

Elizabeth Ho ([00:00](#)):

Well friends, all we are ready to start on this very brisk morning. Welcome to you all to this Adelaide festival of ideas session. Should we reclaim dead languages? I'm Elizabeth Ho member of the AFOI board and delighted to be chairing the session. And now to our speaker, Ghil'ad Zuckermann, he is chair of linguistics and endangered languages at the university of Adelaide. He has a fervent interest in reviving dead languages and on a reading of his biographical notes, I can say that he knows few boundaries. If any, he has worked across cultures and countries and continents from the middle east Africa to Asia, to Europe. And of course, home here in Australia, he has been a consultant, an expert witness in lexicography and forensic linguistics in court cases all over the globe. Now that is one to Google, I reckon. I think that's very interesting.

Elizabeth Ho ([01:10](#)):

And if you do Google, you might get a prize. If you can find out where he has not been, he has been a visiting academic at several major universities in the world from Oxford to Cambridge, to Austin, Texas, to Bellagio in Italy, to Singapore, to Shanghai, to Tokyo, to Jerusalem. I think that it's important to say that he is a prolific author. He's the author of several important works dealing with Hebrew and other languages. But especially for us today, I want to draw attention to his work with Aboriginal people and his respect for the complexities of cultural interchange. This is particularly underlined by his work, engaging a guide to interacting respectfully and reciprocally with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their arts practices and intellectual property that was published in 2015 and the first online dictionary of the Bon Garla Aboriginal language in 2016, he is a chief investigator in a large research project, assessing language revival and mental health funded by Australia's national health and medical research council. He is the founder of Revitalist sticks, a new transdisciplinary field of inquiry surrounding language reclamation revitalization, and re-invigoration. He has launched with the Bangarra Aboriginal communities of air peninsula, south Australia. The reclamation of their language, professors who come in is an elected member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and the foundation for endangered languages. I suspect we might have an answer to the question before us today, but I just want to say good day, Ghil'ad. Good on your night night, tips me lead to you, over to you.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([03:32](#)):

Thank you so much, Elizabeth, for such a welcome, such a warm welcome. It's a pleasure to be here for the first time at the other late festival of ideas. And I would like to also acknowledge Greg who is here with the glasses. Some people do not know you, Greg, so you need to end. I hope it's the beginning of, of a long friendship. When it comes to Adelaide festival of ideas, I call this lecture, should we reclaim dead languages? This is only one question that I would like to answer. I would like to start with [inaudible] is the name for other lead it's support, mentor blend a little bit like motel for motto or hotel or spoke from spoon and fork thunder gun Mia. So it puts them together with Gunyah. So Tom, that is a male red kangaroo, and Danya is a rock.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([04:37](#)):

So the ganja is the rock of the red can group [inaudible] is Adelaide in Ghana, which is itself the result of a language reclamation. So without the language reclamation, I would have never been able to say that acknowledgement rather than welcome to country because I'm not an Aboriginal person. So I cannot do welcome to country. This talk is about resilience. I remember bumping into Muhammad Ali in Detroit. He tried to make, to make me a Muslim. And for me, if you know anything about boxing, he was there

for the long run. He was an athlete. It was not like one bow who just knocks you out. And when it comes to languages, it's for the long run. So this has to do with resilience. I'm going to, I have been told that I only have 35 minutes because we're going to have a discussion.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([05:32](#)):

So I'm going to go through some slides quickly. So don't worry about it. This is a photo from 2012. It was a first language reclamation workshop within the Bangla land. It was galling Yella, port Lincoln, the main port Lincoln in the is galling Yala. And this is from two days three days ago. It's the same place, just the other side. And it's, I dunno, what is the number of these workshops? So you can see them more people. And this is just buying lot. The main question is why on earth? Should we invest time and money in reviving dead languages? This question is important because you are taxpayers and the government might use your tax to reclaim languages in the future. And you need to be aware of whether or not it's good or bad to reclaim dead languages. I'm going to give you in the little time that I have ethical aesthetic and also utilitarian reasons for language reclamation of dead languages, meaning by dead, nobody speaks these languages.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([06:51](#)):

But I would like to say at the beginning that for me personally, and this is a personal thing, the first reason is sufficient the ethical reasons. So I do what I do merely for ethical reasons. In fact, even if I could not find a static and utilitarian benefits for language reclamation, I would have still believed in language reclamation, but it is important to explain that if you're a civil servant, for example, you developed, you need also utilitarian benefits, meaning, you know, I'm giving you \$1 million, how many millions of dollars are you going to save? This is a utilitarian benefit and the aesthetic, of course, it's just because we are homo sapien sapians as opposed to non homosapien sapians animals, the many related questions that are not, or maybe in the question of time, we are going to discuss, is there a link between language and mental health I'm going to touch upon it actually, should we financially compensate indigenous people for the loss of their native tongue?

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([07:58](#)):

Meaning we pay people for the loss of land. I personally believe language is much more important than land. So why should we not compensate people for the loss of language should be indigenous language has been defined as official languages of Australia. As you know, currently there are no official languages in Australia, not even English. Should we define 330 Aboriginal languages as the official languages of the region? Why not? Should we erect bilingual signs? Why is it that I've just been to port Lincoln? And I said, welcome to port Lincoln. There was no, there was nothing about Balin Yala there. Nobody knows that Brooklyn was called Golin Yalla Alice. You are. I mean, now it's true. More, more, more and more people know, does language dictate the way we think? Is it possible at all to reclaim a language? Maybe it's impossible. So why Bubba. But before that, I would like to show you a few slides from my own life.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([09:04](#)):

As Elizabeth kindly said I travel a lot. And unfortunately there are so many people in the world who seek language revival help. Well, Margaret Mead said never doubt that a small group of fruitful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed. It is the only thing that ever has. I think it's of relevance to Greg's historical trust and also to the other Lakeland festival of ideas this year. And he hasn't been Yehuda on the left. He was the revivalist of Hebrew. My own native title is what I call Israeli, which is revived Hebrew. So if I speak coherently, you can argue that it is possible to have a mother tongue that did not

exist 120 years ago and still to be able to think properly. So my mother time did not exist 120 years ago. And in the right, you can see it. He hasn't been Buddha, his grandson, we were, we met together by a journalist, arranged a meeting with a hope that we would fight. But at the end we became friends. So you can see it in the photo. [inaudible]

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([10:23](#)):

Was an amazing missionary that you might have heard of. He wrote with Tyson MUN in 1840, the dictionary of the other lady language, which we call Ghana today. Ghana is an exome in meaning it is not a name within the Ghana language. It's an, an external name. So we differentiate between an excellent and domain. So excellent is a name given to you by somebody else in this case, not in Geri people. So Ghana in fact in Ghana would have been me or now me or not means people within Ghana. So there was an attempt to change Ghana to me or not because it's a name by somebody else. It's a little bit like bleach and you know, Tabasco in Italian, et cetera. So it depends who gives the name climate of income Sherman in 1844, wrote a dictionary of the bundler language. And this is wonderful because he was a German Lutheran missionary who wanted to Christianize the heathens in quotation marks.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([11:25](#)):

But 170 years later, we use this very dictionary in order to reconnect with the spirituality that as I see it as a non-religious Jew, the missionaries wanted to the Aboriginal people to forget about. In other words, you have here at twist, the missionary wanted to Christianize the show. The life we use is very dictionary in order to do the opposite. I mean, to reconnect with the Aboriginal light, so to speak. So this is a beautiful righting, the wrongs of the past, and it's a poetic justice. If you want pursuing an academic career in the arts and the humanities in 2018, reminds me of the three marks of existence in Buddhism, permanence, nothing is constant. Nothing is tenured. Even a ten-year does not mean much today. This is called the casualization of academia at suffering. Everything is painful and stressful. And of course there is no self.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([12:27](#)):

These are the three marks of existence in Buddhism, but this is important as the second president of America said, I must study politics and world that my sons may have Liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics, philosophy, geography, natural history, never architecture of irrigation, commerce, and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study statuary tapestry or sorry, painting poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, porcelain language, revival, heritage languages. This is the third phase, which is very important. So this is something that I fellow Abrar Maslowe's the Jewish American squalor talked about the basic human needs. And I'll ask you where most people in the world are. Now. You might argue that it's somewhere between physiological and safety. Obviously if you're a Syrian from Syria. So it's not even, I mean, it's physiological safety.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([13:40](#)):

I mean, but let's say in China to be probably the third belonging love, I believe, and this is important that the industrial revolution turned people from seeking food to seeking things. But the technological revolution that we are currently experiencing will turn people from seeking things, to seeking ideas, how relevant it is for the other late festival of ideas. The more and more people will not care about early big cars and beautiful houses, et cetera, but also they will seek. I'm talking about the holy Palais. I'm not talking about the elite. I mean, the elite always seek ideas. I'm talking about the masses. And I think this

should be part of the rationale for the Adelaide festival, the ideas for the future. Now, what it means from the perspective of Maslow is that I believe that in the future, people will go up the hierarchy of needs.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([14:38](#)):

You might say it's wishful thinking, but I think that it has to do with a technological revolution, this revolution that has to do with the fact that you can reach today, something which is written right now in et cetera. I remember. And you know, I'm not that old, that what I heard first time about the internet, I was shocked. I didn't understand how it is possible that somebody can read something that are white at the same time. And I'm sure that most of you remember that now I've mentioned the technological revolution I just want to make. So in our understanding of language, there were three linguistic revolutions. As I see it, the first new rustic revolution was speaking at this was more than 70,000 years ago. This is why we homosapien sapiens are different from animals. Animals can communicate basically, but they cannot produce sentences that they have never produced before.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([15:34](#)):

And this is why homosapiens happens is different. And I'm kind of corresponding with Marcela Costa's lecture yesterday about homosapiens. So speaking was moving 70,000 years ago. In my humble opinion, it is what allowed the Aboriginal people to arrive in Australia which was so far from Africa. The second one writing, and this is approximately 5,200 years ago. And writing happened because of economic reasons, not because of romantic reasons. So practically somebody stole some wheat from on the way from Iraq to Israel. And then when the Iraqis were supposed to receive what the exchange VIX. So it was half and they said, what's happening here. So it, next time they actually wrote for units of wheat. And this is how writing emerged. Now, as you might know, most of the languages in the world do not have writing systems. Traditionally, for example, 330 Aboriginal languages, no writing system type printing.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([16:41](#)):

So this is one so 14, 50 Ohana slipping back. But you can also talk about Chinese pilot developments. This is why Shakespeare wrote his surname in five different ways. None of which was S H a K E S P E a R E. He was not dyslexic. It's just, nobody could give a about spelling before type printing and the mass production of books. So in the past now, nowadays, we, we care a lot about spelling. There is a spelling bee in America, et cetera, but this is something that nobody cared about. In fact, in 19 76, the rules, it was the abs, the Australian bureau mystics had a survey and Presbyterian Australians spelled was battalion in 383 ways. So they asked you, what are you? And you have to say, Presbyteria I repeat 383 ways Presbyterian and these words Presbyterian people.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([17:50](#)):

So there were not Catholics or somewhere there. No, I'm not going to talk about history because I do not have time, but it is maybe for the next lecture. So let's talk about language revival. Why on earth? You understand now that in the future, we're going to have more time for language revival, because people will be into ideas into heritage Mervin today. And again, I'm talking about the whole Palais, then why should we revive dead languages? Let me begin with ethical reasons. Ethical reasons have to do with historical humanistic and social justice. As Nelson Mandela said, if you talk to a man in her language, he understands that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart, I believe in native tongue Pikal native tongue title is noble upon the famous native title, which I personally think is a beautiful thing that has caused huge problems among Aboriginal communities.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([18:58](#)):

It's a Western idea to give kind of attack to a tangible thing, because you can it's property. You can touch it, you know, as opposed to language it's intangible, we're still in, in a world in which the intangible is less acknowledged and less say quantified, but it will not be like that forever. Native title means that Bangalore people fight with cooker people and with [inaudible] people over a certain area, native tongue title means that at the Madonna people take part in the reclamation of the Bangalore language because of the Magna is still spoken and they can help the Bangalore people. So it's actually more harmonious. Native tongue titled means compensation for the loss of language. As I said earlier, the loss of language is more severe than the loss of land language. Death means loss of cultural, autonomy, loss of intellectual sovereignty, loss of spirituality, loss of excuse, the metaphor soul.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([20:05](#)):

You lose your soul. When you lose your language. I was attending a beautiful show here last Mumbrella it's an opera and I was introduced to somebody called Peter whole Peter Hoban. Do you know Peter Hogan? Yeah, bitter Herbon. And I say horrible. What a beautiful lame just like Russell Hoban, the American children's writer. And then I quoted this languages and archeological vehicle full of the remnants of Bevin living past lost and buried civilizations and technologies. The language we speak is a whole palimpsest of human effort and history. And then Peter, it was the first time I met him and unfortunately the lifestyle, he said, you're the first person to get my name. Right. Cause everybody calls me Peter Hogan, like Paul Hogan. And then he says, yesterday, I received a phone call from Optus. Would you like to upgrade your your plan, Mr.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([21:04](#)):

Hogan? So I told her it's not Hogan it's with a B. So she said, would you like to add the plan Mr. Bogan? So she, she wasn't a Bailey telemarketer and nothing. I mean, she knew nothing about bogans and no Australia was full of bogans to start with, for example, and forgive me if you're related to unto me Forster look, this is what he said in 1843, the native would be sooner civilized. If the language was extinct, this is a Bogan forgive, the flexibility of the use of a term, a bourbon point of view. You know, we kill the language. Vendor will become civilized because the language makes them primitive. This is in quotation marks, the Chinese, a Chinese student asked me what this means, because you know, nobody teaches what this means. You know, like so this means quotation marks. So the problem is when it is an audio, you have to, you have to say in quotation marks that you probably know this guy George way.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([22:09](#)):

And he says, and he was relatively pro Aboriginal languages disappeared successively. And the tongue of England alone is heard around. Why does George Gray? The governor regard the Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal languages as rude languages, grammatically Aboriginal languages are actually very complex. They have the [inaudible] case. For example, they have a plethora of pronouns, much more complex than English. I mean, English is getting more complex. For example, when I go to [inaudible] or where y'all port Augusta with some friends that will be use guy thing. So use means you plural. This is complexification because you for both singular and plural is very simple. It used to be Val for your Cingular and give a PLO. But then because of simplification, English became kind of not that rich, but now there is a richer English in which you have used for Cingular and use for plural. This is richer. This makes English more complex Australia to learn from New Zealand. New Zealand is a wonderful place when it comes to language. As you know, there are two official languages in New Zealand. Do you know what they are Maori that are Maori with a long arc that are Mallory? And what is the second official

languages language of New Zealand? This is a very hard question. Not English. No. So the second official language of New Zealand, I will give you a hint. What is this? Very good? This means good. This one means sex.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([23:59](#)):

You can find it in Peter. Goal's worth is a book about the sheep and Z. You know, if it's good, but it kills you. You know, this is how, if you see two deaf people in Adelaide talking to each other, and one does like that, it doesn't mean they're from Dinesh or from from ISIS. It means that, you know, they're talking about sex. So the the the point here is that New Zealand is so advanced to understand that English, but not to be the official language. And I'm talking about the Europe, of course, the factor English is official, but the Euro it's not, and this is beautiful. And I think that Australia should have the same thing. English is not. So Australia should have 331 official languages. It's the same language all's land. And also 330 Aboriginal languages. Of course, Bangla will be the official language of urban insula, according to the native title.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([24:58](#)):

And then Ghana will be of other labor, et cetera. Ghana is not going to be the official language of Sydney. So this is going to be regional. Now I've talked about ethical reasons. I would like to talk now about aesthetic reasons, because I want to leave some questions for some questions later, skeptic motivations are based on Kim hair's statement. When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It's like dropping a bomb on a museum. The loofa it has to do with diversity, with beauty. If I go to the Adelaide central market and I'm told, excuse me, sir, unfortunately we are out of shabby shoe. We are out of work for, we only have cheddar cheese. I would be extremely upset because I love my cheeses. I believe in Jesus. You see the point is that some lactose smell observant people might not have this idea about believing in Jesus so that it is, it has to do with a static pleasure.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([26:06](#)):

It has to do with taste. Look how beautiful Australia used to be a sweater used to be a beautiful multicultural, colorful, lucky country. And look how ugly Australia is today. And the ugliness of Australia also has to do with the fact that you have a line between Western Australia and south Australia, Northern territory, which is based as you might know, on the line, dividing Latin America, between Spain and Portugal. In other words, the line dividing wrestling Australia and the rest has nothing do with Aboriginal culture. It has to do with some political agreement between Spain and Portugal. It is trucking, but typical date with a globe, you can continue. And if you're interested, I can give you a reference to read about it. This is what we do not want. We do not want [inaudible] God is to become a barcode. We want this, we want diversity.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([27:10](#)):

We want complex complex characters of Chinese. This is an endangered Chinese character. Don't think the Chinese dissolve have endangered aspects. Of course it does. It took me 57 strokes, one character, 57 strokes. You know, I mean like a, you just want to two, this one is 57. This is beautiful. No, I don't have time to discuss animals, but I'll just tell you that the survival of the Tasmanian devil is important, but what about the survival of the Palo or languages of Tasmania? What is it that people care more about things that they can touch then about things that they could not touch? I'm not saying that. I mean, I'm for animals, I'm a zoo member and I give my dues to the kangaroos, but the point is that,

what about languages? I mean, languages are also important. Diversity is good. Mummy subpoena, the pie is a beautiful term that I remember feeling, but I did not have a word for it.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([28:14](#)):

It means look, one of the other hoping that the other side would initiate something that both sides really would like to do, but nobody has had the guts to initiate so far. And this is in Uganda and terrible forego. It's beautiful to have such diversity, it's aesthetically pleasing. So in this specific case, we have an endangered grammatical way to express a familiar concept. I'm sure everybody here had this feeling, but more word for it. But as a linguist, I can analyze how to say that. And then I have the ma shopping, a pie and I analyze, and this is something that without your gun, I would have never been able to do. So this is a beautiful existence. On the other hand, you have a word like in Persian ancient, Persian, which I would have never thought about a camera that will not give me a control.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([29:08](#)):

Her nostrils have been tickled. So this just shows you that our imagination is very limited. It's enough to look at Hollywood films and to see what aliens look like. Lvns. Usually I'm not saying always look like ugly Asians. So kind of a round face, two eyes, one nose. Now I'm T I'm asking you a question. 13.8 billion years. The world has existed. 3.5 billion years. DNA has evolved. I repeat 3.5 billion, not million but billion. How on earth is it possible that an alien would look like an ugly human being? It's just impossible. And still, this is how holy usually depicts an Evian. Does it have to do with the limited imagination of Hollywood or does it have to do with their belief that we are a bunch of idiots? One of the other, there is no other possibility in this specific case, I would like now to end with you to determine benefits.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([30:22](#)):

So I've told you why we should reclaim deadline, which is for more reasons, we have killed them. This is green with side. We should revive them. I told you why we should do it for a specific reasons. Diversity is beautiful. Now I'd like to talk briefly about you to determine reasons you, to tell him benefits, have to do with health and wellbeing. I have noticed since 2012, that Aboriginal people who take part in language reclamation show anecdotally, or qualitatively feelings of empowerment. So I can give you hundreds of examples. It was an antidote for self-loathing. This is my own controversial view, colonize people by and large hate two types of people. They hate the colonizers obviously, and they hate themselves. And the reason is that the colonizers have kind of told them again and again, that they were worth nothing. This, by the way, I've seen everywhere in the world.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([31:30](#)):

It's not an Australian phenomenon. It's not a middle Eastern phenomenon everywhere in the world. I've seen that. And when, what I've noticed when you reclaim languages is that it serves as an antidote for that. Self-Loathing now I'm saying it to you because these are my scholarly insights. I'm not sure it's politically correct to some of that. So but I think this is how it is. So, you know, there is kind of a run would just power, lets us have ours says Aiden Ridgeway, perspicacious Slee. So this anecdotal evidence that I have discovered was just anecdotal. So what I did, I approached a half professor called Alex Brown and I said, look, let's, let's quantify it. Is it possible to quantify? Because if we can quantify, then it means that we can show governments all over the world, not just in Australia, that people taking part in language reclamation feel better about themselves.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([32:41](#)):

Now, do you imagine what it means from a utilitarian perspective, how much money you spend on mental illnesses, how much money you spend on suicides, how much money you spend on incarceration, et cetera. So this is actually a very powerful utilitarian benefit for language reclamation. We're doing that just now, practically Hallett Chandler and the, and in 2007 found the correlation between language loss and youth suicide. My hypothesis just as the [inaudible] correlation between language loss and suicide. There is a correlation between language gain and diminishing of suicidal ideation. Nobody in the world has done it before. Nobody has found a correlation between language revival and reduced suicide. If we can find that that would be a game changer, it would be a game changer because governments in Mexico, Colombia, America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand that will actually say, wow, there is a correlation. We won't. I mean, you know how many billions are spent on health and mental health specifically?

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([33:58](#)):

So this is a new NHMRC project. I'd like to end by telling you who is at the wheel. This is the theme of the Adelaide festival of ideas, the Aboriginal community, nobody revives languages without the community wanting to revive. It's not the Labella kind of Latin looking. And BEVA, it is with the communities. Therefore you cannot suffer from say Aspergers, if you are a revivalist, you can suffer from Aspergers. If you are a pathologist or a documentary linguist, no problem whatsoever. I know scores of linguists or Aspergers, but you cannot suffer from Aspergers when you're a revivalist, because you deal with communities. It's very hard. You are essential worker, not only a scholar, you're a driver, you're a cook, you're everything. And it's very, very hard with this regard. Immersion is what we want. We want the kids to immerse in the language.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([35:05](#)):

Let me end by showing you four Australian signs. And that will make my point. This is a first sign from Sydney. You need a paradox. I mean, two PhDs to read, to you need a paradox in order to realize which one, whether you, whether the ticket I received when I parked on the left was justified. That's a beautiful sign from south Australia. I think they got rid of it. Don't drive like a K and a AB don't drive like a normal, some Chinese students of mine. I have many Chinese since they took a photo and said, what is this? We cannot understand. Don't drive. Like don't drive, like while raising way weights or then a Chinese student asked me whether you are not allowed to private up to like a chicken because they go from one link to the other, you know, they kind of don't drive like a.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann ([36:08](#)):

Of course, this one somebody asked whether you know, when I saw it, I made a very dangerous U-turn because I am a linguist and I wanted to take the and, and when the guy shot at [inaudible], then I understood what the what it meant, but it was a Rebus. And this is what I wanted to sign with. That's the best sign. I don't know if you'd say Elizabeth, stop revive survive. So if your language isn't dangerous, do not allow it to fall asleep. If the language falls asleep, stop without survive. If you revive the language, embrace the hybridity of the emerging mother tongue, your language is not going to be the same as it used to be. It's impossible. If the language is healthy, if you are say a American or mundane, then maybe consider helping others in need. Thank you so much.