: 1), and out of those 250 documented languages only 18 are still alive and relatively safe today (Eades 2013: 80). We must remember that the use of Aboriginal languages had been strictly forbidden in Australia up to the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Cavanagh 2005: 14, Walsh 1993: 2, Dębski 2009: 36)<sup>3</sup>. Children were taken away from their families by Australian government agencies and placed in orphanages led mainly by the church. They were not allowed to speak their native language, because they were supposed to be 'civilized' by adopting English language, culture and religion<sup>4</sup>. That stopped natural intergenerational language and culture transmission and in consequence led to a total decline of most Aboriginal languages. Not only that, this cruel policy deprived people of their cultural heritage which was a really serious offence since in Aboriginal culture knowledge is more valued than material possessions (Bęben 2012: 399). People who don't speak the language have no contact with their ancestors or their cultural past. They don't know either traditional stories or songs, hence they may feel lost and are more vulnerable to delinquency and crime (Zuckermann et al. 2014: 58). The vast majority of Indigenous people in Australia nowadays speak a variety of English, the so-called

3 As Walsh (1993: 2) puts it, "from the earliest days of European contact there was often an assumption that Aboriginal languages were of less value than English". This bias can be clearly seen in the words of a nineteenth century politician, Anthony Foster who claimed that "[t]he natives would be sooner civilized if their language was extinct (...) the use of their language would preserve their prejudices and debasement, and their language was not sufficient to express the ideas of civilized life" (after Zuckermann et al. 2014: 56).

4 Aboriginal people who were deprived of their childhood are called *stolen generations*. It wasn't until 2008 (sic!) that the Australian Prime Minister Ken Rudd apologized officially to the Aboriginal people of Australia for this cruel policy (Dębski 2009: 39).

*Aboriginal English* in which some Aboriginal patterns of speech are still preserved (see Eades 2013). A lot of people—approximately 10 thousand (Lewis et al. 2016)—mainly in the Northern and Western Australia speak Kriol. The majority of Aboriginal languages spoken today have less than 1000 speakers, some are used only by elder generations. Beben (2012: 23) estimates that only 10% of Australians who think of themselves as Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders speak an Indigenous language. In New South Wales, where no language has survived colonization, the linguistic situation is much worse. According to the Australian Census for 2006, only 804 (less than 1%) out of 138 506 Indigenous people living in New South Wales speak an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language (Troy & Walsh 2010: 175). The once most widely spoken languages in this region, like Wiradjuri or Gamilaraay are practically extinct (Beben 2012: 23). However, as we will see later on, there is still some hope for both of them<sup>5</sup>.

### Revival linguistics

The first attempts to preserve indigenous Australian languages began in the late 1970s (Romaine 2004: 7, Walsh 1993: 1). But it was almost twenty years later when in the 1990s Rob Amery began his pioneering work on reclamation of the Kurna language from Adelaide (see Amery 2011, and also Crystal 2010: 387, Troy & Walsh 2010: 176). In the same decade John Giaccon began his work on Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay in Walgett in northern New South Wales (Troy & Walsh 2010: 179). In 2011 Ghil'ad Zuckermann initiated the reclamation process of the Barngala language of the Eyre Peninsula (Zuckermann et al. 2014: 58)<sup>6</sup>.

As it was said earlier, Zuckermann (2013) claims that Australia is a country where the rate of *linguicide* 'language killing' or even, as he calls it, *glottophagy* 'language eating' is the highest in the world. Zuckermann, Shakuto-Neoh and Quer (2014) thus postulate creating a new law, *Native Tongue Title*, based on a *Native Title* regulation that entered into force in 1993 enabling Aboriginal communities to claim for the compensation of the territories lost during the colonization period. They argue that "the Australian Government ought to compensate Indigenous people not only for the loss of tangible land, but also for the loss of *intangible language*" (Zuckermann et al., 2014: 56). *Revival linguistics* is Zuckermann's term modeled upon *contact linguistics* (Zuckermann & Walsh 2011: 112) and it may be defined as a branch of linguistics that investigates language *reclamation*, *revitalization* and *reinvigoration* processes (Language Revival MOOC 2015). As Zuckermann & Walsh (2011: 112) state, revival linguistics aims at drawing

"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".

### Revivalistics methodology

Now let us look at three major processes investigated by revival linguistics, that is language reclamation, revitalization, and reinvigoration. *Reclamation* concerns practically extinct languages that have no native

5 This paper is concerned only with the revival of Gamilaraay. A reader interested in the reclamation of Wiradjuri may refer to (Kutay et al. 2010).

6 In 2015, a very useful MOOC entitled *Language Revival: Securing the Future of Endangered Languages* was created on the edX platform by the University of Adelaide, featuring Zuckermann and Amery as its tutors.

speakers left, like Gamilaraay or Kurna. *Revitalization* applies to languages with some speakers left, like Maori in New Zealand or Karuk, an isolate language from California. And finally, *reinvigoration* deals with languages that, albeit endangered, possess a significant number of fluent speakers, like Irish or Welsh (consult Language Revival MOOC 2015 for more details).

So what is the essence of language reclamation: the most relevant process as far as dormant languages, like Gamilaraay, are concerned? What do revivalists in Australia do to bring a hibernating language back to life? According to Zuckermann, “language reclamation is the most extreme case of foreign language learning”, so revivalists ought to combine “scientific studies of *native* language acquisition and *foreign* language learning” (Zuckermann et al. 2014: 56). On the basis of the available written sources—and in case of Aboriginal languages those written sources are mainly 19th century missionaries notes (see section entitled “Reclamation of Gamilaraay”)—new texts, e.g. fairy tales and songs, are being created, dictionaries of a language and its grammar are written, and then with these new resources language courses are introduced into schools and Aboriginal cultural centres. Of course a revived language is inevitably doomed to *hybridity*, and in Australian context by *hybridity* we mean mainly semantic, phonetic, morphological and syntax calques and borrowings from Aboriginal English and from other, better-preserved Aboriginal languages (Giaccon 2014: 8, Zuckermann & Walsh 2011).

One of the specific techniques used by the revivalists is a *phono-semantic matching*. It is a way of lexical expansion of a dormant language and it may be described as a “camouflaged borrowing in which a foreign lexical item is matched with a phonetically and semantically similar *pre-existent* native word/root” (Language Revival MOOC 2015). The new word built on the basis of existent target language elements would preserve the meaning *and* the sound of the reproduced lexeme in the source language. A good example of a natural phono-semantic matching that occurred in the immediate post colonisation period is a Gamilaraay word *wanda* ‘white man’, from a Wangaaybuwan word ‘ugly-looking’. Another useful technique for language development is *semantic extension*, a mechanism that can be found in every natural language evolution. Examples include such Gamilaraay words as *wiyayl* ‘pen’ (from ‘echidna quill’)<sup>7</sup>, and *maa* ‘five’ (from Yuwaalaraay word ‘hand’).

According to Zuckermann and Amery (Language Revival MOOC 2015), there are four areas equally responsible for the successful language revival. These are: Language Owners, Education, Public Sphere and Linguistics. As we have already said, there must be an interest on the side of the *language owners*, there must exist a community who views the language as a symbol of its identity and is determined to have the language back. There must also be an interest and money on the side of the academia, professional *linguists* ought to write grammar, dictionaries, and textbooks, establish consistent orthographic rules and use new media to make the language visible on the web. Language owners together with linguists should make the language visible also in the real world, e.g. in the public media. Toponyms in the indigenous language should be promoted in the *public sphere*, the city welcome signs may be written both in English and in the vernacular language. People may use the language in simple contexts, such as greetings or vocatives. Language courses should be introduced into *schools* and cultural centers, and songs should be taught to general public. Some niches should be carved for using the language in public, e.g. social and religious rituals, like baptisms, weddings or funerals, may be held in a vernacular language<sup>8</sup>.

7 A very similar extension of meaning can be found in Polish, where *pióro*, originally ‘bird’s feather’ is used also as a name for ‘pen’.

8 An interesting proposal concerning revivalists methodology is that of Goddard & Wierzbicka (2014: 83) who postulate that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) should be used to assist the attempts of language documentation and

### Basic information on Gamilaraay

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Gamilaraay is a south-eastern Pama-Nyungan language of New South Wales and Queensland, belonging to the Wiradhuric subgroup (Hammarström et al. 2016). Giacon (2014: xxx) says that it belongs to the Central New South Wales linguistic subgroup, together with Yuwaalaraay, Wiradjuri, Wangaaybuwan and Wayilwan. It used to be spoken in the northern part of New South Wales, mainly in areas including Tamworth, Gunnedah, Toomalah-Boggabilla, Goondiwindi and Moore (see Giacon 2014: 4 for a detailed map). The name of the language, *Gamilaraay*, is a compound word: *gamil* meaning ‘no’, and *araay* is a comitative suffix, so Gamilaraay is a language that has a word *gamil* for ‘no’<sup>9</sup>. In the literature, one may also encounter the term Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay (or Yuwaalaraay Gamilaraay). Gamilarray and Yuwaalaraay are usually considered, linguistically, two dialects of one language (they have ca. 70% vocabulary in common, Austin 2008: 38). However, Giacon 2014, the most comprehensive account of the language so far, considers Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay as two socially distinct, albeit closely related languages<sup>10</sup>.

In the *Ethnologue* classification, Gamilaraay is an 8b language, that is ‘almost extinct’ (Lewis et al. 2016)—according to the 2006 census it has got 35 speakers<sup>11</sup>, but as far as I know none of them is fluent (see also Giacon 2014: 4 who says that “the more knowledgeable current speakers have learnt the languages [Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay] from books or classes”). Although Gamilaraay has been being reclaimed for more than 20 years now (Austin 2008), it is far from being vigorous. So maybe it is a little bit overestimated when the *Ethnologue* states that there is an “extremely active revitalization movement in place; language courses and an increasing flow of publications are evident” (Tupper 2015, quoted after Lewis et al. 2016). We must note here that language revitalization is often reported very inaccurately, and a series of publications cannot be considered as a sign of a flourishing language<sup>12</sup>.

### Reclamation of Gamilaraay

Gamilaraay has been in decline since colonization (see Kamińska 2006), but it was lucky to be recorded from 1850. The most important 19<sup>th</sup> century sources are notes (including a glossary), a grammar and Bible translations<sup>13</sup> by an English missionary William Ridley (1855, 1856, 1875), and also articles by a surveyor and amateur ethnographer Robert Mathews, published at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1902, 1903). There are few tape recordings made by professional linguists. In the 1950s an hour

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revival. It could be a good idea to write a Gamilaraay version of NSM.

- 9 It is quite a common procedure of naming Aboriginal languages in Australia. Yuwaalaraay is a language that has *yuwaal* for ‘no’.
- 10 There is more Yuwaalaraay oral material recorded on tapes, and these tapes are used in the reconstruction of Gamilaraay. On the other hand, Gamilaraay has a much larger number of potential users, so it is the language that is currently being taught in schools and at the universities (Giacon 2007: 89).
- 11 In the UNESCO *Atlas of World's Languages in Danger* we may read about 5 speakers of Gamilaraay only (Moseley 2010).
- 12 I would like to thank John Giacon for drawing my attention to this important fact.
- 13 Giacon (2014: 606) thinks that Ridley’s Bible translations are actually written in a simplified version of Gamilaraay, hence many grammatical characteristics of the language, like ergativity, are missing from Ridley’s text.

of audio tape was recorded by a linguistics professor Stephen A. Wurm (Giacon 2007: 89). In 1955, Wurm talking to the last fluent speaker of Gamilaraay, 95yr old Peter Lang from Boogabilla, collected another 12 minutes of audio and 44 pages of written records (Austin 2008: 10). The first comprehensive Yuwaalaraay grammar was published by Corinne Williams (1980)<sup>14</sup>. In the 1990s two dictionaries have been published (Austin 1992, 1994), the latter being made available online two years later (Austin & Nathan 1996), making Gamilaraay one of the first Aboriginal languages present on the web. As it has already been said, since 1994 the main person responsible for the Gamilaraay revival is John Giaccon, the author of numerous articles (e.g. Giaccon 2007, 2008, 2010), the most extensive dictionary so far (Ash, Giaccon, Lissarague 2003), textbooks (Giaccon & Betts 1999, Giaccon 2011), and most recently a 600 page Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay grammar (Giaccon 2014). In the 1990s John Giaccon worked with Uncle Ted Fields from Walgett who remembered Yuwaalaraay from his childhood, and collected about 1000 words from him. Unfortunately, Ted Fields rarely remembered any sentence (Giaccon, personal communication), so the grammar of Gamilaraay (Giaccon 2014) is reconstructed mainly on the basis of Yuwaalaraay tapes recorded by Janet Mathews and Corinne Williams in the 1970s. For more than 20 years now, Gamilaraay has been taught in ca. 50 schools in New South Wales (Giaccon 2007: 89)<sup>15</sup>. Currently John Giaccon teaches Gamilaraay at the Australian National University, in Canberra and at the University of Sydney (and it should be said here that very few Aboriginal languages are taught at the university level, see Troy & Walsh 2010: 179). He also helps Gamilaraay people with choosing Gamilaraay names for their children, and with performing baptisms, weddings and funeral ceremonies in the language.

### Some complexities of Gamilaraay revival

The crucial difference between language *learning* and *relearning* lies probably in the fact that relearning a dormant language means “resurrecting something that was effectively gone” (Giaccon 2007: 92). There are no native speakers who could correct the learners. So, as Giaccon rightly notes, the language students speak is “*the only* current GY [Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay]”, and “people who have had even brief lessons are the experts because they know more than almost anyone else” (Giaccon 2007: 92). The lack of native speakers means “that people have a lot of English in their Gamilaraay—in the way they pronounce, in the word order, in thinking of one Gamilaraay word as being the same as a particular English word” (Giaccon 2011: iii).

There are many difficulties learners experience while studying Gamilaraay. A good example of a frequent pronunciation error is students’ inability to pronounce correctly word initial ‘ng’ [ŋ], as in *ngaya* ‘I’ or *nginda* ‘you’. It is sometimes difficult for English speakers to distinguish between ‘r’ and its trilled version ‘rr’, as in *baraya!* ‘hop!’ and *barraya* ‘fly!’. Quite common are also errors in vowel length<sup>16</sup>.

14 As it has been said earlier, most of the recent grammatical and lexical information on Gamilaraay comes from Yuwaalaraay.

15 Some readers for children, and a CD with songs in Gamilaraay have been published in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is also a very valuable webpage where one can find a variety of self-teaching material ([www.yuwaalaraay.org](http://www.yuwaalaraay.org)). In 2014 an app with an interactive Gamilaraay dictionary has been launched (<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/ma-gamilaraay/id935546616?mt=8>).

16 Gamilaraay has three basic vowels (i, a, u), each one can be short or long. All long vowels in a word get equal stress. If there are no long vowels, stress falls on the first syllable (for more details see Giaccon 2014).

As for the morphology, there is a great variety of suffixes (including Time of Day verbal suffixes, and Distance in Time verbal suffixes, Giacon 2014: v) and clitics that can be quite hard to learn. For example, there is a contrast clitic *bala* used to emphasize contrast as in the following example:

*Yaama mara nhalay?*

question hand this

Is this a hand?

*Gamil, dhina-bala nhama.*

No, leg-CC that

No, that is a leg.

Gamilaraay has very variable word order, and, just like Latin, it has a complicated system of cases. The use of English word order is another error committed frequently. Students wanting to say ‘that is a hand’ may say incorrectly \**nhama mara*, instead of *mara nhama* (literally ‘hand that’). Even a noun and an accompanying adjective don’t have to go together, as the following example shows:

*Buruma ngaya buluuy ngamiy.*

dog I black saw

I saw a black dog.

One feature found in most Australian Indigenous languages, including Gamilaraay, is ergativity. When the verb is transitive, the ergative suffix has to be added to the noun that shows who is performing the action (Giacon 2011: 53). Compare:

*Yananhi yinarr.*

went woman

A woman went.

*Ngamiy yinarru bandaarr.*

saw womanERG kangaroo

A woman saw a kangaroo.

Another difficulty of Gamilaraay grammar, that actually needs further studies (Giacon 2007: 93, Giacon 2011: 2), is the large number of demonstratives and place/direction words and suffixes that have never been described properly. Gamilaraay has also elements of ‘associated motion’—verb suffixes that specify if motion is involved in the action described (Giacon 2014). For example, Gamilaraay distinguishes between *banaga-y-la-nha* ‘running on the spot’ and *banaga-waa-nha* ‘running from one place to another.’

As for the semantic level, a common mistake is to think that there is a one-to-one equivalence between English and Gamilaraay vocabulary. To give just a few examples, the Gamilaraay word *mará* means not only ‘hand’, but it is also used to refer to a ‘finger’. Another examples are *gawugaa*, which not only means ‘head’, but also ‘hair of head’ (and not other hair, Giacon 2010: 411), and *bina* ‘ear’ and a strong symbol of wisdom (Giacon 2011: iii)<sup>17</sup>.

It is obviously not easy to work on a language with so scarce resources, there no native speakers left, tapes and notes are not always clear. Many Gamilaraay words and structures have been lost. Yet Gamilaraay people, who used to speak English all their life, now have a chance to restore contact with

<sup>17</sup> For examples of metaphors not based on European models see (Evans & Wilkins 2000).

their linguistic past. Giacon says that “many of them continue to treasure their ancestral identity, and they are now in a position where they can more effectively work on retrieving their language and other elements of their identity” (Giacon 2014: 1). They start using greetings such as *yaama* ‘hello’ and *yaluu* ‘bye’, and also kinship terms such as *gunii* ‘mother’ and *bubaa* ‘father’ more and more in their everyday communication (Giacon 2007: 95). But will they be determined enough to continue to learn their new yet old language and pass it on to the next generation?

### Concluding remarks

Learning an ancestral language can be an emotional experience (Language Revival MOOC 2015), and, as the Bargala reclamation projects shows, it can improve people’s mental health and general well-being (Zuckermann et al. 2014). Language revival may also increase the chances of cultural tourism, hence providing extra financial support to the community. It certainly increases the feeling of pride in people, and lets them understand better their cultural roots. It is “an important part of recognizing the rights and culture of Indigenous people” (Giacon 2007: 89). It lets people speak with their own voice.

The revived language will never be the same as the original language, new vocabulary and new functions must be developed, but “as long as people value it as a true marker of their identity (...) there is no reason to think of it as anything other than a valid system of communication” (Crystal 2010: 387). Giacon (2007: 89) is quite skeptical about Gamilaraay becoming a language of overall everyday communication. In his opinion it will rather be used “in a limited range of contexts,” constituting “a significant part of the ongoing development of GY culture” (Giacon 2007: 89). It is still worth it though. As I wrote elsewhere (August-Zarębska, Bułat Silva 2016: 114), “what is important about using one’s ancestors’ language, is not only the familiar sound that it brings, but above all, the access to the concepts that the language has lexicalized (...). Being able to use one’s own language makes people know who they are and where they come from.” John Giacon once mentioned a Gamilaraay word that he learned from Ted Fields, *gadjigadji* that means ‘tree regrowth’ (Giacon, personal communication). Words like this can provide an invaluable insight into the Aboriginal knowledge about the world. Evans (2010: xviii) rightly notes that “each language has a different story to tell us. (...) such is the distinctiveness of many of these languages that, for certain riddles of humanity, just one language holds the key.” Losing a language may mean losing a way to cope with what future may bring us. It is better to wake that Sleeping Beauty up. For our own sake.

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